



Sermon – December 27, 2020
Ben Dockery

Verses Covered This Week

Isaiah 40:12 - 31

Well good morning, Central. It is an honor to be here this morning. As Phillip said, my name is Ben Dockery and it's a privilege to be with you this morning. If you have your Bibles, we're going to be in Isaiah chapter 40. Isaiah chapter 40. So if you go right close to the middle there in Psalms and keep going just a little bit you'll find Isaiah and we'll be in the 40th chapter. And before I read that for us this morning, I just want to make a few quick introductory remarks. Isaiah 40 is a significant passage both in the Scriptures, but also it has been in American history. And so Isaiah 40 showed up in all sorts of different places. President George W. Bush, when he was taking his oath of office he opened the Bible up and when he solemnly swears to uphold the office of the president, he puts his hand on Isaiah chapter 40. President Obama used this in one of the national prayer breakfasts. This was a big issue in his presidency as well. Martin Luther King, when he was giving his speech, I Have a Dream, in the middle of that speech, he actually went off script when he gives this beautiful picture for what America could look like. And the preacher background of him goes right to Isaiah chapter 40. Handel's Messiah, which you may have had a chance to hear in the last month, the lyrics that go along with Handel's Messiah come from Isaiah chapter 40. Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Peter, Paul. Each one of them in the New Testament when they're telling the good news and the story of Jesus, they all refer back to Isaiah chapter 40. I've never had a chance to preach from Isaiah 40. This is the first time I've had a chance to do this. And I have learned so much in the past few weeks getting ready for this message this morning. And my hope is that I can share just a few of those things with you. I will say I feel inadequate. We're just going to be skipping a rock off the top of this passage. There is so much here. I encourage you to spend your afternoon going to read it, study it more, talk about it in your small groups or other places in the next weeks ahead.

Now before I read it, I'm going to make a few more introductory remarks. And one is this: Central has been a church that I've been familiar with for years now. Met several friends in seminary and since then who were called to ministry in this church, the ministry of this church with Pastor Chris: so reputation-wise. Also, in addition to that, Phillip mentioned my wife, Julie. My in-laws are members here so that's also fun to come back. We've been coming here when we come back to College Station for Christmas and other things. So Reggie and Laura Holzer are members here at your church and it's a joy to be a part of, to be with you for that. Now

Reggie told me because you've gone from two services to one, that means I get to preach twice as long this morning. So just want to be aware of that. And secondly, at my church back home, we get a lot of questions about the sermon. They will just send us an e-mail afterwards and there may be some questions you have or maybe you disagree. Maybe you want to complain about how long I preached or whatever that is. So I wanted to provide you with my e-mail address. And so my e-mail address should be on the screen right here. If you just want to send me a quick e-mail, I'd be happy to respond to anything that you have a question about this morning.

Alright, Isaiah chapter 40. I'm going to begin reading in verse 12. And I'm going to read through the end. It's a long section here. And this is poetry. So if you're not familiar with, or you're not used to reading this, just hang on, hold on, Christmas fog, I know it's there. Long passage of Scripture, but want you to hear all of this this morning as we begin. Beginning in verse 12 the prophet Isaiah writes this:

¹²Who has measured the waters in the hollow of his hand, 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? ¹³Who has measured the Spirit of the LORD, or what man has given him counsel? ¹⁴Who did he consult, who made him understand? Who taught him the path of justice, and taught him knowledge, who showed him the way of understanding? ¹⁵Behold, the nations are like a drop in the bucket, they're accounted as dust on the scales; behold, he takes up the coastlands like fine dust. ¹⁶Lebanon would not suffice for fuel, nor the beasts enough for a burnt offering. ¹⁷All the nations are as nothing before him, they're accounted by him as less than nothing and emptiness.

So verse 18.

¹⁸To whom will you liken God, what likeness will you try to compare him? ¹⁹An idol! A craftsman casts it, goldsmith overlays it with gold and casts it with silver chains. ²⁰He who is too impoverished for an offering chooses wood that will not rot; he seeks out a skilled craftsman to set up an idol that will not move, or not fall over.

