

Isaiah 40:12–31

None Like God for Worship, Help, or Strength

Wednesday, January 17, 2024 □ Read Isaiah 40:12–31

Questions from the Scripture text: What question does v12a ask? With what implied answer? And what question does v12b ask? With what implied answer? And what question does v12c ask? With what implied answer? And what question does v12d ask? With what implied answer? And what question does v12e ask? With what implied answer? How much greater are the questions in v13–14? To what do v15a–b refer? How big are they? In comparison to Whom must this be speaking? About Whom does v15c now speak? What can He do? What can be done for Him (v16)? By whom (v17)? But whom does v18 now address? What does this verse ask them? What happens when man tries to make a comparison to God (v19–20)? How does the difference between v19 and v20 further mock this? What do v21a–b ask? Especially with regard to what “time” (v21c–d)? How does v22 now describe Him? In comparison to whom in v23? What are these princes and judges like, not only in their stature, but in their duration (v24)? What question does v25 now repeat (cf. v18)? What command does v26 now give? What do we see about Him, when we consider the heavens (cf. Ps 8:1, 3, 9)? Who has been speaking, in v27a–b? What have they said, in response to God’s chastening providence (v27c–d)? How do v28a–b begin again (cf. v21a–b)? How do v28c–d describe God? What does this mean about His endurance (v28e)? What does this mean about His wisdom (v28f)? To whom does he give this power and strength (v29)? What other causes of strength fail (v30)? But what happens when YHWH is the cause/source of strength (v31a–b)? Just how much will their strength be renewed (v31c)? And for how long (v31d–e)?

How does God’s greatness relate to being carried by Him? Isaiah 40:12–31 prepares us for the first serial reading in public worship on the Lord’s Day. In these twenty verses of Holy Scripture, the Holy Spirit teaches us that whereas idolaters cut themselves off from purpose and strength, when God carries believers, they are carried by infinite strength and eternal endurance.

God alone is great, v12–17. We come, out of v11, into this section of Scripture, where the Lord carries His people tenderly in His arms. Now, the rest of this chapter emphasizes just how almighty are those arms!

Much of the book of Isaiah has been spent rebuking man for seeking his own devices and resting upon his own strength. And much of the book has been spent upon God declaring His intentions to give Himself as His people’s salvation. But how will these two come together? How will those who have repeatedly resorted to their own devices come to be “those who wait on YHWH” (v31)? This passage doesn’t directly answer, but it gives a tremendous hint by spending so much holy ink upon the greatness of God and of His strength.

The questions that communicate the immeasurable vastness of God’s creation in v12 give way to the infinitely greater vastness of God Himself in v13–17. YHWH is working by His own Spirit (v13a) to bring about His own justice (v14b) according to His own wisdom (v13b, 14a, 14c–d). All of the nations together cannot help Him in the slightest bit (v15–17). It would be immense arrogance and ingratitude to complain of His plan. It would be utter folly to try to go our own way. This is one of the reasons why it is alarming to read and hear of those in the sphere of the “Reformed” churches who are impressed with the greatness of what they might accomplish for God. We seek to serve Hm with all our might because He is great, not because we might do something great for Him.

Truly great Christian living flows not out of being enamored with what we might do for Him, but rather by being enamored with Him Himself. Being enamored with Him upon Whom we depend. Being enamored with Him Who gathers us to Himself morning and evening, day by day. Being enamored with Him Who gathers us to Himself in a glories way, week by week, on His Sabbath (cf. 56:1–8, 58:6–14).

When we serve Him in this way, we gladly yield to whatever His wisdom and justice and goodness does with our service. Those Who are His will always have Him Himself. They gladly reflect His goodness in their work—in between those worship times—as they diligently seek to produce shalom (cf. Mt 5:9) wherever they are, and whenever they are (cf. Mt 5:14–16), even in the midst of a world that will give way to a new earth (and new heavens)!

No, man is not great. And what he does can never be great in an ultimate sense. We forget what we are before God—what all creation is, before God! But God is great in an ultimate sense. And He gives man to belong to Him, to depend upon Him, even to be strong and enduring in Him.

