

INTRODUCTION:

I think all of us have faced times when we are challenged in our Christian faith.

- Perhaps we encounter a difficult situation, perhaps we face a serious illness or surgery, or perhaps we are faced with some kind of deep sorrow—maybe divorce or perhaps the sickness or death of a loved one.
- As people we are surrounded by death, and sorrow, and sickness, and a huge number of other things that might cause us to question our faith.

As we think about all of these challenges, it seems to me that all of us would benefit by going back to the Scriptures for a reminder that will give us a more realistic view of God.

- Many times, when we face a challenge, we are tempted to view God as being rather small and distant.
- Perhaps we start to look at God as being far away and disconnected, and so this morning, I'd like for us to continue in our three-part series from **Isaiah 40** as we get just a glimpse of God and His incredible power.

If you were here for the morning service last Sunday, then you might remember that the prophet Isaiah was writing roughly 700 years before the time of Christ, he was urging the people of his time to repent, but the people were not listening.

- In fact, the Bible tells us that about a hundred years after Isaiah's message, that the people were defeated by the Babylonian army, Jerusalem was then destroyed, and those people who were not killed were taken into 70 years of Babylonian captivity.
- And so, as we look through the book of **Isaiah**, we see a major shift.
- In **chapters 1-39**, Isaiah was basically preaching doom and gloom (and the need for repentance), but starting in **chapter 40**, the message changes to a message of hope for those who would end up in captivity.
- When we looked at **Isaiah 40** last week, we found that God offered a message of comfort to those who would repent.

This morning, as we move along, we find that the comfort continues as Isaiah passes along a message about the nature of God.

- Too many times today, I think we find that people have reduced God to their level.
- In their own minds, sometimes people have tried to make God more "**user-friendly**."
- And yet when we look to God for comfort, we need to understand who God really is.
- What is it that makes God trustworthy, and what is it that makes God able to provide comfort in difficult situations?

In just a few moments, we're going to look together at **Isaiah 40:12-26**, and as we do, I'd like to ask that all of us think about the challenges that we might be facing.

- As we read, let's think about all of our worries—our health, our employment, our families...anything that may be bothering us this morning—and let us look at those problems in light of God's power.
- Please read with me from **Isaiah 40:12-26...**

12 *Who has measured the waters in the hollow of His hand, and marked off the heavens by the span, and calculated the dust of the earth by the measure, and weighed the mountains in a balance and the hills in a pair of scales?*

13 *Who has directed the Spirit of the Lord, or as His counselor has informed Him?*

- 14 *With whom did He consult and who gave Him understanding? And who taught Him in the path of justice and taught Him knowledge and informed Him of the way of understanding?*
- 15 *Behold, the nations are like a drop from a bucket, and are regarded as a speck of dust on the scales; behold, He lifts up the islands like fine dust.*
- 16 *Even Lebanon is not enough to burn, nor its beasts enough for a burnt offering.*
- 17 *All the nations are as nothing before Him, they are regarded by Him as less than nothing and meaningless.*
- 18 *To whom then will you liken God? Or what likeness will you compare with Him?*
- 19 *As for the idol, a craftsman casts it, a goldsmith plates it with gold, and a silversmith fashions chains of silver.*
- 20 *He who is too impoverished for such an offering selects a tree that does not rot; He seeks out for himself a skillful craftsman to prepare an idol that will not totter.*
- 21 *Do you not know? Have you not heard? Has it not been declared to you from the beginning? Have you not understood from the foundations of the earth?*
- 22 *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 out like a tent to dwell in.*
- 23 *He it is who reduces rulers to nothing, Who makes the judges of the earth meaningless.*
- 24 *Scarcely have they been planted, scarcely have they been sown, scarcely has their stock taken root in the earth, but He merely blows on them, and they wither, and the storm carries them away like stubble.*
- 25 *“To whom then will you liken Me that I would be his equal?” says the Holy One.*
- 26 *Lift up your eyes on high and see who has created these stars, the One who leads forth their host by number, He calls them all by name; because of the greatness of His might and the strength of His power, not one of them is missing.*

I. As we look at these 15 verses, we are reminded, first of all, of the **AMAZING POWER OF GOD**.

There is a kids song that says, **“Our God is so big, so strong and so mighty, there’s nothing our God cannot do!”**

- As adults, we need to sing that song more often!
- Sometimes we need to back up and take a look at the big picture.
- As we look at our problems, we also need to look at the Lord, and we need to consider God’s amazing power.
- We need to stop underestimating God’s power—that seems to be a major theme all the way through this chapter.

Isaiah starts out in **verse 12** with a list of various measurements—as if there were some way that we could possibly come to understand the Lord’s power.

- He speaks of measuring, and marking off, and calculating, and weighing certain things on a scale.
- He starts by asking the question, **“Who has measured the waters in the hollow of His hand?”**
- I have read that the average man can hold about three tablespoons of water in the palm of his hand.
- And yet we look at the Lord, and we find that His hands have measured all of the waters on the earth.
- Have we ever had the experience of riding a boat or a ship so far out into the water that we can’t see the shore?
- How small and helpless that makes us feel—and how much more so if the ship were to sink!
- But to God, all of those waters are just like those three tablespoons in the palm of our hand.

