

The Gravity of Life and Rising Above It

Isaiah 40:21-31

Epiphany 5-B, February 4, 2018

Have you ever thought about how cool it would be, if you could fly? And, here, I don't mean—flying in one of those loud, noisy, metal contraptions we call an “airplane.” No, I mean you flying—SOLO—in just your own body; though perhaps you might be flapping your arms a bit!

So, picture it: There you are soaring above the earth; banking over the forests; skimming over the rivers and darting through the canyons—all the while—breathing in the fresh air of free and effortless flight!

And yet for some of you the thought may not be all that appealing; not if you suffer from “acrophobia;” the fear of heights! And it doesn't matter if you are standing on the top floor of the Willis Tower in Chicago, looking down from that 110th floor at West Wacker Drive below—or you are standing on a 6-foot ladder in your living room—the thought of flying doesn't appeal to you at all!

BUT WHAT IF, ALL OF A SUDDEN—YOU HAD NO FEAR OF HEIGHTS ANYMORE! THEN YOU COULD COME ALONG, FLYING WITH THE REST OF US TOO—WITH NO NEED FOR A PARACHUTE!

Psychologists tell us that most of us have given some thought to the possibility of our being able to fly—at some point in life! If not, how would it have ever become possible for Orville and Wilbur Wright to become the “First in Flight” out there along the coast of North Carolina in 1903?

Psychologists also tell us that we tend to do this with far more frequency and vividness when we are children—than when we are adults! Why? Because as children the POWERS of our IMAGINATION are much greater for us than they are for us when we are adults! We have not spent 20 years of our lives yet with people telling us why you can't do this and you can't do that!

THIS IS ALSO WHY TO BE THE MOST HAPPY AND WELL-ADJUSTED PEOPLE WE CAN BE—THERE IS A PART OF US THAT ALWAYS NEEDS TO REMAIN A CHILD! And wasn't our Lord Jesus this first to endorse this powerful truth for us? *“Truly, truly, I say unto you, unless you become like a little child, you can in no way enter into the kingdom of heaven” (Mark 10:15)!*

Young children so often believe that their parents can do anything. How many children have popped a balloon only to then take the remnants of that balloon and hold up in the face of their young fathers, saying: “Fix it, daddy! Fix it!”

Perhaps you have had some dreams of flying and your dream of flying is so exhilarating that you can recall it vividly. **BUT THE TIME ALWAYS COMES WHEN YOU WAKE UP FROM THAT**

DREAM, ONLY TO DISCOVER THAT YOU HAVE LANDED UPON EARTH ONCE AGAIN—AND WHERE? Nowhere else but right there, smackdab in the middle of you own bed.

As you pull yourself out of bed you feel yourself being pulled down by the weight of **GRAVITY**—THAT NATURAL PHENOMENON THAT PULLS OBJECTS OF MASS TOWARDS ONE ANOTHER! Gravity is the reason that when you drop a piece of paper, no matter how light it is, it falls to the earth, rather than rising into heaven!

Yes, there is physical gravity—but there is also a certain amount of **SPIRITUAL GRAVITY WE ALL EXPERIENCE AS WE MAKE OUR WAY THROUGH THIS WORLD TOO!**

So, when you awake from your dream of flying, you walk towards the bedroom with your shoulders slumped down—not by the mere physical weight of your body, but also by the **WEIGHT OF YOUR PROBLEMS**—suddenly pouring back into your heart and mind. This kind of weight doesn't show up on the bathroom scale, but you can still detect it in signs of weariness, so evident in your face, and in the sadness lurking behind your eyes!

Unfortunately, you suddenly become filled with an unwelcomed-state of consternation once more! My first point is true, I believe, with respect to all of us is this: **THE GRAVITY OF LIFE SOMETIMES WEIGHS US DOWN!**

- There is the gravity of the world's situation! There is the fearful possibility that those **WEAPONS OF MASS DESTRUCTION** will fall into the wrong hands of one of those ever-present, world's tyrants in the nightly news!
- There are problems associated with your place of work! You are fearful because the company you work for has recently hired a CEO who is "absolutely" ignorant of all the great contributions you have made to the firm you work for! What if she decides to cut you "loose" simply to show a bigger profit margin at the end of the year—and enhance her own standing in the stockholders' view.
- There are family problems...whether you are a teenager whose parents just don't understand you. Maybe you are a young couple and have hit a rough patch in your marriage! You grew up in what you believed was a very good home and certainly do not remember love being such a difficult and a demanding thing! But back then—you were primarily on the receiving end of that love! Now that you are an adult—you are being called upon to be much more of the **PROVIDER OF THAT KIND OF UNCONDITIONAL LOVE TO YOUR SPOUSE AND TO YOUR CHILDREN!**

And **DO YOU EVER THINK OF THE POSSIBILITY OF YOUR FLYING?**

Or are you telling me: "That will never happen to ever again!"?

