

To whom will you compare God?

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[0 : 00] We're going to dive back into this passage and think a little bit about what it means for us.

As we've just said with the kids, we thank you for the Bible, for the Word of God.

We thank you that this is the way that you've decided that you want to speak and communicate yourself and who you are and who we are. You want to tell us that all the time.

I pray that as we come now that you would help us to focus, help us to concentrate, help us to listen. And that you invite us to be changed by your Word.

And so bless us as we listen to it together and think through it together. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Now, I don't know if you like doing this as much as I do, but one of the things that I enjoy doing is going to the dump.

[1 : 13] I love going to the dump. And I think I especially, I don't know why, but I think I especially enjoy it the bigger the item is that I've got to throw away. It's kind of fun.

You've got to try, you know, the whole journey, you've got to try fit the thing in the car first. And then you've got to get there. And then you've got to decide which skip it goes in.

And then you've got to throw it away. There's something nice about going through, like, home, seeing what you need and you don't. But there is this moment, isn't there, where it's connected to that.

Now you can't just turn up at the dump. You have to book your slot at the dump. So you have to be really focused about making sure you use it really well. And there's this moment after you've booked the dump where you kind of go around the house to see if there's, that you've got the stuff that you really need to chuck.

That's kind of why you booked it. But as soon as you're already doing it now, you think, well, I'm going to have, like, a definite chuck pile. This is stuff that is broken. Oh, we totally don't need.

[2 : 18] It's just taking up too much space. And then there's this kind of, the stuff that's kind of good, but you don't want to throw it because somebody else might use it.

It's kind of the give away pile. And then there's kind of the stuff in between that you think, well, oh, man, I kind of chucked this, but it's kind of, I don't know if anybody will use it. It's still in good enough condition.

I don't want to throw it away, but I don't know if anybody will actually need it. Generally, as I've said, the definite chuck pile is stuff that is not in a good enough condition to keep.

We don't need it. In terms of its usefulness, it's kind of a lost cause. It's a lost cause, and we give up on it. The moth-eaten sofa, the beyond repair rusty bike, the bookcase where the back has been, come out of it because you've pushed books in too far.

And once you get to the dump, once you lift it up and chuck it all in, they are forgotten about. They are forgotten about.

[3 : 23] No more. You don't, apart from now, I don't generally leave the dump and then wonder what's happening to my moth-eaten sofa. It's gone forever.

It's gone. It's helpful as an illustration as we begin looking at this passage this morning. Because this whole series that we're looking at, Isaiah 40-55, it's actually written to a people that feel like they've been forgotten.

It's written to a people that feel like they've been tossed on the scrap heap. It's written to the Israelite nation after they've been thrown out of their land, Israel.

They were thrown out, just as a bit of a history recap, they were thrown out because for centuries, for many years, they hadn't been listening to God. And they hadn't been listening to the way of life that he wanted them to live in the land.

And so he sent in the Babylonians, a different nation, to take over Jerusalem and Israel. And they were kicked out.

[4 : 33] And so now it feels, they've now been taken to Babylon. They live under a foreign king with foreign gods and a foreign way of life. And it feels to them like they've been forgotten and chucked on the scrap heap.

That they're a lost cause and that God has given up on them. It feels like he doesn't care about what they're doing anymore. We get that in our passage, which we'll just look at, if you just turn to page 726.

726. You see in verse 27, second half of verse 27. Look with me. It says, what is, this is Jacob. Jacob, that's another way that we describe God's people, Israel. So you go, why do you complain, Jacob? Why do you say Israel? This is their complaint to God. This is their complaint to one another. My way is hidden from the Lord.

My cause is disregarded by my God. In other words, our way, our cause, our life is hidden.

[5 : 40] It's disregarded. It's forgotten about. What we have here is an accusation, actually, to God. It's an accusation that God has forgotten them.

It's as if he can't see us anymore. It's as if he doesn't care. He's just forgotten about us. It's as if their cause, their life situation has been totally disregarded.

