

## Behold your God!

Isaiah 40:9-31

*Series: Key Texts for Difficult Times*

**Introduction:** Take your Bible and join me in Isaiah 40. We continue this morning with considering key texts for difficult times. These are the texts that are often the most familiar to us and which contain some of the most cliché statements from the Scriptures. But they are the texts which pack the most punch to knockout the fears and anxieties of difficult times. Today's text may not be one that you would put on your list of key texts – but it is one that should be there – as I hope you will see by the time we are finished this morning.

Beloved, it is so easy to talk about God. It is so easy to use descriptive language to express how we understand his goodness and his greatness. It is so easy to be casual in how we talk about him – to talk in ways that Christians always talk about him. It is easy to think that my current level of understanding about the greatness of God's character and essence is good enough. We know that we do not know him fully, but it is easy to think – but I know him enough. I can function just fine with my current level of understanding about God. But then, a crisis hits. And from the depth of bewilderment and confusion about our circumstances and our futures, we see how much more we need to know God. If God is our refuge and our shelter in the storm, then this present storm has shown us just how weak our shelter is. And that is not because God is weak, but it is because we have not rightly understood His greatness.

The task before us this morning then is to humble ourselves before the indescribably great majesty of God. It is to open the shades to the windows of our hearts and let the full sunlight of God's glory beam in from this text. And what we will find is that we will be grasping for words to describe the view. That is what is striking to me about this text in Isaiah 40. In a way that only the Spirit of God could accomplish – this text takes the incomparably great nature of God and expresses it in human language that leaves you breathless and speechless. So, let's read this glorious text. *Read Isaiah 40:9-31.*

Reading this text reminds you of the words from God to Job in chapters 38-40 of his book doesn't it? Both texts make clear to us the incomparable greatness of God. And this is an especially needed truth in the midst of very powerful difficulties and trials. For Job it was the loss of everything – literally everything – at the hands of a sinister Satan who was seeking to disprove Job's love for God. In Job's perplexity about what is going on and why God is doing this and what his future holds – God speaks and never directly answers the questions. Rather, he answers the questions by putting Job's understanding of God to the test through a series of humbling rhetorical questions. And this is what is happening in our text as well. The questions themselves expose the meager understanding of God that we often operate with in everyday life. And the descriptions of God given throughout the text must become the bedrock of truth upon

which we build our trust in the Lord. If we will, then there will be no trial or difficulty or problem that will overthrow us in the end.

This text in Isaiah is written about 100 years before it was first really needed. He is writing as the prophet of the Lord to the generation of Jews who will find themselves in military exile in Babylon. He is writing to give them the comfort of the truth about God who will rescue them and bring them back to Jerusalem. They will be in exile for 70 years and during that time they will experience the agony of exile. I think it is easy to not think about that fact much, because we hear it so often. But just try to place yourself in those sandals for a moment. Everything you know and love is gone and will likely never be seen again in your lifetime. You are indoctrinated with Babylonian culture and Babylonian religion. And you must wonder – where is God in all of this. But if you had the scroll of Isaiah's prophecy you could read in the first 39 chapters of the coming judgment upon all the nations of the world. Though they have been used by God to bring about His righteous judgment on Israel, their day of judgment is soon coming. And as they would roll the scroll to chapter 40, they would notice a shift in the tone and in the promises given. The promises of judgment give way to the promises of salvation. The servant of Jehovah takes center stage in these last 27 chapters of the book and by his life and work the nation will be saved from physical exile, but most importantly they will be saved from spiritual exile.

But before the Servant of Yahweh shows up to do his mighty work, they will pass through the darkest days of Israel's history. They will not pass into that dark tunnel because God is incapable or uncaring or disinterested in them. He is not all of a sudden distant or detached. He is not searching for a way to respond to their plight. Rather, he is incomparably great and is at work in inscrutable ways to bring about his purpose and plan. And that is the message these exiles will need the most. They need to see the truest truth about God. The brightest lights are needed for the darkest nights. And so, the text before us is an exaltation of God from beginning to end. It does not exalt him by lifting him to heights he has not himself already reached, but it will exalt him by exposing the heights of glory he has never abandoned! And this will prove to be both humbling and encouraging. And those two go together you know. We often think of encouragement as puffing someone up – lifting them up – which sometimes it is. But often, encouragement in hard times is simply found by seeing God rightly which will humble us and lift our hearts in trust-filled worship – and that will be the greatest encouragement of all. So, the prophet says to them – behold your God! And then he proceeds to tell us of the greatness of this God we are to behold.

