

By rights we shouldn't even be here! This was the cry of the Israelites as they found themselves in Babylon. They were dragged away from Israel kicking and screaming. The temple of the Lord their God was destroyed, their homeland was ravaged, and they are held captive by those with foreign gods. Where was the Lord in all of this?

By rights *we* shouldn't even be here! This is our cry as we find ourselves in the Babylon of today's world. Just look at the news, how much violence is there in this world? How much hatred is there? How often is justice miscarried and we're left wondering in whom to trust? How can we handle our own personal tragedies: the loss of loved ones, the loneliness of social distancing, and the anxiety that sickness and injury brings? We are captives in this Babylon of the modern world. These struggles we face imprison us like the Israelites in Babylon. How can this have a happy ending? How could the world go back to the way it was when so much bad has happened? Where is God in all of this!?

Can't God make all this suffering go away? Maybe He is unable to do so, these forces of evil are terribly strong. We find ourselves asking: 3. Am I captive because the LORD is too weak?

Isaiah in today's lesson anticipates this complaint. He writes to encourage the exiled Israelites in Babylon. He is God's messenger to proclaim to the Israelites that they are not abandoned. Isaiah writes, **"Do you not know? Do you not hear? Has it not been told you from the beginning? Have you not understood from the foundations of the earth?"** He starts off saying, "Haven't you already heard this? Is this news to you? God is all powerful! This is what you have learned from Sunday school days!"

Isaiah continues, **"It is he who sits above the circle of the earth, and its inhabitants are like grasshoppers; who stretches out the heavens like a curtain, and spreads them like a tent to dwell in; who brings princes to nothing, and makes the rulers of the earth as emptiness."** The Lord is of course all-powerful. The rulers and princes are mere grasshoppers to Him. The Lord views even the strongest of adversaries as nothing. After all, the Lord stretches out the heavens like a thin curtain. He created the heavens and the earth as effortlessly as you put up your dainty lace window curtains. He spreads the heavens with as much ease as you set a tablecloth. He has done this effortlessly and can rend the heavens and come down just as easily. If the Lord can do this, how much more does He have power over your captors and over those things with which you struggle?!

Okay, we often don't struggle with believing God being all powerful, but if God is all powerful yet we are still captive under sin and death, then He might not know what exactly what is going on. All of our role models and heroes need rest, why would God be an exception? How could He know everything? We often ask

ourselves, echoing the words of Isaiah 40:27, 2. is my way hidden because the Lord grows weary?

Does God know my way? Does God know what my path is? Does God know how this struggle is going to end? Will we ever get out of this pandemic? Will my wife ever get better? Will I ever find that special someone? Will I ever overcome this sin? Sure, God is powerful, but does *He* know how this story will end? Does He know how *my* story will end?

We may know the Sunday school answer that God is omniscient, or all-knowing, but these questions still keep us up at night, these answers still gnaw at us in the wee hours of the morning, and these questions have us second guessing ourselves.

Isaiah is quick to answer these concerns. He writes in verse 28, **“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.”** The God of the universe is the everlasting God, He was here from the beginning. Psalm 139 proclaims, His eyes saw our unformed substance, in His book is written every day of our lives before we even were conceived. Our way is *not* hidden from Him, the future is in His hands.

This God does not faint or grow weary, God never sleeps but is watching over us like a mother watches a babe in her arms. His understanding is unsearchable, the Lord knows all things! Our way is not hidden from Him.

So... in the midst of our captivity, in the midst of our suffering we have a God who is all powerful and He is perfectly aware of sufferings. How horrifying is this!? He knows of our suffering and can stop our suffering; He knows of our captivity and can free us. Why doesn't He? Why did I lose my job? Why did my wife die? Why doesn't He stop all of this?! It's not right. Is God some kind of watchmaker who sets up the clock then steps back and lets the events run their course? Does He not care? 1. Is my right disregarded because the Lord does not care?

The Lord does care. The Lord is not a distant judge. The Lord has fearfully and wonderfully made us. God interacts with us intimately on a daily basis. Isaiah writes in today's lesson, **“[The Lord] gives power to the faint, and to him who has no might he increases strength.”** The Lord is constantly empowering us and renewing us. Isaiah continues, **“...they 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.”** Yes, we are captives in this world, but in the midst of suffering the Lord gives us strength to get through all our tribulations. In the midst of suffering, we are left no option but to wait for the Lord.

But we wait not as those without hope, but as those who know that the Lord has come. He does not stand idly at the sidelines of this world. Our captivity is not

alien to Him because He Himself was made a slave. Our way is not hidden from Him because He Himself walked down the way. Our right is not disregarded from Him because He Himself took up our cause. God Himself has come to us in the captivity of this world through His Son Jesus Christ.

The God who created the universe as easily as you hang up your coat was reduced to nothing. As His life was drained from Him as He was beaten and tortured, this young man, Christ, fell exhausted as He carried the cross up to Mount Calvary.

Christ's way was well known by Him as His path led from His baptism to the horrible suffering and death on the cross. He knowingly suffered this death for us. Very rarely will a man die for another, in the heat of the moment a soldier will save his brothers from a grenade or a mother will save her child from an assailant, but Jesus Christ woke up every morning of His life *knowing* He would die this gruesome death, yet He did not turn back. He walked this path *for you*.

The God of the universe who cares for us regarded your right as Christ Himself sacrificed Himself for you on the cross. All your struggles, sufferings, and sins were made right on the cross as Christ pleaded your case before God the Father. By all rights He should not have even been there! On that cross, bleeding dry for crimes He didn't commit. Drinking the sorrows and the sufferings of His people. On the cross He drank the sorrows of the captive Israelites, as well as our own sorrows. We have been freed from captivity; our way is not hidden from the Lord. Our right has been regarded because Christ destroyed the dividing wall between us and God.

**THE ALMIGHTY LORD REGARDS THE WAY OF HOPEFUL CAPTIVES BECAUSE THE LORD REGARDS THE WAY OF HIS SON AS OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS.**

There are still sorrows, there is still violence, suffering, and sin. We still struggle as captives in the Babylon of this world, but by the power of the Holy Spirit, we wait on the Lord. The Lord has promised to renew our strength.

When we wait on the Lord, and we hope for His action in our life, we are forced to reflect on the cross. We see that the cross didn't end in death. Christ rose again! All the sorrow of the cross has been swallowed up in victory. In the same way that Christ's suffering was forgotten by the joy of Christ's resurrection, our sufferings and captivity will one day be forgotten by the joy of *our* resurrection. Until then, we wait upon the Lord to renew our strength, knowing all the while that the ultimate renewal of strength will be when Christ comes again to restore the heavens and the earth. The ultimate victory is yet to come; until then, the Lord renews our strength through His very real presence until our last day. Amen! Come Lord Jesus.