²¹Do you not know? Do you not hear Has it not been told to you from the beginning? Have you not understood from the foundations of the earth? ²²It is he who sits above the circle of the earth, and its inhabitants are like grasshoppers; he stretches out the heavens like a curtain, and he spreads them like a tent to dwell in; ²³who brings princes to nothing, he makes the rulers of the earth as emptiness. ²⁴Scarcely are they planted, scarcely sown, scarcely are they stem to take root in the earth, and when he blows on them, and they wither, and like the tempest, or maybe your translation says like a whirlwind, gets carried them off like stubble.

Verse 25.

²⁵To whom then will you compare, who should be like him? says the Holy One. ²⁶Lift up your eyes to the heaven and see: who created these? He who brings out these starry hosts by number, calling them all by name; by the greatness of his might and because he is strong in power, not one is missing.

Why do you say, O Jacob (this is the complaint)? Verse 27.

²⁷Why do you say, O Jacob, and speak, O Israel, “My way is hidden from the LORD, and my right is regarded, is disregarded by my God?” ²⁸Have you not known? Have you not heard? The LORD is everlasting, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He does not faint or grow weary; his understanding is unsearchable. ²⁹He gives power to the faint, and to him who has not might he increases strength. ³⁰Even youths grow tired and weary, even young men stumble and fall; ³¹but those who wait for the LORD shall renew their strength; and they shall mount up on wings like eagles; and they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not grow faint.

Please pray with me.

Spirit of God, You breathe these verses out through the prophet Isaiah. We pray now that You would breathe into our hearts. That we would be amazed once again at who You are. Give us understanding, that we may love. Give us love that we may obey. Give us obedience, Father, that we may worship You with our whole lives. We pray this in Jesus name. Amen.

Inside of this passage of Scripture, there’s actually fourteen different questions that show up this morning. And I really believe that the quality of your life is largely determined by the quality of the questions that you ask. The quality of your life is largely determined by the quality of the questions that you ask. And this morning, the prophet Isaiah’s asking a bunch of different questions. So I want to frame our time with four of those questions. This morning the four questions I’d like to kind of hang your hat on, of if you’re a fisherman, to hang your lure on this hook, is this. Is one: is God big enough? Number two: Is God strong enough? Number three, the prophet asked: Why does sometimes God seem not big enough, or weak and not strong enough? Why sometimes is He not seem like He’s those things? And then number four: Does God still see me? So those four questions are going to guide our time this morning.

I want to begin in verse 12 there with the first question. Is God big enough? Now if you’re like me, sometimes these passages, these prophets are talking about things that I can’t quite remember all the historical context. It’s, who is Isaiah talking to and what’s happening during the middle of this? And it’s really helpful to understand who he’s talking to and some of the context. So briefly, Isaiah is writing to these people of God who are following God and they have been dispersed. They have been exiled. There is an enemy who has come and taking them out of their land. And so they’re no longer in the place that they have known in Jerusalem where the temple is, where they have these festivals, where everything is normal and normal life is now taken away. And they don’t know what’s going to happen because the Assyrian, or maybe the Babylonian government during this time as they’re reading this, maybe their future is in question. Maybe they don’t know exactly what is going to happen. And because of that, they begin asking whether or not Yahweh, their God, is big enough for this new circumstance that they’re in. Their circumstances, their challenges are driving them to ask questions about who God is. So what does Isaiah say? He says, “God’s not stuck in Jerusalem. Just because your circumstances aren’t the same, don’t forget who He is. Don’t forget who I’ve told you. What does he do with the waters? He measures them in the hollow of His hand. Phillip mentioned that we live up in Chicago. And if you’re familiar with Chicagoland area, Chicago is situated on a big lake there. It’s called Lake Michigan. Lake Michigan, if you were to try to get on a boat

