

Behold Our God

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[0 : 00] And good morning again and Happy New Year to everyone.! So good to see us together on this first Lord's Day of a new year. Please turn your Bible, if you've not yet done so, to the book of Isaiah.

Isaiah chapter 40. And this morning, our attention will be directed to verses 9 to 31.

We are two days into this new year. And while we all have many desires, no doubt, and expectations for this new year, none of us knows for sure what this year holds for us individually, for our families, for our church family, for our nation, and indeed for our world.

But I'm struck by how we can have expectations that I've just not realized. If my life depended on it, I would not think we would start 2022 with the pandemic that we've been in for the last two years.

And so that makes a lot of uncertainty for us and for this world in which we live. But the good news this morning is that the Lord holds 2022 in His hands.

[1 : 34] He holds all the days in His hands. And He holds them to the smallest detail. And so that is the reason I don't think that we could find a more appropriate way to approach this new year than to fix our eyes on the God who knows what this year holds and indeed what every year holds for all of us.

And so this morning I want us, by the grace of God, to get a fresh vision of our God. And I pray that our time in Isaiah 40 this morning will give us that fresh vision.

This is a lengthy passage, but it is God's Word, so let us hear it. Please follow along as I read. Isaiah chapter 40, beginning in verse 9.

Go up to a high mountain, O Zion, herald of good news. Lift up your voice with strength.

O Jerusalem, herald of good news, lift it up, fear not. Say to the cities of Judah, behold your God.

[2 : 56] Behold, the Lord God comes with might and His arm rules for Him. Behold, His reward is with Him and His recompense before Him.

He will tend His flock like a shepherd. He will gather the lambs in His arms. He will carry them in His bosom and gently lead those that are with young.

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?

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?

[4 : 10] 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. Lebanon would not suffice for fuel, nor are its beasts enough for a burnt offering.

All the nations are as nothing before Him. They are accounted by Him as less than nothing and emptiness.

To whom 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 for its 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.

[5 : 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?

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.

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 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 things. He who brings out their hosts by number, calling them all by name, by the greatness of His might.

[6 : 43] 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?

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.

Even youths shall faint and be weary, and young men shall fall exhausted. But they who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength.

They shall mount up with wings like eagles. They shall run and not be weary. They shall walk and not faint.

[7 : 57] Let's pray together. Father, we bow our hearts before your greatness this morning. And I pray that you would open our eyes and our hearts to behold you.

To behold you in your greatness, in your splendor, in your majesty, in your transcendence, but to also behold you in your eminence. To behold you as the God who condescends to his people and who is with his people.

Lord, we bow our hearts on this first Lord's Day of a new year. We submit our ways to you.

We submit every plan to you. We submit every desire. Indeed, we submit every anxiety and every uncertainty about this year to you. God, would you meet us this morning.

Meet us in the preaching of your word, and may this sermon this morning serve as a rudder. May it truly serve as a compass and a guide for us as we go throughout this year.

[9 : 06] And I pray that you would bring us back to it again and again when uncertainty fills our hearts and when we are tempted to be anxious. Cause us to behold you this morning and to continue to behold you throughout this year.

We pray in Jesus' name. Amen. Over the years, I've had numerous conversations with people who have visited our island.

And one of the common things I've heard people say is something like this. If you have not been to Atlantis, well, you have not been to Nassau. And I always find it amusing because, first of all, Atlantis is on Paradise Island, which is a different island, and Nassau is a very separate island from Atlantis.

But for a lot of people, Atlantis is Nassau. And so some of them will literally come from the airport or cruise ship, take a taxi or tour bus to Atlantis, and they never leave.

And they design it that way. They stay on the beach, they eat, they do whatever, they enjoy it, and then they get back in a tour bus or a taxi, and they drive back to the cruise ship or they drive back to the airport.

[10 : 30] Never visited any of the touristic sites like the Queen's Steercase or like Fish Fry or like the Straw Market, and yet they say they've been to Nassau.

