

## **“The Incomparable God”**

Isaiah 40:12-26

by Pastor Jason Van Bommel

*12 Who has measured the waters in the hollow of his hand  
and marked off the heavens with a span,  
enclosed the dust of the earth in a measure  
and weighed the mountains in scales  
and the hills in a balance?*

*13 Who has measured the Spirit of the LORD,  
or what man shows him his counsel?*

*14 Whom did he consult,  
and who made him understand?  
Who taught him the path of justice,  
and taught him knowledge,  
and showed him the way of understanding?*

*15 Behold, the nations are like a drop from a bucket,  
and are accounted as the dust on the scales;  
behold, he takes up the coastlands like fine dust.*

*16 Lebanon would not suffice for fuel,  
nor are its beasts enough for a burnt offering.*

*17 All the nations are as nothing before him,  
they are accounted by him as less than nothing and emptiness.*

*18 To whom then will you liken God,  
or what likeness compare with him?*

*19 An idol! A craftsman casts it,  
and a goldsmith overlays it with gold  
and casts for it silver chains.*

*20 He who is too impoverished for an offering  
chooses wood that will not rot;  
he seeks out a skillful craftsman  
to set up an idol that will not move.*

*21 Do you not know? Do you not hear?  
Has it not been told 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 like a tent to dwell in;  
<sup>23</sup> who brings princes to nothing,  
 and makes the rulers of the earth as emptiness.*

*<sup>24</sup> Scarcely are they planted, scarcely sown,  
 scarcely has their stem taken root in the earth,  
 when he blows on them, and they wither,  
 and the tempest carries them off like stubble.*

*<sup>25</sup> To whom then will you compare me,  
 that I should be like him? says the Holy One.*

*<sup>26</sup> Lift up your eyes on high and see:  
 who created these?  
 He who brings out their host by number,  
 calling them all by name;  
 by the greatness of his might  
 and because he is strong in power,  
 not one is missing.*

- Isaiah 40:12-16, ESV

### **Introduction: Who Do You Fear and Trust?**

If you're afraid of getting hurt in a car accident, you put on your seatbelt and probably have a car with good airbags. If you're afraid of storm damage to your house, you make sure you have a good homeowners' insurance policy. If you're afraid of how your car is going to do a long road trip, you have it checked out by a mechanic before you leave. If you are afraid you will not have enough money to retire, you may trust and a good financial advisor and are you solid retirement savings plan. Whenever we are afraid of something, we are usually trusting in something else to save us from the thing we fear.

So, let's begin with two key questions: What are you most afraid of in life and what are you trusting in to protect you from what you fear?

Does a fear of failure drive you to work harder, trusting in your own hard work and talent for success? Does your fear of rejection drive you to trust in people pleasing, doing everything you can to try to make people like you?

As we have been studying Isaiah, we have seen that God's people feared being conquered and taken into exile, so they trusted in foreign powers and alliances to protect them. At times in the Old Testament history of God's people, they feared famine and starvation and so they sacrificed to false gods who promised to bring rain and fertility to their land.

We may think we are much more sophisticated than the ancient peoples of the Old Testament, but we really are not. In our fears, we so readily turn to other things besides God to provide us with some sort of security or protection or reassurance or confidence.

Very often, it is only when all of our other attempted refuges and resources fail us that we turn to the one true and living God. So we find ourselves with God's people in Isaiah 40 dealing with the harsh reality of the exile they feared for centuries. Defeat has come. Their idols have all failed. Who will they now trust?

What we have seen already in verses 1 to 11 is the Lord bringing a word of comfort to his people through the prophet Isaiah that culminates in verse 9 with the people of God being called to proclaim to one another, "Behold your God!" God alone Himself is the true and unshakable comfort for His people. But what is this God like? He speaks a tender word of forgiveness in verse 2, and He promises to come with a mighty arm of justice in verse 10. But is he really strong enough to deliver His people? Can they really rest all the weight of their hope for salvation on Him alone?

We seemingly live more complex lives today, dealing with so much information and so much uncertainty. Is the Lord wise enough and powerful enough to be our strong and certain hope, our trust in times of trouble?

### **The Lord & the Nations, vv. 12-17**

Well, listen again to verses 12-17 and hear how our incomparable God compares to the world He created and the nations who inhabit His world:

*<sup>12</sup>Who has measured the waters in the hollow of his hand  
and marked off the heavens with a span,  
enclosed the dust of the earth in a measure  
and weighed the mountains in scales*

*and the hills in a balance?*  
<sup>13</sup> *Who has measured the Spirit of the LORD,  
or what man shows him his counsel?*  
<sup>14</sup> *Whom did he consult,  
and who made him understand?  
Who taught him the path of justice,  
and taught him knowledge,  
and showed him the way of understanding?*  
<sup>15</sup> *Behold, the nations are like a drop from a bucket,  
and are accounted as the dust on the scales;  
behold, he takes up the coastlands like fine dust.*  
<sup>16</sup> *Lebanon would not suffice for fuel,  
nor are its beasts enough for a burnt offering.*  
<sup>17</sup> *All the nations are as nothing before him,  
they are accounted by him as less than nothing and emptiness.*

Some people have bigger hands than others. Boban Marjanovich is a 7-foot, 4-inch NBA player with massive hands. You can look up “Boban’s hands” online and see him holding everyday objects from soda cans to basketballs and making them look tiny in His massive paws. But even Boban’s hands are infinitesimally insignificant compared to the hands of the Lord God almighty. Of course, God does not have actual hands. God is a spirit and does not have a body as we do. Verse 12 is using what Bible scholars call anthropomorphic language to make a point.

