

Title: “Your God is too small”

Purpose: For us to see the importance of the Doctrine of God to us in our everyday circumstances.

That it grants us the necessary perspective we need as a lens whereby we can see other things at a right size and level of significance.

INTRODUCTION

Scottish Independence Vote

This vote took place just last Thursday and the reality will have been for more than just a few voters that they will have had their point of view (POV) changed in the final run up – having listened to one argument for one side and then another argument the alternative POV.

It is a fact that our perspective, the way we think and see things, can change very dramatically, even very suddenly, IF our point of view (POV) IF our vantage point is changed.

Illustration from the word Battle in Isaiah 27

I will illustrate this by look at the meaning of a single word – the word battle that comes in a phrase in Isaiah 27:

- When I just say the single word BATTLE – you think noun – you think “ a part of a war”.
- If I widen the POV and say “TO BATTLE” then you start to say, probably a verb meaning “to fight” – like a David and Goliath situation
- If I widen it further and say “I HAD THORNS AND BRIARS TO BATTLE” – now you say, ok that changes things around somewhat. This appears to be not something literal but something more figurative and metaphorical – it means a struggle with a common agricultural enemy weeds.
- If I change the POV once more and say “WOULD THAT I HAD THORNS AND BRIARS TO BATTLE” – then you are changed all over again and now you say well I thought this was a real battle (whether literal or figurative) but now it seems to be only something that is hypothetical.

So I think you can see that our POV is powerful and can be changed to major effect.

Let me give one more aspect to this and draw in the Film Industry

POV Horror films

It is a fact that in the making of films there is a type of filming called POV (Point-of-view) and this is when the camera is positioned so that the viewer is allowed to see exactly what one of the actors sees.

The effect of this is very powerful and makes the viewer more of a participant rather than a spectator.

And here in Isaiah 40 – we are allowed a very powerful POV position and that is all the more true because we are treated to looking through God’s eyes.

Background

Isaiah is speaking to a new set of people now that everything is changing and will change – there has been the defeat of the Assyrian army by the angel of God leaving 185,000 of their soldiers dead. King Hezekiah is on his way out and his son Manasseh (and no that’s not the same Manasseh as Ephraim and Manasseh – that Manasseh was the first of two sons of Joseph who were adopted by Jacob and became part of the twelve tribes of Israel).

Isaiah now speaks to the generation of Israelites, that small stump of a remnant, that are languishing in Babylon.

Isaiah has clearly stated that a remnant will return – in fact if you cast your eye back to Isaiah 35 and the last 3 verses (so this is the final bit before we head into the 4 transitioning chapters Isaiah 36-39) – this is what we read:

Isaiah 35 verses 8-10 “And a highway will be there;

it will be called the Way of Holiness.

The unclean will not journey on it;

it will be for those who walk in that Way;
wicked fools will not go about on it.

⁹ No lion will be there,

nor will any ferocious beast get up on it;
they will not be found there.

But only the redeemed will walk there,

¹⁰ **and the ransomed of the LORD will return.**

They will enter Zion with singing;

everlasting joy will crown their heads.

Gladness and joy will overtake them,

and sorrow and sighing will flee away.”

Putting yourself in their shoes

So just putting yourself in their shoes, they are over 500 miles from home, they have been there decade after lousy decade – nothing gives any sign of changing – in fact even the prophet Jeremiah had told them to settle down and get used to living there because it wasn’t going to be a ten minute stay.

And so for them they are calculating the odds, doing the math, which tells them that no other deported people has ever managed to find its way back home.

So how is God’s word through Isaiah going to come true.

For these exiles, the words of God carry, in their **pressing** and **depressing** situation, **NO WEIGHT!!**

Thus far – Isaiah 40 verses 1-11

Now thus far, in the opening eleven verses – Isaiah has brought this new audience, this new generation of long-term exiles – a very tender and exciting message.

(We covered this a couple of weeks back – it truly is a breath-taking set of verses).