Well, I think that in the same way that some people visit Paradise Island and never come to any of the iconic sites on this island and say they've been to Nassau, is very much like going through the Bible and not spending any time in Isaiah 40 to get a vision of who God really is.

Friends, if we don't grasp the God of Scripture, especially as we see Him proclaimed in Isaiah 40, my concern is that we may have a vision of another God, indeed an idol God.

And I know part of the reason for that is that Isaiah is located in the most unpopular part of the Bible, the Old Testament, and then Isaiah is also in the Old Testament in one of the most unpopular parts of it, which is the prophets.

And so we just scan over it, we know Isaiah broadly, topically, but we don't know Isaiah in any kind of detail and we miss this God of the Bible.

[12 : 07] And you don't have to talk long with a lot of people to find out that there are many people who are worshiping a God who is not the God of the Bible, though they claim that He is.

They literally worship an idol. They worship a God of their own making, their own creation. creation. And so we hear all kinds of strange ideas about this God of the Bible, that He was lonely and that's why He created people.

But He allows them to run the earth because He values their free will so much He will never violate it. that He is a God that you can bribe with money.

You can bribe with good behavior. You can manipulate with selfish prayers. But friends, we don't have to consider Isaiah 40 very long to see that the God of the Bible is not an idol God.

He is not the God that so many people play with. And sadly, even some sitting in churches. In Isaiah 40, the true God of the universe is described for us.

[13 : 27] And He is the God, friends, who holds every day of this year and indeed every year in His sovereign hands. And so let us this morning consider Isaiah 40 verses 9 to 31.

And obviously, time does not permit me to go into detail in considering this very lengthy and dense passage of Scripture. So this is more like a drive-by tour of Isaiah 40.

And I pray that you'll go back and spend some time and accrue to yourself with this God who reveals Himself to us in His Word in Isaiah 40.

So what's the point of this text that we've read this morning? I believe it's this. God is great enough and cares enough to watch over and sustain His people.

God is great enough and He cares enough to watch over and sustain His people.

[14 : 41] Now, although our circumstances today are different from Isaiah's original audience, what we share in common with them is the experience of facing uncertainty and the anxiety that can come from uncertainty.

Israel faced an uncertain future and we see it talked about in chapter 39. In chapter 39, Isaiah prophesied to King Hezekiah in plain language the dreadful words of the coming Babylonian captivity.

where He, Isaiah, and his household and indeed all of Judah would be taken into Babylonian captivity. And the Babylonian captivity was going to last for 70 years.

And although it was at a point where it had not yet happened when Isaiah was prophesying that the invasion had not yet happened, he knew it with such certainty.

He knew that God would do this. That he in advance spoke words of comfort and hope to the people of Judah. And the comfort that Isaiah holds out to them is to be realized by beholding God as He truly is.

[16 : 11] Not as they imagined Him to be like the idol gods of the nations surrounding them, but Isaiah wanted them to hope and have confidence in this God who was their God but as He truly was, not as they believed Him to be.

And so Judah was assured of a future beyond Babylonian captivity by beholding their God and being convinced of two facts. Number one, God was great enough to watch over them in all of their uncertainty.

And number two, God cared enough to sustain them in all of their uncertainty. And so Judah's comfort and assurance about the future was to come from God's greatness and God's care as laid out to them in these words of Isaiah.

And brothers and sisters, I believe it's true for us as we consider our own future in this unknown year. Our comfort and our assurance for this new year will come from a biblical vision of God's greatness and God's care.

And so in our remaining time, I want us to consider those two truths from Isaiah 40. Number one, God's greatness and number two, God's care.

[17 : 45] So first, God's greatness. Notice how Isaiah starts in verse nine. God through the prophet Isaiah is about to address the people of Judah and give them good news about his greatness and his care.

And so he tells Isaiah to call out as a herald, to call out as one bringing news. And Isaiah, the herald in that day, would have been the equivalent of a news reporter today.