How much water do you think you could hold in the hollow of your hand? Maybe one or two tablespoons? When I tried, I couldn’t get my right hand to hold even a half-tablespoon of water. Now imagine trying to fill up your bathtub 1 handful at a time. This is an image that was put into my head earlier this week by Pastor Brian Borgman's sermon on this passage. Right now, the Raibers’ swimming pool is empty and undergoing repair. When it comes time to fill it up again call, I can guarantee Joel will not attempt refilling it by the handful. Yet God can measure all the waters of the earth in the hollow of his hand.

So, who else has measured the waters in the hollow of His hand? Certainly not you or me or anyone else in the world or all people of the earth together.

What if everyone in the world went to the ocean all at once and we all dipped our hands in at the same time and removed a handful of water. That’s almost 8 billion

handfuls. By my calculations, if everyone could get their hand to hold a full tablespoon of water, the whole population of the earth could remove about 30 million gallons of water from the oceans. That sounds like a lot, huh? It is enough to fill about 60 Olympic-sized swimming pools, but it would have no measurable effect whatsoever on the water levels of the earth.

God has “marked off the heavens with a span.” A span was an ancient way of measuring using the full extent of one hand from the tip of your thumb to the tip of your pinky finger. God measures the heavens, the full extent of the created universe, in a span. Light travels at 186,000 miles per second. At that rate, the light from the sun, 93 million miles away, reaches the earth in about 8 minutes and 20 seconds. Imagine being able to drive your car that fast. You’d reach Los Angeles in a tiny fraction of a second. And yet, travelling at that speed, it takes about 100,000 years to go from one end of our Milky Way Galaxy to the other. And ours is just one of billions of galaxies in the universe, and not a particularly big one either.

So, look closely at your thumb. Do you see the time ridges that make up your thumb print? The Milky Way Galaxy, 100,000 light years across, would fit comfortably in one of those ridges of God’s hand measuring the heavens with a span.

The point of verse 12 is that God is massive beyond our comprehension. In fact, He is infinite, without limit, in His being, as we confessed earlier in the worship service. We have no way of grasping what infinite even means, so Scripture uses images like verse 12 to help us begin to grasp the concept.

Yet God is not just infinitely massive in being and power. He’s also infinite in wisdom. Verses 13-14 touch on this reality –

*<sup>13</sup> Who has measured the Spirit of the LORD,  
or what man shows him his counsel?*

*<sup>14</sup> Whom did he consult,  
and who made him understand?  
Who taught him the path of justice,  
and taught him knowledge,  
and showed him the way of understanding?*

We sometimes think we can question God or trap God in a logical box by saying things like, “Well, if God were infinitely powerful and all-good, He would not permit a world where bad things happen to good people, where evil and suffering are so

widespread. Therefore, either God is not all-powerful or all-knowing or all-good, since a world of evil and suffering exist. Ha!”

We don't realize how ridiculously limited our minds are and how absurd it is for us to be making such statements with such confidence. We would have to know all of the possible reasons God might have in His mind for allowing what He allows and causing what He causes, and that if even further beyond us than draining out the Chesapeake Bay by sucking the water up with a straw. We think we're so brilliant with all of the technology we've developed and discoveries we've made. In truth, we're only scratching the surface of the tip of the iceberg of God's infinite knowledge and wisdom.

Verses 15-17 then compare the Lord to the nations of people on earth:

*<sup>15</sup> Behold, the nations are like a drop from a bucket,  
and are accounted as the dust on the scales;  
behold, he takes up the coastlands like fine dust.*

*<sup>16</sup> Lebanon would not suffice for fuel,  
nor are its beasts enough for a burnt offering.*

*<sup>17</sup> All the nations are as nothing before him,  
they are accounted by him as less than nothing and emptiness.*

All the nations of the earth and all their power – like a drop from a bucket or dust on a merchant's scales – insignificant. Earlier this week, I heard something that blew my mind. If you've been keeping up with the daily devotionals, you heard this earlier this week. If you took all 7.91 billion people on the planet and grouped them together, standing side-by-side in a giant crowd, they would fit neatly into the state of . . . What? Texas? Virginia? Maryland? Nope. Rhode Island. And if we all jumped up and landed at the same exact moment, what would it do to the earth? Nothing. Not a thing.