Placing anything or anyone alongside Him is ridiculous in its blasphemy and folly, v18–24. This is the first “to whom will you liken God” (v18) and “Have you not known? Have you not heard?” (v21) section. This section exposes several image-makers. The goldsmith and silversmith imagine themselves to be working on something great (v19). But the wooden creation for the poorer man in v20 sufficiently approximates theirs. The most subtle and self-deluded idol in this section is the “prince” or “judge” of v23. By comparison, they are so small as to be “nothing” and “useless.”

This is not just the wicked princes and judges, but the righteous ones too. Of course, we wish to have righteous ones, for honoring God and doing good to men. And, if in God’s providence we are able to serve Him as princes or judges, we wish to be righteous ones. But let us never put our trust in princes (cf. Ps 146:3a) or in a son of man (cf. Ps 146:3b), who is about to be dust (cf. Ps 146:4a) and whose best laid plans are ultimately destined to go with him (cf. Ps 146:4b). Every beginning of those who hope in the efforts of man is a small beginning, and will soon enough have its weak and withered ending (v24).

God is announcing not merely that He is greater than others, but that He only is great (v18, 21–22).

But depending entirely upon Him is a gift by which He does us infinite and eternal good, v25–31. Now, we come to the second “to whom will you liken Me” (v25) and “Have you not known? Have you not heard?” (v28) section. This time, rather than the folly of what the men in v19–20 did and made, the Lord proceeds directly to the command in v26.

O that you would heed this command, dear reader! Lift your eyes (v26a). Lift your thoughts. Behold the heavens, and behold by faith the God Who created the stars (v26b), and who numbers and brings each one out to its exact place (v26c), Who names each one (v26d), and upholds all of these things by His might (v26e) and power (v26f), in faultless perfection (v26g).

Can it possibly be that the God Who oversees all of these would forget Jacob whom He chose (v27a) and Israel whom He redeemed (v27b)? Is He really failing to notice what is happening to you (v27c) or failing to maintain your interests (v27d)? Of course not! Don’t you know Who He is (v28a–d)? Not only His strength and endurance (v28e), and His wisdom (v28f), but the generosity in which He gives Himself to be ours (v29)?

In this context, “the weak” here is all of us. Every human “has no might.” The princes and judges are nothing and useless (v23). The youths and young men don’t have lasting strength (v30a), and every one of them will utterly fall (v30b).

None of us have any strength to rely upon. But YHWH has given Himself to be our strength. This strength doesn’t run out (v31b, d–e). It is more than we can understand (v31c)—what man can mount up with wings as eagles? But this is only in union with Him. He does not give us an inexhaustible strength of our own, separate from Himself. At the last, there will be a new heavens and new earth, in which we will have perfected souls and glorified bodies that fulfill this literally and physically. But, of course, even then, it will not be apart from Him. Especially then, it will be with Him forever!

So, let us heed this word and remember that God alone is great—but that as we devote ourselves to the what His Word says to do, in dependence upon Him, let us remember that He carries us tenderly in His arms as a Shepherd (v11), being for us infinite and eternal strength (v28–31). And let us not think that any amount of men, even righteous men, amounts to something great before God. Let us consider true might to be that which is in His Spirit and in His Word, and be willing to leave to Him what He makes to come of all of our diligent and zealous effort.

What evil men’s “greatness” are you concerned about? What righteous men’s “greatness” are you tempted to trust in? But Who alone is great? How does this help true diligence and zeal? What confidence does it give you to know that ONLY HE is great? And how does this remove the anxiety over what will come from what you do? And to where does it direct any and all praise for anything that happens?

Sample prayer: Lord, we thank and praise You, Who measure the oceans in Your palm, and the heavens with Your forearm. How great are Your power and wisdom! Though we say that there is nothing and no one like You, our actions expose different when we depend on anything else. And when we are devoted to anything to which Your Word would not direct us. And when we delight in anything apart from delight in You. O, forgive us, Lord! Even our anxiety or despair exposes that we are not waiting upon You as our strength. Forgive us, and return our faith to its proper object, to You Yourself in Christ Jesus, through whom we ask it, AMEN!