#### **I. The Unconquerable Greatness of God – vs. 9-11**

- a. Specifically in verses 9-11 he tells us of the unconquerable greatness of God. To do this he depicts God as a mighty conquering warrior king. The lead up to this section in verses 1-8 is about the forerunner of the Messiah. He is to make the path clear and make a highway for the Lord to return to His rightful place in Jerusalem. He says in verse 5 that the glory of the Lord will be revealed, and all flesh will see it together. And this is followed up by a promise of the surety of God's Word. Everything else will pass away, but the word of God shall stand forever. He will not renege on his promises to Israel – no matter how doubtful the situation looks to the human eye.

- b. And now in verse 9 he tells Zion, which is another name for Jerusalem, to go up to a high mountain and declare the good news. She is to tell all the other cities of Judah the good news – the Lord has returned. The victory has been won and the battle is the Lord's. Behold your God! He comes with might and his arm rules for him. In other words – he has defeated all of his enemies and his mighty right arm has them all in subjection. And his reward is with him, and his recompense goes before him. These are describing the wages of one's work. In other words, these are the spoils of his victory. He has fought the great battle and the recompense of that victory is with him.
- c. And verse 11 describes his relationship to His people – which makes the connection with verse 10 that this is his reward. Through the great victory he has secured His people as his own, and they come with him in this great victory parade. And he tends them like a shepherd and provides gentle care for them along the way. This warrior God - Sovereign Lord - is also the tender Shepherd King. His works are mighty, and his care is gentle!
- d. This is a text which will ultimately be fulfilled when the Lord Jesus Christ returns at his Second Coming and defeats all of his enemies and sets up his rule in Jerusalem over the whole world. And it will be at that return that all Israel will see this one whom they crucified, and they will recognize him as their Messiah, and they will weep over him and they will finally believe and be saved. And the glory of the Lord will return to Jerusalem after thousands of years of absence, and the enemies of God will all be vanquished. So, to those who will find themselves in the darkness of exile, the promise is clear. God is unconquerably great. The mighty nation of Babylon will not withstand him when he comes. The mighty nation of Persia will not withstand him. The mighty power of Alexander the Great or of the powerful Roman Empire – none of it can stand when the Lord determines that it is finally time to bring about the end. From their exile they will doubt their future rescue, but they must hear these words – Behold your God!

## II. The Unmatched Greatness of God – vs. 12-26

- a. This unconquerable greatness of God is combined in verses 12-26 with the unmatched greatness of God. He is incomparably great. If the question attached to the first section is – who can stand against God – then the question of this second section is – who can compare to the Lord your God? The answer is a loud and proud – no one – absolutely no one!
- b. This middle section is the heart of this expose on the greatness of God. It is carried along in a question and answer type of format. It is the catechism of Isaiah on the greatness of God. The first set of questions spans from verses 12-14 and each question widens the gap between our small thoughts about God and the reality of the greatness of God.
- c. The first question in verse 12 takes the greatest observable aspects of God's creation to show how great God is in comparison. He asks about the water, the heavens, the entirety of the dust of the earth, and the mountains and hills. These are the things in God's creation that we find ourselves looking at repeatedly with awe and wonder. We stand at the seashore and gaze out over the endless mass of

water before us and we ponder our smallness. On a cloudless night we find a dark spot and we lay on our backs in the warm summer grass and we stare up at the endless sky above with its millions of lights shining down on us – and we ponder our smallness. We look at a globe and we consider the many nations of the world and vast amount of land that remains uninhabited on the planet, and we wonder at man’s smallness. And we trek into the mountains stopping along the way to look at some new view of the peaks of mountains and hills which surround us – and we consider how small we are in comparison to these great heights.