They accuse God of forgetting them, of throwing them on the scrap heap. I wonder, as we start off today, I wonder if we have ever felt the same.

Like it feels like God has forgotten us. Now, we might have felt that personally. Maybe we feel like we've got nothing to give.

Or perhaps we've messed up so much in our life that nothing can ever be restored or redeemed. Or get back to how it was. And it feels like you've been forgotten.

[6 : 41] And maybe we assume that God has seized us as a lost cause. Could be individually. Perhaps we, on a bigger scale, we might even think that about our world.

Maybe we even think that about the church. And think, we look at the way the church is. Or we look at how our world is. And think, it feels like God has forgotten.

And that he's thrown in the towel. It feels like he doesn't care anymore. The good news of the Christian faith today.

Is that God does not forget anyone, anything or any situation. That is the good news of the Christian faith. And in today's Bible reading, what we have is God telling his people.

He's proving to them. He actually, the whole thing is him making a case against that accusation.

He's making the case that not only has he not forgotten them.

[7 : 39] But actually it is impossible for him to forget them. He's making the case. Sometimes, Isaiah is one of the prophets. And sometimes one of the names they give to the prophets is they call them a covenant lawyer.

It's where the promises of God. The prophet comes and he takes the promises of God. And God, like a lawyer, proves to them that when they make a case against them, that he is always faithful to the covenant, the promises, the spiritual contract that he set up.

God's line in his case against their accusation starts in perhaps quite a peculiar place. The place that we don't expect.

The place he starts is this. He starts with this true fact that we're going to look at. The first point, God has no rival. God has no rival.

In a sporting contest, when somebody has a close rival, it normally means if they're close, that they compete against someone who's on a similar playing field.

[8 : 53] If they're a close rival. They'll have to really be on their game to win. It'll be a close match. They'll be competing against one another in a close battle.

What we have here is God explaining that he doesn't have a rival. He doesn't have anybody who can match him. He doesn't have anybody that can compare to him.

There is nothing in the whole of creation that is on a similar playing field to the living God. Nothing that comes close. And we see it in three particular examples.

The first thing is that he doesn't have a rival in creation. There's no one who's able to create apart from the living God. Look with me in verse 12.

Who has measured the waters in the hollow of his hand? It's on page 725, by the way. Who has measured the waters in the hollow of his hand? Or with the breadth of his hand marked off the

heavens?

[9 : 55] Who has held the dust of the earth in a basket? Or weighed the mountains on the scales and the hills in a balance? When we see the waters and the heavens, it's kind of like from one extreme to the other.

It's used a shorthand to express everything that has been made. And we have the comparison of scale. All the oceans, the seas, every drop of water would be like a few drops of water nestling in the palm of his hand.

Waves, storms, tornadoes and hurricanes like me or you watching a drip from a kitchen tap. All the dust of the earth, every bit of mud and soil and sand on the planet, every grain in a shopping bag. In a basket. He can treat the mountains and the hills of the earth like ingredients to bake a cake. He can balance them on his scales. God has no rival in creation.

There is no person and no other deity who compares to the living gods. He has no rival in creation. The second thing that he wants to show that he has no rival in is that he has no rival with anyone who's in his wisdom.

[11 : 16] He's unrivaled in his wisdom. We'll be verse 13. Who can fathom the spirit of the Lord or instruct the Lord as his counsellor? Whom did the Lord consult to enlighten anyone who taught him the right way?

Was it that taught him... Was it that... Who was it that taught him knowledge or showed him the path of understanding? In Babylon, when Babylon had its own religious system, their own belief system, they had in the sort of plethora of many, many gods, they had to create a god.

His name was Marduk. M-A-R-D-U-K. But Marduk was different to the living god. Marduk could not create anything in Babylonian setup without consulting their other god, the wise god called Ea. Here, the God of the Bible works unaided. He doesn't need anyone else. He didn't need to overcome anyone or consult anybody to create.

He spoke with wisdom and creative power. And nothing could stand in his way. He didn't need to get a team together to brainstorm how he's going to do this. He doesn't need to hold a planning meeting or get consensus from the room about what to do next.

