

Title: “Does God really care?”

Purpose: For us to be able to answer, without any uncertainty, the age-old question: **“Q. Does God really care?”**

INTRODUCTION

I have just a few particularly favourite verses and one is **Isaiah 50 Verse 4**:

“The Sovereign Lord has given me an instructed tongue, **TO KNOW THE WORD THAT SUSTAINS THE WEARY...**”

And what passage might we find upon this very subject of a word that is able to SUSTAIN THE WEARY:

- if not this passage here that we are covering this morning
- if not **Isaiah 40 Verses 27-31**

Summing up this chapter

I suppose if you wanted to sum up this chapter then you could say:

- **Verses 1-11** – “Comfort, comfort my people...speak tenderly...proclaim ...that her sin has been paid for...”

Truly good news – an OT gospel message of - **UNBELIEVABLE PROPORTIONS.**

- **Verses 12-26** – “He’s measured the waters in the hollow of his hands...held the dust of the earth in a basket...surely the nations are a drop in a bucket...He sits enthroned above the circle of the earth...”

In fact – even “Lebanon is not sufficient for altar fires, nor its animals enough for” a worthy sacrifice Truly a great God of – **INCOMPARABLE DIMENSIONS.**

This **second set of verses** really serves to VALIDATE and make CREDIBLE the wonderful promises of those **opening 11 verses**.

But that is not quite all because the **Verses from 12-26** also serve to supply application to a stubborn and seemingly **INTRACTABLE and AGE-OLD PROBLEM** posed by **Verse 27**, where we read:

“Q. Why do you say, O Jacob,
and complain, O Israel,
My way is hidden from the LORD;
my cause is disregarded by my God”?

And this is where this chapter conclusion begins – with a COMPLAINT.

This is no anti-climax

And I think it would be important to make clear, at this early point, that though the proceeding verses have been very great and glorious, **this chapter does not go out with a whimper** – no!!

Verses 29-31 are essentially a promise to cap all promises – definitely the cherry on top.

George Adam Smith makes a very helpful comment on these closing verses of Isaiah 40, he says:

“Let hope rejoice in a promise which does not go off into the air but which leaves us upon solid earth.”

What was going on?

Q. So what was going on?

Verse 27 reads: “Why do you say, O Jacob, and complain, O Israel,

“My way is hidden from the LORD; my cause is disregarded by my God”?

To put it simply the people felt that they had a just COMPLAINT to lodge before God.

The complaint seemed to be essentially two-fold:

- **FIRSTLY** – they felt that **GOD DID NOT SEEM TO SEE THEM:**

“My way is hidden from the LORD...”

For them – the most fundamental question of faith:

- was ***NOT*** **Q. Does God exist?** (They weren’t tempted to Atheism – the belief that there is no God)
- it was, instead, **Q. Does God care?**

And perhaps this is the same for you.

- **The SECOND** part of their complaint:

where we read in Verse 27 **“...;my cause (or my right) is disregarded by my God...”**

And their feeling here:

- was ***NOT*** “God you don’t care”
- it was, instead, “God, this is not fair”

Back to Genesis 3

As I read Verse 27 – I couldn’t help but feel that at the very heart of Israel’s complaint were very fundamental

things and I thought back to the Garden of Eden and to Satan’s first conversation with Eve in Genesis chapter 3.

Q. Do you remember how it goes?

Genesis 3 verses 1-5 “He said to the woman, “Did God really say, ‘You must not eat from any tree in the garden’?”² The woman said to the serpent, “We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden,³ but God did say, ‘You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.’ ”⁴ “You will not surely die,” the serpent said to the woman.⁵ **“For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.”**

Satan is very successfully sowing a couple of poisonous thoughts/poisonous lies into the mind of Eve (and of Adam, who we believe was probably present with his wife at the time):

- The FIRST – is that God is *not* GOOD – that **He does *not* in fact CARE**
because in reality He is withholding something really nice from you.
- The SECOND – similarly is that God is *not* JUST – that He does *not* have your best interests in mind – that, **in reality, things are *not* FAIR**
because if He was just and truly equitable He would allow you to become “like God – yes knowing good and evil.”

Can you identify

And perhaps you can identify with one or other of these things – very possibly with BOTH.

A one-off crisis?

Q. So were the people of Israel just going through a **sort of “crisis of faith”** – a one-off bad patch where they were indulging in a bit of a pity-party?

