

Incomparable

Isaiah 40:12-31

Introduction

Do you ever get confused as to how you fit into things? I don't mean like jeans or that T-shirt from a few years ago! I mean confused about how you fit into the world.

Well, this week I've been reading a book called 'When People are Big and God is small'. It's one of those books where you didn't know that you needed it until you started to read it! The basic idea of the book is that in our minds people are bigger than they should be, and God is smaller than He should be, so that we find ourselves putting our trust, our hopes, our fear, our security in people rather than in God.

The problem with that is that it doesn't reflect the reality of where we fit into the world as we'll see in our passage this morning – it just doesn't work. If we want to see our world through prophetic eyes - that's the title of our series in Isaiah - if we want to see the world as it really is, then we need to realise two things.

1. God really is much bigger than our little minds, as clever as they are, can ever take in, and,
2. We are much smaller than our big egos make ourselves out to be!

And those are going to be our two points this morning as we continue to look through this 3,000-year-old prophecy, that was written for the Israelites in exile 100 years in advance by a man called Isaiah. They'd been sold into slavery in Babylon, and had been sent out into exile. And we said last time that we are in a sort of exile at the moment, both literally and theologically. Literally, in that we are scattered, unable to gather, and theologically, in that we are pilgrims in this world on our way to the promised land, waiting until Jesus returns and takes us finally home.

Until then believers are strangers and pilgrims in this world, and during our time in exile we face many of the same challenges that the Israelites did. We can be tempted to think that people and problems are bigger than they really are, and that God is smaller than He really is. So God wants us to see things differently. So just two points this morning. The first one is God is much bigger than we think.

God is much bigger than we think

God wants us to see just how big he is, he even gives us seven quickfire facts about Himself to get our heads straight, so that we might behold how amazing he is. The first we see there in verse 12, where we see that,

God is bigger than everything

Have a look at verse 12 again with me:

*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?*

God is bigger than everything. Now, I sometimes gawk at that phrase "God is big". It sounds so simplistic. It sounds like the sort of thing you hear in kid's songs – you know, "our God is a great big God" – you hear it lots, don't you. It almost makes it sound like God is just a really big giant!

And yet it's the imagery of the Bible. Actually, God uses this imagery of Him being big to get across just how awesomely, hugely different God is from us. To get across that magnitude of difference between what God is like and what we are like. God uses phrases that we'll understand to get across ideas about what he's like. So, God doesn't have literal 'flesh and blood' hands that are bigger than the oceans, but we all understand what that tells us about the greatness of God. He equally doesn't have literal weighing scales that have weighed the mountains, but again we understand that that tells us that God is immense.

God is much 'bigger' than we think. His greatness is more massive than we can imagine. And that means Stuff is not hard for God - even moving a mountain would not tax him or tire him. Filling oceans would not be tricky for him. Measuring the length of the sky, well that's just a handspan for Him. He's greater than the sky; He's greater than the sea; He's greater than the mountains.

Sometimes we slip into underestimating God's bigness. We ask him for small things, because we think he's a small God. But God is not a small God. When we make God a small God, our problems seem bigger and our prayers are often smaller, as though we're asking Him to do something hard or something that will inconvenience him. But God can hold oceans! God can weigh mountains. God can measure the dust of the earth as though it were flour - if you can get flour at the moment! There is nothing too big for God because God is bigger than everything – that's what verse 12 tells us!

But He's not just bigger than everything,

God knows everything

Have a look at verses 13-14:

*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?*

What it's saying here is that God does not need advisors. He didn't need a teacher. He has no need of experts because He is THE expert in everything! No one directed his Spirit, that's probably what that verse means right at the start in verse 13. Nobody can tell him what to do. Nobody can teach him anything. He already knew everything - He already understood everything even before the world began.

So that means You can't surprise God. You can't know better than God because he's all knowing. That's often our problem isn't it, we think we know better than God. But that's making God smaller than he is, and making our opinion much bigger than it really is. God doesn't need our advice; He already knows everything. He's the only one who can

legitimately wear that t-shirt you see people wearing "I don't need google I already know everything". God knows all things.

And The exiles, that Isaiah was writing to, needed to remember that. God hadn't been taken by surprise by the exile; God hadn't made a wrong turn by sending them there. He knows everything and his plan... is always the best plan. God knows everything.

But he's not only bigger than everything, he doesn't only know everything...

