

# Waters that Do Not Fail

*Isaiah: Strength for the Weary*

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**Bible Text:** Isaiah 58:1-14  
**Preached on:** Sunday, November 13, 2016

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*Heavenly Father, as we continue now in your presence, we pray for the blessing of the Holy Spirit upon the reading and preaching of the word of God, that the word might dwell in us richly by faith and grant that it might bring forth fruit to your praise and glory for Jesus' sake. Amen.*

Please be seated.

Now, turn with me, if you would, to the prophecy of Isaiah 58, and you'll find it in your Pew Bible on page 617. Chapters 58 and 59 belong together and chapter 59 is a depiction of reality and is a description, a lengthy description, of the sins of Judah and it contains several verses that are quoted by the Apostle Paul in that lengthy section in chapter 2 of Romans. We sometimes use it as a confession of sin here during our morning worship and there is a long list of the poison of asps is under their lips and so on, and as Paul cites from various places in the Old Testament passages about sin, he quotes several verses from chapter 59. But chapter 58 is the ideal. If chapter 59 is the reality of sin, chapter 58 is the ideal and what we ought to be, what we should aspire to be, and what we should pray to be. One more thing I want you to notice as we read chapter 58, it begins with reference to a fast. Evidently they were engaging in fasting but there is no blessing to this fasting. So it begins with a fast without blessing and it ends with a feast, the feast of the Sabbath, and there is a blessing. So it begins with a fast without a blessing and it ends with a feast with a blessing.

Well, let's read it together.

1 "Cry aloud; do not hold back; lift up your voice like a trumpet; declare to my people their transgression, to the house of Jacob their sins. 2 Yet they seek me daily and delight to know my ways, as if they were a nation that did righteousness and did not forsake the judgment of their God; they ask of me righteous judgments; they delight to draw near to God. 3 'Why have we fasted, and you see it not? Why have we humbled ourselves, and you take no knowledge of it?' Behold, in the day of your fast you seek your own pleasure, and oppress all your workers. 4 Behold, you fast only to quarrel and to fight and to hit with a wicked fist. Fasting like yours this

day will not make your voice to be heard on high. 5 Is such the fast that I choose, a day for a person to humble himself? Is it to bow down his head like a reed, and to spread sackcloth and ashes under him? Will you call this a fast, and a day acceptable to the LORD? 6 Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the straps of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke? 7 Is it not to share your bread with the hungry and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover him, and not to hide yourself from your own flesh? 8 Then shall your light break forth like the dawn, and your healing shall spring up speedily; your righteousness shall go before you; the glory of the LORD shall be your rear guard. 9 Then you shall call, and the LORD will answer; you shall cry, and he will say, 'Here I am.' If you take away the yoke from your midst, the pointing of the finger, and speaking wickedness, 10 if you pour yourself out for the hungry and satisfy the desire of the afflicted, then shall your light rise in the darkness and your gloom be as the noonday. 11 And the LORD will guide you continually and satisfy your desire in scorched places and make your bones strong; and you shall be like a watered garden, like a spring of water, whose waters do not fail. 12 And your ancient ruins shall be rebuilt; you shall raise up the foundations of many generations; you shall be called the repairer of the breach, the restorer of streets to dwell in. 13 If you turn back your foot from the Sabbath, from doing your pleasure on my holy day, and call the Sabbath a delight and the holy day of the LORD honorable; if you honor it, not going your own ways, or seeking your own pleasure, or talking idly; 14 then you shall take delight in the LORD, and I will make you ride on the heights of the earth; I will feed you with the heritage of Jacob your father, for the mouth of the LORD has spoken."

Well, so far God's holy and inerrant word.

We are looking at some passages in this great prophet, Isaiah, and we have a couple of weeks left in this very short little series, taking some of the great texts from the second half of Isaiah and this is one of the great texts. Verse 11, "you shall be like a watered garden, like a spring of water, whose waters do not fail." In verse 14, "then you shall take delight in the LORD." Delighting in God. Delighting in the LORD. Well, that's what I want to talk about this morning. What does it mean, what does it look like to delight in the Lord? To take joy in the Lord?