and go across it, it's over a hundred miles across. To go to top to bottom, it's over 300 miles North to South. So I tried to get this in Texas terms and here's what it is. If you got in a car right now and you drove to El Paso, and then you drove up to Dallas, and then you drove down to Houston, and then looped back into College Station, it's within a few miles of how big that Lake Michigan is, right? It's a big piece of water. And on average, Lake Michigan is about 300, almost 300, feet in depth. OK? So just to give you an idea, and I don't even know what this number means, but I know that this number is true because I read all the research, or science, on it. And that Lake Michigan holds one quadrillion gallons of water. One quadrillion gallons of water. OK. What in the world does that number mean? Well, how about this. If you wanted to lower Lake Michigan one inch, you would have to empty four hundred billion gallons of water to lower the lake one inch. You know what Isaiah says? God puts that in His hands and He looks at Lake Michigan and He compares it to the Atlantic Ocean in His other hand. He says, "You want to know how big your God is? He measures the waters in His hands like this." And then he says, "He looks at the sky and He holds it between His finger and His thumb, His forefinger and His thumb. That's what He does with the sky. It's this big. He takes the Rocky Mountains and He puts them on a scale on one side and He grabs another mountain and He sticks it over here to weigh them." Heh! That's what God is doing with the earth. He is grand. He is majestic. He is indescribable. He is bigger than any circumstance that these people are going to face. Isaiah says, "If you have questions, let's remember who God is. Let's remember the size of our King." And then he says this, he says, "Not just is He grand enough, is He big enough, but you know how He learned these things? You know how He's able to do that? You know where He went to school? You know what degree He got on the wall? You know His consultant is that He hired in to learn how to do these things? Nobody. There's nobody that taught God how to do these things. There's no one that explained to Him how He can drop Lake Michigan in the palm of His hand. There is no one like our God." Isaiah says, "Is God big enough?" Absolutely. Whatever circumstance that you are in this morning, remember that God is big enough.

The second question he asked is, "Is God strong enough?" Now, again, if you think about the context here in Isaiah. They have been removed, they're in, they're living underneath a foreign enemy. Someone else is now setting the rules. Who's in charge? Who says what you can worship? You can't go to the temple. The temple has been destroyed. How are you going to get sacrifices? How are you going to relate to God? What are you going to do when someone else is setting the rules for your life? And the people of God are asking a question like this. And so Isaiah's going to give them some context, something to measure, something to understand what God might be doing in the middle of a foreign enemy that God says He's sending to them to refine them. He's actually sending this other enemy, He's using the Assyrian army, He's using Babylon to come to Israel and to help them turn back to God because of the way that they have been living. The things that they have forgotten. Verse 21 says,

²¹Do you not know? Have you not heard?

These are imperfect verbs that are essentially saying, "You already know these things." You've learned songs like we just sang here this morning that talk about the strength of God. Isaiah says, "You already know this. You went to temple. You studied the Torah. You memorized these verses." You already know this, but let me remind you how strong God is." And what illustration does he use? He takes them to the nations and he says, do you know the GDP of

China? Fourteen trillion dollars last year, right? That's a lot of leverage if you're in an argument. China has a quite a bit of power if they want to exercise it, right? Do you know how big the American military is? You know how massive it is? What does God say? Each one of those nations, sticks them on a scale, and they're like dust. They don't even register. They're not even heavy enough, they're not significant enough to even show up when you're going to compare them to who God is. Isaiah's saying, you're worried about Assyria? You're worried about Babylon coming in? Who do you serve? Who rules the world? It's not these foreign enemies. It's Yahweh. It's your God who from the foundations of the earth has been running the world. And just because you got moved out of that circumstance, doesn't mean He stopped doing His job. God is big enough and He is strong enough. Sometimes it's easy to lose this perspective, right? 2020 was helpful for us in this way. Is that, I think, many of you may be like me, and that is, you began to believe that this globalized innovative, unbelievable world in which we are living in, how connected we are, how much power that we have, the things that are happening, the technology that we carry around with us, right. In some ways it seems like we're untouchable. In some ways it seems like there is nothing that could sort of thwart what it is that's happening right now. Except for something so small that you can't even see it. This little microbe that gets released and takes a globalized economy and absolutely stops it; just halts it in its steps. People can't get on planes, they can't travel, they can't move, the economy is crashing, right. This powerful, powerful engine, the nations. If you put them on a scale compared to God they don't even show up as dust. Like a speck. God is big enough and He's strong enough to meet any circumstance that Isaiah and Israel was entering and He's big enough and strong enough to meet you wherever you are as well.

