
²⁵ To whom then will you compare me, or who is my equal? says the Holy One.

²⁶ Lift up your eyes on high and see...

²⁷ Why do you say, O Jacob, and speak, O Israel,
'My way is hidden from the LORD...?'

²⁸ Have you not known? Have you not heard? The LORD is the everlasting God...

²⁹ He gives power to the faint, and strengthens the powerless.

³⁰ Even youths will faint and be weary, and the young will fall exhausted;

³¹ but those who wait for the LORD shall renew their strength,
they shall mount up with wings like eagles,
they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.

From Isaiah 40:21-31 (NRSV)

Who is someone you would describe as an 'elite runner'? Usain Bolt? Roger Bannister? Florence Griffith-Joyner? Cathy Freeman? Cliff Young? Leonidas of Rhodes?

Who is someone you would describe as a great singer? Kiri Te Kanawa? Dame Nellie Melba? John Farnham? Elvis Presley? Frank Sinatra? Oliver Sykes?

Who is someone you would describe as a successful business person? Gina Reinhart? Gerry Harvey? Bill Gates? Gail Kelly? Jeff Bezos?

Who is someone you would describe as a famous artist? Leonardo da Vinci? Pablo Picasso? Vincent van Gogh? Frida Kahlo de Rivera? Jackson Pollock? Nora Heysen?

How do we usually define someone as 'elite' or 'great' or 'successful' or 'famous' or by some such other word? Usually we do this by way of some form of 'measurement' or comparison to other people....

But can we describe people in other categories? Who is an 'elite parent'? Who is a 'successful child'? Who is a 'great person'? Who is a 'famous worker'? What measurement do we use to 'define people'? How do we 'measure up' as we 'face this world'?

Most of the time people will say that they are 'egalitarian' and 'want to consider everyone as equal'. Practically, however, our human nature is such that do 'compare ourselves to others'. Has anyone never said in some way, "Dear God, I thank you that I am not like other people: thieves, rogues, adulterers, or those who take advantage of others. I look after myself; I give to the church, and I try to do the right thing."

Does this sound familiar? Does this sound like something from Luke 18:9-14 – Jesus' parable of the Pharisee and the tax-collector?

In many facets of life we do compare ourselves with other people. We do not do this, however, to 'feel good about ourselves' (although that's always a danger). Rather, we do so because we wish to reflect on 'how we are going in life'. We may ask, 'Am I the sort of person God wants me to be as a parent, a child, a citizen, a leader, a worker, a boss, etc...?' In doing this, we do not seek to 'judge others' (as the scripture say, 'Do not judge', and so we always need to be careful with whatever metric we use to assess anyone's performance). Rather, we are reflecting on 'Where we are at', and sometimes wondering if 'I am the sort of person God wants me to be'...

And often as we do this, we may feel like a failure... (The opposite, of course, is pride). 'Am I the sort of person God wants me to be?' we may ask ourselves...

In this context, then, when we do feel a bit 'down', people may say to us, 'Do your best and God will do the rest'. This, however, is not really a good thing to say. First, this saying is not biblical at all. Second, at what point do you allow God to do the rest? When you are exhausted? When you are injured or incapacitated? Third, it may lead to a false sense of importance, for such a saying gives us a sense of 'control of our lives', as if we can determine the outcome of our life.

When you believe 'Do your best and God will do the rest', it's like getting on the religious treadmill of religious activity. You hop on and start walking...slowly at first...going to church reading your Bible – "doing your part," "doing your best." Then you see other Christians who look like they're doing a better job than you – maybe reading the Bible more or praying more intensely or sharing their faith more openly or singing in the choir or helping more people who are in need. So now you start to "jog" on the treadmill to catch up – "if that's them doing their part – then I should be doing at least that." Next, you notice other people who seem to have a life that's double yours and so you start to speed up. Then it happens! BANG! You burn out – you can't keep sprinting – running full force forever.

The Christian life is about receiving salvation and with it the very life of Christ and then letting this indwelling Christ express Himself through you moment by moment, each and every day. Paul says in Romans 15:18: I will not venture to speak of anything *except what Christ has accomplished through me* in leading the Gentiles to obey God by what I have said and done. Paul also says in 1 Thessalonians 5:24: The one who calls you is faithful and *He will do it*.