See how the complaint starts:

Verse 27 “Why do you say, O Jacob, and complain, O Israel...”

Following the Hebrew grammar here, the verbs TO SAY & TO COMPLAIN both take what they call the IMPERFECT ASPECT which simply means as **Wikipedia** helpfully puts it:

“The imperfective is used in language to describe **ongoing, habitual, repeated, or similar semantic roles...**”

It would be fair for us to translate it: “Why do you **keep saying**, O Jacob, and **keep complaining**, O Israel...”

So clearly this was no momentary crisis of faith – the Israelites had been struggling for a long time and very likely they would have been able to tell you by rote that their God was Yahweh and had worked with His outstretched arm to save them from the slavery of Egypt in days gone by – doubtless they would have affirmed that their God was the Creator of the heavens and the earth.

However:

- it is one thing to say and to affirm that God is Great
- it is entirely another thing to say that God is one who cares (especially when circumstances seems to say something different)

So this was the question, which ever flavour of it you take (and they are fairly overlapping):

1. Q. Does God care?
2. **OR** Q. Is God fair?

So this is the question of the people that Isaiah prophetically addresses, and this is the very same question that perhaps you have this morning.

And there is no point being coy on these sort of questions – feeling that perhaps you shouldn't articulate such things – because the reality is that God already knows what you think down in your heart of hearts.

And until you are willing to face honestly what you think about God then you will not be able to move on to a place where you can get the answers you need.

Q. So are there any answers?

And this passage says ABSOLUTELY and the answer comes in 2 ways with 2 keywords:

- FIRSTLY – **Remember** – Verses 28&29
- and then SECONDLY – **Receive** – Verses 30&31

So then #1

1] REMEMBER (Verses 28-29)

Now the order in which Scripture gives the answer to this problem of Q. Does God care? is something that we do well not to ignore.

Q. So what is the order?

Well **THEOLOGY** first, **EXPERIENCE** second.

Verse 28 starts off “Q. Do you not know? Q. 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.”

Again these are rhetorical questions – what they mean is really the OPPOSITE i.e. You DO know & You HAVE heard and then Isaiah proceeds to REMIND them of their THEOLOGY, of their KNOWLEDGE OF GOD.

Q. Where do our problems come from?

Have you ever thought about where most of our problems that we struggle with arises from and we can't just say because of the fact that we are unlucky in our circumstances –because for some people the identical type of circumstances can produce totally different and opposite results.

No I believe that it is no exaggeration to say that the root cause of most of our problems arises because of a faulty view of our God.

That is the same thing as saying that our problems arise because our THEOLOGY, our UNDERSTANDING OF GOD is defective, weak and insufficient.

And hence this is exactly where Isaiah begins in his answering of the ongoing and persistent complaint of God's people – he starts with the THEOLOGY OF GOD – of WHO GOD IS AND SHOWS HIMSELF TO BE.

Let me ask you:

Q. Is that your **starting point** **OR** Do you go about things in the **reverse sequence**?

Being "Experience-led"

I think for a great many of us – we might have to admit that we tend to be EXPERIENCE-LED.

This, if we don't actively stop ourselves, tends to be a bit of a DEFAULT MODE really.

So this is how it works - **what we see** AND **what we progressively observe** is that which holds the authority of telling us how things actually are:

- So, for example, if we see someone suffering with a cold and they are prayed for and the next day the cold seems to have vanished then we start to entertain the thought that God must be a healing God. And if we see further examples of this sort of thing we assume that the bible must teach that God's default intention & express purpose is that people would be physically healed in the here & now.

We form and shape our THEOLOGY based on the essential APPEARANCE OF THINGS.

(And don't get me wrong, I not saying we should go about lives with our eyes shut – but I am talking about the sequence and order in which we do things.)

Let me give another example to try and illustrate this a bit more:

- Imagine that you decide to test out whether it is really true that God hears and answers prayer – and so you decide that you will set aside an hour a day for the next month.

You do this without fail – you bring to God all sorts of things that are concerns. Concerns for your family, concerns for your work and for all kind of personal issues and things that you would like to see.

BUT after the month is done and you have faithfully done what you set out to do – HOWEVER there has been little if any response – heaven seems to have been like brass (as the saying goes).

