

Pastor Jonna Bohigian
Waiting on the Light of God
Isaiah 40:21 – 31

Dear friends in Christ, grace and peace to You, from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

When I was young, I had romantic notions about life and relationships. Frankly, I still do; it's probably impossible for idealists *not* to. Regarding my future spouse, I had this notion that I would meet my future husband as a young person, would have this cute story about how we met, how he would sweep me off my feet, and we would be *madly* in love forever.

The older I've gotten, the more I've realized that everyone has their unique story. And it is often *not* so romantic, but commonplace, painful, comedic, and/or embarrassing.

(picture) Alek and I met in seminary, a place where some have given up the pursuit of marriage in a desire to pursue God's call, whatever that may be. This was, at least, the headspace both Alek and I had when we met. We became fast friends, but I *strongly* believed that we were *not* the right ones for each other. He reminded me of some friends in my past, who had told me that they would never be interested in me, for one reason or another. Since he reminded me of those friends, I kept him at an arm's distance, confident that we would have no future together.

It wasn't long before we started having serious conversations. He told me that he believed that *he* was the right one for *me*. I was *shocked* with his boldness and told him that he shouldn't be so arrogant. He laughed, and proceeded to say that he believed that *I* was the right one for *him*. I told him in earnest that I believed that he was wrong. Just like my other friends, he would get to know me, and realize that I was not the right person for him. *He* would

want someone more laid back than me, and *I* would need to be with someone different from him. He laughed, and said, “Well, I’ll just have to prove it over time to you then. I feel *increasingly* confident that we are the right ones for each other, so I will pursue you until you tell me to stop.”

And that’s the beginning of our story. Not the most romantic story, but one that I love. What I love most about this story is Alek’s ability to understand *my* lack of trust and lean in. He didn’t tell me to “just believe him;” he told me that he would show me *over time* that he meant what he said.

Trust is built over time. As much as we may desire it, it doesn’t come immediately, *especially* after life events indicate that we *ought* not trust, that we *ought* to be more leery, discerning, and careful. Trust is really a rather *fragile* thing.

And it’s in *this* space that we enter the biblical story in Isaiah. Judah has been destroyed and God’s people *in masse* are exiled to Babylon. Many scholars believe that quite a bit of time elapses between Isaiah chapters 39 and 40, 150 years even! Judah has been exiled, away from everything they knew, and *unable* to access the presence of God; God has remained *silent*.

They are left to wonder. *Doesn’t* God care? *Doesn’t* He see them in pain, toiling away for kings who don’t believe in God? *Doesn’t* He see the injustice they’ve endured? *Doesn’t* He hear their cries? *Why* does He remain silent? *Why* does He not act to save them? Does He *no longer* care for them? Is He *powerless* to act?

These are the types of questions they asked. We hear it evidenced in verse 27: “Why do you say, O Jacob, and complain, O Israel, ‘My way is hidden from the LORD; my cause is disregarded by my God?’” They *longed* for God to see their pain, the injustice they suffered,

and *act!* But it had been *so long!* They had waited *so long* for God to bring them justice, for God to free them. They reasoned that either God must be blind to their situation, or He must not care.

It is *difficult* to trust God, when circumstances seem to indicate that God is weak and unable to act, or when it seems that He does not *wish* to act. Appearing weak and uncaring does *not* bode well in building trust.

As humans, we need *reason* to trust, *evidence* to believe. And by no means is this a bad thing! We need reason and evidence to trust humans; why would we *not* need that in our relationship with God?

The sticking point comes when *we* determine how God needs to prove Himself to *us*. We set the criterion and God either passes the test, or He doesn't. For example: *If God is concerned for me, He will make my situation easier. If God cares for me, He will cure me from my disease. If God loves me, He will restore this broken relationship.*

It is by no means wrong to pray, to plead with God, that He might act in a certain way. Scripture *encourages* it, in fact. We see in Job and in the Psalms, that Scripture even encourages us to be *angry* with God, to let Him have it, to share with Him what is really on our hearts. And Scripture reveals that we *cannot* know the depth of the mind of God – why He does or doesn't act, why He at times chooses to wait instead of intervening right away, or why some seem suffer more than others. Scripture also, and most importantly, reveals to us the heart of God.

In Isaiah, God's people complained that God did not see their suffering, or worse, that He disregarded the injustice they endured. And they understandably *felt* that way – exiled,

enslaved, not having heard from God in 150 years... But was it *true*? Did God *not* see their suffering, or *did* He disregard their pain?

God proclaims through the prophet, “Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to [her] and proclaim that her hard service has been completed, that her sin has been paid for, that she has received from the LORD’s hand double for all her sins” (Isa 40:1 – 2). Her persecutors will have no power and will wither away like the flowers and the grass. God is the good shepherd, who gently tends His sheep. God is the One who created everything, and can blow away the power from the powerful like the wind blows away chaff. There is no one like God; *no one* is His equal. He has no beginning and no end. He is the Creator of all things and never grows tired. “Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall; but those who [wait on] 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).

God was present, had heard their cries, was *more* than caring and powerful enough to save them the *entire time*, and *would* bring them strength and justice. *Why* He waited we don’t know, but it was *not* due to a lack of power or love.

As we read this passage from Isaiah, we are uplifted by its beautiful poetry, put in our place as grasshoppers in comparison with the majesty of God, and still *cannot* comprehend *why* God didn’t act to prevent or minimize their suffering. We *cannot* comprehend the depth of the mind of God.

It’s *maddening*, frankly. It would be so much better if God were more like us, doing *everything in His power* to protect His children from pain, punishing the wicked and protecting

the innocent, putting an end to the pain in this life! In many ways, you and I *wish* we were in charge. But the reality is, we are *not*. You and I are *not* the center of the story of God.

Pastor Francis Chan once shared an analogy like this. **(picture)** Take a look at this picture. What do you see? An energetic picture of triumph! This soccer player is a hero for his team. He has scored a goal, and his team is *winning!* The masses of fans are on their feet, cheering, raising their hands, and clapping. Now, if I ask the question, “Who are *you* in this picture?” the majority of us would like to say that we are the hero. We tend to be the heroes of our stories, don’t we? If we ask the question, “Who are we, in light of God’s story?” Scripture reveals to us that we are more like one of the fans in the background, and that God *alone* is the hero.

God is the hero. And amazingly, God allows Himself to be questioned, to be hated, to be misunderstood, and allows humans to make decisions *not* in accordance with His will. And He not simply *allowed*, but proactively *sent* His only Son to earth, who gave up his rights and his dignity, to be hated and to die – for *you*, so that you might have hope and a future.

God does not often reveal the answer as to *why*, but in His perfect wisdom, He gives *Himself*. And it is in the giving of God’s self in Jesus, that God most clearly chooses to reveal Himself. Martin Luther claimed, in fact, that **(quote)** God *hides* Himself in order to be known as He desires to be known – through the suffering of Jesus on the cross.¹ *God hides Himself in order to be known as He desires to be known – through the suffering of Jesus on the cross.* God wants to be known on *God’s* terms, and He wants us to know Him as the One who humbled Himself to death on the cross out of His love for you and for me.

¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_revealed_God

“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. He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak. Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall; but those who [wait on] 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 40:28 – 31).

May you wait on and hope in God alone, and may He renew your strength. Amen.