In 1677, the second half of the seventeenth century, 1677, Henry Scougal, a very well-known name, wrote a book that has had influence down through the centuries to this very day, a book that is still in print and widely used, "The Life of God in the Soul of Men." Henry Scougal went to the University of Aberdeen in Scotland when he was 15 years old and graduated and when he was 19 was teaching at the University of Aberdeen, teaching philosophy. After four years of teaching philosophy at Aberdeen University, he went into the pastorate for one year and then was called back to teach at the same university, the University of Aberdeen, and to teach divinity and to teach future ministers of the Gospel,

which he did until he died at the age of 29. When he was 27, two years before he died, he wrote this book, "The Life of God in the Soul of Men," that had such tremendous influence. He was dead before he was 30 like David Brainerd who was dead before he was 30; and Henry Martin, a great missionary to Persia, was dead before he was 30; like Robert Murray M'Cheyne who was dead at the age of 29. And we remember all these people. They ministered just for a short space of time.

Henry Scougal wrote this book, "The Life of God in the Soul of Men," it's a short little paperback. He said in this book, "There is in the soul of men a raging and unquenchable thirst." There is in the soul of men a raging and unquenchable thirst. A thirst for God. A thirst for meaning. A thirst for a sense of purpose. A thirst for community. A thirst for a sense of belonging. A thirst for the forgiveness of sins and for peace with God. There is in the soul of men a raging and unquenchable thirst. You can be like a well watered garden. That's the picture. That's the vision that the prophet Isaiah is giving to us, where that thirst is quenched. Where that thirst is satiated. Where that thirst is met. Well, we want to examine that, then, if that's true. If I can know this morning the quenching of my thirst, if I can know this morning a condition where I'm likened to a well watered garden where I take delight in the Lord, where I glory in God, where I can say God is my chief delight, God wants you to be there this morning. Maybe you're not there this morning but that's where God wants you to be, to be able to say, "He is my chief delight."

Well, this passage begins with an expression of a lot of religion, a lot of outward religion. It's in the form of fasting and piety and praying and worship and you see, "Behold," in the middle of verse 3, "in the day of your fast you seek your own pleasure, and oppress all your workers. Behold, you fast only to quarrel and to fight and to hit with a wicked fist." There is something wrong here. There is a lot of religion, a lot of outward religion, fasting and so on, but it's not producing piety, it's not producing godliness, it's not producing holiness. The question that this passage forces upon us this morning is a very simple one: will your Sunday worship produce Monday mercy and Friday fairness? Will your Sunday worship produce Monday mercy and Friday fairness? Will your worship on Sunday produce something tangible on Monday and Tuesday and Wednesday and Thursday and Friday and Saturday? Something that evidences your faith and the genuineness of your faith?

Well, there are two things I want us to see in this passage. The first is: the hypocrisy that we are capable of expressing. The hypocrisy that we are capable of expressing. Let's take a look in particular at what hypocrisy he has in mind. We've had a glimpse of it there at the end of verse 3. They fast and so on, they exercise their outward piety, they exercise outward religion only at the end of verse 3, to oppress the workers, or at the end of verse 4, the middle of verse 4, to hit with a wicked fist. Then in verses 6 and 7, "Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the straps of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover him, and not to hide yourself from your own flesh?" And so on. What is he talking about? Well, he's talking about outward forms of mercy as a consequence of your faith; as a consequence of your trust in the Lord Jesus; as a consequence of the knowledge of your

forgiveness; that you're a child of God, you're a child of the King. So what? What does that mean? How does it express itself? Well, that you don't exploit people. The language of freedom here, freedom from bondage and depression. He's talking about exploitation. It's talking about having a concern for those who are hungry. It's talking about those who need housing and shelter. It's talking about those who need the basic rudiments of everyday life, clothing and so on. It talks about the use of verbal abuse and false accusation and the use of slander and so on. You see the gist of what's being talked about here.