[12 : 35] No, every decision he makes is perfect and good and will always bring out what he tends. And he always knows the result of his actions. He is unrivaled in his wisdom.

He has all knowledge and knows everything about all things. And so he's unrivaled in creation. He's unrivaled in his wisdom. And the third thing is that he's unrivaled by any nation.

Verse 15. 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.

Do you see how the nations are described as similar language to creation, but this time smaller? We had dust before. Now we have fine dust. We had water in the whole of our hands.

Now we have a drop in a bucket. God is not challenged by them either. Their size, their strength and ability is puny. They are so small.

[13 : 41] Verse 17. It is like they are nothing. They have no impact. They are that small. He's unrivaled in creation. He's unrivaled in wisdom. He's unrivaled by the nations.

He has nothing that can match him, nothing that is on a parallel with him, nothing compares to him. He does as he pleases. What we're really seeing here, the whole point of this, is to illustrate that there is a natural order to the world that we live.

Nothing compares to the all-wise loving creator God. He's alone at the top of the pyramid and everything else sits underneath him. Nothing else and no one can ever usurp him or overthrow or alter his plans because he's unrivaled.

He's unrivaled. And God, as we're going to see, he doesn't let up with this thought. He continues to make his case against their accusation that he's been forgotten by them.

Firstly, we said, he points out that he has no rival. But what we're going to look at next is what people do as they think about our world. When people think that God has forgotten them, what they try to do is replace him, substitute him with other created things.

[15 : 03] We're going to move on to the second line in this kind of, the living God sort of dispute as he responds to their accusation. Second point is that people substitute God.

People substitute God. Everyone, without exception, forgets this natural order of God at the top of the pyramid and everything else underneath. That's the natural order of creation.

They forget and attempt to substitute God from the top for something else. Flip the order on its head, put something created in God's place, placing him underneath.

What they do is God has no rival, but they set up a rival and compare him. When we do that, when people do that, substitute something in for God's place, there is actually a name for it.

It's called idolatry. That's what it's called. When people, or when we, put something in God's place. God's people, the Israelite nation, they think they've been forgotten by God, that they've been tossed on the scrap heap.

[16:05] They think that, and so what they've, what they've done is, as they're kicked out, they're tempted to replace God with created things. Verse 18.

With whom, then, will you compare God? To what image will you liken him? Look with me from verse 19.

This is illustrating the things that they are tempted with. They are tempted by the idols and gods of Babylon. They've been tempted to substitute God for a piece of wood that's covered with gold, a lifeless statue.

Look with me at what, verse 19, the point is at how foolish this is. As for an idol, a metal worker casts it, a goldsmith overlays it with gold and fashioned silver chains for it.

And verse 20. They look for a skilled worker to set up an idol that will not topple. A piece of wood cannot help anyone.

[17:10] It's designed, the way that they go about choosing the man who's going to make it, it's designed to be something that doesn't move, that it won't topple.

It's designed to be immobile. It's designed, they hope that they choose something that will last longer, wood that won't rot. It is embarrassing to substitute the living God for a piece of wood. That's the temptation to follow Babylon's God. To substitute God for anything created, the point is, is foolishness.

We might not bow down to a piece of gold-plated wood, but we are tempted to put things in his place, to substitute God out and replace him with things that have become more important to us. And when we do that, it affects the choices we make and the way that we live. Sometimes even good things. Even really, really great things.

[18:13] But when we put our, even things that we're, a good thing is it's good to earn money, to have money, but if we substitute our bank balance in for God, it won't do us any favours.

We might even substitute, it's good to do well at school and to make progress in our jobs. But if we substitute that in for the God who made us, it will have a bearing on the choices that we make. These things are good, but they can't move. They are immobile and they can't rival God. He is over them. He is on top of them. He is at the top of the pyramid.

The second temptation that we see is to substitute the living God with the new leaders that rule over them in Babylon. You can imagine why that's the case, living in a foreign nation in captivity.