Isaiah also says that God has marked off the heavens by the **“span.”**

- The span was basically a measurement done with a person’s hand—either the width of the hand, or sometimes the farthest stretch of the fingers—somewhere between 6-9 inches.

- And so Isaiah says that God has used his hands to measure the heavens.
- Isaiah continues into the next chapter with this analogy about the largeness of God's hands when he said in **Isaiah 41:10** that God will uphold us with His *"righteous right hand."*
- God can measure the span of the heavens by His hand and yet he can also hold us carefully with His hand as well.

In **verse 21**, Isaiah also refers to the Lord weighing the mountains and hills in a pair of scales.

- And as we read through these verses, we start to understand that Isaiah was having a difficult time describing God in terms that we could understand.
- In some ways, in fact, we could even say that God is **"indescribable,"** and yet I guess as soon as we describe God in that way, He is no longer **"indescribable"!**
- And yet the Lord's amazing power is far beyond our ability to understand it or describe it properly.

When it comes to God's powerful wisdom, we notice **verses 13-14**.

- Basically, *"Who has given the Lord advice? Who has taught the Lord a lesson? Who has made the Lord any smarter than He already is?"*
- Even a powerful person here on earth—even someone as powerful as the President of the United States—even this person will surround himself with advisors.
- But here we learn that God has no advisors.

In **verse 15**, we see that Isaiah compares God to all of the nations of the world.

- I know that in our time, we are concerned about certain nations that are developing nuclear weapons.
- We are concerned about state-sponsored terrorism.
- We are concerned about the situation in Iraq and Afghanistan
- We are concerned about the tensions between Iran and Israel.
- We are concerned about all of these things, but Isaiah says that all of the nations of the earth *"are like a drop from a bucket."*
- As we carry a bucket of water, we do not get concerned when we lose a single drop.
- And when we compare God to all of the nations of the world, the situation is the same.
- God is so much larger than any political tension.

Isaiah goes on to say that the nations are like a speck of dust on the scales.

- Traci and I have a small-capacity digital scale that can weigh grams and even fractions of ounces.
- When I use that scale, I do not worry about dusting it off beforehand, just to get an accurate reading.
- The dust on the scale is not a factor.
- Isaiah is saying the same thing about all of the nations of the earth when they are seen in comparison to God.

He goes on to say that God lifts up the islands like fine dust.

- *"Islands"* here most likely refers to the major continents.
- God lifts up North America like it is *"fine dust."*
- And so as we consider God's amazing power, He is certainly larger and more powerful—by far—than any nation on this earth.
- Certainly this would have been a great comfort for the Jewish people who were living in captivity in the city of Babylon.
- There they were in a far off land, surrounded by high walls, and that situation would have seemed almost hopeless.
- And yet we understand that God is greater than any nation.

A number of years ago, I was able to go to Berlin, Germany with a group from Harding University and I was able to acquire a very small piece of the **Berlin Wall**.

- This piece of concrete actually came from that wall that divided the city of Berlin—but we know that God is larger than any wall.

When we consider the nations of the earth, we also see an interesting statement in **verse 16**.

- Lebanon was known for its many cedar trees.
- But Isaiah says that even Lebanon itself was not enough to burn.
- Even all of its animals would not have made an adequate sacrifice of praise to God—because God is more powerful than any nation on the earth.

Starting in **verse 21**, we also have a few references to God’s power over the Universe.

- In **verse 22** we find that the Lord sits above the circle of the earth, and that He has the ability to look down on us *“like grasshoppers.”*
- A number of years ago when we lived up by Chicago, my brother and his family were able to visit us and we decided to go to the top of the Sears tower.
- I just remember looking out from the observation deck at the tiny little ants on the ground that were actually people walking in the park and walking down the streets to and from their jobs.
- I also remember seeing how the cars looked smaller than Hotwheels from that elevation.
- Isaiah is saying the same thing about the Lord.
- From the Lord’s point of view, everything else in the Universe is small!

In fact, Isaiah also says in **verse 22** that God stretches out the heavens like a curtain, and that He spreads out the heavens like a tent.

- Just like we would pitch a tent in the woods, the Lord has spread out the Universe for us to enjoy.

In my short lifetime, I have heard many estimates for the number of stars in our Universe.

- One of those estimates indicates that it is about 10 times the number of grains of sand on all of the world’s beaches and deserts.
- I don’t know about you, but that number is a little difficult for me to comprehend!

As we just try to understand how big God is, let’s just think about our own star—the sun.

- I am told that the sun is 868,000 miles across.
- We think the earth is huge...but we could fit 109 earths across the width of the sun.
- That’s like comparing a BB to a basketball. We are tiny.
- But our sun is a little on the small side. With the naked eye, we can only see a few thousand of those other stars...but as telescopes improve we just continue to find more and more stars.
- The Universe keeps on going. But Isaiah says that the Lord has pitched it like a tent!

Not only that, but **verse 26** tells us that the Lord knows every star by name!

