

PREPARE
THE WAY
OF THE LORD

4th Week of Advent
DEVOTIONAL



ISAIAH 40:12-26

¹² 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?

¹³ Who has measured the Spirit of the Lord,
or what man shows him his counsel?

¹⁴ 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?

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.

¹⁶ Lebanon would not suffice for fuel,
nor are its beasts enough for a burnt offering.

¹⁷ All the nations are as nothing before him,
they are accounted by him as
less than nothing and emptiness.

¹⁸ To whom then will you liken God,
or what likeness compare with him?

¹⁹ An idol! A craftsman casts it,
and a goldsmith overlays it with gold
and casts for it silver chains.

²⁰ 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.

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?

²² 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;

²³ who brings princes to nothing,
and makes the rulers of the earth as emptiness.

²⁴ 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.

²⁵ To whom then will you compare me,
that I should be like him? says the Holy One.

²⁶ 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.

DAY 1

ISAIAH 40:12-14

¹² 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?

¹³ Who has measured the Spirit of the LORD, or what man shows him his counsel?

¹⁴ 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?

Behold our God. Last week we were reminded of what God does for us as our victorious Savior (v.10) and tender Shepherd (v.11). Verse 12 and onward launches into a passage where our eyes are lifted up to behold who God is--to marvel in His character. Remember that this discussion about his character comes right after the declaration of the good news of the gospel. Consider for a moment, what makes a promise trustworthy? It is dependent on the character of the person who made the promise. Do they have the means and the ability to ensure the promised result? The strength? The expertise? The time? Do you have to question an ulterior motive? How do I know that there isn't a catch? Can I trust that the promise-maker is good, just and honest?

God answers the unspoken questions by posing questions back at his people. These questions stretch our mental capacity. It is one thing to say that God is infinite in strength. It is another thing to imagine someone lifting up a mountain to measure its weight. To a man, this is an absurd task! To God, this task is so simple that it doesn't even come close to bringing His power into question. Behold our God.

- Take a moment to reflect on what aspects of His character are highlighted in these verses (e.g. strength and wisdom).
- What can you say about the quality of these characteristics?

God backs the promise of his gospel with all that he is. We can trust his promise to powerfully save us and gently lead us to our heavenly home because He is infinitely equipped to do so. His character declares it.

PRAYER

Father in heaven, mighty is your name. You are holy, good and loving beyond measure. Your power surpasses our wildest imaginations. You transcend all that we are and all that we know. Yet in your infinite grace, poured out according to the mercies afforded by Jesus' blood, you are pleased to call us your beloved, your great reward. What a mystery! To you O God be all the glory and honor and praise. Amen.

DAY 2

ISAIAH 40:15-17

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.

¹⁶ Lebanon would not suffice for fuel, nor are its beasts enough for a burnt offering.

¹⁷ All the nations are as nothing before him, they are accounted by him as less than nothing and emptiness.

Have you ever tried to take one drop from a full bucket of water? Or remove one particle of dust from your shelf? Have you ever tried to start a fire with a small twig? The thought of such activity seems foolish. Yet this is a reminder, to Israel, to God's people, you and me that our time, our nation, our moment is but a speck of dust, a drop of water, a small twig to the Lord. As Isaiah has already pointed out, "the grass withers, the flower fades" (v.7,8). God reveals his majesty, his power, his judgment and his strength to the watching world. This is meant to bring about awe and wonder. To remind His people that the chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy him forever.

