

Had God Disregarded Me?

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Date: 09 September 2018

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[0 : 0 0] you can find it on page 725 of the pew bibles who has measured the waters in the hollows of his hand or with the breath 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 who can fathom the spirit of the lord or instruct the lord as his counselor 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 surely the nations are like a drop in a bucket they are regarded as dust on the scales he weighs the islands as though they were fine dust lebanon is not sufficient for altar fires nor its animals enough for burnt offerings before him all the nations are as nothing they are regarded by him as worthless and less than nothing with whom then will you compare god to what image will you liken him as for an idol a metal worker casts it and a goldsmith overlays it with gold and fashions silver chains for it a person too poor to present such an offering selects wood that will not rot they look for a skilled worker to set up an idol that will not topple 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 he sits enthroned above the circle of the earth and its people are like grasshoppers he stretches out the heavens like a canopy and spreads them out like a tent to live in he brings princes to naught and reduces the rulers of this world to nothing no sooner are they planted no sooner are they sown no sooner do they take root in the ground than he blows on them and they wither and a whirlwind sweeps them away like chaff to whom will you compare me or who is my equal says the holy one lift up your eyes and look to the heavens who created all these he who brings out the starry host one by one and calls forth each one of them by name because of his great power and mighty strength not one of them is missing why do you complain Jacob why do you say Israel my way is hidden from the Lord my cause is disregarded by my God do you not know 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 even youths grow tired and weary and young men stumble and fall but those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength they will soar on wings like eagles they will run and not grow weary they will walk and not be faint thanks Jamie for reading can I have my word of welcome my name is Martin Ayres I'm the senior minister here at St Silas and we're looking at this chapter of Isaiah together so if it's fallen shut if you keep it open for me that'd be a great help it's seven two five what really matters is not what I say but that we look we hear from God speak to us together and if you find it helpful there's an outline inside the notice sheet and just to follow as we work through this amazing section of the Bible let's ask for God's help as we send to his word let's bow our heads and I'll lead us in a prayer father God we praise you and thank you that you are a speaking God and we ask that you would give us ears open to your word this evening heads that can understand and hearts that are willing to

change to follow you for Jesus name's sake amen well sometimes we might limit ourselves for a challenge might find something straightforward so you limit yourself to make it a bit more risky for a challenge like the Bulgarian lifeguard Yanni Petkov you might have seen him in the news recently this summer he reclaimed the Guinness World Record for swimming along with his hands and feet tied while fully wrapped inside a sack not satisfied with normal swimming it took Petrov three hours to work his way along a lake in Macedonia swimming 3,380 meters if you're wondering about the method apparently it was face up and feet first and as he floated along when you read the Guinness Book of Records it's kind of full of ridiculous things like that isn't it people who make something harder so that they can be the world beater with that particular handicap on them and that's fair enough although if it goes badly you really have no one else to blame but it can be a lot more troubling if we start limiting God like that in our minds that we reduce his abilities and his attributes

and then as we shrink him he becomes easier to ignore which we might like but actually much more much less ready to help us when we're really in need much more difficult to trust when you compare what Christians believe about Jesus and God today with the Christians of history it does look as though we've shrunk God in our view of him the writer

David Weld says this it is one of the defining marks of our time that God is now weightless because he's speaking there about I think more about the general culture as people if people still say they believe there's a God what they think about him he says I do not mean by this that he is ethereal but rather that he has become unimportant he rests upon the world so inconsequentially as not to be noticeable so he talks about how lots of people say they still believe in God but they clearly find him less interesting than what's on Netflix we find his commands carry less authority for us than our own desires to be comfortable and rich we find the thought of his coming judgment on the world a lot less significant than we do the latest news on the BBC we find his truth less compelling than the latest advertising and marketing that we appeal that appeals to us and Weld says this that is weightlessness it is a condition that we have assigned God by nudging him out to the periphery of our secular culture we exclude God from our reality now what's the problem with that well one problem is that a God like that isn't much help when suffering comes along in your life we don't see God really able to keep the amazing promises of the Bible maybe we doubt that he really is reliable we doubt that he's even there we wonder how could

