

“High Hopes: Those Who Hope in the Lord” | Isaiah 40:27-31

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Young Hope and Mature Hope

When I was newly following Christ, I became friends with a Christian brother who was doing ministry among the homeless and lower income in Philadelphia. His name is Adam. Along with many other college-aged students, we joined Adam to help with a Monday afternoon meal for homeless, and a Tuesday evening outreach to kids in neighborhood—and hopefully, to plant a church.

We were young, passionate for Christ, and filled with hope. Hope that God was going to do something mighty in Philly, freeing people from addiction, putting the homeless in jobs and houses, and bringing revival in that neighborhood.

One by one, the passionate college students graduated and moved away. But Adam stayed. In his twenty years of ministry, I imagine he’s been featured in the local newspaper dozens of times, had documentaries done on his life, and was even given an award by President George Bush at one point.

I went back to Philly to visit Adam last spring. I hopped right into the old work, setting up for the Monday meal, serving about two hundred plates of food.

One man even recognized me, after almost twenty years. He was still on and off the streets—or so it seemed. Not broken; but also, not altogether healed.

Philadelphia wasn’t fixed either. There had been no great revival. Our church plant didn’t come to anything. There were as many, if not more, homeless in the city. And there was Adam, still serving up that one meal a week.

This experience has made me reflect on a particular feature of the Christian life: *hope*.

Hope is our **desire** for good in our future. For Christians, this entails the good God may do in our lives and in the lives of others. Hope is also **confidence**—confidence that God will work to bring about this good in our future.

You might say that hope is *confident desire about good in our future*.

And I noticed something different about the quality of hope my friends and I had about Philadelphia in 2005, and the type of hope that was sustaining my friend Adam in 2025.

The former was a **young hope**—rooted in passion, it was well-meaning, but immature. It was a hope that didn’t understand the cost of certain callings, nor the mysterious ways God worked. It

was a hope that longed for fast and big results—results that everyone could see and celebrate. But that type of hope—young hope—didn't sustain people in hard work very long.

When I returned last spring, I saw a different quality of hope at work in Adam and others. What I might call **mature hope**. Mature hope is hope that has taken its bumps and bruises, seen disappointment and pain. But from that, transformed into something way stronger—like a muscle that's grown. A hope that was rooted in a broader understanding of what it means to live upon God in a fallen world.

Hope in Isaiah

Over the next several weeks leading up to Christmas, as a church we will be thinking about hope. We'll do so by drawing passages from the Book of Isaiah, and by reflecting on the theme in our Liturgy Boxes. Some have said that "Isaiah is the book of the hope and consolation of Israel."¹ Isaiah prophesies during a time when Israel has gone into exile—a time of darkness and despair. But across his book there is a promise of God's salvation that is meant to give Israel an indestructible hope—despite circumstances.

We start by jumping into the middle of with chapter 40:27-31. This passage concludes on our key verse for the series—a verse featured as the memory verse in our Liturgy Boxes. It reads,

those who **hope** in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary; they will walk and not be faint (Isa 40:31).

Looking at the passage broader passage—Isaiah 40:27-31—we note three things about biblical hope. **(1) Hope's Two Ditches; (2) Hope In; (3) Hope Helps.**

I. Hope's Two Ditches

Our passage opens with God's people in a moment of hopelessness:

Why do you say, O Jacob, and speak, O Israel, "My way is hidden from the LORD, and my right is disregarded by my God"? (Isa 40:27).

Here's the situation. Isaiah lived and ministered against the backdrop of geopolitical upheaval around Israel, and spiritual decline within Israel. Assyria, Egypt, and Babylon were vying for power, often with Israel caught in the middle.

The immediate context of Isaiah 40 is the rise of Babylon and the exile of Judah to Babylon. God is now speaking to the people who have seen Judah and Jerusalem burnt to the ground and been taken into captivity in Mesopotamia.

So we can understand the questions Jacob and Israel are crying in verse 27, "My way is hidden from the Lord, and my right is disregarded by my God." Two different things are being said here.

¹ Josef Pieper, *Faith, Hope, Love*, pg. 112.

“My way is hidden from the Lord,” means God cannot see them. He has lost sight of his people. He is not able to see them. “My right is disregarded,” means God will no longer hear their case.

This is a picture of hopelessness—or, no hope. They have lost everything, and either God no longer can save them, or no longer is willing to.

This is an awful experience, for a people or for an individual. To be without hope makes life unbearable. If we consider the large happenings of Isaiah, we can see that there are two very different types of hopelessness.

Ditch One: Despair

The first is this experience of despair. This is when we are tempted to say, God does not see me. He does not care. He does no work powerfully. He has disregarded my case. Jesus experiences the blackness of despair on the Cross, when he cries, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me” (Matt 27:46).

This is one of the ditches of hopelessness—and when we are in it it saps the vitality out of life.

