

Infinite

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[0 : 00] We're starting a new series this evening. So I'll just explain just for a couple of minutes what's going to happen. So for the next 10 weeks, we'll follow a similar pattern. We're going to be following the themes of None Like Him.

Still copies available, only £5. Take them and pay later, should you wish. And the reason why we're doing this, the reason why we're discussing the character of God is firstly so that it will help us in our worship, but also so that it will give us something with which we can help and encourage others. Somebody said recently that in our pastoral care, in our care of others, that the best thing that we can supply for people is a big and a true picture of who God is so that we understand that He is trustworthy, that He is good, that He is someone that we can rest and rely on.

So we'll have a shorter time of worship. We'll have a sermon. And then once the service finishes, we'll have an opportunity together to break into small groups and to discuss, and really to discuss, for example, today, how does the fact that God is infinite, how does that help us to worship Him? Why should that lead us to praise Him? And how can that knowledge be used to help and encourage other people, whether Christians or not Christians, as they're hurting, troubled, confused, or anxious? I know some people don't like discussion groups, feel a bit uncomfortable, a little bit awkward.

[1 : 25] Can I encourage you, even if you don't want to say anything, still stick around, because as you listen to other people share their experiences, even if you're not saying anything, you'll be encouraged.

You'll be hearing how God has been at work and continues to be at work in people's lives. So it'd be wonderful if we could all stick around just for 15 or so minutes after the service finishes.

Time is marching. We're going to make sure that we keep things nice and tight. So let's read together from Isaiah chapter 40, this wonderful chapter of God's Word, page 724.

Our first theme tonight is the God who is infinite, the God who has no limits.

So we're in Isaiah 40, on page 724, and we're going to read from verse 12 to verse 31. Let's hear God's Word together.

[2 : 24] Who has measured the waters in the hollow of his hand, or with the breadth of his hand marked off the heavens? Who has held the dust of the earth in a basket, or weighed the mountains on the scales, and the hills in a balance?

Who has understood the mind of the Lord, or instructed him as his counselor? Whom did the Lord consult to enlighten him, and who taught him the right way?

Who was it that taught him knowledge, or showed him the path of understanding? Surely the nations are like a drop in a bucket. They are regarded as dust on the scales.

He weighs the islands as though they were fine dust. Lebanon is not sufficient for altar fires, nor its animals enough for burnt offerings. Before him all the nations are as nothing.

They are regarded by him as worthless and less than nothing. To whom then will you compare God? What image will you compare him to? As for an idol, a craftsman casts it, and a goldsmith overlays it with gold and fashions silver chains for it.

[3 : 28] A man too poor to present such an offering selects wood that will not rot. He looks for a skilled craftsman to set up an idol that will not topple. Do you not know?

Have you not heard? Has it not been told you from the beginning? Have you not understood since the earth was founded? He sits enthroned above the circle of the earth, and its people are like grasshoppers.

He stretches out the heavens like a canopy and spreads them out like a tent to live in. He brings princes to naught and reduces the rulers of this world to nothing. No sooner are they planted, no

sooner are they sown, no sooner do they take root in the ground than he blows on them and they wither, and a whirlwind sweeps them away like chaff.

To whom will you compare me? Or who is my equal? Says the Holy One. Lift your eyes and look to the heavens. Who created all these? He who brings out the starry hosts one by one and calls them each by name.

Because of his great power and mighty strength, not one of them is missing. Why do you say, O Jacob, and complain, O Israel, My way is hidden from the Lord. My cause is disregarded by my God.

[4 : 34] Do you not know? Have you not heard? The Lord is the everlasting God, the creator of the ends of the earth. He will not grow tired or weary, and his understanding no one can fathom.

He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak. Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall, but those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles. They will run and not grow weary. They will walk and not be faint. Amen. Now, I want to begin with something that I'm sure we are all familiar with, the reality that we are, as people, limited, and we can be measured.

And that's something that life teaches us in so many ways. As we grow up, we're very interested in our height. We are concerned for our strength.

Our age is really important to us. We want to get older, then we reach that certain point we just wish we could get a little bit younger. Life teaches us as well that we have limits of our capacity, our emotional capacity, our physical capacity.

[5 : 49] We reach max, and we can't do anything more. We suffer from time constraints. We have to-do lists that we, if you're like me, you probably never manage to get through.

You find yourself being double or sometimes triple booked, and you can't be in two places at the same time. We have diminishing abilities. I didn't always need glasses.

Exercise wasn't always such a challenge. Staying up late, getting up early was easy, but not so much now. So all of us know this. It's true. From the day we're born until the day we die, we are limited, and we can be measured.