God really be committed to my good when my life looks like this now Isaiah chapter 40 was written to people feeling exactly like that they were a religious group of people because they were God's people on earth at that time representing God God had given them his word they were the Bible people of the Old Testament but even though they were religious outwardly God had become weightless for them he didn't really carry weight in their society and because they then worshipped other gods in 587 BC they were carried off into exile away from the promised land it was a horrific thing for those people taken away from the land they lived in under the Babylonian empire and they suffered horribly and you can see the complaints that they make at that time in verse 27 of chapter 40 if you just have a look over verse 27 this is actually after Isaiah's writing so he's prophesying about what will happen after him and he says verse 27 why do you complain Jacob why do you say Israel my way is hidden from the Lord my cause is disregarded by my God in other words their God has shrunk he's too small they think that he's forgotten them he doesn't notice them anymore so what does God say when they feel like that when we might feel like that well we got the start of the answer last week as we began this chapter of Isaiah where God promises that he's going to come and be with his people to shepherd them to rescue them so just read that from verse 10 of chapter 40 we saw it last week verse 10 see the sovereign Lord comes with power and he rules with a mighty arm see his reward is with him and his recompense accompanies him he tends his flock like a shepherd he gathers the lambs in his arms and carries them close to his heart he gently leads those that have young amazing picture of a mighty God but a kind in caring God shepherding his people to rescue them that's the great promise but will the people really trust that God can deliver on that promise that's what tonight's passage is all about it's an answer to that anxiety is God big enough and does he care enough to do this so our first point is wake up to your creator God and you can see that it's a wake-up call for the people because Isaiah talks about things they should already know so if you look at the way the questions are asked in verse 21 he says do you not know have you not heard has it not been told you from the beginning you should know this have you not understood from the foundations of the earth if you look at verse 27 why do you complain Jacob why do you say oh Israel have you verse 28 have do you not know have you not heard he's saying wake up to what you should already know about God and that's where the questions take us in verses 12 to 14 at the very beginning of our section and Isaiah gives us four different measuring instruments I don't know whether you noticed that in verse 12 he starts with the hollow of your hand that is like if you cup your hand how much you could fit in the palm there and then he talks in verse 12 about the breadth of your hand the span so it's like the span from the tip of your little finger to the tip of your thumb that's your span that's the breadth of your hand then he talks about a basket so you might imagine your washing basket that you use to carry your laundry to the machine if you're a first year student you know that's it might be a new thing you might just maybe think about your shopping basket if you can't imagine a laundry basket I'm just kidding but I mean that was basically what I was like when I went to university anyway then the last thing we picture is our kitchen scales okay and then he look at the different things he places in those measures for

God verse 12 who has measured the waters in the hollow of his hand you just picture the capacity imagine how much water there is in Loch Lomond and then in your mind you zoom out to imagine all of the water in all of the oceans the Mariana Trench in the Pacific Ocean is deeper than the height of Mount Everest all of that water for thousands of miles and it's as though God could just hold it in the palm of his hand it's nothing to him and then the stars each one is thousands of times bigger than our planet and they're clustered into vast galaxies and Isaiah asks who marked off the heavens with the breadth of his hand just with the span of his hand then he talks about the dust of the whole earth being able to carry all of the dust of all of the world in his washing basket in his shopping bag and weighing all the mountains of the whole world on his kitchen scales just think about the islands off the west coast of Scotland all of them and you put them all together but then you add Britain because that's an island and Ireland and Australia and verse 15 says that each one is like a speck of dust to God he wears the islands as though they were fine dust they're just pictures God doesn't have a body but they're pictures to help us grasp in our hearts the vast magnificence of God he goes on to ask about

[12:55] God's wisdom verse 14 whom did the Lord consult to enlighten him and who taught him the right way then God's dignity in verse 16 Lebanon is not sufficient for altar fires nor its animals enough for burnt offerings that's what God is worthy of and then we compare God with the great superpowers the United States China Russia the EU verse 17 all the nations are as nothing before him all the nations are as nothing they are regarded by him as worthless and less than nothing not that they don't matter to him rather that compared to him they are so insignificant they're no match for him now I find that when I'm with friends who don't believe in God one of the key reasons they don't believe in God is a kind of scientism science is a great thing where we look for patterns in our observable universe to understand the big what questions and the big how questions about our universe science is a great thing but scientism takes science and turns it into like a philosophy of all knowledge so it says you shouldn't believe anything that you can't prove by the scientific method method by empirical observation very common to believe that today it's ridiculous by the way because you can't actually prove that by the scientific methods there's a massive contradiction but basically that's kind of how we function that unless you can prove it with a scientific experiment you shouldn't believe it and sometimes people who believe in God have responded to that with what sometimes called a God of the gaps idea so what the theist says back to the atheist is ah but your science can tell us so much about how the universe was formed and how we got life and how we got humanity and how the world works but it doesn't explain this bit here and it doesn't explain this bit here there are these gaps and that is where God was at work that's where you need God that's the kind of