Whereas **PREVIOUSLY** they had heard much to do with JUDGMENT and that CHALLENGE to assess where their confidence and trust was placed – **NOW** they are hearing a message of good news, a message of COMFORT and TENDERNESS from their God because all their hard service is complete all their many sins are paid for completely – double has been paid for them.

A hard message to believe

Now if this was an easy message for them to believe, then I guess Isaiah 40 would have just ended at Verse 11 – but clearly that is not the case and this brings us into Verses 12-26 which are the verses that immediately follow on.

2 POINTS OF OBSERVATION

Now before we get into the passage proper – let me just make 2 observations:

- the FIRST – very obvious
- the SECOND – something you only really notice on closer inspection

OBSERVATION #1 - Lots of questions (rhetorical ones)

Now one of the first things that is pretty apparent about these 15 verses that take up most of the rest of chapter 40 is that **there are a lot of questions** that are getting asked.

In total I counted 14 – In fact, if you averaged them out, that would make pretty well one for every verse!!

Now these questions are **NOT** real questions – real questions that are actually looking for an answer – these are what we call “**rhetorical questions**” that is:

- a question which is really just **A FIGURE OF SPEECH** whereby a particular point is being made.

A rhetorical question is one that simply encourages somebody to think and to hopefully understand a particular point of view that is being placed in front of them.

So for example:

If someone says to you: “**There’s no point, is there?**” – it is really a statement of that persons viewpoint that there is, in his or her opinion, no point.

And so much of this section is all about Isaiah making **a whole series of rhetorical questions** that are all designed with reasonably obvious answers, which therefore progressively, move the hearers along a

particular path of thinking.

If you want that all in one word – then I guess you could call it Isaiah’s persuasive **RATIONALE**.

OBSERVATION #2 – It’s in two parts

The second thing that helps us to notice is that the section from Verse 12 down to Verse 26 is in two parts and these 2 parts mirror each other.

And the 2 parts each have the same 3 sections to them:

- SECTION 1 – uses multiple rhetorical questions to make the point that we have a Creator God:

So look at Verses 12-14 and then flick down to Verse 21 and you see they are verses all full of questions.

- SECTION 2 – no longer uses questions, instead this section uses affirmations OR bold statements of fact that we are expected to agree with. This is meant to point us to the fact that we have a Sovereign God:

So look at Verses 15-17 and then similarly Verses 22-24.

- and then one last SECTION that is similarly mirrored in both parts of the passage. In this case we have an identical rhetorical invitation: Q. To whom will you compare me?

Here we see this at Verses 18-20 and then Verses 25&26.

The point here is that we are being asked to make a response – that is what an invitation does – it asks us to respond – and to come to a particular conclusion – in this case that we have:

not only – **a Creator God**
not only – **a Sovereign God**
but also – **a Superior God**.

So I want to work through the 3 mirrored parts of these 2 sections under three headings:

- FIRST – that He is God of gods
- SECOND – that He is Lord of lords
- and then LAST – that He is One out of one

So then first then:

1] He’s God of gods (Verses 12-14 & Verse 21)

To get us launched let me just read the matching parts of our two sections:

FIRST Verses 12-14:

“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?
13 Who has understood the mind of the LORD,
or instructed him as his counselor?
14 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?”

SECONDLY Verse 21:

“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?”

These are our **rhetorical questions** – and they are ushering us down:

- what is meant to be, a path of INESCAPABLE LOGIC
- down a path of OBVIOUS LOGIC & THINKING

The magnitude, the sheer majesty of God is being held up here SO THAT WE WILL BE “BLOWN AWAY”!!

The subject here is the GLORY OF GOD.

The Glory of God

Let me say a brief word about the Glory of God. This word Glory in the OT is the word in Hebrew: “kavodh” and it conveys the literal meaning of “WEIGHT” or “WEIGHTINESS”.

Q. I wonder – how “weighty” God is in your estimation?

Q. Exactly how much CLOUT does God CARRY?

David F Wells – God’s Weightless

David F Wells is a very perceptive evangelical thinker and scholar – and he has written a set of four books assessing the current course of the church and the world (he’s a kind of Francis Schaeffer equivalent).

