

**The Power of Potential**  
**Isaiah 40:21-31 (AFBC 1/13/19)**

- <sup>21</sup> Do you not know?  
Have you not heard?  
Has it not been told you from the beginning?  
Have you not understood since the earth was founded?
- <sup>22</sup> He sits enthroned above the circle of the earth,  
and its people are like grasshoppers.  
He stretches out the heavens like a canopy,  
and spreads them out like a tent to live in.
- <sup>23</sup> He brings princes to naught  
and reduces the rulers of this world to nothing.
- <sup>24</sup> No sooner are they planted,  
no sooner are they sown,  
no sooner do they take root in the ground,  
than he blows on them and they wither,  
and a whirlwind sweeps them away like chaff.
- <sup>25</sup> "To whom will you compare me?  
Or who is my equal?" says the Holy One.
- <sup>26</sup> Lift up your eyes and look to the heavens:  
Who created all these?  
He who brings out the starry host one by one  
and calls forth each of them by name.  
Because of his great power and mighty strength,  
not one of them is missing.
- <sup>27</sup> Why do you complain, Jacob?  
Why do you say, Israel,  
"My way is hidden from the LORD;  
my cause is disregarded by my God"?
- <sup>28</sup> Do you not know?  
Have you not heard?  
The LORD is the everlasting God,  
the Creator of the ends of the earth.  
He will not grow tired or weary,  
and his understanding no one can fathom.
- <sup>29</sup> He gives strength to the weary  
and increases the power of the weak.
- <sup>30</sup> Even youths grow tired and weary,  
and young men stumble and fall;

<sup>31</sup> 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.

Over the years, some of you have recognized my appreciation for the book of Isaiah. It's been called "the Old Testament Gospel," and for good reason. What Isaiah says in his book comes closer to what Jesus emphasized than any other Old Testament writings.

But that's not to say that Isaiah is all about love and mercy. It's not! Isaiah confronted people who said the right things, who went to church every Sabbath Day; yet, at the same time, they gave no indication through the way they lived their lives that what was important to God was important to them.

Last April, we considered a verse from Isaiah 1 that most of us know quite well: "Come, let us reason together," says the Lord. "Though your sins are as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow. Though they are red like crimson, they shall be as wool."

We've heard many sermons from this passage—most of them emphasizing our need to confess our sin and God's promise to forgive and cleanse us of all sin—we need that message!

But we also need to hear it in the context of the whole truth of God. The specific sin God is confronting His people over all through Isaiah often goes unmentioned. God is holding His people accountable for their indifference toward the poor.

Friends, we must address issues like these if we're to be true to God's word, and if we are to ever reach the potential that God has for us as His children. This morning, I want us to reflect on the power of this potential that God has placed in our lives and in this church.

Any potential that we have comes from our relationship with God. Listen again to verse 28 of Isaiah 40 (from KJV this time):  
**"Hast thou not known? hast thou not heard, 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."**

You hear the strength in those words? Isaiah describes an all-powerful God. And what does this Almighty God do? Listen:

**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 their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint” (vv. 29-31).**

“... **They that wait upon the LORD...**” Of course, we don’t like to wait; so maybe we don’t resonate well with Isaiah’s suggestion that we should “wait on the Lord.” I mean, who does He think he is—asking busy people like us to wait?!?

But there’s a lesson to be learned here--one that we all need—and it goes something like this: **1. THERE IS POTENTIAL IN BEING PATIENT.** Often individuals--and even institutions like churches--become stronger as they experience the very unpopular process of waiting.

During the 197-year history of Anderson First Baptist Church, those who have led this church, along with all who have been members here, have often been required to exercise great patience. That crude, lean-to structure that served as the church’s first gathering place did not discourage those first members of this congregation.

They waited and persevered until the first church house could be built—located on what is now Murray Avenue, where the Saluda Baptist Associational Office now stands. That first little building was no Taj Mahal. It didn’t have air conditioning or even a balcony to sit under! Imagine that!!!

What we see surrounding us today has been a long time in the making—so, too, the church we are today. The person you are and the person I am today, friends, have also been a long time in the making—longer for some than others.

For most of us, progress hasn’t been continuous. Some of us may have regressed some along the way. Churches do this too.

Sometimes we have to be patient with ourselves and with those people and institutions around us—because there’s almost always *unrealized* potential. And there’s power in that potential, if we’re willing to be patient.

I wonder how many good dreams never become reality because the dreamers are too impatient, too unwilling to wait for the right moment--for God's moment--for that vision to take shape.

It occurs to me that every generation experiences setbacks, times of conflict, economic downturns, health crises and more. Lots of dreams have to be put on hold. This is part of the human condition. Those who succeed... practice patience.

If our dreams are worthy, and especially if God is in them, we shouldn't give up on them. Wait on the Lord. Be patient. God may well be preparing us for something even grander than we ever imagined just a little ways further down the road.

But listen—this is not patience in the sense of just twiddling our thumbs, or not getting anxious when things aren't moving along as fast as we think they should. It's not that at all, because the prophet tells us clearly that those who "wait on the Lord" will what?—"renew their strength."

That changes everything, doesn't it? There is strength that comes from being patient; but it must be a "waiting on the Lord" kind of patience—which brings us to this:

**2. THERE IS POTENTIAL IN TRUSTING GOD.** Our ability to be patient grows out of our trust in the Lord. Strong patience rises up out of strong trusting—not trusting in ourselves, but trusting, instead, in God.