At the mercy of those in power, you'd be perhaps scared of what might happen next. There would be the temptation to fear those in power rather than fear God. But verse 21, God questions them.

[19:18] 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? In other words, have you forgotten?

Have you not forgotten the natural order of things? I'm on top. Verse 22, people are like grasshoppers. Verse 23, he brings princes to naught. He reduces the rulers of this world to nothing. End of verse 24, he can blow on them and they wither. Why? Because he sits above the circle of the earth. He's on top of the pyramid. In our world today, as we prayed earlier, there's lots going on and we might genuinely fear decisions that world leaders are making.

More sort of immediately, we might even fear our bosses. Perhaps we worry about the decisions that they might make. Maybe there's people that you interact with in your street or maybe there's people in your school that you, they have some apparent level of control or authority and we are concerned by that and we're tempted to think that they are, that they rival God.

They are like grasshoppers. He can flick them away. If he blew on them, they would wither like grass. They're not in charge but the living God is.

[20:48] Final temptation is to substitute God for nature. To look for, to look for wisdom in nature. You see that?

Just much like today, astrologers look to guidance and promote, like horoscopes and things like that. That was prevalent in Babylon culture and you see what the living God is saying.

Verse 26, lift up your eyes and look to the heavens who created all these. He brings out the starry host one by one and calls forth each of them by name because of his great power and mighty strength not one of them is missing.

The stars are created. They contain no wisdom or guidance or spiritual power. That doesn't mean the stars and the cosmos as we look up are not insignificant but they're significant not because of anything in themselves but only in relation and connection to their maker.

The names we have for the stars, the great bear, the plough, the seven sisters, that's not their names. That's human names that we have for them as we recognise constellations but they have names individually, not as groups, given to them by God.

[22 : 03] They have significance. significance. The cosmos has significance because it demonstrates the power and the strength of the almighty God who made them.

You think each star, our own sun being one of them and the power and the heat generated, it burns us without sun cream, it blinds us if we stare at it, without it we would have no life and then multiply that power and heat of our sun by millions and millions of stars and think that God made everyone and that he's in control of everyone.

There's a deep significance because it shows us the power and the might of the almighty creator and the sustainer of life. He's unrivalled in creation, he's unrivalled in his wisdom and he's unrivalled in nature.

We looked for these things to substitute for God but he's on top of them all. We then come to that verse 27 that we started with and the point is this, in light of all we've heard of who God is, no rival by all of these things, nothing compares to him, even though we try and invert and flip the order on its head and substitute God out, even though we try and do that, this is what the living God is saying to his people, why do you complain?

Why do you say my way is hidden and my cause is disregarded by me? Why do you think I've forgotten you? The almighty never lost in God is probing his people, they're accusing of him, of forgetting and disregarding them and God's question right back in their faces, in other words he's saying this, how can you accuse me of forgetting you given the order, power and control I have over the whole of creation?

[23 : 50] How can you accuse me of that? How does that accusation stand given how I am unrivalled and order all things? It doesn't stand up, how could I forget you given who I am?

If God has no rival, if nothing comes close to him, if he's beyond compare, it is impossible that he can forget anything at all and definitely not his people. They have forgotten their God, they have forgotten his character, it is their forgetfulness of who he is that leads to temptation and looking to replace him, to substituting him out.

he has never forgotten them. He has never forgotten them. Whenever we fall to temptation, we have forgotten the character of God, we have forgotten the natural order.

God has not forgotten you. God has not forgotten you. God will never forget you. And so, whatever is going on in your life right now, whatever you've done in your past, in your history, whatever things plague your mind, the things, the anxieties, the worries, you are not a lost cause.

You have not been thrown into the scrap heap. Your situation is not hopeless because the God who orders the world is a God of hope and you have not been thrown on the scrap heap because we can't accuse him of ever forgetting because he orders the whole world.

[25 : 26] After proving his point, the living God has more for them. He wants to remind them of himself but also he wants them to turn to him and recapture the true order that he's at the top of the pyramid.