God is also more powerful than anyone

Or anything - nothing can stop him from bringing his plan about. Have a look at verse 15:

*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.*

God is more powerful than anyone. God looks at the nations and to him, they are nothing but a drop in the bucket. Think about that for a second - a drop in a bucket, that's is nothing isn't it! You wouldn't go back and fetch it if that fell out of your bucket, would you?

That's exactly what he says in verse 17 – the nations are as though they're nothing before Him, accounted by Him as less than nothing, an emptiness. It's not saying God doesn't care about them, it's saying that They're not a rival to God, they're not a threat to God, they're nothing to Him.

And that included the Babylonian Empire. And the exiles needed to hear that, too didn't they? Babylon had come and taken them away, but Babylon was not more powerful than God! In fact, Babylon had been doing God's bidding. So it's telling us here that no power on Earth can thwart God's plan. If God says he is bringing his people home, like we saw last week, no nation on Earth can stop Him. No empire can stand in his way. God is more powerful than any nation.

So he's bigger than everything, he knows everything, he's more powerful than anyone and then also we see,

God is worthy of our everything

Have a look at verse 16:

*Lebanon would not suffice for fuel,
nor are its beasts enough for a burnt offering.*

God is worthy of our everything. Now, I'm sure this is what Isaac Watts had in mind when he wrote the hymn 'When I survey the wondrous cross'. He wrote in the last verse:

"Were the whole Realm of Nature mine, that were an offering far too small;
Love so amazing, so divine, demands my soul, my life, my all."

That's what this verse is saying. Lebanon was a nation famous for its forests, in fact it still is - if you have a look at its flag, I'll just bob it up on the screen, you'll see that actually (on) the flag of Lebanon is still a tree, a cedar tree, because Lebanon was famous for its trees. And he's saying that even the whole forests of Lebanon could not provide enough fuel for an offering for God, nor all the beasts that live in its ample woodland. All that could not provide

a big enough sacrifice to reflect God's worthiness. God is worthy of absolutely everything - including us. There's nothing that you could give him that would be too much!

There's an episode of the Big Bang theory – I don't know if you like that program – but it's got a character called Sheldon, he's the main super-geek, and he believes he has worked out the solution to the problem of matching the value of the gift that someone gets you for Christmas with the one that you get them. What he does, he buys dozens of hampers of different prices, literally dozens of them fill his room, and then waits for his present from another character, Penny, so that when she gives him her present he can match it with the one that he's got.

Well, Penny in the programme gets him a used napkin signed by his hero Leonard Nimoy, who played 'Spock' in Star trek. Sheldon disappears into his room and comes back with ALL the hampers.

'What's this?', says Penny.

To which Sheldon replies, "I know... it's not enough, is it!".

And that's what it's like with us and God, we could never match His gift to us. He is worthy of our everything - everything we possess, everything we are!

So he's bigger than everything, he knows everything, he's more powerful than anyone, he's worthy of our everything and also...

God rules everything

Have a look at verses 22-24:

*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.*

Now, some translations have this as He "sits enthroned above the circle of the earth", which carries the idea these verses have in mind. God sits in the highest place, ruling over the whole of creation. He's so high above it that the people look like insects. Now, we laugh at that because most of us have been in planes where even houses look like dots - but really, it's the same idea. God is out of reach of the plots and schemes of the people below. His rule is untouchable, unstoppable, unbreakable.

It's not saying that He lives in the clouds but that He's out of the reach of man. He brings princes to nothing. He makes the rulers of the earth as though they were nothing. They too are like grass that withers and fades - as we saw last week. All of histories Nero's, Napoleons and Nebuchadnezzar's have come to nothing. God rules the world. Always has done, always will do.

So he's bigger than everything, he knows everything, he's more powerful than anyone, he's worthy of our everything, he rules everything and also...

God is Creator and Sustainer of the whole universe

Have a look at verses 25-26:

*To whom then 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?
He who brings out their host by number,
calling them all by name;
by the greatness of his might
and because he is strong in power,
not one is missing.*

God is the Creator and Sustainer of the whole universe. This is one of my favourite parts of this passage, and in fact the whole Bible. God created and sustains the whole universe.

What he does here is invites us to look up to the night sky, on a clear night. And he asks us- who created these? Now, if you grew up in South Leeds like I did, there are between 2 and 3 stars visible to the naked eye on a good night. But if you stand where there is less light pollution there are between two and three **thousand** stars visible to the naked eye from planet earth. Creating and sustaining two to three thousand giant nuclear fusion reactors, each measuring more than a million miles across and hanging them in the sky. That's pretty impressive, isn't it?