And he was heralding the headline. And the headline was, Behold your God. Those of you who are anxious, those of you who are concerned about the future, I have good news.

Behold your God. Now this first picture that we see of God in verses 10 and 11 is a picture of a mighty shepherd.

But for the moment, I want us to pass over this. I'm going to come back to it. But I want us to consider the other picture that Isaiah paints for us of God in verses 12 through 26.

[19 : 03] We'll come back to 10 and 11. But let's first consider 12 to 26. The picture in verses 12 to 26 is the picture of an immense God.

And Isaiah paints this picture of God by asking and answering 11 questions. questions. And he has one goal in mind.

He's asking all these questions and I think one of the ways that will help us to work through this lengthy and dense portion of scripture is to remember that Isaiah is saying a lot to say one thing.

He wants us to see. He wanted his original audience to see. He wants us to see God's greatness. That's the goal behind all that he says.

He wants us to behold God's power, his knowledge, his wisdom that are beyond measure and that God's place in his universe is unrivaled.

[20 : 08] Isaiah is not interested in people saying God's greatness for God's greatness sake. He wants us to see.

that God is great and therefore they can be assured that his absolute power and his absolute authority and his absolute wisdom will be at work on their behalf.

So look at verse 12 and consider this first question that Isaiah poses. Who has measured the waters in the hollow of his hand and marked off the heavens with a span, enclose the dust of the earth in a measure, and weighed the mountains in scales and the hills in a balance?

Now really this is a four-part rhetorical question. And the answer to each one, each part of this four-part question is obvious. God. God and God alone.

God and God alone to each one of these questions, this four-part questions. Let's try to picture what Isaiah is aiming to convey.

[21 : 26] This reference to the waters is all the waters of the earth. And I'm working my way back through my reading plan and I began in Genesis and saw how the earth is just filled immensely with a lot of water.

And notice the question. the question is who not can, not who can measure, but who has measured the waters in the hollow of his hands?

Who's done that? Now I'm going to ask all the children to help me. Just go ahead and just cup one of your hands and imagine for a moment that you are going to your favorite beach on the island.

Whether it's Goodman's Bay or Saunders Beach or Montague, wherever, you go there and you are going to measure out the waters in the hollow of your hands.

Just imagine that you're going to go down there and you do that. Now you're probably thinking that's silly. Who in their right mind would do that? Well suppose we all did it. Suppose all of us went down with our scoop hands and we're going to measure the water at Montague.

[22 : 48] That would be silly as well. There would be no difference. We would not see any difference if all of us scooped up waters in both of our hands.

If the whole world did that, if every able-bodied man, woman, child went to the waters, wherever they are located, and tried to scoop it up to measure it, it would literally make no difference.

But Isaiah says that God is the one who measured the waters in the hollow of his hand. Our brains cannot comprehend that.

Look at the other picture he gives us. He talks about marking off the heavens with a span. Now he has a span, that's a span from the tip of your thumb to the tip of your little finger.

Now our island is seven by twenty-one. How long do you think it will take you if you decided to use the span of your hand and measure just the seven miles part?

[23 : 54] don't take you, I mean, probably won't take you long because you'll give up real soon. It doesn't make any sense to even try to do that.

But Isaiah doesn't say who measured the earth. He said who measured the expanse of the heavens. Now to help us to appreciate this, I've done a little bit of research to try to get some understanding of how vast the heavens are.

So don't be impressed with what I'm going to tell you. It's what I researched. Now some of you know this, I'm sure, because you're smart. Light travels at 186,000 miles per second.

Per second. That's the speed of light. Now I was trying to give myself a little understanding of how fast that might be or how much faster it might be than anything I could ever imagine.

And I decided to Google the fastest plane that we know about. And the fastest plane that is recorded is a U.S.

[25 : 14] Air Force military jet, the X-15, and it travels at 4,520 miles an hour. Now a regular commercial jet, like when we go on a flight, travels at 460 to 575 miles an hour.

