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The Greatness of God (Oct 1957)

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Scripture reading: Isaiah, chapter 40.

The Apostle Paul said that prophecy was given with a view to edification, exhortation, and comfort (1 Cor. 14:3). In the light of this statement, it would seem that should ministry fail in this regard, it fails in its primary purpose. It is clear that when Isaiah wrote that part of his Prophecy called chapter 40, he was endeavouring to comfort God's people for he opens this chapter with the words, "Comfort ye, comfort ye My people" (V. 1).

Let us see how in a very simple yet important way he sought to do this by directing their thoughts to God, "Behold your God" (V. 9). No doubt Isaiah realized it was important for the people of God to be taken up at times with their circumstances, their responsibilities, their leaders, and even with their mistakes and failures, but he definitely saw their need for a more intensive occupation with God. What better theme could any preacher have before him than this? What more important subject could be uppermost in any believer's heart than being taken up with God and His things?

Notice please how he challenged them, "Behold your God." He did not say, behold the God of Abraham, of Isaac, or of Jacob. It is true that He was likewise the God of these patriarchs, but it seems that the prophet wanted to more deeply impress the people, so he said, "Your God." Jabez called Him, "The God of Israel;" Jacob called Him, "The God of my father;" but Daniel reached further and said, "My God." How sweet and blessed for

the child of God, however weak, poor, or simple to be able to look to heaven and say concerning the God Who sits there, “My God.”

Isaiah presents God to them in a fourfold way: in His grace (V. 2), His greatness (V. 12), His glory (V. 5), and His gift (V. 29). While it would be helpful and comforting to consider each of these in this article, we shall confine ourselves to the one feature, the greatness of God.

The Greatness of His Person

In order to manifest His greatness Isaiah makes mention of a number of created things.

The Waters: This writer likely had in mind much more than the oceans, even if only these with their vastness, depth, and seemingly irresistible force are meant, how great must be the person of God, for Isaiah writes concerning Him, “Who hath measured the waters in the hollow of His hand.”

The Heavens: If the grandeur of the ocean causes us to stand in awe and wonder, how much more the heavens! We, like David, the shepherd boy of the hills of Judea, consider the heavens and are at once impressed with the nothingness of man and the greatness of the One Who measured these with His span.

The Nations: The great and populous nations that occasionally have drenched the world in blood and, we fear, threaten to do so again, are to our God as only a drop in a bucket. A drop of a bucket! We would hardly bother to turn the bucket over in order to empty it, or take a cloth to wipe it out. Such then are the nations in the sight of God. How small, how valueless, and how unimportant they all are!

The Greatness of His Power

“He that sitteth upon the circle of the earth…that bringeth the princes to nothing” (Vv. 22-23). As the prophet wrote this, his mind must have been engaged in retrospect, and as we read his words, our minds as well become occupied with the salient points of history. Proud Pharaoh said, “Who is the Lord that I should obey His voice?” No one else mattered to him, but self; therefore, he openly defied the God of heaven. What happened to him in his pride? God drowned him in the Red Sea.

Nebuchadnezzar (Dan. 4: 30) in some respects was in the same frame of mind; he was a boastful haughty man, but God humiliated him and sent him out to graze like a beast of the field until he knew that the Most High ruled among the children of men.

Herod, a similarly proud monarch beheaded James, and intended to do the same to Peter (Acts 12). We are familiar with the wonderful way in which God delivered Peter, and how He dealt with Herod. Such is the greatness of God’s power, He sent a few worms and Herod’s life ended in pain, humiliation, and shame.

Napoleon boastingly said, “God is on the side of the army with the heavier battalions,” and so he set out for Moscow. God sent a few snowflakes, bogged down his armies, and smashed his power. “He…bringeth the princes to nothing.” How comforting to know that there is nothing too hard for the Lord, and that He can right every wrong in the Church, the home, and in the world!

The Greatness of His Understanding

“There is no searching of His understanding” (V. 28). God is not only great in His person and power, but He is infinite in His wisdom and knowledge. He knows the end from the beginning, and the darkness and the light are alike to Him. He looketh on the heart, and all things are naked and open before Him. His knowledge was made evident in His dealings with the seven churches of Asia (Rev. 2-3). To each He said, “I know.” To one of them, He said, “Where thou dwellest;” to another, “What thou doest;” and to a third, “What thou art.” How comforting such a fact is to those who are right and doing right! How searching to those engaged in anything of a questionable nature! God knows the widow’s tears, the orphan’s struggle, the young Christian’s temptation, the overseer’s burden, and the preacher’s need. Like Peter, we bow in His presence and with worshipping hearts say, “Thou knowest all things.”

