

Words to the Weary and Encouragement to the Faint

Russell Elliott

online: 02.12.2022, updated: 02.12.2022

© SoundWords 2000–2022. All rights reserved.

All articles are for private use only. They can also be distributed privately without demand. Commercial reproductions of any kind are prohibited. Publications on other internet pages are only possible after consultation.

“He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might He increaseth strength. Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall: but they that wait upon the Lord shall renew [margin, change] their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint” (Isa 40:29-31; read also, in connection with above, 1. Kings 18:36-39,46; 19:18).

The chapter from which the above words are taken is full of wonderful contrasts. God is presented to us in the completeness of His power and majesty, and yet in the most tender, gracious light conceivable. It is this combination which is so marvelous. He feeds “His flock like a shepherd,” and yet He “measured the waters in the hollow of His hand”; He gathers “the lambs with His arm, and [carries] them in His bosom,” yet He “weighed the mountains in scales, and the hills in a balance,” and “nations before Him are as nothing”; He “sitteth upon the circle of the earth, and the inhabitants thereof are as grasshoppers.” No wonder the question is raised, “To whom then will ye liken Me, or shall I be equal? saith the Holy One.”

In the presence of such a God we are tempted to ask, What and where are *we*? Are we forgotten? Does He care? Does the God, of whom it is said, “Lift up your eyes on high, and behold who hath created these things, that bringeth out their host by number: He calleth them all by names by the greatness of His might, for that He is strong in power; not one faileth,” take any notice of us? It seems as if, just here, God anticipates our questionings and difficulties, and He would remove from our troubled, perplexed hearts all fear of being overlooked: “Why sayest thou, O Jacob, and speakest, O Israel, My way is hid from the Lord, and my judgment is passed over from my God?”

How this reminds us that human hearts were the same centuries ago as they are today, for do not the foregoing words express often our own thoughts? “My way is hid from the Lord.” “Does God take notice of my case, and will He undertake my cause?” And, next, have we not here a further and more blessed illustration of the combination in God to which we have drawn attention, that He who marshals all the stars and ordains a path for each is equally familiar with “my way” and “my cause,” and, what is more, He is equally concerned about it.

And then, once more, we are reminded that “the everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary, there is no searching of His understanding,” and alongside of this we are told, “He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might He increaseth strength.”

It is this combination of qualities that the human heart finds so difficult to understand — how a God so immense that He fills all things, so great that He is above and beyond all things, and so powerful that He supports all things can accommodate Himself to creatures such as we? how He who has a universe to uphold and care for can concern Himself with our affairs? how a Being, who in one respect is so distant, can also be so near? It is difficult for us to comprehend One to whom great and little are alike, and to believe in a love which, while it embraces a universe, takes equal account of needs and sufferings which appear so small in comparison.

Yet such is God as He is presented to us in this chapter: complete in power and majesty and in possession of every attribute of which the human mind can conceive, and yet mindful of His

creatures and actually making Himself the servant of their needs. His resources are endless, yet they are placed at our disposal. His promise is:

“They that wait upon the Lord shall *change* their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint.”

The reader will notice on reference to the margin of his Bible that the word “change” occurs as an alternative rendering of the Hebrew word translated in the text *renew*. The word “change,” we believe, represents the true meaning of the passage and suggests different kinds of strength: strength to “*mount up with wings as eagles*,” strength to “*run, and not be weary*,” and strength to “*walk, and not faint*.”

We have here a threefold experience of the Christian life — mounting up, running and walking. And the strength required for each is obtained by waiting upon the Lord. How much seems implied in that word “wait.” It means prayer, but it means more. There seems to be the added thought of waiting in order to receive something. Our Lord told His disciples to *tarry* in the city of Jerusalem until they were endued with power from on high (Luke 24). Do we thus wait upon the Lord? *tarrying* in His presence — to learn His mind, to hear His message, or to receive His strength? “They that wait upon the Lord shall change their strength.”

“Mount up With Wings As Eagles”

And this in order, first of all, to “*mount up with wings as eagles*.” God teaches His children to fly before they can walk. Man learns first to walk, next to run, and has only learned to fly very late in his career. The order is completely reversed in the passage we are considering. The reason for this will become plain, we trust, as we proceed.

