

Sermon Notes & References

Who Is a God Like Our God?
Isaiah 40:18-26

October 10, 2010

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D. 'Who Can Compare With Me?' asks God

1. the question 40:25

'To whom then will you liken Me That I would be *his* equal?'
says the Holy One.

2. the heavenly bodies cannot^D 40:26

E. Conclusion - Our God Is Incomparable

1. forsake any idols^E

2. trust in Him

^B Luke 16:19

^C Psalm 2:4

^D Romans 1:24

^E Philippians 3:8

^A 1 John 2:16

A. Introduction

1. humour

- a. has been defined as having a sense of the ridiculous
- b. that being the case, there is certainly humour here in the inspired prophet's description of idols
- c. you will discover the satire to be even more intense on this subject of idols in later chapters in this book of Isaiah
- d. because when viewed from any reasonable point of view, idolatry is an exercise in the ridiculous

2. idolatry

- a. had been a continuing failing throughout the history of the people of God, of Judah and Israel
- b. one by one they adopted for worship the gods & goddesses of the nations around them, and the nations that God had driven out before them to give to them the land of Canaan
 - (A) they adopted gods of wood and stone
 - (B) gods that did not deliver from the Assyrians, and that would not deliver from the Babylonians
 - (C) instead of Yahweh, their covenant God
- c. Isaiah's words are written for the future exiles of the people of God, a people taken captivity into those pagan nations
 - (A) Israel already in the pagan nation of Assyria
 - (B) Judah who would be in the pagan nation of Babylon
 - (C) nations that worshipped
 - (1) a great many images and gods
 - (2) the sun, the moon, the stars
 - (3) worship associated with seeking physical pleasure
 - (4) all of which Judah and Israel had gladly embraced
 - (D) so what will keep these, God's people, from joining into the culture in which they live and worshipping such false gods even more intensely?
- d. God is speaking though Isaiah – and through Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and other successor prophets – in order to prevent that very thing happening; that by this exile, rather than intensifying their idolatry, they may

be turned away from it for ever

3. let's talk about idols

- a. yes, there are many who today worship and bow down to idols and images made of wood, stone and other materials, that are said to represent God by those selling them
- b. but there are many forms of idolatry
 - (A) wherever we put our trust in other than God
 - (1) dependence on human efforts and institutions for our well-being
 - (2) basing our view of life and after-life on intellect
 - (B) wherever we worship the creation more than Creator
 - (1) man and his skills and things man creates
 - (2) artists, musicians, athletes and such stars
 - (3) nature, money, power, political systems
- c. here are some definitions of idolatry for you to consider:
- d. Augustine^{-{2}}: 'Idolatry is worshipping anything that ought to be used, or using anything that ought to be worshipped.'
- e. and Rev. Adrian Rogers^{-{3}}: – 'An idol is anything you love more, fear more, value more or serve more than you do Almighty God. Fill in the blank.' for yourself.
- f. & 1 John 2:16 seems to cover it: For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world.

4. there is a modern parable

- a. which I trust you will not find irreverent, but rather penetrating
- b. the Scientist comes to challenge God as the Creator
- c. 'We have studied,' says the Scientist, 'life for centuries. We have investigated the whole subject of biology, the fields of botany and zoology. We have taken life apart down to the smallest cell. Then analysing the cells themselves, we have discovered DNA. We have built faster and more powerful computers and have decoded that DNA in order to find the very secrets of how life is perpetuated.'
- d. 'and now,' the Scientist sums up, 'we can create life.'
- e. 'Go ahead,' say God.

f. 'First,' says the Scientist, 'we start with some dust.'

g. 'Oh no!' says God, 'First you start with nothing!'

h. and for many, science falsely so called, is the idol of this world that is keeping them from Christ and from salvation

5. Isaiah asks us to attempt some comparisons and to face some facts that we may recognize the foolishness of idols and the reality of the God of the Scriptures

B. 'Who Can Compare With God?' asks Isaiah

1. The question: [To whom then will you liken God? Or what likeness will you compare with Him? . . . 40:18](#)

a. this chapter continues with a rhetorical questions – these having the obvious answer to all who hear

b. that answer is 'there is no one'

c. man may have been created in God's image as a spiritual, intellectual, social and self-aware being

d. but it does not follow that God is in man's image: in this direction the distinctions are too vast, too radical, for any comparison to be made

e. have you ever as a child stood back to back with your mother or father to see who is taller? that is the idea of comparison in these words – who can you even set beside God to measure the difference ... there is no one

2. Man-made idols cannot: [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 skilful craftsman To prepare an idol that will not totter.](#)40:19-20

a. the whole idea of an idol is ridiculous

b. man worshipping that which he has made by himself as greater than himself; 'my God' should indicate that He owns us, not we Him!

c. man worshipping that which is limited by his own feeble resources: if I am poorer than you, my god will be poorer

d. it is ridiculous if we are talking of wood, metal or stone

e. it is just as ridiculous if we are talking of philosophy, art, politics, science, or any human endeavour

f. because despite all the advances in these endeavours, the age old problems of sin remain: greed,

injustice, cruelty, man's inhumanity to man, lust and pride

g. and like the ancient people with their hand made gods, we employ specialists who are constantly endeavouring, patch upon patch to prop up these false gods unless they should be shaken by some wind of truth and totter and fall

C. 'Learn This Lesson,' says Isaiah

1. The four-fold question: [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?](#) 40:21

a. the first 2 questions here are really best translated into English in the present or future tense, as possibilities

(A) Edward J. Young suggests that they are best understood of Isaiah speaking of Judah's attitude: ['Will you not know? Will you not Hear?'](#)

(B) there was no shortage of the truth proclaimed to the people of Israel: as in Jesus account of the after-life in Luke 16: 19, Abraham answers the rich man in hell, [They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.](#)

(C) but like those who murdered the first martyr, Stephen, man has stopped his ears, and refused to listen

(D) yet the questions are asked raising the possibility that a faithful remnant may listen and know

b. the last 2 questions are in the past tense, dealing with facts

(A) first, and the answer should be yes, have these truths not been revealed to you from your very beginning?