But, of course, as science has progressed, we know much more now! The Milky way Galaxy, of which we're a part, actually contains around 100 billion stars. That's a 1 with 11 zeros after it! And that's not even the whole picture; our galaxy is just one of an estimated 100 billion galaxies! That's what the Hubble space telescope has found! That means there are at least a staggering 10 sextillion stars in the sky. That's a one with 22 zeros after it! (10,000,000,000,000,000,000,000 - I was going to put it on the screen but it was just too long). That's one with 22 zeros after it.

And it's not just like there's one kind of star, that it's just a copy of. There are Dwarf stars, Yellow Dwarfs, Red Dwarfs, White Dwarfs, Brown Dwarfs, Red Giants, Blue Giants, Super Giants, Pulsars, Neutron Stars and Binary Stars. Even variable stars which pulse and change in size, I found out this week! There is as much diversity in the 'star kingdom' as there is in the animal kingdom!

And God... knows each of them by name! Knows each one of them intimately, that's what our passage tells us. Now, I struggle to remember my name some days! But God knows the name of all the stars- and he sustains them! From a human perspective he brings them out every night, he keeps them in the sky. From a scientific perspective, he created and maintains the very laws of physics which means these giant objects can exist in the vacuum of space. He maintains each and every hydrogen atom that fuels their existence and keeps every proton of those hydrogen atoms spinning!

Friends, science when applied rightly is not the enemy of belief in God, it's actually fuel for worship, isn't it? It is evidence of the greatness of God, a God who created and sustains the universe and its 10 sextillion stars! But not only does he do that, lastly, he also keeps doing that!

He's bigger than everything, he knows everything, he's more powerful than anyone, he's worthy of our everything, rules, created and sustains everything and on top of that...

God is everlasting

Have a look at 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.*

God is everlasting. Now everlasting here doesn't just mean that God will exist forever; it means that he remains his powerful, vigorous, all-knowing self forever. God will not 'wind down' as the years go on. He won't get old and infirm. I'm always surprised by the images we see of God in art, as though he's some sort of doddering old man with a beard who's grumpy and needs a sit down. That's not the Bible's image of God at all! He is everlasting - he'll never grow faint or weary. He's got more energy in him than a whole warren of Duracell bunnies! He's the holy grail of the physics world because he effectively has perpetual motion. He can just keep going and going and going and never needs to slow down and he never has less energy when he finishes than when he started!

Again, the exiles needed to hear this. You have not gone into exile because God has gone for a lie down. He is as active now as He ever was. and when he says he will get you home, He will not get you halfway home and then have to stop and have a breather! God will always be able to do what he says! He is everlasting - he lasts the distance.

So that's what we learn about God, God is so much bigger than what we think, isn't He, as we consider all those things that it has shown us; but then secondly...

We are much Smaller than we think

If we think about all these things that it's told us about God and how big he is, well actually it reminds us that we are not those things. So again, it gives us seven quickfire facts about ourselves - the flip sides of what we've seen about God. Firstly,

We are small

We saw in verse 12 that God is big. If God is big then we are small. God asks the questions in verse 12, doesn't he, "*Who has measured the waters in the hollow of his hand?*" He goes on with these questions.

And the answer among humankind is no-one! We are nowhere near this and never will be. He is creator, and we are all creatures and that's ok. You are not God, I am not God, but that is how God designed it to be. And actually, it's when we pretend that we're God that the problems start. When we make ourselves out to be big, when actually we're quite small,

when we try and be big, and actually what we need to do is recognise our dependence on God. So, we are small. And then secondly,

We don't know everything

If God is all knowing, it's a reminder that we're not. There's that refrain twice in verse 21 and verse 28, "*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?*"

And again, the answer is supposed to be "no". We should have known about God, but we don't know everything about God. Our knowledge is limited, and again that's a good thing to remember. We often ask God questions, "Why this God?", "Why me?" but we forget that we don't have all the information, we don't know everything.