Mounting up with wings suggests that the higher we rise, the wider the prospect. As you have climbed some high hill, have you not noticed how the prospect widens? Almost every few steps in the ascent opens to your view some feature of the landscape you had not noticed before — the distant and the near lie extended as a map at your feet. That which had never been seen before becomes distinct and clear.

So God would have His children mount up with wings as eagles, in order that they may survey the prospect and the vast extent of their blessings that lies open to view. As eagles! No bird flies higher. It soars aloft with unfaltering flight and with unflinching eye, gazing, it is said, upon the glorious orb of day itself. Have we risen yet on eagle’s wings? Have we taken in the full prospect of our blessing? Have we comprehended the divine purpose? God said of His people of old, “I have borne you on eagles’ wings and brought you to **Myself**.”

In order to illustrate what we mean, we invite your attention to Romans 5. Five times it will be noticed in verses 9-20 the expression “much more” occurs.

“Much more then, being now justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him” (vs. 9).

“Much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by His life” (vs. 10).

“Much more the grace of God, and the gift by grace, which is by one man, Jesus Christ, hath abounded unto many” (vs. 15).

“Much more they which receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness shall reign in life by one, Jesus Christ” (vs. 17).

“Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound: that as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord” (vss. 20-21).

Now, is it not easy to see that throughout these verses we are steadily advancing — mounting up with wings as eagles? To begin with, not only are we justified by His blood, but we are saved from wrath *through Him*. Not only Christ’s work, but His very Person is between us and wrath. God’s judgment can no more overtake the truly penitent and believing soul than it can overtake Christ! And it is of incalculable benefit to see this, not only because of the additional assurance it gives, but because it occupies the soul with the Saviour and not merely with His salvation.

Take the next instance — how *much more* shall we be “saved by His life.” By Christ’s one act on the cross we are reconciled to God. He once and forever bore the judgment due to us and thus removed out of God’s sight all that was so obnoxious to Him, in order that through Christ’s finished work we might become pleasing to Him. That is what Christ’s *death* accomplished. But there is “much more” — how “much more being reconciled we shall be saved by His *life*.” That is, the One who died for us and, once for all, reconciled us now lives for us, and by His intercession He saves us all the way through. And as the result of this service which is ever going on, we have a present, daily salvation.

Verse 15 carries us still further; we are mounting higher all the time. Our attention is fixed upon the “one Man, Jesus Christ.” God’s grace to *us* is according to His estimate of Him. As linked with Adam, death was our portion, but we are now associated with another Man, the Head of a new race, One who is altogether what God requires, and the blessing grace bestows is commensurate with this fact.

And what is that blessing? Life. Verse 17 tells us we “*shall reign in life by one, Jesus Christ.*” Verse 18 declares it to be “justification of life,” while verse 21 calls it “eternal life.” Christ the Head of a new race administers eternal life to all who are His. Each member shares the life and status of the Head. Thus we have mounted up until this illimitable life is in prospect, stretching before us and touching God’s own eternity. For who shall attempt to define or describe what eternal life is? **Christ** is eternal life. It is His own life and involves His own relationship with God: a life of holiness, joy and blessedness. “*That eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us.*”

In the Epistle to the Ephesians, the prospect seems to widen still further, for we are mounting higher. We look into heaven itself and learn that we are blessed with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places; we are permitted to gaze upon the vast inheritance which is ours, which includes nothing less than all things in heaven and earth, gathered together in one in Christ — “in whom also,” we are told, “we have obtained an inheritance” (ch. 1:3,10-11). Then in

chapter 3, we have the full extent of it — the breadth and length and depth and height of all the glory that is Christ's, in which the church will have her part, love filling all until we reach the very "fullness of God" (vss. 18-21). God's revelation of Himself is complete, and all is seen to be perfect in love and power and glory. We have reached both the summit and the limit, which is nothing short of God's own fullness.