God of the gaps idea now it's worth saying some of that might be right and some of our scientists need more humility about the limits of scientific knowledge but the problem is that we don't know that those gaps are because of God's supernatural intervention and often what happens is then as scientists we manage to fill the gap and we work out how in our universe cause and effect has filled that gap and then the atheist says to the theist your God has disappeared because I filled the gap see how that works in a debate you've got you've told me that I can you can prove there's a God because there's a gap I've filled the gap that's the end of your God but Isaiah 40 gives us a picture of God that is totally different to that it's a much bigger God than that it reveals to us a God that you could never find through science because he's way beyond that but the only reason that science is conceivable and possible is because of the God of Isaiah 40 a God who has created the universe and created a universe of order and not chaos he is the reason that there is something rather than nothing and science only works because of a God like this so we don't look for a God of the gaps we trust in the

God who made our ordered universe so that there is cause and effect and science is a conceivable and possible endeavor and the only response to a God like that is awe and fear at him and when we wake up to God being like that it sheds a new light on all of our anxieties it's as though by making God bigger more reflective of the true God we make our own fears smaller appropriately so usually one of the reasons we get really anxious is because we've got a circle of concern in our lives you imagine a circle and you put into it everything you're concerned about and we have a circle of control that's smaller than our circle of concern what we can control is less than the things that we're concerned about so I'm concerned if my house is not very clean but I can clean it right it's within my circle of control so I'm not going to get anxious about that I just need to get on and clean

the house right

I've got an inbox that's full of emails but I can go through them I'm in control but what we find much harder is where there are things in our lives even very hard things that are beyond our circle of control it could be things like having a really difficult line manager at work who doesn't give you any recognition and you feel trapped in the job the terrible thing it could be something very trivial could be will my sports team get relegated and make me miserable will the traffic be bad and make me late or it could be something very heavy in your life that feels crippling struggling with being single with being childless with being short of money with being depressed these are really difficult things and they're outside of our circle of control but they they can be awful for us for me it would be things like the influences on my kids because they're at an age where I can't control it anymore who influences them I'm I'm concerned about where they are spiritually how they feel emotionally and I'm not in control of it our health is a massive one isn't it the health of elderly parents if you've got them I don't know what it would be for you what you wish you could control and you can't control and when things in that circle get resolved in a way that we wouldn't want them to be we're left thinking my way is hidden from the Lord just like those people in Isaiah 40 God doesn't do things in the way I want him to how can he really be the God who loves me and chapter 40 speaks powerfully but gently into that and says wake up to your creator God do we really think when we look at God like this that his circle of control is too small to cover the things that we're worried about no of course not so that when the Bible says cast your anxiety on him because he cares for you we look at his vastness and we can throw all of our burdens on his shoulders weigh him down with our burdens so that's our first point wake up to your creator God is a great comfort and that means there's nobody else you could turn to like him our second point worship your incomparable God do you see that in verse 18 he goes on in verse 18 of chapter 40 with whom then will you compare God to what image will you liken him and then he contrasts God with idols with worshiping other things he describes this man in verse 20 and he's he's too poor to bring an offering but then he finds a piece of wood and he he finds a craftsman and he pays the craftsman to make it into a God for himself and it says in verse 20 that even he finds a particularly good one just to make sure it won't topple over it's the most ridiculous idea he doesn't stop to think hang on a minute if this idol's a bit wobbly how is it going to solve the things I'm worried about in my life now we're not perhaps buying wooden blocks to turn into shrines but the same idea for us is about the the things around us that we find appealing that we want to put our trust in to sort out our problems see for them then physical idols were an issue worshiping the stars were an issue that's why in verse 26 it mentions the stars as created by

[21 : 03] God it's because the people of Babylon would have worshipped the stars and they they worshipped their their kings their emperors and so it it explains how God is bigger than that but for us today we need to think about what people put their trust in around us that might pull us away from God you can help diagnose that for yourself by asking what do you most fear what are you most afraid of losing in your life when you stop and daydream what do you daydream about what do you love to imagine that you have that you don't have what do you spend your time really wishing for usually these things are our false gods that we trust to give us what only God can truly give us and then in contrast where is the God of the Bible compared to what we make verse 22 it is he he sits enthroned above the circle of the earth and its people are like grasshoppers what a picture Donald Trump Vladimir Putin they're like creepy little insects that jump around in verse 22 Isaiah says the Lord can spread out the galaxies like we might get a tent out for a camping trip and people are so frightening to us we're so frightened of people but verse 24 says God can take a powerful tyrant and blow them down in the same way that we might pick up a dandelion and just blow on it and see its seeds fly away verse 24 nor sooner are they planted speaking about princes about rulers nor sooner are they planted nor sooner are they sown nor sooner do they take root in the ground then he blows on them and they wither and a whirlwind sweeps them away like chaff so it's God alone who we should worship in verse 26 it says he's the star maker in verse 25 he is the holy one the one is so different to us and when you have when you get your view of God corrected like this and you see how big he is you can understand a bit more clearly why the disciples struggle to grasp Jesus being among them can't you that the word for God in the Bible in the Old