He's at the top and the natural order along with the rest of creation comes underneath him. He's in control and nothing else and so he reminds them once again of what it means if they have a true understanding that he's on top.

Look with me. 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's on top. Never doubt the capacity of the Lord. His capacity is unlimited.

We will never understand all his ways. He's the everlasting eternal God. We belong to time. He doesn't. He's always ahead of us. He doesn't clock off at the end of the day to take a rest.

[26 : 29] He's not wearied by life or beaten up with excessive demands. And here's the beautiful truth that actually is the truth of the gospel, the good news, is that when we submit to that natural

order that God is at the top of the pyramid, when we allow him to be the Lord overall, he doesn't keep all that divine strength to himself but he shares it with his people.

Verse 29. 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. Fresh strength is given to those who wait and rest with patient hopeful trust in Almighty God.

Our natural resources will fail us, our natural resources will fail us. The circumstances we face in life will be too demanding.

Being in exile for the Israelite nation was too demanding. They felt like they were forgotten, we can feel like we're forgotten but if we turn to the Lord he'll renew our strength to make it through any and every circumstance and situation that you face because he shares his divine resources, his divine strength with his people.

[28 : 04] The strength that sustains the whole of creation that sustains all those things. That same strength is the strength that he gives to his people. That same strength.

In the NIV we read in this version here it reads they will saw on wings. Having looked at the original I think it translates slightly better not on wings but with wings.

they will ascend up they will mount up they will saw up with wings like eagles. You think of the bald eagle best eagle without a doubt can't touch the bald eagle white head golden beak wingspan about seven feet seven and a half feet glides effortlessly looks like it's not even trying it's kind of showing off to all the other birds.

this is the picture you picture that on an Attenborough documentary soaring over this is the picture that everyone who hopes in God who hopes in him because they recognise nothing compares with him and his majesty and power that everyone who hopes in God is given divine strength to soar through life's challenges with strength from almighty God.

To do something impossible to soar heights on one to soar heights unknown in one sense it's to become like to become like him not to become him but to become like him because he shares his divine strength with you.

[29 : 37] Our inner resources will fail but his never will strength given by God so that we can hope in him in any situation of life by waiting and resting with patient hopeful trust in almighty God.

God has not forgotten you. He's at the top of the pyramid and however you feel he gives you wings to soar with patient hopeful waiting trust.

He's unrivaled nothing compares to him. I said earlier just as we're going to come in for landing now but I said earlier that it was impossible for God to forget anything not strictly true.

The reason we have this hope is because there is just one person that God forgot that he abandoned.

You see it culminates in that God abandoned he forgot he left he left his only son Jesus Christ on the cross.

[30 : 48] He forgot him he abandoned his son on the cross so that he would never abandon us. He tossed him in the skip he tret him like a moth eaten old rug sofa not good anymore forgotten about.

God came down in the person of his son Jesus Christ Jesus Christ became a grass hopper made from the dust of the earth that would fit in the palm of God the father's hands.

He died and was abandoned so that we never would be. That's the reason we have hope. He became weary! So that in our weariness we could have the strength of almighty God given to us.

This is where it's all possible. Wait and rest with patient hopeful trust in the God who has no rival. Let's pray. Almighty God we come to you and we love your word. We delight in the fact that you want to communicate these truths to us.

[32 : 04] And Lord we know in our own hearts every single one of us as at a time thought that you had forgotten us felt like you had forgotten us thought that we were a lost cause and we had lost hope but we thank you that you came down in the person of your son you sent your son to be abandoned to be forgotten to be left to be tossed on the scrap peep so that we could have hope that we never will be we thank you that you are unrivaled you are matchless you're peerless nothing compares to you that you are the top of the pyramid and that is why we can never accuse you of ever forgetting us because you order the whole of creation and so we praise you we worship you and I ask that you would minister to us that you would remind us of this truth that you would set it

deep in our hearts and that we would trust and believe and have that hopeful patient trust in the God who gives us wings to fly and soar through life circumstances wings to be more like Jesus we ask for this in the name of Christ Amen