Have we taken in this prospect? Have we mounted up with wings as eagles? The power for this — the capacity for it — comes from waiting upon the Lord. God would have us survey all that is ours in Christ. Before we have done this, we cannot respond to His demands or meet His requirements. The reason why so many who call themselves Christians find so little satisfaction in their Christianity — the reason their Christian life is so weak and so worldly — is because they are not in the enjoyment of what grace has bestowed upon them. They have no strength to fly, but simply flutter just above the surface of the ground. May some who read these lines come to understand that before God asks them to live the Christian life, before He demands any service, before, indeed, He expects anything from us, He asks us to wait upon Him, in order that we may receive strength to mount up with wings as eagles to survey the salvation that is ours through our Lord's past sacrifice and present help, and then, further, to take in all that is ours in Christ in the purpose of God, one day to be *actually* possessed and enjoyed — but realized now by faith and by the power of His Spirit — and which is *all* ours as a free gift and as the fruit of what Christ suffered for us on the cross!

“Run, and Not Be Weary”

We now come to the second experience described in our text: “They that wait upon the Lord ... *shall run, and not be weary.*”

It is important to discern both the distinction and the connection between mounting up with wings as eagles and what it means to “run, and not be weary.” Running implies a closer touch with this present scene and our actual surroundings. It is the effort to get through to reach a certain end. But we should know nothing of that end and certainly have no desire to reach it except, first of all, we “mount up with wings as eagles.”

Apart from the first experience, the second would be impossible. When a person runs, he usually has some object before him. And herein lies the connection between mounting up and running. In mounting up we apprehend the true goal of the Christian calling, and this gives both the desire and the energy to run the race set before us. How necessary then to mount up —for the renewed spirit to soar, so to speak, into its own domain and breathe its native air! It is this that starts us on the race.

The Apostle Paul was a runner. Hear his description of himself as he writes to his beloved Philippians:

“Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus. Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus” (ch. 3:12-14).

He had mounted up on eagle's wings and apprehended the purpose for which Christ had laid hold of him. That was the prize and the mark. All that which God had purposed for him in Christ was the goal towards which he hastened. And he exhorts all Christians to be runners. "Wherefore," he says, "seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus the beginner and finisher of our faith" (Heb 12:12, margin).

He seems to indicate two possible hindrances. First, we are exhorted to "lay aside every *weight*." A runner, who is in earnest, divests himself of every encumbrance. His one object is the race and to reach the goal. But what weights we are often content to carry in the heavenly race, sometimes even adding to their number, failing to realize that things which are not sinful in themselves may yet prove weights and hindrances. The good things of this life need not necessarily prove a hindrance. It is a question of the affections — of *where* our treasure is — of knowing that "a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth" (Luke 12:15). Would that we regarded everything more from the point of view of whether it will be a help or a hindrance in the heavenly race!

The fact is that the whole scene through which we are passing is characterized by sin, and it besets us on every side, just as water does a swimmer. And exactly as he must make his way through this foreign element or else he will sink, so we must ever keep in mind those words of the prophet Micah, "Arise ye, and depart; for this is not your rest: because it is polluted" (ch. 2:10).

What need, then, is there to wait upon the Lord? "They that wait upon the Lord shall change their strength ... they shall run, and not be *weary*." Has not many a one grown weary in the race? Heaven was more in their thoughts when they were first converted than now. They have settled down and given up the race. This may be due either to want of waiting upon the Lord or to neglect of the admonition to lay aside every weight, or it may be due to both. In any case, the cure is to mount up on wings as eagles. Thus we should breathe a purer atmosphere and the heart would become attached to a fairer prospect. This is an experience which needs to be constantly renewed—indeed, if we are to be in spiritual health, it must be enjoyed continually. Thus invigorated, progress would be sure and constant.

“Walk, and Not Faint”

We now reach the last phase — "*they shall walk, and not faint*." This is by no means easy. Indeed, it is more difficult to walk than either to fly or to run. To go slow is sometimes harder and tries us more than to go fast. There is not the exhilaration which attaches to flying and running, for walking may mean monotony, and monotony may become a grievous burden.