So even that jet is moving really, really fast. But light travels at 186,000 miles per second. not per hour, per second. So that's how fast light moves. Now the distance between the moon and the earth is 240,000 miles.

At the speed of 186 miles per second, light can travel from the moon to the earth in 1.3 seconds.

8.3 minutes. Now the distance between the sun and the earth, the sun is hot, so it's much further away, is 93 million miles.

[26 : 25] The sun from the earth is 93 million miles. At the speed of 186,000 miles per second, light can travel from the sun to the earth in 8.3 minutes.

Approximately 8.3 minutes. Now in my research, I learned that the sun is a star. I thought the sun was the sun, but the sun is a star.

And the next closest star to the earth after the sun is located 4.5 light years away.

light year. A light year is the distance light travels in one earth year.

So in terms of miles, one light year, or the distance that light can travel in one year at the speed of 186,000 miles per second, is approximately 6 trillion miles.

[27 : 38] So the next closest star to the earth after the sun is 4.5 light years away, and it works out to be 26 trillion 395 billion 623 miles away.

I was thinking for a moment, I better make sure I get these numbers right because some people may nickname me in some way. So I made sure I write these out myself so I didn't trip over these words, these numbers.

It's a lot of digits. It's a lot of digits. The next closest star to the earth after the sun is 26 trillion 395 billion 623 million miles away.

Our heads should just be spinning or into nothingness. We just can't comprehend this. because added to that, we're only talking about our galaxy and I had to research all this stuff.

I didn't know any of this. Our galaxy is called the Milky Ray Galaxy. And our galaxy has 10 billion stars and there are, I'm told, hundreds of millions of galaxies in the universe, each with 10 billion stars.

[29 : 15] And why am I saying all of this? Why did I take the time to research this?

Not to impress you with my research, but really to help us to see the vastness of God, the greatness of God. He is the one who marked off the heavens with the span of his hands.

Normally you can tell the greatness of people by the things they do or they create. We tend to think about it in that way.

God, the vast heavens, point to his greatness. He marked it off, Isaiah said, with the span of his hands.

That's the God who holds every moment of every day in his hands. But that's not all. Look at what Isaiah says further in verse 12. He says, who enclosed the dust of the earth in a measure and weighed the mountains in scales and the hills in a balance.

[30 : 24] The images of God holding one of those two-sided scales and weighing the physical mass of the earth, all the mountains, everything in it.

And the whole point is that God is great. The whole point is God is great and he really doesn't need our help. I mean, who would try to offer help to God, this vast God?

And yet we do all the time. Abraham and Sarah did and God had promised them they would have a son and they decided that they'd help God out. And today we live with the consequences of that.

God. I pray that God will remind us of his greatness so that we will not be tempted to try to help him in any way.

Isaiah then helps us to see not only that God is greatly on comprehension, but he also helps us to see God's wisdom. In verses 13 and 14, he asks three rhetorical questions.

[31 : 27] Who has measured or directed the Spirit of the Lord? Or what man can show him his counsel? The answer is no one.

Whom did he consult and who made him understand? The answer is no one. Who taught him the path of justice and taught him knowledge and showed him the way of understanding? No one. His point is that God's wisdom and knowledge, knowledge and understanding are self-sufficient.

He lacks no wisdom. He lacks no knowledge. He lacks no understanding. It's quite the opposite. We are quite the opposite. Just imagine going to your workplace on Tuesday morning and telling them, you know, I don't need anybody's help.

I know everything. And so no one needs to tell me anything. The first thing they do is try to get you some help. Because we know that none of us is self-sufficient.

Whenever we think we have all wisdom or all knowledge and don't need help from anyone else, we demonstrate one of two things. We are either fools or we are mentally ill.

[32 : 47] But not God. He lacks nothing. not only does this passage give us an accurate view of God, that he is great, but it also gives us an accurate view of ourselves.

We are small. We're small. Look at the descriptions of all the nations that we find in verses 15 to 17.

they're compared to God's greatness. Verse 15, a drop in the bucket and dust on the scales.