But if that's true, if that's true, why is it the third question, why is it that God sometimes seems small? Why does He sometimes seem weak? Or at least why do we live that way, right? Why is that true? Well, I think Isaiah gives us an instinct into this. He asks that question twice. I don't know if you heard it when we read through the Scripture. Who are you going to compare Me to? Who are you going to, who are you going to think that I am like? And he says, an idol, right. Something that a craftsman can build. Something that you can get gold and silver, these expensive things, and you can form and shape something and then that is what you will compare Me to, is what Isaiah says. And this is what commonly, right in the Scriptures, is referred to as idolatry. Or you're taking your attention and you're replacing, you're doing this great swap between the place where God should be and you put something else in that place. You just do an inverse; you do a swap. You take something, you put it where God should be, and you take God and you put it where something should be, right. And so you take a big God and you put Him in a small box. You take something in a small box, something packaged up, and you put it in this place where you say, "I'm going to find life there." And, you know, we're much more sophisticated today than maybe we seem like these ancient Assyrians are where they're doing this out of wood and they're carving that. That's not the way that it happens today in our lives. But you and I are subject to misplacing and swapping out our allegiances and our loyalties and our love just like Israel was then. It can happen to you and to me in the same way. Ray Ortlund says this, a pastor in Nashville, he says that we worship what we make because we can control what we make. Let me say it again. We worship what we make because we want to worship what we can control. Right? We want to worship the things that once we worship that, we get to set the limits. Because if we make it, then we can say, "Ah, no, you don't have to do this and you don't have to do this." God didn't really say this, and we're the ones who are in control of what that looks like. We're looking for life or looking for significance or purpose in the wrong

places. We're trading out where God should be for where we should be. It's a swap that happens. Let me try to make this practical for you today. I went and looked at one of the most common gifts, some of the hottest gifts in 2020. What were people buying, right? What were they potentially looking for life to find? Looking for significance. Looking to identify themselves with so that other people might think a certain way about them, right. Let me name some of these potential gods. It doesn't mean they are. But it does mean that people might try to replace them and put them in this place of God. Right? Vitamix. Lululemon, lemon, I'm not sure how you say it down here. Ping. Tesla. Right? Peloton. Apple. Xbox 5. These things are crafted by the best craftsmen around. They use the best gold; they use the best silver. And it's easy to take something that is created by man and to take it and say, "That's where I'm going to find life." If I only had that thing. If I could possess it. If I could consume it then I would have life. Then I would really be someone. Then my identity would be secure if everyone knew I had this. In the same way Israel did that we can do the exact same thing today, right? You can go to home good and it becomes a temple where you can find little idols if you want to. One person, one pastor, says it this way. He said that, he's talking about the culture of consumption that we are in and he says this. Amazon is the new temple. The Visa statement is the new altar. Double-clicking is the new liturgy. Lifestyle bloggers are the new priests and priestesses because money is the new god. We look to money to find life. We look to money to find identity. We look to money to find security and safety. And what God was doing to Israel is He was removing those things from them, putting them in a new place and saying, "Do you think I'm big enough? Do you think I'm strong enough?" And the reason that they didn't is because they were looking to things and not God in order to find who they were in their security.