Now, don't misunderstand the prophet here. There are those who say, "Well, when you start talking about social justice and so on, when you start talking about the needs of the poor and the needs of those who have no voices of their own, the unborn, for example, and you take up that cause, that all of a sudden the Gospel is at threat and the church shouldn't be about these things. The church should be about the Gospel." Well, amen, the church should be about the Gospel. There should be the preaching of the unfettered Gospel; the Gospel of faith alone, in Christ alone, through faith alone, to the glory of God alone as taught in Scripture alone. Amen. That's what the church should be about. That's what Isaiah has been about. That's why he is called the evangelical prophet, the prophet who centers on the Gospel. How can we be right with God? How can we be just with God? Through faith in the servant Mediator who is coming; this righteous King and conqueror who is coming. But Isaiah also wants you to see, my dear friend, that faith without works is dead. Faith that doesn't express itself in concern on a Monday morning and a Tuesday morning and a Wednesday morning is a dead faith. It's not real faith. It's not genuine faith.

So here in chapter 58 is a mandate for social justice and the needs of the poor and the needs of the indigent and the rights of those who cannot speak for themselves and so on. There is the mandate for why our church should be involved in local outreach, which we are. And there are elders and others who are on committees with the focus on local outreach. And there are some things that are better done not by the church itself but by organizations that the church supports. There are issues that are complicated and difficult for the church to be involved in and therefore we help and provide funds for and manpower for and pray for those who are involved in these things. Sometimes it is said that one of the characteristics of millennials is a concern for social justice and so on. I'm not sure that I accept that dichotomy. I think every Christian should be concerned for social justice, for the needs of the poor and the indigent and so on. Well, here it is in Isaiah 58. You want a mandate? You want to see what is the responsibility of the Christian? What responsibility does the church have? Well, here's God and he's addressing us through the prophet Isaiah from 2,700 years ago and he's saying, "Will what you do on a Sunday morning and a Sunday evening as you worship God and as you engage in these outward acts of piety, will it have any effect on Monday morning and Tuesday morning and Wednesday morning and Thursday morning and Friday morning?"

We are resistant, aren't we? We see the sins of others. We see the sins of others. We could list them. We could write them down and give a list of 15 or 20 characteristics of the sins of others but here we are being addressed about our own sins. Remember in

Romans 2, actually the very passage that quotes from the next chapter, Isaiah 59, when Paul is giving a list of sins and Paul says in Romans 2:21-22, "you who have the law," and he's talking in particular to a Jewish audience, I think. "You who have the law, you teach others, do you teach yourselves? You preach against stealing but do you steal yourself? You say one must not commit adultery, but do you commit adultery? You say you boast in the law, but do you break the law?" Do you see what he's doing? He's saying to those who have the law, who have the Bible, who have Scriptures, who have the word of God, is there consistency or is there hypocrisy? We can point the finger. Notice how Isaiah mentioned that here, of pointing the finger? We can do that. We can point the finger at others and fail to see, perhaps, the beam that is in our own eye.

Well, I was reading a blog this week by a friend of mine, Jonathan Leeman. Jonathan Leeman is one of the pastors at Capitol Hill Baptist Church where Mark Dever is the senior pastor and a dear friend of mine. And this hurt. I didn't want to read this. It came too close to home. You know sometimes when you read something and you think, "I don't want to read this. This hurts. This is way too close to home." And he's writing obviously in the wake of being on Capitol Hill in Washington and he's writing, of course, to an audience where there are a lot of folk who are involved in the world of politics and so on, lots of young people especially in Capitol Hill Baptist Church. And he wrote a blog the day after the election and this is what he said and this is going to hurt. You're not going to like this. Just remember, I didn't write this. "You who vote for family values, do you honor your parents and your spouse? Do you love her sacrificially, love him sacrificially? We are all concerned about family values but what about your own family? What about your own parents? What about your own wife or husband? You who speak against abortion, do you physically and emotionally defraud your girlfriend, boyfriend? Let worldly ambition govern your influence on your children? Never make it home in time for the soccer game? Quietly acquiesce to abortion itself when push comes to shove? You who talk about welfare reform, do you give to the needy in your congregation? You who proclaim that all lives matter, who are your friends? You who rightly lament structural injustices, do you work against them in your own congregation? You who fight for traditional marriage, do you submit to your husband or love your wife and cherish her as you would your own body, washing her with the water of the word?" Remember, I didn't write this. "You who are concerned about the economy and the job market, do you obey your boss with a sincere heart, not as a people-pleaser but as you would obey the Lord Jesus? You who care about corporate tax rates, how do you treat your employees? Do you threaten them, forgetting that he who is both their master and yours is in heaven and that there is no partiality with him?" Well, so it went on. There was more. I gave up reading at that point. It's convicting, isn't it? And you can add your own questions. Isaiah is talking here about how godliness manifests itself on Monday morning, how godliness manifests itself on a Wednesday afternoon, how godliness manifests itself at the weekend. The hypocrisy that we are also capable of.