Suggested songs: ARP18A “I Love You, LORD” or TPH228 “Hast Thou Not Known, Hast Thou Not Heard”

(The following is a machine-generated transcription. PLEASE BE AWARE of—and patient with—transcribing errors. If there is something confusing or obviously erroneous, you are invited to listen to the audio recording via hopewellarp.org)

Isaiah chapter 40. Beginning in verse 12. These are God's words. Who has measured the waters and the hollow of his hand. Measured heaven with a span. And calculated the dust of the earth in a measure. Where the mountains in scales and the hills and a balance. Who has directed the spirit of Yahweh or has, his counselor has taught him.

With whom did he take council and who instructed him? And who taught him in the path of justice. Who taught him knowledge and showed him the way of understanding. Behold, the nations are as a drop. In a bucket. And are counted as the small dust on the scales. Lucky lifts up the aisles as a very little thing.

And lebanon is not sufficient to burn nor its beasts sufficient for a burnt offering. All nations before him are as nothing. And they are counted by him less than nothing. And worthless. To him then will you liken god? Or what likeness will you compare to him? The workman molds, an image the goldsmith over, spreads it with gold, the solar smith, casts, silver chains, Whoever is too impoverished for such a contribution.

Chooses a tree that will not rot. He seeks for himself a skillful workman. To prepare a carved image, that will not taught her. Have you not known? Have you not heard? Has it not been told you for the beginning? Have you not understood from the foundations of the earth?

That is he who sets above the circle of the earth? And it's inhabitants are like grasshoppers. His stretches out the heavens, like a curtain, spreads them out, like a tent to dwell in. Okay, brings the princes to nothing. He makes the judges. Of the earth. Useless. Scarcely shall they be planted scarcely shall they'd be sewn scarcely.

So they're stocked a grit in the earth. When he will also blow on them, they will with her. And the whirlwind will take them away like stubble. To whom then will you liken me? For to whom shall i? Be equal says the holy one. Lift up your eyes on high and see who has created these things.

Who brings out their hosts by number? He calls them all by name by the greatness of his might. And the strength of his power, not one. Is missing. Why do you say? Oh, jacob and speak of israel. My way is hidden from yahweh. And my just claim. This passed over by my god.

Have you not known? Have you not heard? The everlasting god, y'all play the creator of the ends of the earth. Neither faint nor is weary as understanding is uncertain. He gives power to the weak to those who have no mighty increases strength. Even the youth shall be fainted weary the young men's elderly fall.

But those who wait on your way. Shall renew their strength. They shament up with wings like eagles. There shall run and not be wary. Official walk. And not faint. So far the reading of god's inspired and And Aaron toward,

Lord asks. At the end of Um, Or towards the end of verses 10 through 20. To whom then will you liken god? Or what likeness will you compare to him? And then in the section marked off at its beginning with the first, have you not known, have you not heard?

He asks in verse 25 again. To whom then will you liken me? Her to whom shall i be equal? And then, The last section is, Marked off again, by the beginning of verse 28. Have you not known? Have you not heard? So we have three sections here and the same point, as in all three sections.

To whom will you liken god? And the first is to whom. Will you like in god? For worship. Verses 10 through 20. To whom will you liken god for help? In versus, 21. 326. Or rather 21 through 27. And to him will you like in god for hope or for strength?

Versus 28 through 31. To him. Will you liken god for worship? Uh, in versus Sorry, i say 10. We're uh, verse 12. 320. Verse 10 was still the section. On comforting. From last week. So to whom will you like in god for worship versus 12 through 20? To whom will you like in god for help?

Versus 21 through 27. And to whom will you like him god for strength? Versus 28 through 31. First then to whom will you like in god for worship there are No other gods. There is. Nothing that a man can conceive or come up with. That can be anything like.

The living, god, the whole creation. Is dwarfed by him. You know, all the oceans in the tiny little dimple. That is in the middle of your hand. It's hard to carry. Even a small amount of water with your hand, isn't it? Unless it's, you know, less than a teaspoon right there in that little dimple.

But all of the oceans of the world. Are smaller to god. Then that small amount of water that you could reasonably carry in your hand. He measures out the heavens. We don't even know how big the heavens are. We keep guessing by aiming telescopes, but the light can't travel.

Far enough fast enough to tell us. And he measures them by the span, by the, the length, between the his elbow and his wrist. As it were. And of course, that's just an anthropomorphism. If god had elbows or wrists, They would be bigger even. Uh, than that. He weighs.