- Reflect on God's majesty for a moment. Does it move you to awe and wonder? Posture is so important through the Scriptures. Oftentimes we find those before God prostrate or kneeling. Consider kneeling for a time of prayer;
- *Lord you are marvelous. Majestic. Your beauty is made manifest in this world, through creation, people and ultimately your Son Jesus. Lord as I anticipate the coming of Jesus, as we are reminded of through Christmas, would you strike my heart with awestruck wonder at the mention of your name. Amen.*

God will bring his judgment against the nations. He will separate them like the sheep from the goats. The sheep being those who follow Christ, the goats being those who do not. The goats, in their rebellion and stubborn refusal to obey the shepherd, are cast away. Psalm 22 reminds us that "the kingdom is the LORD's, and He rules over the nations." The nations opposed God. They worshiped idols,

they followed different paths and lived as goats do. This is a stark reminder of us, especially during this season of the importance of going to the nations (Matt 28; Acts 1). The command, the plea here is to go high up on a mountain; to enter into the lives of those around us through work, activity, grocery store workers, delivery persons, and to proclaim “behold!” the Lord your God, he has come, he has entered into our lives, your life, and he promises to come again and finish his work. This is a message that the nations need to hear. For their time is as a speck of dust, a drop of water in a bucket, but the maker of heaven and earth is wooing them to Himself.

- Pray for a missionary you know. If you do not know a missionary pray for one of our missionaries who is proclaiming this good news that King Jesus has come and rules! Here are a few names you could pray for;
 - Davidson & Katie Jean-Rejouis (and kids) missionaries in Toulouse France
 - Emad & Michelle Mikhail missionaries in Egypt
 - Aaron & Cassie Gortmaker (and kids) missionaries in Costa Rica
 - Confex & Mwai Makhalira (and kids) missionaries in Malawi
- One of the benefits of having a global economy is that the nations are not just “countries out there” anymore. God has brought the nations to our neighborhoods, our schools and to many of the places around us. Pray that the Spirit would move and lead you to see the beauty of the nations around you. Ask God for the courage to engage with someone from a different part of the world this week. Seek to answer in your heart, “How can I be a blessing to this person?”

PRAYER

Father in heaven. Your name is greatly to be praised in all the nations. The Lord of lords. King of kings. The one who bridges the divide between us and them. Would you continue to draw us nearer to one another? To continue to fulfill your promises to Abraham, namely that your people would be a blessing to the nations. Would we have eyes, ears and mouths that are a blessing to those around us? Help us to stumble and bumble our way through relationships with your image bearers. Father we love you, and thank you for the many blessings you have given us in Jesus. Amen..

DAY 3

ISAIAH 40:18-20

¹⁸ To whom then will you liken God,
or what likeness compare with him?

¹⁹ An idol! A craftsman casts it, and a goldsmith
overlays it with gold and casts for it silver chains.

²⁰ 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.

At the heart of Israel's sin was idolatry.

*Their land is filled with idols;
they bow down to the work of their hands,
to what their own fingers have made.* Isaiah 2:8

Idolatry happens when Israel deifies elements from the creation and follows the gods of the other nations. In the verses prior to this Isaiah points out the sovereignty of God over the creation, the whole cosmos, and over the nations. In verses 18-20 Isaiah argues how idols fail to compare to the true God.

First, the false gods cannot even create their own images but they have to be formed by human craftsmen. The true God creates his own images and they are living. The apostle Paul points this out to the Athenians in Acts 17:24, 25:

The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man, nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything.

While the other gods require human hands to shape them, the true God has created all things and gives life to his images.

Second, the idols that are crafted are not alive. The poor man is concerned with picking a wood that will not rot because from the beginning their images are dead and prone to rot.

Furthermore, the idols cannot even move or act on behalf of the god they represent.

It would be easy to say, “look how foolish those Israelites were.” But the reality is that we continually create idols for ourselves. What are the created things that we put our trust in? How often do we place our hopes in the nation? Everyday we need to remind ourselves that God is sovereign over the creation and the nations. Nothing compares to the true God in whom we have breath and life.

PRAYER

Sovereign Lord, help me to discern the idols that I create. Bring me to your Word so that I can be reminded of your majesty. Let me trust in you, and place my hope in you. You are the True God to which nothing can be compared.

DAY 4

ISAIAH 40:21-24

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?

