

Words of Encouragement: The God who Carries Us

We serve a truly amazing God. Slow to anger, abounding in love, faithful to a thousand generations... We could go on forever. And so we should!

One of the characteristics of God that we may not often think about is his passion for his people. We see this throughout the bible, but it definitely comes into clear focus in the book of Isaiah. God is doing a lot of the talking as he pleads with Israel to turn from their sinful ways and be restored, to abandon their idols and to trust him completely. The analogy that comes to mind is a father trying to reason with a rebellious teenager. In this case it is God who, through Isaiah, is reasoning with Israel.

An earthly father might attempt to impress upon his son or daughter the value of the wisdom he has gained from his greater experience and longer life. Likewise in Isaiah, God presents a very impressive list of credentials (could it be otherwise?) that demonstrate his power and wisdom. Along with it he gives a direct challenge to name anyone who is like him. (Is 40:12-31).

The point, of course, is that there is no one like him! There is no other place, no other person in whom Israel can put her trust. None other is secure or steadfast, none other faithful to Israel. God contrasts powerless idols against his own unfailing strength.

Then, tucked away in Isaiah 46, there are a few verses that set God's faithfulness in stark contrast with the fleeting aid of Israel's false gods. In the opening verse we read of idols being carried on the backs of beasts. "The things that you carry are burdensome," the Lord says. Idols always are burdensome. In this case the burden is so heavy that it has led people into captivity. (46:2) That's a heavy load. Then God bares his heart for his people:

Listen to Me, O house of Jacob
And all the remnant of the house of Israel,
You who have been borne by Me from birth,
And have been carried from the womb;
Even to your old age I will be the same;
And even to your graying years I will bear you!
And I will bear you and I will deliver you. (46:3-4)

Mark those words. I have borne you from the womb and I will still carry you until you are old and gray. Those idols of yours will burden you down because you have to carry *them*. They sap you dry and lead you to destruction. But I am the one true God and *I carry you*. God is indeed passionate for his people. His love for us surpasses anything to which we might compare it on this earth, for it lifts us up, it bears us up, and assures us of certain hope.

So now let us examine our own lives. Likely none of us has gone so far as to fashion a statue from household goods and bow down to it in the family room. Thank God for that. It is the grace of God on us that we can recognize the foolishness of such things. But that's not the only way to recognize an idol.

What is it in your life that has become a burden to you in your walk with God? Is there anything that you've spent a great deal of energy crafting that is not God glorifying? If we're nurturing desires that have to work out "just so" for us to be satisfied, we may well be fashioning idols in our own image. All of the energy we expend there leads us only to bondage to that desire, whatever it may be. When things don't work out to our plan? Bitterness, anger, resentment, hatred, jealousy—these are the crippling effects of the idols that we carry. Each should be a warning flag to us. What could so capture our mind and emotions as to elicit that kind of response? Perhaps we have crafted an idol.

Note that it will be very difficult to manage such *consequences* when the *root* issue is an idol that has us burdened down. E.g., Do I resent my boss's decision, or is the real issue that I've held a ravenous craving for his job and I resent that he's still in it? Am I bitter over my spouse's reaction or do I feel entitled to something that I just need to die to? I may regret my reaction, but the real issue is the deeper covetous idol sapping my zeal and strength.

Just as in Isaiah's day, now is the time to renew our love for the God that carries us. We don't need to go digging for idols. But we should learn how to recognize and deal with any that we find. How do we topple an idol? We "turn it over" to God who can deal with it completely. Praise God there is a redeemer in Israel and his yoke is easy and his burden is light. (Mt 11:30) So shall our strength be renewed, and so shall we mount up on wings like eagles, lifted up by his grace. (40:31)