

Victory in the Valley

God has visited his church numerous times throughout the past few years. Yes, God is always with his church, and constantly provides for all her needs. These visits however were special visits. These visits included the taking of a loved one to glory, or another especially difficult trial. You may have wondered as I have, why does God do these things? How do these trials benefit me in my life on this earth? From what in God's Word can I draw strength during these difficult trials? My favorite verse in Scripture is found in Isaiah 40:31. This verse centers on the comfort that a Christian has in God's sustaining grace by using the picture of an eagle. We can all benefit from a brief study of the biology of an eagle and how God, in his infinite wisdom, used even an example of the eagle to teach his people about comfort.

As a part of the 2007 graduating class at Covenant Christian High School, we can tell you first-hand that God has given us as students special visits over the past few years. God has taken from our midst two dear students, as well as parents of students. No matter where you live, you all very well know of at least a few loved ones who have passed on to glory "before their time." One does not have to search very long surfing the web, reading the daily paper, or watching world news to see that everyday Christians are persecuted and even killed for their faith. Perhaps last Sunday your minister announced that a father or mother in your congregation has been diagnosed with cancer. When we see these trials and afflictions, our finite minds cry out, "Why Lord? Why this particular person at this time?" During this time you and I must look to God's Word to answer those questions.

Isaiah 40:31 is a fascinating verse. It is especially interesting because God uses a picture that we can easily understand. It may not surprise you that God uses the eagle as a picture in this verse. Throughout history, eagles have been seen as strong birds. If you have ever seen them up close in the wild, at the zoo, or have seen pictures of them in a book, you will see their strength. You can easily imagine an eagle gracefully gliding with the wind currents on his seven foot wingspan. He sweeps the ground with his sharp yellow eyes, looking for prey from his position at hundreds of feet above the earth. He suddenly swoops with a speed of around one hundred miles per hour, extending his talons to catch a helpless rabbit. By his sheer strength, he is able to carry the four pound rabbit back to his nest, where he is able to feed his eaglets. His nest alone weighs nearly two tons after a life full of gathering sticks and branches to build his home. No, there is no question that the eagle is one of the stronger, if not the strongest, birds on this earth.

It is *this* bird, first, that we are compared to. "But they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength..." Eagles undergo a fascinating process at about the midpoint of

their life called molting. During this process, the eagle suffers a chemical change in his body. At this time, a number of things will happen to the eagle. He seeks out a secluded valley where he will lose his feathers, lose weight, and even make his talons brittle by digging them in the dirt. His head is constantly in a stooped position because of the weight of calcium build-up on his beak. His vision starts to weaken and is he unable to fly because of his lack of strength. The end result is that he walks around like a pathetic turkey because he is incapable of doing anything else!

That is not the end of the eagle's life however. There is yet hope for that poor secluded bird in the depths of the valley. At the end of the molting cycle, the eagle will find a rock where he soaks up the sun. At this time, eagles that have already gone through the molting cycle will begin to drop pieces of meat down to that eagle. After a period of time, the molting eagle will begin to gain its strength back, and is soon able to fly again. In this way, the eagle renews his strength.

No wonder God used this creature for our comfort in times of trial! There are so many applications that we can draw from this verse alone. Have there been times when you have felt like the eagle in the gloom of the secluded valley? Have there been times in your life when you have been too weak to lift your head or see clearly? What a wonderful promise is yours in the beginning of this verse! Jehovah shall renew your strength! He feeds you spiritual meat from his Word and through prayer, and feeds you that meat through our ministers chiefly, but also through your teachers, parents, relatives, and friends. He causes your feathers to grow again so that you can once again soar to Him in confidence.

The verse reads on to say that "they (us as believers) shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint." Eagles have an interesting way of teaching their young the art of flying. At a young age, parent eagles will show their eaglets the way a mature eagle lives by soaring over the nest. After a time, the parent eagles will remove the soft lining from the bottom of the nest, making the nest less comfortable for the eaglet to live in. After that, the eagles will lift the eaglet to the lip of the nest, where the mother will suddenly push the eaglet down. Meanwhile, the male eagle monitors this whole process very carefully from above. When the eaglet is pushed out of the nest, the father will wait for a few seconds before shooting downward with breathtaking speed to catch the eaglet on his wings before it is crushed by the ground. The parents, sometimes switching roles, will repeat this whole process over and over until the eaglet learns to flap its wings, catch the wind current, and begin flying.

There is a beautiful application here too. Why does God send us trials? Through these trials, as also illustrated by the second part of this verse, God teaches us to "fly." He teaches us that trials are for the good of our salvation. Surely, we do not see that truth

very well as we walk through our journey on this earth. Nor does the eaglet see the mother's decision to push it out of the nest as very wise either. We can agree that the eaglet would be foolish to think that its mother was pushing it out of the nest to kill it. Are we not also foolish then if we think that God sends us trials to weaken our faith, or to cause our downfall? Yet, you and I often fail in this regard. Our human nature constantly questions God's providential hand. Do you not look forward to that day when you shall see how your trials and afflictions have molded you into someone who is perfectly fit for your heavenly place? Do you and I reflect back on our life and praise God for the good that has come even out of a death or serious disease?

You may have wondered, "What is the basis of this comfort?" We have talked about means by which we receive this comfort, and results of this comfort, but the foundation of our comfort has not yet been described. You know as well as I do that Jesus Christ is found on every page of Scripture. This page, and more narrowly, this verse, is no exception. There is a reason that the name Lord, or Jehovah Salvation, is used in this verse. He is a God of salvation! He sends His only begotten Son into the world so that poor sinners are made rich! *Grace* is the basis of our comfort. This is supported in a commentary that I was reading about Isaiah 40:31 which said that "Those who trust to their own sufficiency, and are so confident of it that they neither exert themselves to the utmost nor seek unto God for his grace, are the youth and the young men, who are strong, but are apt to think themselves stronger than they are." We are saved from the clutches of death, and from the slave of sin. Listen to the words of Paul: "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me." This verse in Isaiah would give us no comfort if we ourselves had to renew our strength. This verse would give us no comfort if we had to mount up on our own wings. No! Salvation is all of God in Jesus Christ! *Jehovah* mounts us up on his wings. *Jehovah* renews our strength by His sustaining grace so that we are able to walk and run our spiritual journey in this life. Thanks be to *Jehovah* for giving us that which we could never do or merit ourselves. Thanks be to *Jehovah* for giving us eternal life through Jesus Christ—an eternal life in the blessed city where we shall never grow weary, and where we shall live in thankful praise for our salvation!

May God give us the strength to live every day of our lives resting on the wings of His wonderful grace in Jesus Christ. There is peace in the valley!

Bibliography

Eagle FAQs. Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation. 5 Aug. 2007
<<http://www.inhf.org/eagle-faq.htm>>.

Whelchel, Mary. *Eagles*. 5 Aug. 2007 <<http://www.mindfreedom.net/eagles.htm>>.