You are, from that experience, very likely to conclude that God does not really answer prayer OR that

somehow you didn't pray hard enough OR you didn't pray for long enough etc. etc.

EXPERIENCE as the GATEWAY to THEOLOGY (the knowledge of God) is what we call the cart before the horse.

The reality is that if we know what God has said, if we know clearly who God is and what He promises to us and any conditions that He might attach to those promises and assurances THEN we are well placed to see our EXPERIENCE fall naturally into line with the pattern of Scripture.

Scripture can be always be used as a trusted INTERPRETER for our EXPERIENCES but **not*/*never** the other way around.

What they should KNOW/REMEMBER

Q. So what should they KNOW?

And Q. What should they REMEMBER?

Well 2 things:

- #1 – He is **the ETERNAL GOD**

And the Israelites were not unaware of this Isaiah himself in [Chapter 26 and Verse 4](#) stated:

“Trust in the Lord forever, for the LORD, the LORD, is the Rock eternal.”

or you could take [Psalm 90 Verses 1- 2](#) “Lord, you have been our dwelling place throughout all generations. Before the mountains were born or you brought forth the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God.”

It becomes ever clearer as we get to the final chapter of the Bible [Revelation 22 verse 13](#):

“I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End.”

And the implication of this is that God has not and will not somehow lose sight of His eternal calendar, His divine timetable.

God's promises and commitments have not lost anything of their freshness due to the passage of time because GUESS WHAT – God is not bounded by time as we are – he is everlasting & eternal.

- the 2nd thing they are to REMEMBER is that God is **the CREATOR GOD**

He creates and sustains the whole world, or the ends of the earth as Verse 28 puts it. He weighs the dust of the earth in a scale, he holds all the nations as a drop in a bucket.

And so the obvious implication is that a God like this does not get a bit weary like we do and also His

understanding is always and necessarily going to be one step ahead of ours.

It is about the equivalent of us truly expecting to understand why a CHESS GRANDMASTER makes a particular move when he is somehow able to hold the next 5 or 10 moves in his head at the same time.

Transcendence no barrier

How important that the starting point for us is always GOD and a REMEMBRANCE of His TRANSCENDENCE.

Derek Kidner in his commentary adds a necessary side note to that when he says:

“The wrong inference from God’s transcendence is that he is too great to care; the right one is that he is too great to fail.”

Barry Webb (BST) adds another side to things:

“The glory of God is not just, or even essentially, his power, but his servanthood; the fact is that no-one and nothing is too small to be important to him or worthy of his attention and care. He is not only strong in himself (Verse 28) but he gives strength to the weary (Verse 29).”

So let’s move on from REMEMBERING to #2:

2] RECEIVING (Verses 30-31)

And in this we are going from that crucial first step THEOLOGY to the all-important next step EXPERIENCE.

THEOLOGY is never dry and dusty – that is BAD THEOLOGY.

Real THEOLOGY is living and properly touches down on our lives and on real experiences.

And God gives us His wonderful promise:

Verse 29 that “He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak.”

And maybe immediately you say – well that is all well and good:

- BUT – I’ve tried it and I didn’t find that it worked
- I’ve been weary and desperate and God never showed up, never seemed to lift a hand to help me

And these are as aspects of EXPERIENCE that we need to understand – because if our take on THEOLOGY on God is right THEN the EXPERIENCE should match.

Let me make a few important observations at this point because it is easy to go wrong and make a few false assumptions and then end up falling at the first fence:

- FIRSTLY – let’s avoid the danger of being TRIUMPHALIST in our thinking.

Q. What do I mean? Well we all tend to warm to notions that: “we have the victory”, that “we are on the winning side”, that “we can never fail”! BUT it is one thing for God to give us a promise – it is another thing to have some sort of CAST IRON GUARANTEE that covers all and every eventuality – something that is in every sense totally WITHOUT CONDITION.

And the last three lines can TEMPT us to be a bit over TRIUMPHALISTIC in attitude – they kind of just run off the tongue don’t they: **“They will soar on wings like eagles, they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.”**

These lines are not meant to be some sort of **MAGIC CHARM** or **WINNING LOTTERY TICKET!!** (And don’t misread me here – I’m not trying to suggest that these concluding lines are not very wonderful and tremendous – BUT they have to be taken in the light of their context and NOT ripped out and hung around our necks as a **LUCKY ST. CHRISTOPHER CHAIN.**

- **SECONDLY** – let’s notice the **CONDITION** which is put alongside this wonderful promise – it comes there in **Verse 31** where we read:

“...but those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength...”

