

Series: Transition

July 16, 2017

Title: "On Eagles' Wings"

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Text: Isaiah 40:27-31

Ironman

The IRONMAN Challenge:

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In 1977 Judy and John Collins came up with a crazy idea: why not combine the three toughest endurance races in Hawaii, and do it all in one day? That meant swimming 2.4 miles, cycling 112 miles, and then running a 26.2 mile marathon.

The first IRONMAN took place on February 18, 1978. 15 people entered the competition.

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This October over 2000 athletes will take up the challenge of the 140.6 mile journey: they will do the ocean swim, then cycle and run in 95 degree temperatures under a blazing sun, with crosswinds of 45 mph. And all of this has to happen between 7:00 a.m. and midnight!

It's been said that just finishing the triathlon is a victory. Last year's winner may run out of gas half way through the marathon and drop out of the race altogether. To win the event and become this year's "Ironman" you will need to find strength to outrun the field right to the last mile of the marathon.

God's IRONMAN Challenge:

Isaiah issues God's IRONMAN Challenge to a shattered and defeated Israel:

"Go build a highway in the desert for the LORD!"

It was the ultimate IRONMAN Challenge. Would they dare to take a radically new journey in a dangerous and unfamiliar place? Would they dare to believe that God would actually be out there to meet them and sustain

them? Would they take the Exodus Marathon Journey into God's purpose and plan for them and their world?

God is issuing the same challenge to you and me. He is challenging us not to a short sprint, but to a life-long race. And it is a race that courses through the desert areas of our lives. Sometimes we'll find ourselves swimming against the waves; sometimes we'll be cycling along with the wind at our back; all too often we will be slogging along under a blazing sun, the finish line seemingly a million miles away.

Don't let anyone tell you that religion is a crutch! This journey is not for the faint of heart.

Israel's complaint:

It turns out that Israel had lost sight of the finish line. She had forgotten why God had called her. She had lost any sense of purpose and direction. So, Isaiah calls her out:

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Isaiah 40:27 NIV

Why do you say, O Jacob, and complain, O Israel,

"My way is hidden from the LORD; my cause is disregarded by my God?"

Israel's complaint is that the LORD is no longer leading the journey. Israel is now on her own – wandering aimlessly among the nations of the world, with no future and no destiny. What's worse: God is acting like a corrupt judge, deliberately overlooking her case and withholding justice!

Israel is like a runner who has completely run out of gas, and is now walking dejectedly under the blazing sun, while the other athletes run by. What will it take to get her going again? Is there any hope at all?

The IRONMAN God

A fresh look at God:

What Israel needs is a fresh look at God. She has fallen into the trap of thinking that God is like us: prone to forgetting other people's problems, or unwilling to be fair. So Isaiah asks a second question:

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Isaiah 40:28 NIV

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.

Israel had lost sight of who God really is. She had become so trapped in her troubles that it seemed as if God had checked out. It was time to see Him again for the first time.

Who God really is:

God hasn't lost track of us. Our journey is never hidden from Him. He is everlasting: The Beginning and the End. He created all of reality. He knows right where we are. He knows what we've been through. He knows what we will need for the journey ahead.

Everything in our world eventually runs out of energy. Everything in our world eventually breaks down. But not God. He is not subject to the entropy that is the ultimate reality of our existence. The God who created the cosmos is the same powerful God who keeps it going. We'll never figure Him out.

The God who gives strength:

This is the God we encounter when we build that road in the desert. Isaiah tells us that not only is God unlimited in His power and strength, but He gives us His strength for our journey:

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Isaiah 40:29 NIV

He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak.

You know what it's like to have your phone battery down to 3%. It's on its last legs. But you finally get to an outlet and plug in the charger. You check back in a few minutes and, sure enough, the numbers are going up!

Well, that's what God does for us when we come to Him. He *increases our power*. An empty battery cannot recharge itself. An empty soul cannot create new hope out of thin air. But God can!

On Eagles' Wings

The Exodus Journey:

When God rescued Israel from slavery and death in Egypt, He took them on a desert journey: the very first IRONMAN Challenge. The journey brought them to Mt. Sinai, where He met with Moses. When they met, this is what God said:

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Exodus 19:3-4 NIV

Then Moses went up to God, and the LORD called to him from the mountain and said, "This is what you are to say to the house of Jacob and what you are to tell the people of Israel:

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'You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself.'"

Israel was no match for the forbidding Sinai Desert! But God gave her strength every mile of the journey. Israel's path was never hidden from God. Instead, God Himself showed the way.

A New Exodus Journey:

Now, Isaiah says that God is going to do the same thing for Israel:

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Isaiah 40:30-31 NIV

Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall;

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.

This new journey was as impossible and as intimidating for Israel as the Exodus from Egypt was for their ancestors. But God was bigger than the desert they faced. He would provide fresh energy for every new challenge. He would show the way.

All Israel had to do was put its hope in the LORD.

On Eagles' Wings:

You may be like the athlete who has just jumped into the water for the first leg of the IRONMAN triathlon: you're excited and full of energy, but you wonder whether or not you'll have what it takes late in the day when you're running the marathon.

You may be like the cyclist who is struggling to make up time lost on the swim. The clock is ticking and you are giving it your all. But will it be enough?

Or, you may be running the last leg of the competition: the marathon. It's late in the day and you have 10 miles to go with nothing left in the tank. Oh now tempting to just stop moving, call it quits.

But in this race you are not alone. Jesus has promised to swim, ride and run right alongside you every mile of the way. And as He does, He gives you *His strength*. All you have to do is *run with Him*. Let Him set the pace. Let Him lead the way. Let Him pour His strength into you.

When Paul was at his lowest point, he discovered that he was not running the race alone. Jesus said to him:

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2 Corinthians 12:9-10 NIV

But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness."

Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me....For when I am weak, then I am strong.

God doesn't demand that we do this journey in our own strength. He dares us to put our hope in Him. He doesn't tell us to fly. He promises to lift us up on eagles' wings.

LIFE Group Lesson for "On Eagles' Wings"