Testament that we have translated Lord capital L-O-R-D is Yahweh it means I am and then the disciples go off in that boat one night without Jesus and when they're three or four miles from the shore he comes to them walking on the water and they're terrified because they think it's a ghost

and he says to them take courage it is I that's how we have it translated okay now let me give you some Greek all right now I've been a few years out of college now so basically one of the I don't remember much Greek one of the only Greek words I can remember is kebab but um the word for I am in Greek is ego amy Yahweh is ego amy I am and when Jesus goes past them on the water when he says it is I he says ego amy to them that's what we have in our Bibles when they come to arrest him in John's gospel the soldiers arrive looking for him he turns around to them he says ego amy I am and they fall to the ground he is so powerful it's breathtaking so that when he speaks and calms a storm it's because he's the God of Isaiah 40 in the flesh everything was made through him Isaiah says worship him it's extraordinary he is the one who's worthy of our worship so that if I've got him on my side and he's promised to be my shepherd why on earth would I think if only I had a better car my life would be so much better if only I had a new outfit if only I could see the world why would I shove people out of the way in pursuit of more power why do I long for more admiration or more sex when I have a God this big who cares for me Isaiah says look at your incomparable God worship him that's our second point wake up to him worship him and our third point is to wait for him wait for your everlasting God we see he's worth waiting for in verse 28 do you not know 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 I was reading a book recently for Christians talking about optimists and pessimists it's a big thing isn't it in life people want to know you're an optimist or a pessimist glass what's the is it half full half empty and then and if you're an optimist basically you really look down on pessimists because you say you'll never get anything done with that attitude you'll never try anything but the pessimists look down on the optimist don't they because they say you're so naive this is all going to blow up in your face where's your realism and as Christians we're not really called to be either of those things we're called to be hope to miss hope to miss people who know that the end is going to be really good because our hope is in the promises of the living God hope to miss we're not naive about life being hard weary and tiring painful but we know that Jesus wins in the end God is the everlasting God and that means that his promises are always reliable even if generations go by even if our lives go radically differently to how we expect them to so the Christian life so much of it is about waiting for God to keep his promises wonderful promises and when you put your hope in them like that it gives strength to the weary that's where we can truly flourish as the people God made us to be strengthened because of our hope we're surrounded by the university buildings here and so we're in a culture we're in a context where it's easy to idolize the strength of youth we see it in our culture often elderly people compared to other cultures elderly people tend to be ignored and they're written off as out of touch or you won't understand this even viewed as a burden it's a terrible thing but then everyone wants to know what young people think and the message to young people is you can change the world be a world changer a song that song is it by the script you can be the greatest you can be the best you can be the king kong beating on your chest you can throw your hands up you can beat the clock you can move a mountain you can break rocks you can be a master but the truth is that physical strength isn't the ultimate thing that we need what we need is spiritual strength and the source of immense spiritual strength is just to put your hope in the Lord because he is the creator and he's incomparable and he's everlasting verse 30 even youths grow tired and weary and young men stumble and fall but those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength and then there's this wonderful description isn't there at the end of the chapter of the outcome of that strength to soar on wings like eagles stamina to run they'll run and not be grow weary and resilience to walk they'll walk and not be faint don't we long to be strengthened like that so we go to the Lord

Jesus God in the flesh who said to the woman at the well when he asked her for a drink from the well everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again but whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst indeed the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life he stands ready to fill us with spiritual strength to sustain us refuel us each day as we depend on him and set our hopes on his promises for the future promises that one day the world will be put right and all the sickness and all the sadness and all the badness will be taken away so how big is your God when we shrink God we make our problems look much bigger than they are when we grasp God's revelation of who he really is in Isaiah 40 we can place all of our worries and all of our fears and all of our sadnesses on his shoulders wake up to our creator God in all his vastness and might worship our incomparable God see how stupid it is that we set our hearts on other things and then wait for our everlasting God who renews our strength when we set our hope

on him amen we're going to sing again I hand back to the band and we'll sing in response to this great revelation from God