So the really important thing for us is how do we respond to that? The Bible would say to us we should respond by viewing ourselves with humility, living within those limits, recognizing that they are from God, who created us, designed us with limitation.

However, sometimes we go wrong as people because we want to reject those limitations. If we remind ourselves of what happened in the Garden of Eden, we think about Adam and Eve, what happened there?

[7 : 07] They weren't content to live under God's rule. They wanted to become like God. And we can do that. We can try and take God off his rightful throne, and we can put ourselves there instead.

We can be guilty of pride that rejects the limits that are placed on us. Or we can do another thing. We can put other people on a pedestal.

We can make someone else so important in our lives that to us they then have a God-like significance. And we place on someone else a crushing weight of expectation because we don't understand that only God is supposed to have that ultimate position.

So the key to being fully human, biblically, is to embrace our limits, to live under God's good rule. So that's a truth that we recognize.

The Bible also teaches us very clearly, Isaiah 40 is a great example, God is unlimited, and he cannot be measured. That's what we mean when we talk about God being infinite.

[8 : 16] God has no limits. He doesn't have the limitations that we have because he's not human. He's not created. He is eternal, and he is uncreated.

He doesn't suffer those restrictions of space and time. He rules over them. So, for example, he sees all of history in a single moment. God can be in all places at all times, and he is infinite.

He cannot be measured by us. God can superintend the whole of creation at the macro level, the movements of stars, planets, galaxies, and at the micro level.

As Donald was praying, he knows the number of hairs on our head. We have a God who, unlike us, his power and his capability never diminishes. He is not affected by age or decay.

He doesn't find that he gets pressured and makes bad decisions. In fact, the only limit that there is on God is that he cannot sin. He must always remain true to his character, which is good and perfect and holy.

[9 : 23] And so, I want us to explore these two realities by using Isaiah 40. I want us to see clearly the difference between God and us and to celebrate that as good news, to worship him as a result, to recognize that embracing this infinite God, the one who has no limits, is the key to all that we need in our lives.

This is why Isaiah 40 was written. It was written to deliver to a people, people of Israel, who were being prepared for exile because of their disobedience, because they were rejecting life under God's rule.

Isaiah is saying to them, even in that situation, in turning to this God, in turning to the God of no limits, this is your one hope for security, trusting in this God who keeps his promises, this God who can be trusted absolutely.

And so, for us this evening, I want us to receive this God and his good news, to embrace our own limits and to embrace the God without limits, and to see how God in Jesus has provided out of his infinite love all that we lack.

So, let's look at our passage. Let's turn to Isaiah 40, and let's see, first of all, the God who measures, but cannot be measured. There's wonderful imagery all through this passage.

[10 : 51] Verse 12, we see it very clearly. The choice of scale is deliberate. Here is a picture that the largest things in our universe, they're small, and they're controlled by God the creator.

So, he can measure all the waters of the universe in the hollow of his hand. You know, we can manage a few drops. He can manage all the oceans. God is so great that he can, as it were, mark off the size of our universe in handbread, where we're still trying to grapple with its size.

He's held the dust of the earth in a basket, weighing Mount Everest, as it were, on a scale. Here is a picture of God who is in absolute control.

He has the capacity to measure and control the universe he created. He is without rival in that regard. So, God measures all things, but then Isaiah is quick to point out that he cannot be measured.

That's the point of verse 13 and 14. Who has understood the mind of the Lord or instructed him as his counselor? The implied answer, of course, is nobody.

[12 : 08] It's impossible for us to fathom God's creative mind. God didn't go to anyone for advice or direction. God is in no need of a teacher.

He lacks no wisdom or information. So, here in these three small verses, we get an amazing picture of our unlimited God who contrasts with us as people.

Because the next thing that we see in verses 15 to 26 is the God who has the measure of us. You know the expression to have the measure of someone where you have them figured out where in a sports context you understand how another team plays and you've figured out tactics to make sure that you're going to defeat them and deal with them.

It's clear from Isaiah 40 that God has the measure of us as people. We are no challenge to his uniqueness. We are no rival to him.

He is infinitely greater than us. And Isaiah brings that out in a number of ways. Verse 15 to 17, first of all, we see that the collected strength and wisdom and intentions of humanity are nothing compared to God.

[13 : 25] Surely the nations are like a drop in a bucket. Or the islands just like fine dust. Nothing compared to God.