I'm sure none of you go to anywhere and tell the people, dust the scale before you put my things on it. Because we know dust really doesn't have any consequence.

And sure enough, that is the depiction of all the nations. all the nations are, in verse 17, as nothing, they are less than nothing and emptiness.

[33 : 55] That's the divine assessment and the significance of the nations compared to the immensity of God. In verses 18 to 20, we see that God has no rivals.

Reminded of the folly of idolatry. God is great. He's immeasurable. And yet people turn to idols that they have made with their own hands. In verses 21 to 26, Isaiah is calling people to consider who God really is.

He's the governor of the earth. In verse 22, he's the creator of the universe. He sits on the circle of the earth and the earth's inhabitants are like grasshoppers before him. You see in verses 23 and 24, his greatness as the sovereign ruler who raises up and who brings down kings.

He determines when they come up and when they go down and how long they stay up before they go down. Notice especially in verse 26, that God by his greatness has numbered and named the hundreds of millions of galaxies and the ten billions of stars in each one of them because he is strong in power and not one of them is missing.

Not one of them. My mind just reflected on a gentleman who owns a number of businesses on the island and I was thinking to myself, I wonder how he keeps track of all of those.

[35 : 40] How does he just manage all of those? Not God. Not one of them is missing. He superintends every single aspect and detail of his universe.

And friends, this is power beyond comprehension. We're not able to comprehend this as we should. In verse 27, Isaiah gets to the point that he's working towards with these pictures of God that he is painting.

He asks the question, 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?

Isaiah is in essence saying to Israel, in light of God's incomprehensible greatness, his unfathomable power and wisdom, how is it, Israel?

Why is it, Israel, that you're despairing? why are you saying my way is hidden from the Lord, and my right is disregarded by my God?

[36 : 54] How could you say that? In light of this great God, who is your God? God. And this brings you to my second and my final point, God's care.

In these closing words in Isaiah, chapter 40, Isaiah is reminding the people of Israel that their way cannot be hidden from an all-knowing, an all-seeing, an all-powerful God.

And his help is available to them. Look at what he says in verse 28. 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. Isaiah is reminding them and reminding us of who God is.

He's the everlasting God. He's the creator of the ends of the earth. He does not faint, does not grow weary, his understanding is unsearchable.

[38 : 08] In verse 29, he reminded them and he reminds us of what God does. He gives power to the faint and to him who has no might, he increases strength.

And then in verses 30 and 31, Isaiah reminds us that even the strongest among us, the youth in his prime will faint and be weary and fall exhausted.

But they who wait for the Lord will have their strength renewed and they will mount up with wings like eagles. And it's a picture of a mighty bird that is soaring in the midst of adversity, soaring above the winds of adversity.

He says those who wait for the Lord, they will run and not be weary, they will walk and not faint. And here there's the promise of supernatural health for God's people.

The promise of the ability to run and not get tired and walk and not stagger. We know that in our humanity that will not happen for us, but God promises that he will do these things for those who wait for him.

[39 : 33] And why would he do it? Why does he do it? He does it because he cares for his people and he's able to help his people.

And again, in many ways we're no different from Israel. We sometimes despair, and we sometimes say God has forgotten me. God has overlooked my situation.

He's overlooked and disregarded my right and my cause. And maybe that's where some of us are this morning, rather present or watching online. We're in despair and saying God has forgotten me.

He's not seen me. But Isaiah is saying to us, how can the one who keeps track of the billions of stars in the millions of galaxies?

None of them is lost. He knows them all by name. How and why would he disregard you and forget about you?

[40 : 41] He's reminding us that God knows us personally and uniquely. And I pray for us this morning that we get a vision of God's greatness and of God's care for us.

Now I said I would go back to verses 10 and 11 at the beginning of the sermon and want us to glance back at those verses now. This is the first picture that Isaiah gave to Israel about their God.