Some years ago, an editor of a very popular weekly religious journal invited his readers to confide to him what they considered to be their greatest trial in life. To his surprise, he discovered that to a very large number the monotony of life was their heaviest burden. As one correspondent put it, "I rise every morning at the same hour, I catch the same train, I see the same faces, I do the same work, and I return home at the same time." This may not be felt in a similar degree today, but there must be still a great many people to whom life is very

monotonous. They may sometimes feel ready to faint. Here is the remedy: "They that wait upon the Lord shall *change* their strength" — fresh strength shall be given day by day — it shall be as regular as the duties are regular — and the promise is, "They shall walk, and not faint."

Walking seems to connect us more with "the daily round, the common task" — the everyday life of household duties and business routine, and it has to do with the matters that are nearest to us — our earthly life, with its responsibilities and relationships and in connection with which there is sometimes a sameness which grows tedious, and we are tested almost beyond endurance. Just here the promise of our text meets us: "They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; ... they shall walk, and not faint."

We referred at the beginning to certain passages in 1 Kings which bring under our notice three incidents in the life of Elijah. And we did so for this reason, that we believe they illustrate the very experiences we have been dwelling upon. Elijah on Mount Carmel mounts up, as it were, with eagle's wings. He is carried beyond himself. He sees only God and God's purpose concerning His people. He builds the altar of twelve stones, "according to the number of the tribes of the sons of Jacob," and he remembers those words spoken by Jehovah long before: "Israel shall be thy name." He rears the "altar in the name of Jehovah." For the moment, he seems to forget all the failure and the apostasy, and he remembers only the truth as it concerns God and His people. In answer to his prayer, the fire of the Lord descends, the sacrifice is consumed, the prophets of Baal are slain, and the hearts of the people are turned back again. We can only stand amazed at the sight of one man accomplishing so much. The secret of it all is that for many days he had been waiting in secret upon the Lord, first by the brook Cherith and afterwards in the widow's house, and thus he had received strength to mount up with wings as eagles.

Next, we see that he can run and not be weary. "*The hand of the Lord was on Elijah; and he girded up his loins, and ran before Ahab to the entrance of Jezreel.*" This was an exercise of strength of another kind, but he proves equal to the emergency. Is it not wonderful to think that, whatever be the demands we have to meet and however heavy our responsibilities, if the hand of the Lord is only upon us, we can, in the language of the Apostle Paul, "do all things through Christ who gives us strength"?

Daniel describes something of this when he beheld that great vision beside the river Hiddekel. "There remained no strength in me," he says, "and behold, an hand touched me." "Then there came again and touched me one like the appearance of a man, *and he strengthened me.*"

Nor was the Apostle John's experience in Patmos otherwise. "When I saw Him, I fell at His feet as dead. And He laid His right hand upon me, saying unto me, Fear not." And this experience which was Elijah's and Daniel's and John's may be ours. "They that wait upon the Lord shall change their strength." However weak we may be in ourselves, if His hand of power is laid upon us, if only we become conscious of His touch, we shall be strengthened.

But there was a third experience through which Elijah was to pass. He is called upon to walk and not faint.

“Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done, and withal how he had slain all the prophets with the sword. Then Jezebel sent a messenger unto Elijah, saying, So let the gods do to me, and more also, if I make not thy life as the life of one of them by tomorrow about this time. And when he saw that, he arose, and went for his life, and came to Beersheba, which belongeth to Judah, and left his servant there. But he himself went a day’s journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a juniper tree: and he requested for himself that he might die; and said, It is enough; now, O Lord, take away my life; for I am not better than my fathers.”

Is this the same man whom we have seen on the mountaintop victorious over the hosts of Baal, confronted by 450 priests and a nation halting between two opinions, and yet unafraid and triumphant over all his opponents?

What has wrought the change, and wrought it so quickly? It seems but a moment ago he was running before Ahab. Now he is in the wilderness sitting dispirited and alone under a juniper tree.

No doubt a great deal was due to the force of reaction—physical, mental and spiritual, for how closely these composite parts of our being are allied! And who that has known anything of spiritual exaltation and triumph has not also known something of the reverse? Never are we more exposed to the assaults of the enemy or more liable to be betrayed by the inherent weakness of our own nature than after attaining some unusual spiritual elevation. And never do we need so much to wait upon the Lord for a renewal of strength as at such times. The Apostle James reminds us that Elijah was subject to like passions as we are. And we need this reminder, for many of his experiences were so extraordinary that we are in danger of forgetting it. But this fact is surely borne home upon us as we behold him now fleeing at the threat of a woman and lying dejected and well nigh despairing under the juniper tree.