- d. But think of those things in comparison to God. The waters of the earth can be measured in the hollow of his hand – the little indent in the palm. Scientists estimate that there is somewhere between 333 and 338 million cubic miles of water on planet earth. God is so incomparably great that if he had a physical hand, all of that water would fit in what would be the small indent on his palm.
- e. And the heavens he would mark off with a span – the span in the distance from the average man’s tip of his thumb to the tip of his pinky finger when they are spread out. Which averages out to about 9 inches. Who can measure the astronomical distance of the heavens with the span of his hand? God can – that’s who? While I was doing some research to find the latest guestimates on how massive the universe is, I came across an article on space.com which was seeking to answer how it is that we even go about measuring these massive distances with any kind of exactness. And he said this – “But how can astronomers make the great leaps to measure the distances to the far-flung stars? How can we claim with any certainty [the breadth and depth of the Milky Way](#)? And what ruler spans the farthest reaches of the universe, separated from us by seemingly unfathomable oceans of darkness?”
- f. It’s almost like he was reading Isaiah 40 – what ruler spans the farthest reaches of the universe – well the ruler of the span of God’s hand! In case you are wondering just how big the universe is – well we don’t really know – but just our galaxy – the Milky Way galaxy is estimated to be 160,000 light years wide – and ours is just one of what is estimated as one hundred billion galaxies in the universe, though some estimate up to 2 trillion. In other words – its big! And God measures it with the span of his hand as it were!
- g. Back to planet earth – he takes all the dust of the earth and measures it and he takes all the hills and the mountains and weighs them in a balance. The idea here is the scales used for household or marketplace use. God’s ordinary, everyday scales are so massive that he can use them to weigh the dirt of planet earth, and to balance out the mountains and the hills. God is unmatched in his greatness.
- h. The next questions in verses 13-14 are about the wisdom and knowledge of the Lord. Notice how many times words for understanding and teaching are used in these verses. The explosive truth these questions reveal is that no one has taught the Lord anything. No one has given him counsel. No one has been his instructor. No one has effectively questioned his understanding and proven his ways to be foolish. These are pretty pointed questions for a generation who would be suffering in exile for their own sins and for the sins of the generations before

them. Why God? What are you doing God? Why is it going this way God? What is the plan God?

- i. Isaiah reminds them – whom did the Lord consult and who made him understand? Who was his teacher and who has been his counselor? No one!
- j. This leads to the statement of truth in verses 15-17. If this was a catechism it would go like this. Question: Who can measure the universe with merely his hand, or who has been the teacher and counselor of the Lord? Answer: The nations are like a drop in the bucket. They are as nothing before this incomparably great God.
- k. They are not even as significant to the Lord as to make his scales move – they are just the dust on the scales. If all the wood and the animals from the great forests of Lebanon were gathered to give a massive offering to this God – they would not be enough. These nations who hold so very much power over God’s people – who confine them to exile and restrict their freedom from returning to the Promised Land – these nations are as nothing before the Lord. In fact, they are less than nothing. They are complete emptiness!
- l. This is so reassuring isn’t it beloved? I love our nation just like you do, and I want it to thrive once again, but we’ve really gotten ourselves embroiled in a worldwide political wrestling match, haven’t we? Nations are vying for power and prestige. They are seeking to be on top in every category, while a large percentage of politicians are pushing for a global society and a one-world nation in which we are controlled by one central political powerhouse. And the words of the psalmist come to mind – “Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain . . . He who sits in the heavens laughs; the Lord holds them in derision.” (Ps. 2:1, 4) They are less than nothing to him! Meaning they hold no hope for us either!
- m. Which leads to our next question in verse 18 – to whom then will you liken God, or what likeness compare with him? If God is truly this unmatched in his greatness, then how in the world do you think you are going to craft an image to represent him? You can make it as fancy as possible – overlaying it with gold and giving it silver chains. You can make this idol from the longest lasting wood known to mankind so that it will be durable. And you can have the best craftsman around make it so that it will never be moved – and it is all a fool’s errand. How would you ever make a physical representation – an idol – of a God who can measure the waters of the earth in the hollow of his hand? What idol could ever rightly represent the wisdom of His Spirit and the depth of his understanding? The point is – you can’t! He is unmatched in his greatness!
- n. Which leads to yet another set of questions in verse 21. These questions start to press in upon them uniquely. Have you not heard? Has it not been told you from the beginning? Well, yes it has, but we forget about the unmatched greatness of our God and must be reminded. And so, Isaiah reminds us. He tells us that this God sits above the circle of the earth, and the inhabitants are like insects to him. He spreads out the heavens like you did when you pulled the shades across your windows last night before you went to bed. Just like that God has pulled the tapestry of the heavens all around us. Because of this unmatched greatness –

