

Session 1

January 12, 2025

THE FOCUS OF OUR WORSHIP

Isaiah 40:21-31

Very often, the first prayer we learn as children is for mealtime grace: “God is great; God is good...” The first phrase tells us about who God is: In His *being*, He is great. The second phrase tells us about what God does: In His *doing*, He is good. The “question and answer” style of this passage from Isaiah is much the same way. The opening phrases get the reader thinking about *who* God is. The following explanations remind us of *what* God does.

The lesson theme for the next few weeks is “The Heart of Worship.” The word “worship” is derived from the Old English “worth-ship.” It denotes acknowledging one’s worth through demonstrating honor and reverence. How fitting then to begin in Isaiah 40, where we see (and acknowledge) God’s greatness in His being, and God’s goodness in His doing.

We worship the ruler of the universe (vv. 21-24). Verse 21 is meant to elicit both wonder and shame. Who could possibly deny so strong a lesson, based on such clear revelation? The prophet is astounded that anyone could possibly miss the truth of God’s greatness. In fact, he knows better! It has been evident from the beginning. The final phase of verse 21 is peculiar, as the Hebrew is a bit ambiguous. Some translations read it as “from the foundations of the earth,” thus linking it to the previous phrase. Others remove the “from” and connect it to the example that follows. I prefer the latter, as if to say, “Where do you think the earth came from anyway?” Verse 22 and following provides the answer, and then some. Notice the very clear distinctions made between the king and His realm. First, God’s *perspective* is distinct. He sees things from above. God sits above the earth with a canopy of stars, and the men of earth are like mere insects. Second, God’s *position* is distinct. The best men the world has to offer (princes and rulers, v. 23), are under His control. He raises them up and brings them down (see Dan. 2:21, Luk. 1:52 et al). And those who judge the affairs of men? He makes their rulings look empty, chaotic, or meaningless. Compared to the reign of almighty God, the empires of the earth are insignificant (v. 24). They barely rise in influence before “He blows on them” and they fade away. For reflection: *We have all been taught that in antiquity, the earth was thought to be flat. Yet Isaiah wrote of “the circle of the earth” two-thousand years before “Columbus sailed the ocean blue.” What does this say about divine revelation?*

We worship the creator of the universe (vv. 25-26). If God is reigning, He must have a realm. And this too, is of His own making. In Job-like fashion, God poses the questions that render His skeptics speechless (v. 25). Not only did God create the earth below, but He created the stars above. And according to verse 26, He did so with infinite abundance (a host of them); with individual attention (they all have name), and with providential care (none goes missing). For reflection: *Why do you think the stars are so often associated with the greatness of God? What is it about them? How does Ps. 19:1ff inform our discussion?*

We worship the strength of the universe (vv. 27-31). Here, Isaiah bridges the gap between God’s transcendence (His “out-there-ness”) and His immanence (His “closeness”). Yes, He is the God of the universe, but He is also the God of His people. As a great God and a good God, how

could He possibly ignore His chosen people? (v. 27). The answer is He doesn't. The very fact that He is Yahweh (the promise keeper), eternal (everlasting), and Creator of the universe guarantees that He not only hears the "claims" of His people, but that He strives along with them. Notice how the distinctions between Almighty God and His people are now softened with God's compassion. Mankind is weak and frail and weary (v. 28), but the great God of the universe gives him strength and power and perseverance. In fact, those who admit their failures and trust in Him will soar on the wings of eagles! (v. 31). For reflection: *We make much of the details in vv. 29-31 but try reading the phrases as one thought. What is the central theme God is conveying to His people?*