Whether we are reading the daily paper, listening to the radio, or watching TV, the news is filled with what one might call the fruits of discouragement and even despair. Without question, we live in a strife-ridden world, one torn by wars, by famine, by disease and sickness, by natural disasters of gigantic proportion, by injustices and corrupt governments. And everyone carries some pain in their heart.

Into this context the word of God through the prophet Isaiah stands out. In Isaiah 40:29 we hear that ‘The LORD gives strength to the weary’

The fact that the text brings up the idea of strength and that we are renewed in strength, implies that there is a weakness. The first 39 chapters of Isaiah deal with judgment upon the nations for their indifference to God and His Word. And so the Lord says, “To whom then will you compare me, or who is my equal?”

But in view of the nations’ troubles Isaiah proclaims comfort to the people of God. Writing to people facing a great time of trial, Isaiah speaks of restoration. These verses in Isaiah 40 which make up the majority of this chapter are designed to get us to see our problems no matter how large against the background of our incomparable God. The problem is that we turn this around. We stand between God and our problems, with our back to God, and we focus on the problems. But by doing so we completely lose sight of God.

Beloved in our Lord Jesus Christ, where is your strength? We live in a world that prides itself in all its accomplishments. We live in a world that prides itself in being able to do anything it sets its mind to do, a world that has put men on the moon, and even plans, apparently, to put a base up there on the moon. We live in a world that has so much power stored up in its nuclear weapons, it could destroy itself a number of times over. But where is your strength? Is it in the things of the world?

Though we are God’s people, nevertheless, in our lives we are weak. We face the enemies of the world. We face the enemy of the devil. We face the enemy of our own sinful flesh. And how many times do we fall before these enemies? We grow weary and tired in the battle against our enemies. And the truth is we cannot win by ourselves. We need strength. We need our strength renewed. That is to say, we need a new kind of strength; not the physical strength of the youths, not the physical strength of the young men. We need strength from the Lord. We need the new life that comes from Jesus Himself. True strength does not come from within, but from God. The more someone says ‘Try harder’, the harder it becomes to try...

Who are the recipients of this renewed strength? Is it all people in general? No. The text is very specific. It says, “They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength.”

The Hebrew word “cha-lif”—translated in our text as “renew”—actually means to “exchange.” Ah, there’s another word with which Lutherans are very familiar. For Christ has made a wonderful exchange with us sinners. He has taken from you your filthy rags of unrighteousness and given to you the white robe of His perfect righteousness. He has taken from you your weariness and given to you His strength.

To wait for the Lord for strength, implies we recognise that we could not save ourselves. To wait upon the Lord for strength implies we recognise our

weakness. Really, that's the story for every child of God. We recognise our true helplessness outside of Christ. God comes to us with the gospel. He reveals to us the true nature of sin. But then he reveals to us Christ. And He brings us deliverance in Christ Jesus, our Saviour.

One of the great movies of all time was the 1959 epic Ben Hur. One of the movie's most riveting scenes where Charlton Heston (Ben Hur) defeated his enemy in a chariot race. The scene required 5 weeks of filming, 15,000 extras, and 18 chariots. To add to the authenticity Heston actually learned to drive the chariots. But after weeks of practice, Heston was worried about the shoot. He confided in the stunt coordinator: "I can drive the chariot, but I'm not sure I can win." The stunt man smiled and replied: "Chuck, you just make sure you stay in the chariot, and I'll make sure you win the race." You see, Heston had made the mistake of thinking that he actually had to win the race by his own power and skill. He had forgotten that the outcome had already been decided. It was in the script, he couldn't lose! And really that's what God is trying to get us to see in Isaiah 40.

"Come to Me, all who labour and are heavy laden," says Jesus, "and I will give you rest" (Mt 11:28). Rest. Renewal. Forgiveness. Strength. That is Christ's answer to your weariness. Therefore, weary ones, ... renew your strength in our Lord Jesus Christ; renew your strength in His words of absolution; renew your strength in His preached Word; renew your strength in His body and blood. For in these and these alone will you find the rest, renewal, forgiveness, and strength that weary souls so desperately need.

Jesus Christ has forgiven and strengthened you through baptism, absolution, gospel, and supper for that very purpose. Day in and day out He bears you up with wings like eagles so that you can run to your neighbour in need and not be weary, so that you can walk in the way of the Lord and not faint. Our strength is God in Jesus. Amen.