Self-confidence—trusting in ourselves and our abilities--is not a bad thing—it's just so limited. God-confidence, on the other hand, has limitless possibilities.

Isaiah was trying to get us to see the "big picture" when he said: "Hast thou not known? hast thou not heard, 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" (28).

Isaiah wants us to closely examine who or what we're placing our trust in. We'd better place it in something other than the stuff we see around us every day—this won't last.

We need to be trusting Someone who's bigger than we are—like the One Isaiah tells us about—the God who never gets tired, never keels over, and never encounters any problems or challenges that He doesn't know how to handle.

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We can't always trust others or even ourselves—but we have every reason, because of who He is, what He knows, and what He can do—we have every reason to trust God.

Let me tell you about a noteworthy piece of Anderson's history in which this church played an important role. Dr. John White was pastor here in the 1920s, but he also served as Interim President of Anderson College.

He was retiring from both positions, so the college was looking for a new President. It was having a tough time finding one. These were the Depression years, and no one thought the college would survive the tough times.

Dr. White did a courageous thing for his day. It required a tremendous amount of trust and confidence in God. Dr. White nominated a faithful First Baptist Church member, a person who was already serving as a Dean at the college, to succeed him.

What was so peculiar about this—and what made it such a huge step of faith--is that his choice to be his successor was a woman! That had never been done before in the state of South Carolina.

Sadly, in some circles, it wouldn't be done today; but Annie Dove Denmark became the first female college president in this state.

To this day, she remains the longest tenured president in the history of the school; and she did a remarkable job of taking a struggling institution whose very survival was in doubt—leading it, encouraging it, and enabling it, to continue its mission!

There is remarkable strength, friends, that comes from trusting the Lord enough to step out in faith and occasionally take the really bold step that no one else is willing to take. If the Lord is in it, His strength will be sufficient to make our efforts successful.

Listen: we all tend to put too much trust in our own strength and resources, in the things we can touch, observe, and control.

Instead, we need to trust the One who never grows weary, whose understanding is unlimited, and who's always ready to share His presence and power with those who know they need them—those of us who can still be humble enough before the Almighty to see our weaknesses, and weariness, and lack of understanding.

**3.** May we find the strength and courage to do great things by placing our trust in the Lord. Great things are exactly what God

wants for us. Which brings us to one other truth that I want us to see in this passage: **THERE IS POTENTIAL IN AIMING HIGH!**

Listen again to this promise. It serves as a wonderful assurance for those of us who are willing to wait on the Lord in an attitude of humble trust. It says: **"..they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint" (v 31).**

On a fishing trip in the lower part of our state, my friend pointed to a massive bird in the distance. "That's an eagle," he said.

We watched as that eagle passed over the lake with his eyes trained on the surface of the water. He was looking for a fish swimming in the shallows.

We watched in hopes of seeing him swoop down and snatch a fish out of the water. It didn't happen, though—the fishing wasn't very good that day for any of us!

It was an impressive sight! But not all of life is spent soaring. That's true for us as individuals, and it's also true for churches.

We love it when we're soaring—it's exhilarating—and I really believe that, as people of faith, we should keep on aiming high. We never know what the Lord may decide to do through us or when that opportunity to soar for Him may come our way.

Still, we need to be realistic enough to understand that most of us will spend a major part of our time just plodding along. And you know what? If we are secure in our faith, if we genuinely trust God, we will be content in simply walking with the Lord.

Isaiah makes allowances for this. He says there're those times when we'll be soaring on eagles' wings. At other times, though, we only have strength to run--not fly. Then there'll also be moments when just walking without fainting is all we can do.

I have no idea if the prophet had different stages of life in mind when he said this—but it could certainly apply, don't you think? When we're young, we're always ready to soar—sometimes throwing caution to the wind in the process—right?

We get a bit older, though, and we settle for running—maybe running around like those proverbial "headless chickens"—but there's lots of running. Later, we reach an age where just getting to our feet and remaining upright is an accomplishment!

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But what I want you to see is this: all these stages of life, and all these varieties of traveling speeds, are nurtured and enriched by this same “waiting on the Lord” and “trusting in Him.”

Whether this results in “soaring high” or just “shuffling along,” we keep waiting on the Lord for what’s next... and we keep trusting in Him when whatever that next thing is starts taking shape.

Mother eagles do an interesting thing with their young. After they’ve hatched them, and fed them, and helped them reach a certain level of maturity, they then push those little eaglets out of the nest. In other words, they force them to fly. Occasionally, of course, human parents have to do something like this as well.

This church has the responsibility to get our young ones to the point that they are ready to fly on their own—thinking for themselves, facing the tough issues of life—but doing so after first being well-grounded in what it means to be follower of Jesus.

May it always be this church’s steadfast resolve to help all of us know and love the Lord supremely, to be filled with enough trust and confidence in Him that we will not only be able to soar—but when we soar, we will know that it’s happening only through the Lord’s strength, and always for His glory!

So, we’ll close with these important questions. Where are you in your relationship with the Lord? Do you know Christ Jesus as your Savior. Are you seeking to follow Him as Lord of your life?

Do you trust Him enough to wait for His timing, but at the same time, do you also trust and obey Him enough to truly soar in those moments when He puts those opportunities in front of you?

God places so much potential in each of our lives, and even more in the life we share together as members of His Body.

May we never take this for granted. Instead, may each one of us do our part to make sure we’re reaching the potential God has placed in us—for Christ’s sake, and for His glory! Amen.

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