And in his second book “God in the wasteland” - he talks about **our current spiritual environment, our conception of ourselves and our conception of God** – he says this (and I’m going to read a longish section –

so bear with me – I think it’s message is important):

“One of the marks of our time is that God is now weightless.

He has become unimportant to us:

- He is **less interesting** than TV,
- **less authoritative** than our appetite for affluence and influence.
- His judgment is **less inspiring** than the evening news,
- and his truth is **less compelling** than the latest ads.

- The **untrue** appears **true**,
- the **bad** poses as **good**,
- and the **trivial** masquerades as **important**.

Modernity has so confused the landscape that it is not always easy to distinguish vices from virtues. The traditional **doctrine of God** remains intact **while its saliency vanishes**.

It is believed, defended, and affirmed as inviolable, and yet it no longer has the power to shape and to summon as it has in the past.

Few contest the validity of doctrinal beliefs, but neither do many allow these beliefs to affect their behaviour. Modernity rearranges all belief in God.

His weightlessness in our lives says more about us than God.

It reveals much about our psychological disposition when we exclude God from our reality.

What was once transcendent in the doctrine of God has either faded, or it has become immanent and private.

When the pollsters ask their questions, they don’t ask about truth, or about our understanding of God’s nature and character. They simply want to know how we feel about religion, what internal value it has for us, rather than asking about God’s objective significance.

If God is objectively true, then he summons all people in all places, times, and cultures to know him in the same way, and for the same end, with the same results, so that his kingdom is extended and his name is made known throughout the earth.

When the objective reality of God crumbles, so does everything that rests on it.

Nonetheless, it is entirely possible for private, internal religion to flourish while belief in God as externally and objectively true fades. He has become a figment of our imagination, a psychological aid.

He is a god with whom we are on easy terms, whose reality mirrors our own, who exists merely to satisfy our needs, has no real authority to compel, and will soon begin to bore us.

This is ***not* the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob!!!”**

Q. So how big, exactly, is your God?

Louie Giglio

What I want to do for a few minutes is to draw liberally from a gentlemen by the name of **Louie Giglio** who has done a good job of helping us appreciate the size of our God.

The Bible begins with the statement:

(Gen 1 verse 1,3) "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." It goes on (Verse 3) "And God said, 'Let there be light' and there was light."

Just think of that:

"Light came out of God's mouth at **186,000 miles per second.**" (The speed of light)

You know when you think of distances in God's neighbourhood – in God's universe – it is no longer any good using our measurements of yards and metres and miles.

God has got his own ruler and it is called **the "light year".**

A LIGHT YEAR is the number of miles that will be travelled by a light wave across 365 days. Now given that each second, light has travelled 186,000 miles – multiply that up to a year – that is a massive **5.88 trillion miles.**

Let me just say something about **big numbers** for a moment, in case we get a bit confused:

- a **million** is a 1,000 thousand
- a **billion** is a 1,000 million
- a **trillion** is a 1,000 billion
- a (Q. Anyone know what comes next?) **quadrillion** is a 1,000 trillion (that probably enough to keep us going for now!!)

Now earlier on we were looking at God and His weightiness/His glory – and

Psalm 19 tells us that **"The heavens are declaring **the glory of God.**"**

Now let me just try put some flesh on those bones by looking at a few planets and stars:

- now the earth seems to us pretty big – after all it can house over 6 billion people with room for more
- the SUN is 93 million miles away and is 1 million times bigger than we are.

If you were to imagine the earth as a humble golf ball (**SHOW GOLF BALL**) then in comparison to the SUN that would measure as a sphere 15 feet in diameter.

- now there is another STAR which has this wonderful name **BETELGEUSE** "Beetle Juice" (Orion Constellation) and this is actually **the 9th brightest star in the night sky.**

It's size is the equivalent of twice that of the earth's orbit around the sun.