because he is enthroned high above the heavens and sits above the circle of the earth – it can be said that he will have his way with our greatest human rulers. They will be used for his purposes and then brought to nothing. They will be like the dandelion stalk plucked by the child who then gives a big puff and the dandelion seeds fly away into oblivion. So too the greatest of nations and the strongest of leaders to this God who is seated on the circle of the earth.

- o. So, again the question is posed in verse 25 – to whom then will you compare me, that I should be like him, says the Holy One? And this is the essence of God’s holiness – which is why the title “Holy One” is so important here. His holiness is his complete otherliness. He is so incomparably great that he is completely holy – set apart unto himself. There is nothing we can compare him to.
  - p. And this is furthered by the truth statement of verse 26. He tells them to lift up their eyes and gaze once more at the myriads of stars above them. Rather than worship those stars as though they each represent some mythological god, they are to let the heavens declare the glory of God. He brings them out each night by their number, calling them all by name – and all by the greatness of his might. Not one goes missing because of his strong power. Did you notice the mixture in this verse of omnipotence and omniscience? His power is what sustains them and keeps them in their place, and his unmatched knowledge calls them by name. God’s thought life and God’s power go hand in hand. He cannot just think about something as though his thoughts are passive and have no consequence. No, his thoughts are entirely proactive and powerful. As Augustine once said, “God does not know all creatures . . . because they exist; they exist because he knows them.”<sup>1</sup> He knows their name and every part about them, therefore they were created and continue to be sustained by his great power.
  - q. Who is like the Lord our God? This section has presented him in his unmatched wisdom, and unmatched power, and unmatched knowledge, and simply unmatched in every way. And this expose of God’s greatness leads to the application of verses 27-31. And here we see the unrelenting greatness of God.
- III. The Unrelenting Greatness of God – vs. 27-31**
- a. The Lord knows that when his people get into the confines of exile and are there year after year after year – they will begin to question his care. They will begin to think the thoughts of verse 27 – my way is hidden from the LORD, and my right is disregarded by my God? He knows they will grow weary of the difficulty and the tribulation of exile. He knows that this will cause them to doubt him. And so, through Isaiah’s pen he communicates his unrelenting greatness to them. We are introduced to another truth about God’s nature and essence – that he is everlasting. This means that he exists, and always has and always will. This is beyond our full capacity to understand, but it simply means that He has never not existed – he is outside of time and he is perfect and unchanging in every way forever and ever. What this means is that He is eternal in all that he is. So, his power is eternal, and his wisdom is eternal, and his knowledge is eternal, and his

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<sup>1</sup> As quoted in Matthew Barrett, *None Greater*, pg. 193.

strength is eternal. These are not parts that must be maintained. His power and his knowledge and his wisdom are not weapons in an arsenal that might come and go as needed. No, what God is, he is in every way. He is eternally powerful and eternally wise and eternally omniscient.

