

3. Is Our God Big Enough?: Big enough to care for the weak

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[0 : 00] Now we've come to the third and last of our studies in this great chapter, Isaiah 40. So if you turn to page 599, please. We've seen how in this chapter Isaiah is talking about God's people returning from exile in Babylon.

Isaiah has already been with his people through a great crisis. He's strengthened the king and the people as the Assyrians have threatened to destroy them. And they've been saved from that.

But yet Isaiah warns that they'll be taken off into Babylon. And that's what chapter 39 is about. But now in chapter 40, he's looking beyond that time to the time when God will bring them back.

And he's using that to reveal great and wonderful truths about God himself. Now today we're going particularly to look at verses 25 to 31.

But I want to read the whole chapter so that we get the flow of it and we see where 25 to 31 fits in with the whole sequence of thought. Isaiah 40 verse 1.

[1 : 10] A voice cries.

A voice says, And I said, O Jerusalem,

Who has measured the spirit of the Lord? Who has measured the spirit of the Lord? 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?

Who has measured the spirit of the Lord? Or what man shows him his counsel? 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? Behold, The nations are like a drop from a bucket, And are accounted as the dust on the scales.

[3 : 31] Behold, He takes up the coastlands like fine dust. Lebanon would not suffice for fuel, Nor are its beasts enough for a burnt offering. All the nations are as nothing before him.

We are accounted by him as less than nothing and emptiness. To whom then will you liken God? Or what likeness compare with him?

An idol? A craftsman casts it, And a goldsmith overlays it with gold, And casts it for silver chains. 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. Do you not know? Did you not hear? Has it not been told you from the beginning?

Have you not understood From the foundations of the earth? 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, Who brings princes to nothing, And makes the rulers of the earth as emptiness.

[4 : 40] 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.

To whom then will you compare me, That I should be like him, Says the Holy One. 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.

Why do you say, O Jacob, And speak, O Israel, My way is hidden from the Lord, And my right is disregarded by my God? Have you not known, Have you not heard, The Lord is the everlasting God, The creator of the ends of the earth?

He does not faint or grow weary, His understanding is unsearchable. He gives power to the faint, And to him who has no might, He increases strength.

[5 : 45] Even youth shall faint and be weary, And young men shall fall exhausted. But they who wait for the Lord Will renew their strength, They will mount up with wings like eagles, They will run and not be weary, They shall walk and not faint.

Amen, That is the word of the Lord, And a very magnificent part of his word it is. Some of you here, Not all of you, Will remember the 1970s.

And you may remember the minor strikes That took place during the middle years Of that decade. And one of the things that happened, One of the actions the government took, Was to order power to be turned off In all towns and cities, At certain times during the evening.

I remember one evening, It was a February evening, The power was turned off, And going outside and seeing the night sky, As people must have seen it, Before artificial light.

What could only be described as the flood of glory, Streaming from the skies. In other words, Seeing the night sky, As Isaiah would have seen it, When he said in verse 26, Lift up your eyes on high, And see who created these.

[7 : 02] He who brings out the starry host, By number. Isaiah, We saw last week, Looking out over the Mediterranean, And then looking up, At the plateau of Lebanon.

And now as darkness falls, He looks up to the night sky, Filled with innumerable stars. And his mind boggles, As our mind boggles, At the sheer size of the universe, At the sheer number of the stars, Many of them hundreds of thousands of light years away, Billions and billions and billions of them.

Now these numbers become completely meaningless after a while, They are so vast, They are beyond our understanding. Scientists I was reading says, There are more stars in the sky, And all the grains of sand, And all the beaches on earth.

Now I'm in no position to say if that's true or not, But it's probably near enough, The truth. But as Isaiah looks up, He sees something else. He sees them almost as sheep, On the pasture lands of space.

The God in verse 11, Who tends his flock like a shepherd, And gathers the lambs in his arms. Now as it were, Calls out his sheep, The starry host, On the pasture lands of space.

[8 : 20] He knows them all. He calls them all by name. Not one of them is missing. He's total control, But it's individual control. Not one star is missing.

It's mind boggling. And here another problem arises, Doesn't it? If he is lord of this staggering creation, If he is lord of the vast times, The vast stretches of time, And of eternity, If he is a great god like that, And perhaps we agree he is, Then another problem arises, Doesn't it?