But should we really exclude ourselves from that possibility in light of the great promise our God makes to us in the world of our Old Testament lesson today from Isaiah 40:31?

"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."

Hmm! Perhaps we are speaking too soon! The Lord says that we can "*soar on wings like eagles!*" The prophet Isaiah was writing to the people of Israel during a time, when they felt like

their strength was sapped and they had no hope. Like us, they had concerns also about the national news. The news for them was not too good either. The dreadful Assyrians, a constant threat, were breathing down their necks and later it would be the Babylonians, who would take them all away to live in exile.

As they only thought about—and worried about—all the trouble they now found themselves in, they were also now taking their eyes completely off their Redeemer and closing their ears to the POWERFUL PROMISES OF GOD'S WORD! In doing so, THE AMOUNT OF ANXIETY THEY WERE EXPERIENCING ONLY INTENSIFIED AND MAGNIFIED ITSELF EXPONENTIALLY TO THE Nth DEGREE! As a result of this - - - to use some slang language from the 1990's—they then began “talking trash” against their God!

Isaiah was so miffed at God's people that he ends up mimicking them and their complaints; complaints that they were now lodging against the LORD God!

Like Jesus who says the children of his generation were calling out in the market place, “We played the flute and you would not dance, and we played a funeral dirge and you would not mourn!” Isaiah says to his people—you are contending: “*My way is hidden from the Lord; my cause is disregarded by my God.*”

In other words: “God doesn't really care about us!” “How can he?” Look at all this bad and difficult stuff that is happening all around us!” “He's not really in charge of things!”

Can you and I see what is happening here? They began to see their problems as being bigger than God himself. It didn't even cross their minds that the all-powerful Lord, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, might have something to say about their problems.

They had made a subtle exchange over the years. They exchanged their faith in God for their own knowledge of the ways of the world. And don't we, oftentimes, my friends, do the same things? We systematically exclude God from different aspects of our lives. We imagine ourselves to be in complete control of our life's situation—BUT WE CAN ONLY DELUDE OURSELVES INTO DOING THAT FOR SO LONG. EVENTUALLY, NO MATTER HOW POWERFUL WE PRESUME OURSELVES TO BE, NO MATTER HOW MUCH MONEY WE HAVE OR IMPORTANT CONNECTIONS WE HAVE WITH HAVE WITH OTHER PEOPLE IN THIS WORLD—THE DAY COMES---WHEN WE STILL FIND OURSELVES HELPLESS AND HOPELESS—APART FROM OUR GOD!

To Israel and to us, the Prophet says “*Do you now know? Have you not heard? He, (namely God) 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.*”

In other words, God created everything and is above everything and rules everything. In other words, “Look beyond the stuff of the world and beyond the stuff of your life!”

When you and I do this, with eyes of faith, then we will also be able to see the One who is behind it all and indeed also above it all!

When can then give the good LORD thanks that it is now we who are in charge, but he who is in charge!

In 1997 an American author, motivational speaker and psychotherapist named Richard Carlson published a book entitled: DON'T SWEAT THE SMALL STUFF AND IT'S ALL SMALL STUFF!

It was so popular that it was USA TODAY'S bestselling book for 2 years and spent over 101 weeks on the New York Times Best Seller's list. It has been published in 135 countries and translated into 30 different languages! You and I, my brothers and sisters, are not in charge of the present, God is! You and I, my brothers and sisters, are not in charge of the future either, God is! God is in charge! God is the Lord! But there's even more. Not only is he in charge, but he also loves you with a perfect love so that he can be trusted completely! How do we know that he loves us? To the Israelites, Isaiah explained it in this way: *"Unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given. And the government will be upon his shoulders, and he will be called Wonderful counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting father, Prince of peace" (Isaiah 9:7)!*

And of course, we know that this Child who was born and Son who was given is Christ Jesus. We know that he established his kingdom by going to the cross to die for all our sins. It certainly wasn't easy for him to do this, but he was willing to do this for us because he loved us and had compassion on us as he saw us dragging our feet and struggling under the gravity of our own lives. He saw what it was doing to us. He sees what it is doing to you. And he says to you *"Come to me, you who are weary and heavy-laden and I will give you rest"*. The good news, my friends, is that the jig is up. You have not been, nor can you ever be the Lord of your own life. Offer that sinful delusion up to your loving Lord Jesus. Be forgiven. Be renewed. Be strengthened! And listen to Isaiah once again: *"Do you not know? Have you not heard? The Lord is the everlasting God! He will not grow tired and weary and his understanding no one can fathom."* *"He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak! 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."* Colossians 3:1-4: *"If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. ² Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth, ³ for you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. ⁴ When Christ who is your life is revealed, then you also will be revealed with him in glory.* So the stuff of dreams and childhood fantasy is really not too far off of the mark. There is a way to escape the gravity of life. Find your hope in the Lord and his Christ! AMEN