It brings to mind the story of the Tower of Babel in Genesis chapter 11. So you have that picture of humanity in rebellion against God. God said, scatter around the world and subdue it and live as God's vice kings on the earth.

But instead they gather together and in human pride they decide to build a vast tower as if to say, we don't need God. Look at us. We're great. And there's that wonderful picture where you've got, on the one hand, the people building up in pride, trying to build this tower to heaven.

And then it says, God came down and saw. And the impression is, what they're doing is so small and so insignificant and no threat at all to God.

He has no rivals. Verse 16, a different kind of imagery. Lebanon, famous for its cedar trees, is not sufficient for altar fires, nor its animals enough for burnt offerings.

[14 : 37] Imagine a country-sized altar for worship. All the forests laid out to offer all the animals of that country as sacrifices.

What it's saying is that while God invites and commands worship, He is not controlled by worshipers. That supposing we were to make that kind of great sacrifice, it would not put God in our debt.

It would not say that we are in any way comparable to God. Our most impressive religious and moral deeds do not put God in our debt.

And then the imagery moves on again. And it begins to address, Isaiah begins to address ways that we fight against the limits that God has set for us.

So God created us to live under His good rule, to be humble before Him, but there are ways that we refuse to submit to that. And there are two ways that we tend to do that as people.

[15:40] The first is in verses 18 to 20, where one of the things that we can do is make idols for ourselves. So reading at verse 18, to whom then will you compare God?

What image will you compare Him to? As for an idol, crafts him in casks, casts it, and a goldsmith overlays it with gold and fashions, silver chains.

But here's this contrast between the Almighty God that we've just seen and this image that somebody has created. And the point really is that no matter how fancy an idol is, no matter how valuable an idol is, back in those days when it was statues, they cannot move, they cannot think, they have no power or influence, they are no rival to the true God, nor are the idols that we create for ourselves.

So it is possible we speak about idolizing money, thinking if I just had enough money, then I'd have security, and I'd have joy, and I'd have happiness.

But money has limits. Money can be lost. We can idolize our jobs and find our identity and source of happiness, and I've made it because I've got this job.

[16:57] But again, a job is something that we will leave behind. We can even idolize another person. And when we do that, we realize that everyone disappoints us eventually, and everybody dies eventually.

God is not like the idols. And in refusing to know and accept our limits, there's another thing that people tend to do.

They did it in Isaiah's day. We can do it in our own day. We can place our hopes in the great and the good and the powerful. That's what happens in verses 21 to 26.

We've got this deliberate choice of imagery. For example, in verse 22, He, that is God, sits enthroned above the circle of the earth, and its people are like grasshoppers.

So people are tiny. People are grasshopper-sized compared to the infinite God. And he goes on in verse 23, this God brings princes to nothing.

[18:08] He reduces the rulers of this world to nothing. End of verse 24, Think about petals on a cherry blossom tree.

One slight breeze, and they're gone. Compared to God, that's what the great kings and rulers and the rich and the wealthy and the powerful are like.

So bearing all this in mind, Isaiah brings us back to the idea of gaining a proper perspective, looking up and seeing God as He truly is.

Verse 25, To whom? He said this already, To whom will you compare me? Or who is my equal, says the Holy One? Lift your eyes and look to the heavens who created all these.

So God's here called the Holy One. God is separate from us. God is in a class of His own. And that's brought out because He has personally created and now personally sustains the trillions of stars in our galaxy.

[19:18] This is the God who created us. This is the God who has set our limits. This is the God who knows us, that we are no rival to.

And because of that, we should live under His rule, living lives of worship. And so the key to living well, according to the Bible, is learning to re-measure.

And that's really where Isaiah goes in the rest of our chapter from verse 27 onwards. There's a really nice quote in chapter 1 of Jen Wilkins' book where she says, our limitations are by design. Whether we spend the remainder of our lives denying or embracing this basic truth makes all the difference in how we will love God and others.

If we put ourselves in the center of our own universe, we will tend to be selfish. We will not tend to love well. But if we are humble and we put God at the center, if we have His values, then we will love Him and we will love others.

[20 : 30] Seeing our limits should, on the one hand, humble us and it should then lead us to worship the God who has no limits. To have Him as our God, not to seek to put ourselves or anyone else in that place.

One of the other positive things about seeing our limits is it should create honesty in us where we can acknowledge our weakness, where we can acknowledge our sin.

We don't expect ourselves to be God-like. We confess our sin. We don't try and hide it. We don't try and justify it.

We recognize that we are limited sinful creatures and we remember the infinite God knows. And so there's a freedom for us to be honest before God.