The fourth question this morning is, they're asking, the text is in verse 27. It says this. Verse 27. They're really asking, "Do you still see me? You're big. You're strong. We know we've looked in the wrong places, but do You see where we are right now? This is sort of the existential, the angst, the question that Israel would have been living in is, does God still pay attention to them? Is maybe He too big in order to see them anymore? Little Israel who's now lost and scattered among foreign people. Does God even see where they are? And he says, "Why do you complain, Jacob? Do you know see? My way is hidden from the Lord. My cause is disregarded by God." That's what they're asking. And the way that Isaiah answers this question is really interesting. But before I answer that, let me just say one thing. This complaint of Israel is a complaint based on judgment they are receiving. It's not a complaint based on the evil that has been done to them as victims or maybe grief and loss in their life. So this year, if you have experienced, if you have experienced evil coming at you or you've experienced grief and loss, this is not the kind of complaint. Those complaints are legitimized over and over in the Scriptures. There's a whole, there's a whole basket of them called lamentations, right. Lots of the Psalms are essentially complaints to God saying, "Why am I experiencing this evil in my life?" And unjust evil. In the same way Jesus experience unjust evil. But this is experiencing, this is experiencing God's refining fire in their life. And they're complaining about it. They've misplaced their hope and they misplaced their trust and yet they are still complaining. "God do you even see me down here?" And God answers them and He answers them by returning to point number one and returning to point number two. He says, "Look at Me. Look at My character. Am I big enough? Am I strong enough?" The, my favorite part in this is in verse 26 right before the complaint as He says, "Did you look up in the stars? And did you look up in the sky? Did you see all the stars? I made them come out; every single one of them. They lined up. They saluted me. I didn't lose track of where they were. I know each one of these stars by

name.” In other words, I don’t come out at night and look up in the sky and go, “Where’s Jupiter? Did Jupiter show up tonight? His he on call? Where is the one that looks like the cup? Where’s the saucer? Where’s the big dipper? Did he show up tonight?” No. Every night they go to their appointed place because God has told them to go there. Let me give you a little bit of perspective. I heard this from a pastor name Louie Giglio. I encourage you to go look it up. His name is Louie Giglio. Type in golf ball next to Louie Giglio and you’ll hear this unbelievable explanation. It takes him 15 minutes to do it. We don’t have that much time but I’ll give you to it in a minute or two. As he says, do you know the size of the earth compared to the size of a star in our galaxy? Let’s just take the sun. The sun’s about 93 million miles away from us, right? That’s further than El Paso, by the way, just so you know. 93 million miles away. And do you know how many earths you could pick up and put inside of the sun? You could pick up a million earths and put them inside of the sun. That’s how big the sun is, right? So if the earth were this big, this golf ball, you could take a million of these things and put them in a bucket and then that would be the size of the sun. That’s one star in our galaxy. You know how many stars there are in our galaxy? When I looked this up, I love the quote, it says this, “There are estimated to be one hundred thousand million stars.” And I was like, did one of my daughters write this? One hundred thousand million? Isn’t there, aren’t there numbers beyond that? So that’s about a hundred billion stars in our galaxy. A hundred billion stars. Find yourself. This is the earth. Find yourself in this golf ball. Do you see yourself? Put a dot on where you are. And now to make one of those stars, there’s a million of these inside the sun. That’s one of a hundred billion stars inside of our galaxy alone. Who made these? Isaiah says. And these respond to God when He shows up and He says, “Line up in the sky again tonight, starry hosts.” Each one of them. And He knows them, each one by name. There’s a star called the Canis Majoris which for years and years was thought to be the largest star inside of our galaxy. Canis Majoris is this unbelievable star discovered by the Hubble telescope and when it is found, the size of this thing just absolutely blows your mind. OK. I said the sun was big; and yes, it is. And it’s true that a million earths could be found inside of this, inside the sun. Now imagine that this golf ball, right, imagine that this golf ball is the earth. If I was to go to Kyle Field and start filling up Kyle Field with golf balls, let’s just say Kyle Field is this star, this Canis Majoris. How many golf balls do you think I could get inside of Kyle Field in order to show you the size of this star, Canis Majoris? Which isn’t even the biggest star anymore. But they thought it was for a long time. I don’t know the answer to that question. But I know this. When they did the math, you could take golf balls across the entire state of Texas, not just one-inch-deep, but 22 inches deep, filled with earths. We could just stand there and throw them 22 inches deep across the entire state. That’s how big Canis Majoris is. One star. One grand star that God has made. And He knows it by name. And I think this reflection is what Jesus is getting at. He’s studying Isaiah chapter 40. He’s doing His devotionals one morning in Isaiah 40 and He’s sending out His disciples and what does He say? You’re about to go out into trouble. You’re carrying my word. Yes, you will face trouble. But what? God pays attention to these two little birds. There’s not two birds that fall to the earth without Me knowing exactly who they are. I know they’re name and I know you and I know the hairs on your head. I know all the names of the stars and I know every name that’s in this room this morning. Anyone who’s joining us online and who’s watching, He sees you. He sees where you are. He knows where you are. And God says, “I’m coming to you. I’m big enough and I’m strong enough to come to you and to see exactly where you are this morning.” We serve an absolutely majestic God. Unthinkably big. Who’s given us a universe that we get to explore and will never find the ends of it. We’ll absolutely never find the ends of it. It’s an opportunity for us, for our hearts to enlargen with wonder and to send us into worship.