How can such a god, Be concerned about the affairs, Of a tiny planet, Circling a minor star, In a remote galaxy, At the edge of the milky way?

That's the question that Isaiah is now considering. Is he, If he is as great as that, Even more, How can he possibly be interested in me? Does my job matter to him?

What do my relationships matter to him? What does my future matter to him? What are my hopes and fears, To the god who calls out the billions of stars, And calls them all by name?

[9 : 36] Now what Isaiah is saying here is, The wrong deduction, To draw from all that, Is that he is too great to care. But the right deduction, Is that he is too great to fail.

Too great to let us down. He is not only great, In the vastness of space, In the spiral nebulae, In the vast stretches of history, This god has an eye for detail.

Not only does he call all the stars by name, He calls his people by name. Indeed, His people's names are written on his hand. That is how big he is.

And this is the final thing we're going to look at. He's big enough to care for the weak, For the helpless, For the vulnerable. And that's all of us, isn't it?

He is big enough, Not just to run the affairs of the universe, To govern the starry heavens, And the stretches of history. He cares for you, He cares for me.

[10 : 35] Our lives are in his hand. And he and his providence guides us. There are two things Isaiah says here. First of all, He says to the people, This has been proved, If you look back at your history, Verse 27, Why do you say, O Jacob, And speak, O Israel?

Now, Right through the Old Testament, These two names are placed together, Over and over again. Sometimes Jacob, Sometimes Israel. Reminding us of Jacob, The cheat, The twister, Who was transformed by God, Into Israel.

But Jacob, But Israel, Would never be allowed to forget, That he had been Jacob. And Jacob would need all this to remember, It was by the grace of God, He had been made into Israel.

Jacob shows that he needed salvation. Israel proves that he had been given that salvation. So you see, The people, Isaiah is saying to the people of his time, And to us as well, If you doubt that God cares for his people, Look back to the very beginnings of their history.

Because after all, Abraham had been told, That his descendants would be as great, As the number of the stars. Surely that's significant.

[12 : 00] That the starry hosts in the sky, Everyone known by God. And that's the very comparison, That God has used to Abraham. God said to Abraham, Back in Genesis 15, Come out and look up at the stars.

If you can count them, Then you can count the number of your descendants. Count the number of the faithful. Count the number of those throughout all the ages, Will come to me in repentance and faith.

And indeed, Towards the end of his life, Jacob is to say, God who has been my shepherd, All my life, Until this day. Now, Probably these kind of thoughts, Are in the prophet's mind, As he speaks to the people.

Have you, My way is hidden from the Lord, My right is disregarded by my God, The way is the whole way of life. And Jacob, As I say, The shepherd, Who had guided him, All the ways of his life, All the days of his life.

And my right, God is totally fair, God is totally just. And then in verse 28, Isaiah uses the question, He's used so often, Have you not known?

[13 : 09] Have you not heard? Lord, As I say, Look, Have you never listened, To the words of Moses? Have you never listened, To the words of scripture? Indeed, Have you not listened, To my prophetic words?

Because if you had, You would have seen, That his control, Is absolute. He is the everlasting God. In other words, There is no time, When he's not there.

No time, When he will not be there. And indeed, That's what the name, Lord means. The one who was, And is, And is to come. The one who reveals himself, As that Lord of history.

The creator of the ends of the earth, There is no place, He cannot be found. And he does not faint, Or grow weary. Now we faint, And grow weary, Don't we?

Sometimes we try to help people, And sometimes we grow weary, Don't we? Sometimes we want people to help us, And they grow weary. That's the nature of human beings.

[14:10] We're vulnerable, We tire. And our understanding, Is not unsearchable. Our understanding, Is very limited. So you see what Isaiah is saying, This great God, Who made the, Who made the Plydays, And Orion, As Amos, Another poet, Says, The God who, Led you, All the way, From the time, He called Abraham, From Ur of the Chaldeans, The time he brought you, Out of Egypt, The God who rescued you, From Assyria, The God who will bring you, Back from Babylon, That God, Is concerned with you, With your way, With everything about you, There is no circumstance, Beyond him.