One of the other benefits of seeing our limits is surely that it will ease our levels of stress. When we recognize that I can't control everything and everyone, that should come as freedom to us.

[21 : 42] When we realize that I should not try to control everything and everyone around us.

There is freedom in that and instead there is an invitation to turn to the God who clearly is in control.

So what does Isaiah 40 teach us about learning to re-measure? We need to hear verse 27 and understand what's going on.

So verse 27, we read this. Why do you say, O Jacob, and complain, O Israel? My way is hidden from the Lord. My cause is disregarded by my God.

So there's a question, perhaps even an accusation going on here. The people, as we said at the beginning, are facing exile because they rejected living under God's limits.

And so they've got questions attached to that. They're having fears and anxieties because of what's happening. questioning either, God doesn't see my difficulties or God doesn't care about my difficulties.

[22 : 54] That's their response. Things are getting bad and so they're beginning to doubt God. How does the God of no limits respond? Well, in the language of verses 28 to 31, he reminds them that he is the infinite God, that he is the God of no limits and in that reality is their hope, is their good news, is their chance of renewal and life.

And he reminds them, yes, I am infinite, but I am also profoundly personal. He's already done that in verses 10 and 11 that Donald read for us at the beginning, the sovereign Lord who is also the shepherd of his people.

He is not distant and remote. This all-powerful God knows and sees and is therefore his people. So why is understanding our limits and God's lack of limits good news?

Well, hear the language of verse 28. Do you not know? Have you not heard? The Lord is the everlasting God, the creator of the ends of the earth.

He will not grow tired or weary and his understanding no one can fathom. And he gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak.

[24 : 25] So here's the moment. When we find ourselves lacking strength, when we find ourselves in a situation and we feel like we don't have the necessary wisdom, when we feel that we have reached the end of our emotional capacity, that's when we need to understand who God is because he is the God who is willing to provide from his unlimited resources of strength and wisdom and love.

So it's in those moments when we are suffering or hurting, when we feel powerless and weak, that we are invited once again to turn and trust in this all-powerful God.

Naturally, there are times when we will all suffer loss and inability, even youths, as it says here. But hoping in this God brings a source of strength that is constantly being renewed.

So embracing our limits is to be truly human and it's also the place where we find help when we need it most because it reminds us again that we are weak and it encourages us to look to the God who is infinitely strong and who is always there for and with his people.

For those of us who have been Christians for a while, I'm sure we can testify to that reality. Times when life seemed incredibly difficult in situations and we had no idea what to do and in those moments praying, giving it to God and finding strength and help to go on.

[26 : 24] Trusting God to care for our families when we send them away and we are concerned for them. Turning to him in our times of sadness and fear and loss, knowing him to be both infinitely great and infinitely personal and loving.

Our greatest limit as people, of course, is that one day we will all die. I read an article this week where there was a quote from an atheist philosopher by the name of Luke Ferry.

And I want to read some of that quote because it's really helpful for our discussion. He said, as distinct from animals, a human being is the only creature that is aware of his limits. He knows that he will die and that his near ones will also die. And he comments this state of affairs is disturbing and absurd, almost imaginable, unimaginable.

And I'm sure we can identify with that sentiment. And then he continues, our greatest desire as human beings is to be loved, not to be alone, and not to be separated from our loved ones.

[27 : 55] And again, I'm sure that we can identify with that sentiment when it comes down to what matters most to us is the people that we love and the greatest sorrow that we have is being separated from them.

So how does the God of no limits offer hope even at that point where we feel our limit most keenly?

And I think to answer that, we need to remind ourselves of the story of the gospel, to remind ourselves that the God of no limits, the infinite creator God in Jesus, took on human limitations. That he knew what it was to be weak and tired and hungry and thirsty. And as that truly human man, Jesus, as well as being fully God, he went to the cross as our representative and as our redeemer and three days later became our resurrected Lord.

And there's the hope for us. Jesus has conquered the greatest of our limits, death itself.

[29 : 20] And the result is that Christianity uniquely offers the kind of hope that Luke Ferry, our atheist philosopher, was talking about.

In Christianity, in Jesus, we find a love that lasts, a love that remains, a love that is stronger than death itself.

And so what we find in the gospel is that the God of no limits offers something we all wish to be true, whether we're Christians or whether we're not.

And so the good news of the gospel is that the unlimited God in Jesus is revealed as the fully personal God. And we are called to look to him as Lord and King.

In our weakness, we are called to look to him and to recognize that he is the key to our hope. He is the key to all our joy.

[30 : 24] Thank you. Thank you.