The Greatness of His Care

“He shall feed His flock like a shepherd” (V. 11). While He has been brought before us as a great personage possessing great power and infinite understanding, lest we should be over-awed and made to feel too small and too weak and insignificant in His sight, He is pictured for us as a Shepherd in His tender care for the sheep of His pasture. When we think of a shepherd, we think of one who has to deal firmly with the sheep, yet of one who is tender, kind, and sympathetic. As a shepherd, Christ feeds and gathers His own; moreover, He carries them in His bosom. What a blessed example for the under-shepherds! Amidst all the changing scenes and

trials of their work, how comforting to know that God is the God Who cares.

The Apostle Paul asks, “Doth God take care ….?” (1 Cor. 9:9). He then goes on to prove from the Old Testament that He does care, and cares even for the beasts of the field. During His earthly sojourn the Lord Jesus showed that He cared for the lilies, the ravens, and the sparrows. Let us stop and consider how very much He cares for His blood-bought children.

The Fear of God (Feb 1958)

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“Ought ye not to walk in the fear of our God … ?” (Neh. 5:9)

Nehemiah and his companions were doing a great work for God: the building of the wall, and the putting in order of the gates. Like every other work of God, it became a target for the attacks of the enemy. For a time, these attacks came largely from the outside; but they were successfully withstood, and the work continued. However, in chapter 5, we see the enemy’s purpose to be the same, but his methods were changed: he was stirring up strife and trouble inside (5:1-5).

Nehemiah, a man of God, was no doubt greatly disturbed because of this, and felt that something had to be done. What did he do? Give up? Cease the work? No! And why not? Because it was a work of God that he was engaged in; what he was doing was in keeping with the will and the word of God.

When difficulty arises in the assembly, there are some who say, “We give up,” and off they go, abandoning a scriptural position, and often going to places in which are found good Christians and good work, but for which there is no scriptural authority. The assembly is of God; let us abide by it.

Note also that he did not say, “Well, it’s clear that we cannot all agree together; we will not give up, but we will divide up.” Rather, he realized that it was one city, one wall, one work; and in it, every man and his work was needed. There would be strength and prosperity in

unity, but weakness and poverty in division. Unity is something which God likes (Ps. 133) and which Satan hates. Let us see to it that we all aim at what pleases God in this connection.

What did Nehemiah do? He reminded his brethren of "the fear of our God." What would be more likely to dispel our troubles than the fear of God? Perhaps most are more inclined to walk in the fear of man; but that, of course, brings a snare. David and Peter both discovered that. Nehemiah did not fear man, so much so that of one he said, "I chased him from me." How important: he feared God! Had he known the old hymn, he would likely have used it:

"Trust no party, sect, or faction;

Trust no leaders in the fight.

Cease from man and look above thee;

Trust in God, and do the right!"

What Is the Fear of God? The fear of God is not a slavish fear of death or judgment. Perfect love has cast out such a fear. Mr. W. E. Vine suggests that the fear of God is "a wholesome dread of displeasing God." If this fear were in our hearts day and night, would not our private and assembly lives be greatly changed?

Reasons For Fearing God

1. His Greatness and Majesty. Let us ever remember that He is a great God. If we were to stand in the presence of kings, presidents, or emperors, would we not do so in a very careful, becoming way? Yes, and rightly so! How much more then should we do so when

we consider the awful majesty and absolute authority of God!

2. His Holiness. Has this not lost its grip on our hearts? God is so holy, that Moses was told, “Put off thy shoes” (Ex. 3:5); holy beings veil their faces and feet and cry, “Holy, holy, holy” (Isa. 6:3). On the cross, the Lord Jesus was forsaken and cried, “Why?” “Thou art holy,” echoes the Psalmist (Ps. 22:3). If these remarkable individuals have had such experiences, how much more should we dread to displease our God!

3. His Judgment. Think of those who lost their fear of God: Uzziah did what was “right in the sight of the Lord” at the beginning of his reign. “He sought God” and “God made him to prosper” … (2 Chron. 26:4-5). However, “when he was strong … he transgressed against the Lord his God.” As a result, God smote him, and he became a leper (2 Chron. 26:16-21).