Uh, the dust of the earth and a measure, and the mountains and the scales. In fact, all of the nations taken together Verse 15. Aren't actually weighed in the scales. They are like that little tiny dust that when they're doing a business transaction, they don't even bother to clean on, you know, they tried to, they wiped off the scale, they polished it.

And oh, they noticed a fleck of dust on there, but It doesn't matter, it weighs nothing in less than nothing. It doesn't affect the transaction at all. And so the supposed greatness of, man, And not just amen. But all men. Put together. They're supposed greatness is as less than nothing, it doesn't figure into the transaction.

At all. But these things are Uh, aren't or even nothing by comparison to Verse 13. Who has directed the spirit of yahweh or as his cancer. Has taught him with whom. Did he take council? Who instructed him? To be in the position in verse 13 and verse 14. The lord's counselor or the lord's instructor?

You would have to be infinitely greater even because now we're not talking about the creation anymore. We're talking about the creator. And you would have to be greater infinitely greater even than the picture that is given in verse 12 and verse 15. And so there's no worship that we can come up with.

Even if we had all of creation at our disposal, And if we imitated god's own prescription, This is what verse 16 is, describing. Lebanon is not sufficient to burn. Nor its beasts sufficient, for a burnt offering. So, the place on earth. With the most wood. And the best wood.

And the most creatures of the forest. If you took all of the wood, And somehow had an altar big enough for it. And you took all of the creatures. And somehow put them all on top of it. It would not do for one ascension offering into the lord. What man can invent for worship.

Even if he had all the creation at his disposal, Is less than nothing. So there are no other gods. There is no other way to worship. There is only What god? Has given him himself, he has. Given he himself, has given Himself. And what man actually offers when he comes up with it, what is it?

Gold and silver. Oh yeah, the rich ones. The poor ones, they approximate it with wood. But the gold and silver is infinitely closer to the wood. Than it is to the actual

offering. By which we come near to god, that which participates in his own son. And of course it is infinitesimally small By comparison to this.

Uh, theoretical. Ascension offering. In verse 16. And so, to whom you like in god for worship. Whom else would you worship and how else would you worship? It is. A vanity. It is an insanity. And therefore we are all the more able to see that. It is a blessed for me.

Worship only the living and true god. And worship him only in the way that he is given. Because the way that he has given, Trusts in christ. Comes through christ. With christ, as the priest christ, is the sacrifice who brings us. Uh, who brings us near as he brings us near by his own sacrifice?

So to whom are you like in god for worship to whom will you like in god for help? God sets the the picture. Is of the whole universe. As a throne room. And the The heavens, the circle that is above the earth which is not just, you know, viewing the earth as as spherical or spheroid or whatever.

But viewing coming out, you know, take the diameter of the earth that is A sphere and extend it by infinity. And you get, The bottom of god's throne, how big he is. And then, if you could see the actual edge of the universe, As the curtain that he has spread as the tent for his seat of judgment having come from his palace, which is greater still than all of this.

And he has set up among the people that he is judging among the creation, that he is judging this teeny little throne by comparison to him. That we would call the universe. And here is the great ruler, the great king, the great judge setting up. Uh, his seat of authority.

And we are going to look to the princes of the earth for help. We're going to look to the judges of the earth for help. You know, this is psalm 146 stuff. Yeah, putting on your confidence and princes or the son of man in hidden in whom there is no help.

He will return to dust and his plans will perish with him blessed, as he who has the god of jacob as his help. Very important thing for us to remember. Isn't it? And an election year? In which people are going to get their hearts and minds. All wrapped up and and who sits on the throne.

And we want christ to be honored. And we want to receive not according to what we deserve, but according to Um, almost Unexpectable or unaskable apart from jesus, of course. Uh, mercy from god. But putting out your confidence in princess scarcely, shall they be planted scarcely, shall they be?

So and scarcely, each other's talk to take root on the earth. And he will blow on them, and they will wither. And whirlwind will take them away. Like stubble. That is a. Dreadful wickedness for those who know the god of jacob. To have the kind of attitude. Or fall into the kind of despair.

As is inverted 27. Because if we are, if we think that Uh, things are unfair. We have anxiety over the way things are happening. We are denying either or both. His sovereignty in power. Where he sits? Or has goodness and faithfulness. That he acts according to his promises and out of love for us.