Then there is a second thing: the blessings that God wants us to experience. That was the bad side, this is the good side. The blessings that God wants us to experience. He begins, as I said, with this fast without a blessing, and it ends with this feast that has a blessing, the feast of the Sabbath day. You notice it comes in there in verse 13, "If you turn back

your foot from the Sabbath," you can translate that, "If you keep your feet from breaking the Sabbath." The Sabbath. And as soon as I mention the word Sabbath, we sometimes get a little defensive and people ask me all the time and I can't tell you the number of times I get asked, "Can I do X on Sundays? Can I do Y on Sundays?" and so on. And I refuse to answer all those questions and there are lots of them. I often suspect the motivation why the question is being asked in the first place because it often sounds like, "What's the least I can get away with and still have some semblance of obeying the fourth commandment?" Let me just say that here in Isaiah 58, the Sabbath is for a blessing. It's a gift of God. God has placed it not just in the realm of redemption but he's also placed it within the realm of creation itself. At the very beginning in creation, God made us with the Sabbath, a rhythm of one day in seven. Six days of labor followed by one day of rest, or under the new covenant, one day of rest followed by six days of labor. And the New Testament rhythm almost reflects the Gospel: rest followed by work. Sunday followed by outward expressions of piety on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday.

I love the Lord's day. I have always loved it. I'm a preacher so I don't have any choice of what I do on the Lord's day but I love the Lord's day. I love this rhythm, this cycle. God has put it into our genes. It's part of the very fabric and makeup of who we are. This one in seven, rest and work, rest and work, rest and work. Why would you not like that? To be free from the tyranny of an oppressive master? And work can be oppressive and the demands can be oppressive. The endless cycle of relentless, the relentless rat race, and the relentless nature of having to produce and so on. A day of rest and a day of worship and a day to give over to the Lord and works of necessity and mercy, spend time with family.

What are the blessings exactly? Well, let's walk through the passage. You have your Bible, open your Bibles now to chapter 58 of Isaiah. I'm just going to walk through it. That's all, just walk through it, and I'm going to be looking at verses 8 and 9 and 11 and 12.

In verse 8, "Then shall your light break forth like the dawn." Now, you notice the "if" clause in verse 13, "If you turn back your foot from the Sabbath, doing your pleasure on my holy day." You will call the Sabbath a delight and then blessings will come, all kinds of blessings.

And in verse 8, "your light shall break forth like the dawn." Fresh beginnings. And they start as they often start on the Lord's day, they start when you gather for worship, when you sit in the presence of Almighty God and you are conscious that he holds the universe in the palms of his hands and your life which seems to be breaking apart at the seams, and on the Lord's day as you gather and you sing his praise and read his word and you are reminded of his promises which are yes and amen in Jesus Christ, that all is well, and it's like a fresh dawn. You remember what Gandalf told Aragon at the Battle of Helms Deep? "Look to the East at dawn on the third day. Dawn. And the riders of Rohan will come in." And it's a fresh start and a fresh beginning.

Look at verse 8 again, "and your healing shall spring up speedily." This word for "healing," it's a word that would be used for fresh flesh on a wound. When you have been nursing a wound and dressing it and so on and you see it is beginning to grow back together again and it has been healed, that's the word that's being used.

Look at verse 8 again, "and your righteousness shall go before you." A sense of being right with God. A sense of being in a right relationship with God. A sense that when you trust in the Lord Jesus, you are acquitted of all of your sins and you are reckoned to be righteous in God's sight and the peace that comes as a consequence.