Ananias and Sapphira were carried out lifeless, because the hand of God was upon them for lying to the Holy Spirit (Acts 5:1-11). Solemnly, we must realize that those who lost their fear of God, experienced His judgments upon them.

Results Of Fearing God

1. It Will Keep Us from Sin (Ex. 20:20). Sinners have “no fear of God”; hence, their excessive sin (Rom. 3:8). When Abraham was in the place where there was no fear of God, he sinned (Gen. 20:11). Job was a man that feared God, and consequently he eschewed evil (Job 1:1). Joseph is another good illustration (Gen. 37: 9). His master’s eye was not upon him; his brethren were not at hand; and yet he fled from sin. Why? He feared God!

2. It Will Produce Reverence (Ps. 89:7). Do we not freely acknowledge that this is sadly lacking in many of our lives and assembly gatherings? Late arrivals, early departures, and irreverent demeanour are sometimes much too common. We could not imagine a priest in the tabernacle or the temple going in to execute holy orders in a careless, irreverent fashion. As he would tread those courts, he would feel that God was there — holy, majestic, eternal. Let us all watch our deportment just as carefully.

3. It Will Lead Us to Treat Our Brethren Properly (Gen. 42:18). Joseph had suffered much at the hands of his brethren, a difficult, cruel group of men. Now the position is reversed: he is in power and they are at his mercy. Had he meted out stern judgment, we could not have blamed him; but he did not do so. Why not? He feared God! A Christian who fears God will not speak evil or act evilly toward a fellow-saint. It may be that many of their ways and associations are unacceptable to him, but he will do what is right toward them because of the dread of displeasing God.

4. It Will Solve Assembly Troubles (Phil. 2:12). I rather think that this verse refers to the salvation of the Philippian assembly from trouble, and possibly the trouble referred to elsewhere between two sisters. Paul says to them, “Work out your own salvation with fear.” If this were present our assembly troubles would soon be gone. If all of us walked in God’s fear and wanted only what was right, surely our troubles would disappear overnight. Why are assembly difficulties often not solved? I submit that the reason is a lack of the fear of God.

5. It Will Promote Fellowship (Mai. 3:16). God says that fellowship is good and pleasant; God loves it, but Satan hates it, and will do anything he can to mar or hinder it. But if we fear God, fellowship will be seen in greater measure. How much need there is for a greater amount of fellowship based upon a whole-hearted acceptance of the truth of God in His fear!

Rewards Of Fearing God

Nothing that I see in Scripture yields better dividends than does the fear of God.

1. It Will Bring Blessing (Ps. 115:13). As we think of our homes, our assemblies, and our service, do we not need and long for the blessing of God? Is He as good as His Word? Let us put Him to the test. (See Gen. 22:12; 24:1.)

2. It Will Bring Protection (Ps. 34:7). Daniel in the lions' den is an illustration of this blessing. He seemed happier and safer in the den than did the king in his palace. "My God hath sent His angel, and hath shut the lions' mouths." How much he experienced the protection of God!

3. It Will Bring Honour (Ps. 15:4). Whether we admit it or not, most of us would like a little honour. The trouble is that we seek it from the wrong source. It is the Lord Who lifteth up. The men of Babel said, "Let us make us a name." God called Abraham out from it all, and said, "I will make thy name great," and He did. The men of Babel died "Unwept, unhonoured and unsung," but Abraham has been honoured in life and death. Today, his name occupies an honoured place in the pages of Holy Writ, and in the hearts of God's own people.

4. It Will Bring Revelation (Ps. 25:14). There are some who do not seem to be great readers or students, yet in a peculiar way, they seem to know the mind of God. It may be that this is the secret: God makes known His secrets as He did to Abraham (Gen. 18:17).

5. It Will Bring Fulfilled Desires (Ps. 145:19). Despite Lot's departure and worldliness, Abraham longed for his good, and stood before the Lord on Lot's behalf. God granted Abraham's desire and sent Lot out of the overthrow (Gen. 19:29).

6. It Will Bring Abundant Provision (Ps. 34:9). Some of us have listened with rapt attention to men of God who can tell of years of service, and of the wonderful way in which God has met their many needs — material, physical, mental, and spiritual.

As the days darken and the difficulties increase, we do well to take carefully to heart the words of Nehemiah, "Ought ye not to walk in the fear of our God?" "It shall be well with them that fear God." (Eccl. 8:12).