And that sovereignty and that power. And so it's not just those who think that their government and their military might, or their political might, that is going to win the day. It's not just those. Who are blaspheming god and denying his greatness. By there being full of themselves. It's also, the, the believer who is despairing, who is dismayed in verse 27.

Who thinks that? Uh, princes and kings. Kings and people's nations. The when when we despair, when we are full of anxiety. So to whom will we liken god for worship? Verse 12, through 20 to whom will we like in god for help? Verse 21 to 27. And at the last to whom will we like in god for strength?

He marks the beginning of another one of these sections. Have you not known. Have you not heard the everlasting? God, yahweh. The creator of the ends of the earth. Gives his people to become like himself. Notice that neither faints nor as weary in verse 28. Compares to They shall run and not be weary and they saw walk and not be faint in verse 31.

So there's really two options. There's one have power in yourself. Like youths and young men are tempted to do. I forgetful of god, they don't feel their smallness, they don't feel their weakness. They look around and compare themselves to other men and their marginally stronger. Haha, i'm a youth.

I'm a young man. I feel strong. But useful faint and be wary. And young men will utterly fall verse 30? It is the one who has the lord as his strength alone. Who is strong? And everyone who has the lord has a strength. Has a strength that cannot be lost.

And so god verse 29 gives power to the weak. To those who have no mighty increases strength. It is as he says in his word even with respect to this life. As your days, social your strength be. He is the one who has written our days in his book.

He is the one who is portioned out. The seasons of life and the strength or lack of it, the health or lack of it for exactly what he has ordained for your life. You cry out to god in your weakness. You rejoice in that weakness. Like second Corinthians 12 says, and thank you.

God, for being my strength. But you also look to him to give you. To be and to be able to do Just as much as is necessary for what he is assigned to you, each day. He is faithful and he does it. And one day you will lay down.

And your body will have known its last moment of weakness. Because when it comes up out of the Grave again. This will be fulfilled, literally. Physically.

It's true enough. Isn't it wonderfully, true. With respect to how he sustains us, by his grace by faith. Through every day of this life. But he really is. Into resurrect us in a new heavens and a new earth with glorified bodies that can do the sort of thing that jesus's glorified body already can do.

Because we know, That. Our body will be conformed to this to be made like this. We are the ones who believe. And spiritual strength and spiritual healing. Because we believe according to the bible. And so to whom will you like in god? For hope for strength. There's no one who ordains for you, what your days are going to be and then matches exactly the strength and health.

That you need for those. Then certainly Who can help you? Once you are dead and decade and the worms of eating, you God can. God does both. As sure as jesus christ is crucified risen ascended and enthroned, god does Both. So the lord forgive us, the lord help us.

If we would worship with any other or in any other way, If we would look, Uh, put our hope for help. In any other. Or be hopeless at any time. And if we would feel ourselves to be strong. Apart from him. Or think that we will not have the strength that we need.

When we have him. To whom. Well, we liken god. Man, let's pray. Our father in heaven. We thank you. For the way that you have declared yourself to us in this passage, And we do have now by your word. Which is living in active our hearts. Exposed laid naked before you.

Because truly, We have lichenized you To other things. Devoting ourselves or finding an ultimate delight in Something other than you. Coming to you and some other way. Then what you have commanded. Thinking that. We are going to prevail by. Political power. Or that. All has lost, because of Uh, some infinitesimally small man

or men.

Taken together who are in political power. We have often felt ourselves, strong and forgotten. Then unmindful of dependence upon you. And then, Even knowing that, we have you We have often. Been overwhelmed. That the prospect of the difficulty of what was before us. And so in all of these ways, oh lord.

We have been guilty of disregarding you. But we thank you that you have come near and you have spoken to us comfort in christ. And you have announced to us. You're in comparability. Not. And condemnation. But rather inviting us to have you as our strength. To rest upon you.

To rejoice in you. To be refreshed by you. So grant that your spirit would keep doing so. Oh lord. Do grant to us the repentance. That we need from these things. But give us the lord, not to dwell in the sorrow. Over how we have disregarded, you But to dwell and to live, and to walk by the joy, Of whom you have declared yourself to be to us.

And whom you have made us to be to yourself. We ask for all these things, In jesus name. Amen.