Most of the more literal translations, use the word **WAIT** instead of **HOPE.**

What this does not mean is that we have to **WAIT AROUND** until the Lord gives us His strength and ability.

No, rather it means that **we are to actively look to the Lord for his strength and enabling.** Hand-in-hand with this **we are *not* to look to ourselves to have the power somehow within us.**

We get a bit of a hint of what this is about earlier on with the **COMPLAINT** there in Verse 27 and the mention of the 2 names O Jacob and then O Israel. It recalls for us that really classic occasion back in Genesis 32 when God wrestled with Jacob at the ford of the Jabbok and where He gave him a new name and a new limp.

He said: (Gen 32 verse 28) “Your name will no longer be Jacob, but Israel, because you have struggled with God and with men and have overcome.”

This has to be one of the biggest practical teaching points of the Bible – what it is saying is that we are to cease striving with events, with circumstances, trying to prevail by our wits, by our bare strength of character, by our sheer strength and naked determination for this will surely lead to ultimate frustration and failure.

RATHER – we are to swap the focus of our striving and our wrestling across to God – whereby He will then give us what we are lacking.

Q. What’s in the limp you say? This is a very important permanent reminder for us – because without it we quickly forget and think that it is we ourselves that are doing things.

So God is saying if you want power – take the limp and look to me alone.

That phrase there “...will renew their strength...” in Verse 31 has the sense of exchanging strength.

Warren Weirsbe comments:

“The word ‘renew’ means ‘to exchange,’ as taking off old clothing and putting on new. We exchange our weakness for his power.”

Something truly supernatural

We are meant to see that this is something that is truly SUPERNATURAL since Verse 30 says:

“Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall;...”

The point being that what God promises to do exceeds the natural order of things. The youths here are those who are young and strong and are in the prime of life and so this is as good as it gets – and what God gives goes beyond anything that they can do.

Note the final order – SOAR, RUN, WALK

Note the final order of things – SOARING then RUNNING then WALKING.

If it were me I would have put it the other way round so that it went higher and higher (from one degree of glory to another).

But there order we are given goes from one natural impossibility (FLYING/SOARING) to two natural weaknesses.

Perhaps the best way to understand this order is that:

- God enables us to SOAR when a CRISIS approaches
- that He enables us to RUN when the CHALLENGES are many
- and that He enables us, for the most time, to WALK FAITHFULLY & CONSISTENTLY in the day-by-day demands of normal life.

William Carey – Father of modern missions

On Wednesday at House Group we were doing “Mission, Missions and our Missionaries” and we started off by looking at the life of a man called William Carey at the end of the 1700’s who established a mission work out in Serampore in India.

Listen to his own words about his particular genius – he said:

“I can plod – that is my only genius. I can persevere in any definite pursuit. To this I owe everything.”

Now I’m sure he was not trying to suggest that his plodding was all done through his own strength and God was nothing whatsoever to do with it – but rather he is simply reflecting the deliberate order of these verses that show the manner of this tremendous promise.

CONCLUSION

So we come full circle and return to where we began and my favourite verse:

“The Sovereign Lord has given me an instructed tongue, **TO KNOW THE WORD THAT SUSTAINS THE WEARY...**”

Surely these verses here fit the bill and put before us a tremendously encouraging promise that God holds out for us to lay hold of.

And to our most-fundamental of questions:

Q. Does God really care?

OR is our way truly hidden from him and our cause truly disregarded by a God who does not care!!

Tell me – Q. How do YOU answer this? Q. Do you HAVE an answer for this?

Q. Have you been trying to approach this from your experience and trying to construct a God based upon your findings?

Let this passage turn you around and get the order right:

- KNOW GOD FIRST – THEN GO ON TO EXPERIENCE HIM
- THEOLOGY and only then EXPERIENCE

Well, let us pray that we learn Jacob’s LIFE LONG LESSON:

- that we should: **WAIT UPON & LIMP with all the power of God’s SURE PROMISE**
- and as we do so that He would : **enable us to FLY HIGHER, to RUN FASTER but also, to PLOD MORE ASSUREDLY**

To God be the glory – for: **HE CARES FOR YOU**

AMEN