Where might you be tempted to say this in your heart right now. My friend in Philadelphia, after twenty years of labor in a city still strewn with problems, may be tempted to say, “God does not see; he does not really regard my right.” One way despair shows up in a more polite disguise is **cynicism** and **skepticism**. When things have been hard in our lives, we are tempted to become cynical about the things of God—churches are all bad; Christians are not genuine. And skeptical toward God—Look at all the problems in the world, the poverty, evil, and war. Where is God.

But that is not the only ditch of “no hope” in Isaiah. Isaiah also makes clear the problem of *false hope*—hoping in the wrong things. Which is as bad as hopelessness, because it is a momentary hope that is illusory, and therefore no hope at all. This is the hopelessness of presumption.

Ditch Two: Presumption

This is where God’s people put our trust in things other than God and *presume* these things can ultimately secure our future or happiness.

Israel’s sin leading up to Isaiah 40 has been, in part, putting their hope and trust in things other than God. They trust in **other kings** to protect them—Egypt, Assyria and Babylon.² They have trusted in **false gods**.³ And they trust in **themselves**—their own strength, and own unfaithful leaders.⁴

² When threatened by Assyria, they are tempted to make a pact with Egypt (Isa 31:1); King Ahaz finally makes a treaty with Assyria.² And before our passage, Hezekiah has begun the process of trusting in Babylon.

³ “Their land is full of idols; they bow down to the work of their hands” (Isa 2:8).

⁴ “He has taken away the covering of Judah. In that day you looked to the weapons of the House of the Forest,

⁹ and you saw that the breaches of the city of David were many. You collected the waters of the lower pool,¹⁰ and you counted the houses of Jerusalem, and you broke down the houses to fortify the wall. ¹¹ You made a reservoir between the two walls for the water of the old pool. But you did not look to him who did it or see him who planned it long ago.” (Isa 22:8-11).

If we are hoping, ultimately, in our own smarts, or strengths, or circumstances to bring about a future we want, then we are *presuming* on our own strength. This is exactly what Israel did when it put its ultimate trust in anything other than God.

It is not wrong to hope in the secure foundation of your house at night, or the roof over your head to keep you safe from the rain. But it is wrong when our hearts make something like our education, or the company we work for, or the nation we live in, our ultimate hope for the future. There is a strong warning against presumption—false hope—in Isaiah:

Woe to those who go down to Egypt for help and rely on horses, who trust in chariots because they are many and in horsemen because they are very strong, but do not look to the Holy One of Israel or consult the LORD! (Isa 31:1)

Here, then, are two ditches that run alongside the biblical road of hope—despair and presumption. Biblical hope avoids despair (hopelessness) on the one side, and presumption (false hope) on the other.

Our passage, however, moves to real hope. It begins by noting the object of real hope—God.

II. The God We Hope In

Verses 28-29 turn our attention to God, by extolling many of his qualities:

Have you not known? Have you not heard? The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He does not faint or grow weary; his understanding is unsearchable.²⁹ He gives power to the faint, and to him who has no might he increases strength (40:28-29).

For anyone struggling with the problem of hopelessness, or for anyone who may have put their hope in “horses and chariots,” the solution is to turn to *the person of God*. He is to be the object of our Hope. Believers, *Hope in God* (Psalm 42). What do these verses tell us about the God we hope in, and how does this address the temptation of despair and presumption. Consider a few things.

First, it tells us God understands—both our experience and His purposes in it. This means more than saying God knows the situation we are in, like we know a person is broken down in their car because we drive by and see. He *understands* everything about it: how we are feeling, why it happened, what its purposes is in the larger plan. This is communicated through several attributes Isaiah reminds us of:

The Lord is the *everlasting God* (v.28): he is the God of the *long view*. He understands how your present situation fits into *eternal purposes*. “His understanding is unsearchable” (v 28), reminding us that “his ways are not our ways” (Isa 55:8-9), that we cannot know “the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgements and how

inscrutable his ways” (Rom 11:33). Israel cannot fathom that their exile is both the necessary judgement for their cleansing, and part of God’s sovereign plan for judging sinful nations, and preparing hearts for the True Messiah, Jesus.

Second, God is not impotent and passive, but active and Sovereign: The Lord is ... “the Creator of the ends of the earth” (v. 28). The language of God as creator is heavily concentrated in Isaiah 40-55. It speaks of him “creating the **universe** (Is 40:26, 28; 42:5), and as the sovereign creator over “**peace and violence**” (45:7), **humankind** (45:12; 54:16), **Israel** (43:1, 7, 15), of **conditions for deliverance** from Exile and sin (41:20), of a **new world** (65:17), and of **salvation and joy** (57:19, 65:18).