So if the earth was a golf ball – BETELGEUSE is the equivalent of 6 empire state buildings on top of each other. (That is – 262 trillion planet earth’s!!)

- STAR #3 – **Mu Cephei** from the Cepheus Constellation – this is a mere 2.7 quadrillion earths in size – which, going back to our golf ball – is the equivalent of having a layer of them throughout the US state of Texas (quite a big state) a mere 2 feet deep!!
- But now for the “BIG DOG” star – Canis Majorus – this is 7 quadrillion earths and that would be the size of golf balls to the height of Mt. Everest – 6 miles high!!!

Interesting isn’t it that Psalm 33 reads:

(Psalm 33 verse 6) “By the word of the Lord were the heavens made, their starry host by the breath of his mouth.”

You know all of this stuff was such that God just spoke – He didn’t even have to lift a finger for all this to come into being.

And the need for us is to drink deeply & freely of God’s POV that it might be our POV. I want to use a quote from [Augustine](#) to bridge us into our SECOND SECTION.

[Augustine](#) – that church father of the 4th Century AD had got something of the essence of this when he said:

“Men go abroad to wonder at the heights of mountains, at the huge waves of the sea, at the long courses of the rivers, at the vast compass of the ocean, at the circular motions of the stars, and they pass by themselves without wondering.”

You see the bigger God is the smaller we are:

Psalm 8 verses 3-4 “When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, **what is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him?**”

Yes “Behold your God!” – for He is truly God of God’s

But He is also:

2] He's Lord of lords (Verses 15-17 & Verses 22-24)

In this section 2 there is a swap over from talking massive to talking minute.

READ v15-17 and then v22-24

The truth of God or about God comes in layers in these verses that we are looking at:

Yes – he is God of Gods but not only that he is Lord of Lords

Yes – he is God of Glory but he is also the Sovereign Lord.

See Verse 22 “He sits enthroned above the circle of the earth, and its people are like grasshoppers.”

Now these verses are not intended to show that God's people are small and irrelevant or really worthless – but simply to appreciate their real and rightful place in God's economy.

What is a worthy sacrifice

Just look at Verse 16 *READ* and ask yourself what is then a worthy sacrifice if all of Lebanon, its tree and animals is not?

The answer is only to be found in God's Messiah in the Lord Jesus Christ.

The answer is that we do not have a worthy sacrifice to bring.

Pauls words in Romans 3 Verses 23-26 explain it better *READ*.

Unless we receive Jesus as our own, then we can do nothing other than approach God empty-handed which scripture tells us that we are not to do.

Without Jesus all we are doing is bringing to God the filthy rags of our own jumped up self-righteousness.

Then me take us on to where the passage itself concludes and drives us.

3] He's One out of one (Verses 18-20 & Verses 25-26)

It is pretty obvious where these mirrored parts begin – especially with the 3rd section because they both start with the very same rhetorical question:

“To whom, then, will you compare God?”

Implied is an invitation to REFLECT & then to RESPOND.

It is as though at the beginning of Isaiah 40 (see Verse 9) the message is “BEHOLD YOUR GOD!”

And now it is God asking them to respond to that and to get them to reveal their own gods – and in these 2 mirrored 3 sections we see that the possible contenders that people often turn to are either idols are to the

worship of the heavenly bodies themselves, the sun, the moon etc.

But the real answer is that God is INCOMPARABLE – He is in a class of one, he is in a category in which only God is present – He is alone, apart, “other” – or to use the Bible word: “HOLY”.

CONCLUSION

Q. This morning does the early declaration (Verse 9) ring true or does your POV need to be adjusted?

“BEHOLD YOUR GOD!”

He’s CREATOR – He’s God of Gods

He’s SOVEREIGN RULER – He’s Lord of Lords

He’s INFINITE yes INCOMPARABLE – He’s One out of One

Q. What then shall we say – perhaps we can do no better than to take on our lips the new found testimony of doubting Thomas in John 20: “My Lord and My God!”

AMEN