- b. Therefore, the conclusion can be made in verse 28 that he does not faint or grow weary and his understanding has no limit. Because he is eternal, he is unrelenting in his greatness. He is never at the end of his strength or of his knowledge or of his power or of his wisdom because he is never at the end of himself – he is everlasting! That word for understanding in verse 28, is meant to communicate his wise discernment in all things. It is used by Solomon in 1 Kings 3 when he asks God for wisdom so that he might discern between good and evil. This is more than a gathering of facts and an understanding of what's going on. This is the full grasp of the omniscience of God which can cut through the cloudiness of all things and declare what is right and what is wrong. This understanding of God is unsearchable. His ways are inscrutable. It may look to us at the moment like evil is winning and like God has lost control and that God has lost his way in his sovereign control – but that's because we are looking at it in this moment. God is not confined to this moment but has an everlasting and eternal perspective. And his understanding of all things is perfect and unsearchably great!
- c. Therefore, he is able to give power and strength to those who do faint. To the one who cannot carry on under current circumstances in their own power – God is able to increase their strength. And remember this is being written to the exile generation who for year after year was separated from everything they associated with the blessing and goodness of God to them. They would easily lose strength in this situation and grow weary of the trial and the trouble. In fact, he says that even the youths and the young men will grow wear and fall exhausted. I love the Scriptures! Isn't that an incredible statement by our Lord there? He lets you know that you will faint and grow weary in this world as you seek to walk by faith in Him. Even the strongest among us will do so. And he is using the physical world to represent the spiritual world. The strongest physically – the youths and the young men – not even they will be fit enough for the journey. So, what is the answer – hit the gym and build up more muscle and more endurance to be able to keep going on when the hardest days hit?
- d. Well, verse 31 tells us that the answer is actually counter intuitive. The answer to our weary and exhausted condition is not found in ourselves at all. The answer is found in this everlasting God who has everlasting strength, wisdom, and knowledge. We must wait for the LORD, and then our strength shall be renewed by him as we wait for him. So, what is this waiting for the Lord? What does it look like? Well, the psalmist couples it with hoping in the Lord, and with patience. David says that it is to have your heart take courage in the Lord. In other words, this is faith. This is taking God at His Word that he will do what he has said he will do. This is the exiled in Babylon believing that this exile will not be the situation for God's people for all time. God will rescue and save and

victoriously return His people to the Promised Land. He said he would, therefore he will. So, when the weariness and exhaustion of it all sets in because the circumstances are insurmountable and difficult, the strength needed is found in waiting patiently for the Lord. It looks like a humble dependence and trust in this everlastingly powerful and wise God. The answer is found in applying the truths about his character and nature that we just learned from the previous verses and letting those form our faith in Him. If he is all powerful and all wise and all knowing, then I can depend upon him to act as he so chooses in any and every situation. I can take him at his word to do as he has said he will do.

- e. And this patient waiting will yield a renewed strength which will allow us to fly, run, and walk in verse 31. Did you notice the progression of action here? Flying is occasional, running is a little more often, but the walking is the ongoing way of life. There are challenges and circumstances that the Lord will give you wings to fly over as you pass through them, and others he will strengthen you to run, but others it will require the day to day ongoing movement of one step at a time. These exiled Jews will know the sustaining grace of God in each of these three ways as they travel through their difficulty – if they wait patiently for the Lord and look to Him in faith.

**Conclusion:** We might be tempted to think that such a high view of God would make him uncaring about us. Since he has so much power and so much knowledge and so much wisdom, why would he think to spend any time concerning himself with me? But as Francis Schaeffer has famously said – with a very big God in mind, “there are no little people.”<sup>2</sup> And nowhere is the power of God and inscrutable wisdom of God and the unmatched greatness of God seen better than in the sending of Jesus Christ to the world. The virgin birth which brought the eternal Son of God from the glories of Heaven into the dusty world of human life . . . the sinless life of full obedience . . . the wise words which proved God true and God’s promises trustworthy . . . the giving of himself upon the execution stake at Mt. Calvary . . . the imputation of our sins upon Christ and of His righteousness upon us . . . the wrath of God poured out upon him for the forgiveness of our sins . . . the shed blood which washes away our iniquities . . . the resurrection from the dead to overcome the power of sin and death and hell . . . and the spread of this glorious good news around the world generation after generation until He will one day return. It is because God is so great that God can so greatly care for you and for me. It is because he is so unmatched in his power and wisdom and strength that he can accomplish our redemption through the work of Jesus Christ His Son. Therefore beloved – you can trust him today. You can wait patiently for him today because he is unmatched in his greatness! Let’s pray!

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<sup>2</sup> As quoted in Matthew Barrett, *None Greater*, pg. 205.