As we see him in this situation, do we not see that, after all, he is very much like ourselves? On the mountaintop he is beyond us, and he outstrips us altogether as he runs before Ahab, but the man subject to fear —the man who wants to be alone — the man tired and dispirited and wishing to die: Here we may see something that reminds us that he was indeed subject to like passions as we are. The juniper tree has become, for all time, a symbol of the very mood in which we now behold him.

But the important question for us is, What will God be to him now? Will the God who upheld him in a supreme crisis in Israel’s history — who answered by fire, in response to His servant’s appeal — will He take any notice of him under the juniper tree? or will He treat with contempt such weakness as he is now exhibiting and leave him to himself? Far otherwise. The gentleness and compassion of God become manifest, and to see Him taking account of His servant’s weakness reveals Him in a wondrous light.

“As he lay and slept under a juniper tree, behold, then an angel touched him, and said unto him, Arise and eat.” God had sent His wearied servant to sleep. In his overwrought condition, sleep was his greatest need, but it is precisely under such conditions that sleep is often wooed in vain. Are we ever astonished at the miracle of sleep? Are we ever half grateful enough for it? Sleep is of such common occurrence and in health its comings and goings are so regular—it steals upon our senses so softly, asking nothing in return — that we are apt to forget how

much we owe to it and to lose sight of the miracle that accompanies so regularly our lying down. No scientific man can really explain what sleep is.

We have said that God sent His tired servant to sleep, and surely never did mother soothe her fretful child to rest with more gentleness. And if God sends him to sleep, God will also be the One to awaken him, and He does it by an angel's touch. What must an angel's touch be like? Someone has beautifully described their ministry thus:

“Love is God's minister, and His own love is the model minister. From the love of God which is in them, the angels long to be our ‘ministering servants.’ They wait upon us in pure love and are not hindered from serving us because we do not appreciate their service. It is no grief to them that we do not know the kind offices which they fulfill, for the love of God is their motive, *and the same love is their reward*. Though we seldom think of them and never thank them, if they can only serve us, they have delight enough.”

This scene is more difficult of comprehension than that enacted on Mount Carmel, and further, to see the Eternal moving amid the shadows of time is more wonderful than to see Him amid His own splendor. To contemplate the Ruler of the universe strengthening the weak hands and confirming the feeble knees is harder to understand than that He should create a world; to know He is touched with the feeling of our infirmities moves us more than any tale of His greatness. His tenderness is more appealing than His power.

Do not such ministry and care as we see bestowed upon Elijah afford us a revelation of God which even the scene on Mount Carmel lacks? What God did for His servant in the desert, prostrated with weariness and alone, seems, in a way, more wonderful than what He did for him on Carmel. The lesson is the same here as in Isaiah 40. The God of the heavens and the stars, the God of the ocean and the land, before whom all nations are as nothing, is the same God who gives power to the faint and takes account of the need of every one of His people.

*“In the desert God will teach thee,
What the God that thou hast found,
Patient, gracious, powerful, holy,
All His grace shall there abound.
“On to Canaan's rest still wending,
E'en thy wants and woes shall bring,
Suited grace from high descending,
Thou shalt taste of mercy's spring.
“Though thy way be long and dreary,
Eagle strength He'll still renew:
Garments fresh and foot unwearied,
Tell how God hath brought thee through.”*

The words spoken to Elijah apply to us: “The journey is too great for thee.” Are any who read these lines very conscious of this at the present moment? Is your present mood a desponding one? Are you sitting under the juniper tree? Remember you have to do with the same God who ministered to Elijah:

*“Though thy way be long and dreary,
Eagle strength He’ll still renew.”*

It is still true:

“They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint.”

And Elijah “went in the strength of that meat forty days and forty nights unto Horeb the mount of God.”

Angels in White — OR — Words to the Worried. P. 153