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## They That Wait Upon the Lord: Isaiah 40.12-31

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# They That Wait Upon the Lord: Isaiah 40:12-31 (A Sermon)

JERRY A. TAYLOR

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In Isa 40:12-31, Isaiah speaks to a humiliated and broken people whose spirit had been shattered into a million pieces by the cold and callous hands of the Babylonian empire. Of those who survived, many, including the former leaders of the nation, were deported to Babylonia. This period became known as the Babylonian exile.

During this national crisis, Israel needed a prophet that would not speak of some distant future or romanticize about some nostalgic past. She needed a prophet who would clearly explain the meaning of the national tragedy that had painfully unfolded in her midst and that tempted her to lose faith in God. This dark night of Israel's national soul caused her to stand on the brink of suffering a national nervous breakdown. She was plagued with serious doubt about God's ability to protect her from the dehumanizing and rapist behavior of her national enemies.

It appeared that God had failed to prevent Babylon from abducting Israel and stashing her away in the uncomfortable cellar of exile. Israel's fearful heart became a haunted house that gave free lodging to the tenets of insecurities. This historic situation caused the release of toxic insecurities that spread infectiously throughout the Israelite community at epidemic proportions. Israel's exilic insecurities drove her to unwisely overestimate the power of her captors.

She began to focus more on the enslaving hand of her oppressor than on the liberating hand of God that possessed the eternal power to break the inhumane chains of captivity. Israel's self-perception as a powerless, helpless victim led her to consider idols, nations, and rulers as possible sources of security. Israel's consideration of humanistic powers implied that she believed there were other powers equal to or superior to God.

Isaiah seeks to discourage Israel from seeing imperfect powers as her protection in an insecure situation. Isaiah knows that it is possible to crave safety so much that the desire for security becomes an idol god.

Martin Luther once called security "the ultimate idol." The worship of security drives people to exchange important values. People will sacrifice family, health, church, the truth, liberty, and freedom at the altar of the idol god of security. In this text, Isaiah wants Israel to understand that despite her temptation to seek liberation by any gods, there is no power equal to the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He makes his case by skillfully comparing and contrasting temporal powers with the supernal power of almighty God.

In verse 25, Isaiah asks Israel, to whom will you compare God? Who in all creation is equal to God? Isaiah brilliantly exposes idols, nations, and rulers as impotent sources of Israel's liberation from the confinement of an insecure exile.

## **DON'T TRUST IN IDOL GODS**

Isaiah starts by exposing the futility of idol gods. He compares and contrasts the all-encompassing hand of the living God with the lifeless and impotent hands of idols.

In verse 12, he says God has measured the waters in the hollow of his hand. The prophet makes the point that God dresses the earth in all its splendor and glory. But idol gods cannot even dress themselves. The prophet cannot understand how Israel can place hope in idol gods whose very existence depends upon the workmanship of craftsmen.

Insecurity always creates a demand for idol gods regardless of the historical period! It is true in most cases that insecurity sells. Frightened people become consumers of idol gods because they think idol gods can protect them against their enemies. This fear-driven demand always creates an economic boom in the idol-god industry. The manufacture of idol gods appears to be good for an economy because it keeps the craftsmen and workmen in related trades working.

As the feeling of social vulnerability increases, so does the popular demand for idol gods. In Acts 19:23-27, craftsmen used violence in order to prevent Paul's ministry from interfering with their financial interests that were based on the mass production of idolatry. The craftsmen's skillful attempt to disguise their financial interests in the name of protecting their religion revealed how much their money and religion were intertwined. Money and religion have always had a peculiar marriage. It is no surprise that the first banks were temples and that the earliest coins were stamped with the images of pagan gods.

### **DON'T TRUST IN NATIONS**

Next, Isaiah says that when God becomes Israel's only source of security, not only will she resist putting her hope in idol gods but she also will resist putting her ultimate trust in the power of nations. The prophet is clear in verses 15-17 that Babylon is no equal to God. As Christians we are thankful for the nation in which we live. We sincerely lift up holy hands everywhere in prayer for the welfare and preservation of the commonwealth of our great nation. We proudly pledge allegiance to the flag of this great nation that represents the sacrifices made by untold millions who died in order to pass on to our generation an undying passion for liberty and justice for all.

However, there are times when Christians feel threatened by moral decline and the unrelenting assaults from demonic values so prevalent in our culture today. But despite how insecure and vulnerable Christians feel, we realize that our national government is not the ultimate protector and defender of the Christian faith! God almighty is the protector and defender of the Christian faith!

As Christians, we realize that if we look to the secular state to alleviate our profound feelings of vulnerability, we will be tempted like Israel to deify the state, and we will—with religious passion—worship the idol god of national power. These are the days when the church must raise her voice and declare—under the threat of persecution, scorn, and retaliation—that her highest allegiance is to God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.

### **DON'T TRUST IN RULERS**

Next, Isaiah tells Israel in verses 23-24 that despite the horrors of Babylonian exile, it is foolish to place ultimate hope in the princes and rulers of this world. Despite the search for cultural saviors and defenders of various political perspectives, as discerning Christians we realize the danger of turning national leaders and heroes into American idols of worship.

Christians realize a sure way to arouse the wrath of God is by exalting the highest office in our land to equal status with God. Christians are to show great respect for individuals fortunate enough to occupy the highest office in our nation. Although Christians are to respect national leaders, Isaiah discourages us from bowing down in worship to these individuals regardless of the political party they represent.

Christians know that our ultimate hope is not in national security, social security, homeland security, financial security, or job security. We confidently declare that our ultimate hope is in the God of all security. After Isaiah expressed his conviction about the futility of trusting in idols, nations, and rulers, he focuses attention upon the one God who is more than able to deliver his people from the grips of exile.

**THEY THAT WAIT UPON THE LORD**

In verse 31 Isaiah says those that wait upon the Lord will renew their strength.

God renews our strength in his own time. Strength is renewed when we acknowledge the impotence of human personalities and systems in comparison with the almighty power of our God. By waiting upon God, we demonstrate our trust in his ability to bring us out of our moral and spiritual exiles. We must respect God as the traffic director of life. He does not want us to rush through the dangerous intersections and crossroads of life without respecting his authoritative direction. The temptation to gain our deliverance from sources other than God is to be resisted.

One weekend, in a rush to enjoy Christian fellowship, I approached an intersection. I looked both ways, and after observing no approaching traffic I proceeded to cross the intersection—to the energetic protest of my fellow passengers who brought it to my attention that I was in fact running through a traffic light that was definitely red. I was horrified by the fact that I had violated the law due to an honest failure to pay attention to the traffic light. The fact that I was on my way to participate in a Christian activity did not excuse my action. I had committed what law enforcement calls a moving violation. My movement through the intersection was without lawful permission. My action failed to acknowledge the existence and purpose of the traffic light.

How often do we commit moving violations in our relationship with God? How often does our rush to complete programs and projects for God cause us to move through the intersections of life without respect for God's existence and divine timing?

When we wait on God we recognize that God's wisdom is superior to the wit and reason of human intelligence. God always delivers on time!

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