But the second thing, Isaiah does, Is he takes that, If you like, Out of the historical past, And places it, In the everyday. And that's the point, It seems to me, Of verses 29, To 31, In other words, What God did, In history, With Jacob, God will do, With all those, Who open their lives, To him, With all those, Who come to him, In repentance, And faith, Believing, That he is the Lord, The covenant God, Who keeps his word, Notice that, Without diminishing himself, He gives to those, Who cannot make it, On their own, He gives power, To the faint, Who are the faint, I suspect, Everyone here, The faint, Are those, Who can't keep on going, Indefinitely, The faint, Are those, Who have a point, Beyond which, They can go no further, He gives power, To the faint, And to him, Who has no might, He increases strength, Now this is not,

Normal strength, There is such a thing, As human strength, Even youths, And that refers to age, The young people, Even they'll, We'll reach a point, When they're exhausted, Anyone who's brought up, A teenage family, Knows that, When you hammer on their door, In the morning, To try and get them up, I always tell young, I always tell parents, Of young children, Who are distressed, By not getting any sleep, Wait, In their teenage years, It would be the opposite problem, We know that youths, That young people, Get tired, Anyone who's lectured, A class of students, Knows that as well, But young men, Is a slightly different, Shade of meaning, Young men here, Is more your kind of, Sporty, Athletic type, The type who play rugby, And run in marathons, And so on, The type who are, Disgustingly fit, There comes a time, When they will be exhausted, I know they're disgustingly fit,

Because I've got a son like that, And the last time, He ran in the marathon, We were waiting nervously, For him to phone, To say he was finished, And we got this phone call, In the middle of the afternoon, I came in about 900th, Or whatever it was, And I'm just lying on my back, And I'm whacked, Even young men, Shall fall, Exhausted, Now that's normal, Natural strength, It's real, It's valuable, But, It has its limits, But here, This God, Gives us strength, That's beyond, Human resources, They who wait, For the Lord, Shall renew, Their strength, And, I used to think, This, After this glorious chapter, This wonderful, Soaring through the cosmos, And then you suddenly, Come down to this, Rather dull, And rather routine line, They shall walk, And not faint, Surely Isaiah, Might have finished, With mounting up,

With wings, Like eagles, But I think, I think when we look at it, More closely, We see what Isaiah is saying, Isaiah is talking about, All kinds of experiences, Isaiah is talking about, Those golden moments, When life is no effort, At all, When everything is going well, And when actually, You do feel, As if you were an eagle, Unrestrained, Flying through the blue sky, With nothing to hinder you, And, And, Isaiah says, That is the kind of thing, The Lord in his grace, Gives us sometimes, They shall run, And not be weary, I think running here, Is a picture of the pressures, The busyness of life, The hassles, The harassments, The sheer, The sheer pressure, Of work, Of family, Of all the, All the kind of things, That make up our, That make up our living, And walking, What's walking?

[18 : 47] Walking is the times, When we feel, We cannot place another foot, In front of, In front of the other one, Walking is the time, When we're just going to collapse, Isaiah says, This God, Will keep you walking, And not giving up, Trudging, But keeping going, I suppose, So all these experiences, The wonderful time, When you feel liberated, The times when you're pressurized, Beyond belief, The times when you're just, Absolutely worn out, You can't keep going, Let me also refer to the, Different stages of life, As well, So you see, This God, Is not, Didn't just make, The, This vast universe, Most of which, We cannot see, Most of which, Is totally, Beyond our understanding, God made you, And before, And as the psalmist says, Even when you were still, In your mother's womb, When you were a fetus, God knew you, He had purposes for you, He, And he planned,

The whole of your life, It's true, What the children's chorus says, Isn't it? My God is so big, So strong, And so mighty, There's nothing, That he cannot do, If you're a Christian, Take courage from that, Whatever stage, You may be at, Whether you're soaring, Or running, Or trudging, If you're not a Christian, This is a God, Who deserves your trust, This is a God, Who wants to, Give you, His strength, Not just your human resources, This is a God, Who you can trust, Not only for this life, But for the life, To come, He is, A big enough, God, And as Isaiah said, There is no one, To whom we can liken him, Or compare him, With anything else, Or anyone else, Amen, Let's pray, And God our Father,

We know that when we trust, In our own resources, In our own energy, In our cleverness, In our gifts, And in our abilities, We make a mess of it, We fall flat on our faces, We stumble, And we lose the way, But we know, However vulnerable we may be, That if it is your strength, That causes us either to soar, Or to run, Or to walk, That you will be, As Jacob found, We will be our shepherd, All the days of our lives, And we pray that may be true, In the lives of everyone here, In Jesus name, Amen.