It's the first picture of God that he wanted them to behold. He doesn't first draw their attention to the greatness of God, but he first draws their attention to the care of God, to this God who is a shepherd.

to this God who tends his flock and gathers his lambs in his arms and carries them in his bosom. This almost seems like mockery for this God that has been described so great and so vast that he would do this.

He doesn't send angels to do it. He doesn't send other surrogates to do it. He does it himself. God this mighty, powerful, all-wise, all-sufficient God who needs nothing and needs no one.

[42 : 20] This is the picture that Isaiah gives us of him that he comes among his people. He cares for them as a shepherd, cares for his sheep. He takes the little lambs in his arms and carries them in his bosom.

And he's mindful of those with young, those who need tender care, and he brings them along gently. This is our great but caring God.

And this is the first vision that Isaiah wants us to behold of God. This God who is transcendent, but this God who is also eminent, this God who has come to be with his people.

And friends, these words in this verse, verse 11, were no doubt fulfilled when God brought his people out of Babylonian captivity. He shepherded them out, brought them out in all of their weakness and all of their difficulties.

But ultimately these verses point us to the fulfillment in Jesus Christ, the great shepherd, the good shepherd, who would lay down his life for his sheep and who would bring them into his fold.

[43 : 46] And it is only through Jesus Christ that we are able to know this God, this great but also caring God who condescends to his people.

But without Jesus we would have no way of knowing God. Without Jesus we would have to wrestle with his unmediated greatness that we see in the rest of Isaiah 40.

But Jesus helps us to know that this otherwise unknowable God can be known and he makes him known. Because God has revealed himself in Jesus Christ, our great shepherd.

And so why should we? Why can't we have confidence in 2022? We can because God is great and because God cares.

he is great enough and he cares enough to watch over us and to sustain us.

[44 : 59] And my prayer for us is that we would know both this year in a more personal way. My prayer for us is that we would grow in our vision of God and his greatness but we would also grow in our experience of God and his care as we wait for him, as we look to him, that he would come and he would tenderly take us as his dear lambs and carry us near to himself and traverse us through all the unknowns of the journey of this year that is in front of us.

And so this morning if you're worried about any aspect of this year, concerned about any aspect of this year, whatever it might be, may God cause you even in this moment to fix your eyes on him and get a vision not just of his greatness but also of his care, not just for his people but for you specifically, for you in your circumstances, whether you're concerned about the next semester, any aspect of it, whether you're concerned about some health situation or your job or your family, whatever it might be this morning, may God give you a vision of his greatness and of his care.

If you're here this morning and you don't know Jesus Christ as Lord and personal Savior, you're listening, watching online, the biggest care that you should have is the care for your soul.

you may be concerned about other things that we tend to be concerned about, but you need to be concerned about whether it is well with your soul.

And the greatest uncertainties that we face is about life itself, how we can, I used to say, be here or there and go on tomorrow, and I remembered Alexander, I said that in a sermon, Alexander came up to me after a sermon, he said, Pastor, you could be here today and gone today.

[47 : 17] I said, yeah, that's right, here today and gone today. That's how fragile life is, friends. And so, we need to be able to say, no matter what else is going on, it is well with my soul, and the only way we can say that is if Jesus Christ is our Lord.

And so, if you don't know Christ this morning, I say, turn to Jesus, come to Jesus, you will find in Jesus, one who is quick to pardon all of our sins, no matter what they are.

There's pardon in abundance for all who turn to Christ. Let's pray. Oh, Lord, I pray this morning that you would give each of us who belong to you a vision not just of your greatness, but also of your care.

I pray, Lord, that we would embrace this year with confidence because you are great, great enough, and you care enough to watch over us and to sustain us in this year, whatever it might bring.

and so, Father, I ask that you would do a work in all of our hearts, and I pray as we go through this year that that will be our experience, that more and more we will testify, both to your greatness and to your care.

[48 : 51] We ask these things in Christ's name. Amen. Amen. Let's stand together. up. Yes.