And that when we sing this closing song in a second, our hearts just burst because we serve a God who is so grand and He's not just so grand, but He sees us where we are. And He comes to us and then this is the result, the final few verses of this passage. The result of looking at the character of God is this, as he says. Some of you are tired. 2020 got you. You're exhausted, right? The apps on the back of your phone, they just keep running all the time. Your mind is thinking about the news or health or something. And because of that you're just worn down. And it's taking, you're more quick to be tempered or you're angry at work or you're short with your kids or you're turning to things to medicate that you used to not. You're not able to sleep in the same way. You've grown tired, you've grown weary, you've asked questions you haven't asked in a while. And what does God say? That might be the exact place that He wants to meet you to show you how big He is. To show you how strong He is. To come along and refill you, to renew you, to give you strength. And not just to give you strength, to make you soar like eagles, to make you run and not grow tired, to make you walk and not grow faint. God is saying that when we turn our trust away from these small things that we're looking for life in, not these idols, not these things you can consume or produce. But when you turn to Him, He can and will give you strength. He can and will refill you or refuel you. How do we know that? What did God do to us so that we might actually know that He's going to fill us back with that strength? Well, God's Son, Jesus, had a similar complaint to Israel. He's dying on a cross and He says, "My, My God. Why have You forsaken Me?" He asked that question. And then He says, "To You I submit My Spirit. I give You My life." At the end of His life. You have God in the form of Jesus who is filled with strength. He does not exercise His strength. But what does He do? He endures judgment for us. And He turns and He says, "Because I have endured this judgment, I am freeing you to live life. I'm refilling you. I experience the judgment so you don't have to experience it. And now I have overcome death and I'm giving you life. I'm just giving it away. All who place their trust in Me, all who turn their life to Me, they will find life. They will experience forgiveness of their sins. Jesus offered up this complaint and God met Him in the middle of that complaint and He says, "I see you." And He brings Him back to life and He does the same for you and He does the same for me. You might be tired this morning. You might be weary. I don't know what's going on in your life, but I encourage you to look to a God who created everything there is, who has no limits on Him. As the Scripture says, He is everlasting. Think about who He is. Take your complaints. Run to Him and find Him in the cross. He has demonstrated His love for you. He knows you by name. He knows the hairs on your head. He sees everything that you're going through. And He says, "I'm strong enough to meet you where you are. I'm big enough to conquer any enemy. You don't have to settle for these small things. I see you and I love you."

Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, when we stop to think about the words from Isaiah, we recognize how small we are in this world. How short we're here. We see what you do with princes, with nations, God we see that You can hold the waters in the hollow of Your hand. There is no one like You, God. Forgive us, we pray, when we make You small. Forgive us, we pray, when we pray small prayers as if You are a small God. Forgive us, God, when we believe that You don't see us exactly where we are. And God, we thank You and we praise You that You have demonstrated Your love for us. Not just said something, but You did something about it. You kept Your promise to find Israel, to send them a conqueror, a king, who would give up His strength so that we could find strength. Who would become faint so that we would not have to remain faint.

Who'd become weary so we would not have to say weary. So God we thank You and we praise You this morning. We pray these things in Jesus name. Amen.