But we have nuclear weapons now, right? Sure. We could wipe out all life on earth in a nuclear holocaust, but the earth itself would remain and the massive universe that God measures out with a span would be undisturbed and unmoved by our petty temper tantrum. We just aren't that great – but God is.

Do you really think God is sitting in heaven panicking over what He's going to do to protect His people if the next election doesn't come out the way He wants? Do you

think He's sweating, wondering of artificial intelligence is going to put Him out of a job?

### **The Lord & Idols, vv. 18-20**

Verses 12-17 paint such a vivid picture of how great God is in part so that his people would turn aside from their idols and trust him instead. Compared to the one true God, all our human idols are just pathetically inadequate, ridiculously inept.

*<sup>18</sup>To whom then will you liken God,  
or what likeness compare with him?*

*<sup>19</sup>An idol! A craftsman casts it,  
and a goldsmith overlays it with gold  
and casts for it silver chains.*

*<sup>20</sup>He who is too impoverished for an offering  
chooses wood that will not rot;  
he seeks out a skillful craftsman  
to set up an idol that will not move.*

The rhetorical question of verse 18 is a reminder that God is truly incomparable. And yet, how utterly absurd it is for human beings to create and then trust in idols. Created beings creating lifeless images and then bowing down before them and trusting in them – How absurd! And our modern idols are no better. They are all flimsy, contingent, dependent, human-created realities like political power, financial wealth, social media influence, career success, approval from others, etc.

Generally, whatever idol we're serving, we're seeking very basic things from them – power, pleasure, approval, security, confidence. We think we'll get these things through our jobs, our friendships, our family, our position in our community, or whatever. And as long as we're using these things to get what we want from them, we're not receiving them as good gifts from God, but we're placing our hopes and expectations in them and at the same time using them to serve ourselves – so we simultaneously have too high and too low a view of God's gifts when we make them into idols.

### **The Lord & Earthly Rulers, vv. 21-24**

The only thing that will break us of our idolatry is a right view and the right worship of the one true God. And one way we get a right view of God is to rightly understand that nothing else compares to Him. And that's what this section of Isaiah 40 is beautifully and compellingly teaching us:

*<sup>21</sup> Do you not know? Do you not hear?  
Has it not been told you from the beginning?  
Have you not understood from the foundations of the earth?*

*<sup>22</sup> 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 like a tent to dwell in;*

*<sup>23</sup> who brings princes to nothing,  
and makes the rulers of the earth as emptiness.*

*<sup>24</sup> Scarcely are they planted, scarcely sown,  
scarcely has their stem taken root in the earth,  
when he blows on them, and they wither,  
and the tempest carries them off like stubble.*

*<sup>25</sup> To whom then will you compare me,  
that I should be like him? says the Holy One.*

*<sup>26</sup> Lift up your eyes on high and see:  
who created these?  
He who brings out their host by number,  
calling them all by name;  
by the greatness of his might  
and because he is strong in power,  
not one is missing.*

We're told two main things in verses 21-26 –

1. God is so much greater than all the great and celebrated rulers of the earth.
2. God has the power to keep all of the countless stars, so how much more is He able to keep His own people whom He dearly loves.

All of the inhabitants of the earth are like grasshoppers to God. Remember the movie *A Bug's Life*? The grasshoppers were the big bad bullies. You get so sucked



into their bug world that you forget that if you were to walk by in your boots, you could crush all the big, bad grasshoppers instantly. That's God's perspective on us. The rich and powerful of the world are just tiny and weak to God. He is not challenged by any of them. The rulers of the earth blow away like stubble when God decides it's time for them to go.

## **The Incomparable God's Keeping Power, vv. 25-26**

And God's power is used to preserve. He calls every star in the universe by name and keeps them all by His power. How much more does He keep His own people whom He loves. The emphasis in this middle section of Isaiah 40 is on the infinite power, wisdom, and ruling majesty of God, but God exercises this power for His people, to keep and bless us to the glory of His name among us.

The stars are kept by God, each and every one, as they shine brightly and glorify their Creator. And the glorious Creator has entered into a covenant of grace for salvation with just one small part of His vast and glorious creation: His chosen people, His bride, His church.

## **Conclusion: Who is Keeping You?**

God loves His people. He gave His one and only Son to redeem and secure His people. And if He keeps the stars, how much more will He keep us. We need to remember that it was this infinite and incomparable God of Isaiah 40 who, in human form spoke these words to us:

*<sup>27</sup> My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. <sup>28</sup> I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. <sup>29</sup> My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand. <sup>30</sup> I and the Father are one.” – John 10:27-30, ESV*

Or as the Apostle Paul said at the end of Romans 8 –

*<sup>31</sup> What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be<sup>[i]</sup> against us? <sup>32</sup> He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? <sup>33</sup> Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. <sup>34</sup> Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us.<sup>[i]</sup> <sup>35</sup> Who shall separate us*

*from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? <sup>36</sup>As it is written,*

*“For your sake we are being killed all the day long;  
we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered.”*

*<sup>37</sup>No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. <sup>38</sup>For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, <sup>39</sup>nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

- Romans 8:31-29, ESV