Then look at verse 9, beautiful, "you shall call, and the LORD will answer; you shall cry, and he will say, 'Here I am.'" What a blessing that is. You send up your prayers and you say, "Lord, where are you?" and there's a voice that whispers in your ear and it says, "I'm right here. I'm right beside you. I've never left you. I've always been here and I'm here for you. I'm your heavenly Father. I'm ready to give you the blessings that you need in abundance. Open your arms and receive them. Even in the midst of trial and difficulty, I'll give you a sense of peace in the midst of this trial."

Dear Alec Motyer in his commentary, and he went to be with the Lord a few weeks ago, and in his commentary and it's a very British sort of comment and he says that prayer, he says answered prayer is not like a food parcel but a personal visit from your doctor. Not like a food parcel that comes with FedEx and you open it and there is stuff there but it's impersonal, no, the doctor comes and visits. Well, I remember when doctors came and visited. He comes into the home. You say, "Where are you?" and he says, "Here I am." What a blessing that is.

Look at verse 11, "the LORD will guide you continually," the reassurance when you walk with the Lord and you manifest that walk in outward concern for the poor and the needy and those with whom you come into contact and the various levels of responsibility in your workplace and in the environment in which you live from day to day, and there will be this reassurance that the Lord will guide you. He will guide you by his word. You will have a sense that you know why you are here and what your purpose in life is. There will be a wholeness to it.

Then in verse 11 again, and he will "make your bones strong." Well, that speaks to a few of you. Your bones seem to be aching. You sit down and your bones are tired. I never thought I'd ever experience that but I think I know what Isaiah is talking about when your bones seem to be tired, "and I will strengthen your bones." Some of you are reaching that point in life where you want to replace part of your bones. There are whole bunch of you here with metal objects that set off alarms when you go through the airport and it's all a symptom of the decay that we are all in as a consequence of the fall. But Isaiah is using a picture here, a spiritual picture that when you trust in the Lord and this trust is such that it manifests itself in outward works of piety for the disenfranchised and those who cannot speak for themselves, it's like a strengthening of your bones because you understand and know your purpose.

You will be like, verse 11, a "well watered garden." It's a beautiful picture, isn't it? A Christian who is like a well watered garden and everything is lush and there are flowers growing and there are carrots and celery and all this stuff that our children seem to be eating, in the garden and it's a before picture. A well watered garden.

Then in verse 12, building. "Ancient ruins shall be rebuilt and foundations will be raised up and you will be called the repairer of the breach and the restorer of streets to dwell in." Well, it's a picture, of course, of a believer who trusts in the Lord, who loves the Sabbath day, gathers for public worship, and goes out on Monday morning and he's a restorer and a builder and he influences the society in which we live. He's like a light that is set upon a hill. He's a salting influence within society.

Ah but verse 14, "then you shall take delight in the LORD." Well, my dear friends, that's what I want more than anything else, to experience joy in the Lord, delight in the Lord. When I think about him, when I think about who he is and what he has done for me and what he promises yet to do for me, it fills my soul with joy. "Solid joys and lasting treasure, none but Zion's children know." What did Henry Scougal say in 1677 as a 27 year old? "There is in the soul of men a raging and unquenchable thirst." And do you know where that thirst is met? In Jesus. In the Incarnate Son. In the gifts that God the Father has given to us of a Suffering Servant, Conqueror, King.

Here's my prayer for today. May this Lord's day, this gathering of worship, it's not a routine thing. Don't take it for granted. It's not a routine thing. I love routine. There are times when I don't want to be surprised. I want routine. I'm comfortable sometimes with routine but this is not just routine this morning. This is a place and a gathering on a special day where God says there is blessing to be had here. Soul refreshing blessing of joy and delight. May we experience it.

*Father, we thank you. We thank you for your word. It is help for the weary and we are weary this morning. We pray that you would refresh us, reach those parts that nothing else can reach, and revive and quicken and bring to life. May we go forth this morning with a joy in our hearts for Jesus' sake. Amen.*