As one commentator puts it,

“The big picture is of God actively creating, forming, shaping, and stabilizing the universe and the historical social order from the beginning on into the present. There is no place for chaos or lack of control, in either sphere. God is in control. And this Creator, Maker, Stabilizer is identical with Israel’s Savior and Redeemer who has willed that Jerusalem be restored.”⁵

Finally, when we look to God, we are reminded that **he is compassionate:**

He gives power to the faint, and to him who has no might he increases strength (40:28-29).

This is the pattern to God’s work across the Bible: God draws near to, and works in the hearts of, the humble.

For thus says the One who is high and lifted up, who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: “I dwell in the high and holy place, and also with him who is of a contrite and lowly spirit, to revive the spirit of the lowly, and to revive the heart of the contrite. (Is. 57:15)

Isaiah will remind Israel again and again to *hope in God*—the God who knows all things, is actively working in and over all things, and is moved toward us when we acknowledge our need for him.

As a church, we are not exactly the Old Testament people of Judah. But we are similar. We are God’s people, called into a lasting relationship with Him of love and obedience. What does it look like for us to hope in God above all else? We may be tempted to hope in our programs or services or worship or numbers. We may be tempted to think these are signs of success. None are wrong. But it is the everlasting God we hope in; we trust that His purposes are being worked out in his way. Let us be careful not to assume that we can always “understand” what He is doing and thereby put our trust in our expectations of how he might work.

⁵ “Isaiah,” in *WBC*, pg. 94.

The way to avoid despair and presumption, Isaiah says to Israel (and us), is to hope *in God*. Finally, in the final verses, he tells us something of what the experience of this hope is like in our present—though hope is about the future, it helps us in the present.

III. Hope Helps—Today.

Verses 30-31 speak of a hope that impacts the experience of God's people—even while in exile:

Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall; ³¹ but those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary; they will walk and not be faint (Isa 40:30-31).

The word hope used here carries also the sense of “wait,” and points to the experience of living with an ongoing expectation and trust in God. It is the belief that God is currently at work and has good for our future. It is confident trust in God's power, character and promises.

Isaiah shows us the present psychological and physical impact such hope can have on us—it **“renews our strength.”**

Have you ever been around a person whose hope is squarely in the Lord? Often it is a hope that has been through the purifying fires.

Sometimes such a person seems to “soar on wings like eagles,” or “run and not grow weary.” But other times, the impact of hope in a person's life is more subtle—like a deep burning ember that cannot be extinguished; and someone despite all odds, “they walk and do not grow weary.”

This is how I have been thinking about my trip back to Philadelphia last spring, and a man named Fila who remembered me. I remember praying for him almost twenty years ago, and with a few other passionate college students. We prayed God would move heaven and earth in his life—my hope was nothing short of total restoration and a flourishing future. If you would have told me back then that twenty years later, I'd meet him and there'd be no family and new house, I'd have been disappointed and confused.

But there was a light in his eyes. He was not broken. He was not there to get a meal, but to help serve. There was a new stability in him—rough has the edges still seemed. No one would have said he was soaring on eagles' wings or running with joy. But this much I can tell you—for two decades, with so many odds against him, he had walked and not fainted.

Believe me when I say this to you: sometimes you will meet a person who has had only hope in God to live on. They have not had their circumstances—whether health, or financial, or relational—drastically changed. But something happened inside of them. God did something—beautiful in them.

When a man or woman in exile, or poverty, or any type of broken situation, puts their hope in God—even and especially when all else is stripped away—something happens to them. They renew their strength.

And sometimes this strength means we soar on wings like eagles—supernaturally lifted above the pain of our circumstances. Sometimes it means we can run longer than we ever imagined.

And other times, it simply means that while we walk through the Valley of the Shadow of death, we do not faint. We know that God is with us; we know that He is at work for His good purposes; and we know that we have a savior who rose from the dead and waits to take us into eternal joy.

Small Group Questions

1. How would you define *hope*? Is hope something you struggle with or something that comes easily? The sermon contrasted “young hope” with “mature hope.” How would you describe the difference?
2. Isaiah portrays two dangers on either side of the path of hope: **despair** (hopelessness) and **presumption** (placing hope in other kings, gods, or ourselves).
What are some subtle forms of despair—such as cynicism—that can creep into a Christian’s life?
What are some modern forms of presumption—ways Christians may trust in “other gods”—today?
3. Do you think of hope more as a feeling that happens to you or as an action you take? Isaiah calls Israel to look to God and put their trust in him (Isa. 40:28–29).
The sermon emphasized that hoping in God means trusting that **God understands, God is active, and God cares**.
Which of these attributes speaks to you most right now, and how might it apply to your life this week?
4. Isaiah 40:31 describes the present experience of hope as “renewed strength.” This strength may look like soaring, running, or simply *walking without fainting*.
Who is someone you’ve known who developed a mature hope? What did God’s strengthening look like in their life as they continued to “walk and not faint”?