²² 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;

²³ who brings princes to nothing,
and makes the rulers of the earth as emptiness.

²⁴ 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.

V. 21 opens with “Do you not know? Do you not hear?” These questions challenge the listener to not just hear the truth of who God is with their ears, but to truly hear it with their heart and to ultimately surrender to that truth.

- What are truths that the Spirit may bring to your mind and ask “Do you not know? Do you not hear?” With regards to anxiety? Or the love God has for you? Or the promise of new life, new creation?

In vv 22-24 Isaiah brings a theological focus to the idea of earthly power. Like Isaiah's original audience, we are often more swayed by the earthly powers that we see coalescing around us (i.e, think how affected we have been by the recent political happenings in our country, or how moved we can be by the threat of leaders having nuclear weapons in N. Korea or Iraq), than we are confident in the supremacy of God (22), the relative smallness of the earth's leaders (23), and the ultimate transience of man (24).

- Spend some time praying for earthly leaders around the world, while remembering their ultimate place in the true history of the world (i.e. God's History).
- Take a moment to actively place yourself (intellectually, spiritually, emotionally) within God's sovereign rule. "Do you not know? Do you not hear?"

PRAYER

Sovereign God, you who sits above the circle of the earth, and stretches out the heavens like a curtain, spreading them like a tent to dwell in. You who bring princes to nothing, and make the rulers of the earth as emptiness; we come to you today to rest in your might, your wisdom and your care for the world that you have created. From the beginning you have exercised this sovereignty, dealing with the rebellion of humanity with justice and mercy. Enlarge our hearts, we pray, to rest in what we hear and what we know to be true. This we pray through Jesus, the one who has been given the name above all names, Amen.

DAY 5

ISAIAH 40:25-26

²⁵ To whom then will you compare me, that I should be like him? says the Holy One.

²⁶ 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.

Since the beginning, God has used penetrating questions to bring His children to truth: Adam, where are you? Cain, why are you angry? Job, where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth? Abraham, is anything too hard for Me?

Isaiah is bringing a message of comfort and hope from God, a word of pardon and a promise that He plans to do something beyond what they could ask or imagine; He will reveal His glory to all people. But there is work to do...mountains, valleys, crooked and rough places in their lives obscure or distort their vision. Isaiah's questions reveal the competitors they have substituted for God: human wisdom, idols, earthly rulers and kingdoms. These questions uncover the folly of trusting in temporal things. So he asks the question we all have to answer:

TO WHOM WILL YOU COMPARE ME?

Have you ever taken time to reflect on what it means that only God is uncreated? This separates Him from everything else. He is the Holy One, the separated one. We often think of God as the highest on a scale of ascending good. But He is saying He is not even on that scale. He is in a category by Himself. Nothing else is self-existing and sustaining, infinite, eternal, sovereign. He is Ultimate Origin, Ultimate Reality, Ultimate Destiny. Nothing can be compared to God.

So Isaiah invites us to behold Him, look and continue to look, for in Him is truth, comfort, hope, and salvation. A psalmist observed that people who trust in dead and ignorant idols become like them. Centuries later, Paul tells us we are being transformed into Christlikeness as we behold His glory. The glory Isaiah promised has been revealed to all people, light to a dark world and hope for a despairing world. He reflects the glory of God, and “upholds the universe by the word of His power.” Nothing can be compared to Jesus!

- Take some time to look up questions God has asked His people. They are everyone’s questions, intended to bring us to truth.
- What looks bigger than God in your life? God does not minimize the reality of our lives, but invites us into His presence.
- Think about small or big ways you can keep God in the center of your attention. How has being a part of Christ Church encouraged you in that?

PRAYER

Above all powers, above all kings, above all nature and all created things, you stand alone, Lord God Almighty! We worship you today. Please forgive us for so quickly trusting in what we can conceive, manage, and control. Please help us in our desire to keep you in the center of our thoughts. Thank you for your Word and your people. In Jesus’ name, Amen.