(1) Paul says that the great advantage to the Jews was that to them had been entrusted the oracles of God

(2) God's intention was that from the early childhood they should learn His revelation found in His word

(B) second, and the answer should be yes, have you not considered the implications of God's creation?

(1) it is there, all around you to see

(2) that, and especially as a people living off the land, there is to be seen a demonstration of a marvellous Creator, and that Creator is Yahweh their God

c. so learn, then, the lesson of this God and His relation to His universe and to the rulers of this earth

2. The Lesson of the Universe: *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.*

40:22

a. in Hebrew, there is one word that means 'sit, inhabit, dwell' and in various forms it is used all three ways in this verse

- (A) and the lesson is most simple
- (B) there is a vast distance between God and His creation
- (C) this earth is man's dwelling place – notwithstanding that he has travelled to the moon – God's is beyond
- (D) God is great; mankind of small estimation, the term grasshoppers overstates, in one sense, his importance

b. then there is a contrast in activity

- (A) those of man resemble more those of grasshoppers – of little moment or purpose
- (B) God sits – He is enthroned as King – and for Him the spreading out of the heavens is of no more effort than the spreading of a filmy veil of finest gauze
- (C) and those heavens, in which He dwells, is but as a very temporary abode for the eternal God
- (D) as the Creator God He now sustains this universe for just so long as is in His counsel and plans

3. The Lesson of earthly rulers: *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.*

40:23-24

a. though God is far above His creation

- (A) yet He involves Himself in man's affairs – God cares!
- (B) an involvement which again demonstrates that He alone is worthy of our worship and trust

b. and what an encouragement to the exiled Israelites

c. and what an encouragement to the persecuted church

d. the apparent power

- (A) ruthlessness

- (B) success
- (C) of the enemies of God is but for the moment
- (D) and it will pass when He but blows on them
- e. how does God respond to those who rage against Him and His Messiah? *'He who sits in the heavens laughs, The Lord scoffs at them.'* (Psalm 2:4)
- f. in the midst of this antagonistic world, be encouraged for

D. 'Who Can Compare With Me?' asks God

1. The question – *'To whom then will you liken Me That I would be his equal?'* says the Holy One. . . . 40:25
 - a. you will recognize this question immediately
 - b. it starts the same way as the question Isaiah asked, v 18
 - c. but this time it is asked in the first person, by God
 - d. and God, the Holy One, the One Unutterably Separated from, and Immeasurably Greater than, His creation, He alone is the one who can ask of Himself this question of us
 - e. for example, take the greatest expanse we know, the sky

2. The heavenly bodies cannot: *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.* 40:26
 - a. take a long, thoughtful look up at the sky, says Isaiah;
 - (A) see the sun, the moon, the planets, the stars
 - (B) these are marvellous sights in the sky
 - (C) the first time I saw the planet Saturn through a very small and shaky telescope, it took my breath away
 - (D) yet, these are not worthy of worship
 - (E) but as Romans 1:24 says, *... they exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshipped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen.*
 - b. yet consider the stars
 - (A) God created them
 - (B) God by His command, keeps them in their places

- (C) even though all the heavenly bodies are in motion, it is not a haphazard, capricious motion
- (D) if you look for a certain star – say the North Star – it will be exactly where it should be; if you looked for it 20, 40, 60 years ago, in each case it was right where it should be – totally predictable
- (E) for you see, the stars follow the laws that the Creator established when ‘He made the stars also’ (Gen 1:16); stars uncountable and unknown by men, God knows their number and each by its name, and they move like a mighty host, an army, according to His command
- (F) Johann Kepler was a devout Lutheran, planning on the ministry, but was called to teach mathematics: it was then re realized that he could glorify God by his studies in mathematics and astronomy. His scientific notes were often mixed with prayers and praise. He believed ‘the chief aim of all investigations of the external world should be to discover the rational order and harmony which has been imposed on it by God and which He revealed to us in the language of mathematics.’ Thus he discovered the 3 laws for planetary motion. His prayer at the end of his life was, ‘I give you thanks, Creator and God, that you have given me this joy in thy creation, and I rejoice in the works of your hands. See I have now completed the work to which I was called. In it I have used all the talents you have lent to my spirit.’^{4}.

c. the heavens declare the glory of God

E. Conclusion – God is Incomparable

1. we, as the church of Jesus Christ, have been placed in a world which is wholly given over to idolatry
 - a. to the worship of
 - (A) what appeals to the desires of the heart
 - (B) what appeals to the delight of the eyes
 - (C) what appeals to the pride in oneself
 - b. ‘For whatever was written in earlier times was written for our instruction,’ and we are to consider Isaiah’s words in regard to all these transient and passing appeals
 - c. that our God is incomparable
2. is there some idol that you or I have kept secret in our heart
 - a. something which does not build us up as Christians?
 - b. but rather tears us down?

- c. that stands between us and our communion with God?
- d. then let us cast such idols
 - (A) things that are keeping us from God
 - (B) perhaps even keeping us from salvation
 - (C) into the rubbish heap where they belong
 - (D) that we may be able to speak Paul's words with sincerity and truth: 'More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ' (Philippians 3:8)
- e. and say, My Lord, My God, how great thou art!

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