- One thing that has irritated me a little bit over the past few years has been those commercials where you can send in so much money and have a star named after a person.
- No offense if anyone here has done that...but I’m afraid that the stars have already been named, and **verse 26** tells us that *“not one of them is missing.”*

And again, I can’t help but think that this passage would have been a great comfort to those Jews who were captives in Babylon.

- Babylon, of course, put a great value on the stars.
- The science of astronomy has deep roots in Babylon.

- We remember that the wise men came to visit Jesus from the east—perhaps from the Babylon area.
- And yet their pagan society probably put a little too much emphasis on the stars—in terms of worship and also in terms of going to the stars for moral direction.

And now, 2700 years later, many in our society still put their hope in the stars.

- I have a friend who shared with me something that happened during one of the past elections.
- He was at the table working as an election official when a woman came in and saw one of his fellow workers reading the newspaper.
- She appeared to be quite relieved, and then let them know that she had not read her horoscope that day, and for that reason she was not yet sure how to vote.
- She read her horoscope in all seriousness and only then headed into the voting booth.
- As Christians we do not pay attention to the horoscopes, but we do pray to the God who made the stars and calls them all by name!

I think that the first lesson, then, that Isaiah would like for us to learn is that God’s amazing power is far beyond our ability to understand it.

- And especially in times of trouble, we should just stop for a moment and think about the awesome power that God has.

II. As we think about this amazing power, there is a second lesson I think Isaiah is trying to get across here as he points out **THE ABSOLUTE FOOLISHNESS OF IDOLATRY**.

In **verses 18-20**, we read about an idol being very carefully crafted by a goldsmith, and then we see it decorated by the silversmith with chains of silver.

- And then we get to **verse 20** which is actually pretty funny!
- When the poor go to worship, they at least look for a tree that will not rot.
- And even the poor will look for a craftsman good enough so at least the idol will not fall over!

Isaiah’s humor continues a few chapters later in **Isaiah 44:12-17**. As Isaiah talks about the process of building an idol, he says...

- 12 The man shapes iron into a cutting tool and does his work over the coals, fashioning it with hammers and working it with his strong arm. He also gets hungry and his strength fails; he drinks no water and becomes weary.*
- 13 Another shapes wood, he extends a measuring line; he outlines it with red chalk. He works it with planes and outlines it with a compass, and makes it like the form of a man, like the beauty of man, so that it may sit in a house.*
- 14 Surely he cuts cedars for himself, and takes a cypress or an oak and raises it for himself among the trees of the forest. He plants a fir, and the rain makes it grow.*
- 15 Then it becomes something for a man to burn, so he takes one of them and warms himself; he also makes a fire to bake bread. He also makes a god and worships it; he makes it a graven image and falls down before it.*
- 16 Half of it he burns in the fire; over this half he eats meat as he roasts a roast and is satisfied. He also warms himself and says, “Aha! I am warm, I have seen the fire.”*
- 17 But the rest of it he makes into a god, his graven image. He falls down before it and worships; he also prays to it and says, “Deliver me, for you are my god.”*

What a ridiculous picture! We may say to ourselves, “Hey, this is the 21st century—we’ve moved beyond idolatry—we don’t have this problem anymore!”

- First of all, we do have this problem.

- I know of a lot of people who have metal angels that they clip onto the visors of their cars to keep them safe as they drive.
- There is also a home in Waukegan that we used to drive past every Sunday on the way to church that has a life-size statue of Mary looking from an angle directly over their home.
- Secondly, though, we also need to understand that an idol can be anything that takes our time and attention away from the one true and living God.
- Anything we put ahead of God shows that we do not really understand how awesome God really is.
- I have known people to worship their cars. I think we've all known people to worship their careers or even their families.

There is also a saying... **“The problem with self-made men is that they tend to worship their creator.”**

- I think we've seen that to be true, and so in some ways, we can even worship ourselves.
- Paul said in **Colossians 3:5**, ***“Therefore consider the members of your earthly body as dead to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire and greed, which amounts to idolatry.”***
- When we are greedy, we are committing a form of idolatry!

And then on another level, many people fashion God in their own image.

- If they want tolerance, then God is tolerant.
- If they want to continue in some sin, then God is permissive.
- If their behavior, beliefs, or life-style are condemned by God, then they create an imaginary god who accepts them on their own terms.
- I think we might agree that this also is a form of idolatry.

But Isaiah would tell us to go back and reconsider the power of the one true God.

- And when we start to understand something about God's power, then we will also see the absolute foolishness of letting anything else come in first place in our lives.

CONCLUSION & INVITATION:

This morning, then, we have studied a wonderful passage about God's amazing power.

- As we think about those things that make us worry, and as we think about those things that might make their way into first place, I hope we can pause for just a moment and remember how awesome God really is.

Our amazing God made our salvation possible by sending His only Son as a perfect sacrifice for our sins.

- We accept that sacrifice by doing whatever it takes to give God the place of highest honor in our lives.
- We repent of our sins, we change the way we live, and then we are immersed in water for the forgiveness of our sins.
- If you are ready to put your life in God's hands, you can let us know as we sing the next song.
- Let's stand and sing...