But God does have all the information - so he's in a much better position than we are to make those decisions. What we have to do is trust Him. So, we don't know everything. Thirdly,

We are not all powerful

If the nations and empires are no rival to God, then what of individuals? But again, it reminds us to go to the all-powerful one. If we think that we are all powerful, then we won't do things like pray, we will never ask him for everything because we think that we'll be able to do it ourselves. But we are not all-powerful; we need to go to God. Fourthly,

We don't give God our everything

Have a look at verses 18 – 20:

*To whom then 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 it 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.*

'We don't give God our everything' is putting it very lightly from this passage. In fact, we give what's due to God to anything and everything else! We may be too sophisticated to make statues, but we still have idols. From the God of our own imagination, who somehow always seems to agree with us, to the different rivals for our trust and hope we see in this very passage: empires, experts, princes, nature, the stars, youth. People idolise these things, they live and die for these things, they believe them to hold the key to the future. But when we treat people or things like this, we rob God of his rightful place. God deserves all our trust, all our hope.

Not that we ignore those other things, maybe the stars we can ignore, Mystic Meg and Russell Grant never really cut it for me! But we don't give those things our ultimate allegiance, we don't put our hopes and trust in them. We see God's hand behind empires, behind experts, behind the rulers and princes of this world. If we fail to see this, they will

end up as idols, we will fear them more than we fear God, we will trust them more than we trust God.

We don't give God our everything- instead we give it to others things. That's what we see about ourselves as human beings. And fifthly,

We are like grass and grasshoppers

We do not rule the world; not like God does. The verse describes us in verses 22 to 24 as but grass and grasshoppers in his sight. Could you imagine a single grasshopper declaring himself king of the world? Could you imagine a blade of grass that thinks they're controlling the course of history?

It's just nonsense isn't it- and yet that's what we do. We think we're masters of our own destinies, but we're not. We're shrubs and bugs, insects with pretensions to grandeur, According to this passage. We don't rule the world, and again that's ok- that's what God is supposed to do. We are to look to Him to rule, rather than try to rule ourselves. Next,

We are doubt his sustaining care

Have a look at verse 27:

*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"?*

This really is the heart of why this passage was written. The people in exile are beginning to think that God has forgotten about them, that he's given up on them, that he's lost control of what's happening: "If God only knew what I was going through!", "God's not being fair with me, can't He see how hard I'm finding this".

As Christians, don't we know those feelings sometimes ourselves, if we're being honest? Why doesn't God do something, is he not powerful enough? Can he not see? But what have we seen? We have no need to doubt his sustaining care:

He is ALL powerful

He is ALL knowing!

Things are not out of God's control - they are completely within his control. What we need to do is trust him in the midst of what's happening. And then, finally, what we see about ourselves,

We fade and faint

Have a look at verse 30

*Even youths shall faint and be weary,
and young men shall fall exhausted;*

I never know these days whether I'm classed as a young man these days. The old seem to think that I'm young and the young seem to think that I'm old- it's a bit confusing at my age. But here even the young flag and fade, and by that reckoning I think I'm young!

What it's saying here is that we are not everlasting like God is. We do grow weary; we do get tired. We are human beings; we do need rest. Again, this is an important thing to remember- if we think we are everlasting like God we will wear ourselves out!

But there is a promise in these last verses, have a look at verse 31:

*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.*

Now, God is not here promising supernatural jogging abilities- sorry to all you joggers out there - or the actual ability to fly! What He is promising is that if we wait for Him, He will give us the strength to make it home. That eagles' wings part is a lovely picture but it's also an allusion to God's rescue of His people from Egypt, Exodus 19:4, "*You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself.*" God is promising that if they wait for him, he will bring to himself safely, he will bring them home safely.

What does it mean to wait for God? Well it means to remember He is big and we are small and we need him to do what we cannot do. And – do you know what? - God did, that great big God became small, became a man. He came as Jesus to die on the cross, to bring about that great rescue, to bring us home, to bring us to God, and to beat our biggest enemy sin. So what we need to do is to trust Him to act, to hang on to that hope- in all situations- however tough they might seem- that's what it means to wait for the Lord.

And that's what we need to do in our own exile ourselves, as we wait for God, hang on to that hope, wait for Him to act, trust in Him to do what He said He will do. And ultimately that's how we fit into things, our role in this world, our place in this world is that God is big and we are small, and we wait for Him, our great God; trusting Him, our great Saviour.

And the amazing thing is that He did act for his people. He did bring the exiles home and He will bring us safely to glory. And if we ever doubt that, let's remember the bigness of God and trust in the one that can do immeasurably more than we can ask or imagine.