

To Whom Will You Compare Me?

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[0:00] Well, how good are you at comparing things? Because we're going to do a lot of comparing this morning! And I want to tell you right up front, it's going to be a bit strange because of the one being compared is none other than God himself.

Now, here in Isaiah 40, God is out to comfort his people. How does God comfort his people as captives down in Babylon, even before they get there?

Well, he does so by telling them that their suffering days are over. He's coming to get them. And in a great display of glory, he's going to save them.

And not just that, there were promises made to these people hundreds of years earlier that God was going to so bless them that they would become a blessing to all the nations of the world.

But how do we know that those promises won't fail? How do we know they'll happen? It seemed, as they looked out, that nothing could be further from the truth.

[1:10] The Babylonians, holding them in captivity. The temple burned. The city of Jerusalem destroyed. Their towns decimated.

The land scorched. And their best and finest hauled away into captivity. How can we know these promises are true? The answer, behold your God.

Behold the promiser. Get your eyes on who the one is who has promised. We cannot trust God better than we know God. We cannot honor God as we ought unless we know Him as He is.

And so in this chapter we have the unknown God making Himself known to us. Now that's not an easy proposition. For God to make Himself known to man.

Because He's not like us. He's not just a little higher version than man. Rather, He's so far above us.

[2:11] As high as the heavens are above the earth. So much distance is there between His ways and thoughts than our ways and thoughts. He's incomprehensible. We cannot wrap our minds around Him.

He's beyond our wildest imagination. He's beyond finding out. And so in revealing Himself to us, He's got to stoop way down low to tell us what He's like.

And in revealing Himself to us, He compares Himself to what is known by us. Big things.

Important things. Things that carry a lot of weight with men. Things like creation. Huge. Like the nations. And their mighty leaders.

Like idols. And in comparing Himself to them. We're made to see that in fact, They really don't compare to Him at all.

[3:09] There's no comparison here. And they only serve as objects To communicate to us something of His unmatched greatness. To whom will you compare me?

Or who is my equal? Says the Holy One. Now are there any five to ten year olds here who like to play basketball? Could I see your hand? Okay.

We're going to do some comparing. Let's say that we're at a basketball court. And we're going to put you on the court with LeBron James. And we're going to have a little game of 21.

One on one. And after about two minutes, The score is going to be 21 to zero. And we're going to all say, There was no comparison. No comparison.

Well, that was the whole purpose of the exercise. To demonstrate you don't compare to Him. And that's the purpose of this exercise today in Isaiah 40.

[4:10] As we're comparing God to these things that are so big and vast to man, We'll come away at the end saying, No comparison. Well, He takes the big things, doesn't He?

Takes creation. The first thing that He compares Himself to. We saw that last week. And so He takes the waters. Oceans that you can't even see across. Lakes that you can't even see across.

And He holds the waters.

He measures the waters in the hollow of His hand. And then He takes us out under the sky in the universe. And He says, What about the vastness of the sky? Well, we've got to come up with new measuring units.

How can we even measure this vastness? And we come up with light years. Billions of them. And God says, I've just marked off the heavens with my hand breath.

And as for the dust of the earth, I carried in a basket the mountains. I put them on the scales, the hills in a balance. The vast creation, when compared to God, is as nothing.

[5:17] There is no comparison. It is dwarfed before its creator. And it's not just His power to create that is so vast in the creation.

It's His wisdom to create. And so He asks us, What wise scientist has understood the mind of the Lord? Or instructed Him as His counselor?

The mere suggestion is laughable. None compared to His wisdom in creation. Now, He's never done with creation. It's a strain that reaches right on through to the very end of the chapter.

We'll see it even next week. We move on then. Having compared Himself to the creation, He moves on now to compare Himself with the nations. And why the nations?

Well, precisely because they were the things that were threatening and demoralizing Israel. First, it was the mighty Assyrians, destroying the northern kingdom and nearly destroying all of the southern kingdom.

[6:22] Then, over a hundred years later, it would be the Babylonians. And remember, Isaiah is writing as if this has already happened. The mighty Babylonian nation that would come and conquer them and decimate the land and their temple and their capital and take them away into captivity.

The world's great nations were causes for daily worries and fears to the Israelites. Now, that might be hard for you to think of, living in the land of the free.

What would have it been like to have lived in Hitler's Nazi Germany? Or in Pol Pot's Cambodia and the killing fields?

About the same year as I was getting a four degree in college, Pol Pot was responsible for two million of his own people being killed. A fourth of the population.

What would it be like to be a neighbor to somebody like that? To have these nations breathing out slaughter? Well, they were mighty, dangerous, fearful, fearsome objects to Israel.

[7:37] Even today, nations continue to hold our attention, as seen in the news. Who's got the greatest military might? Who's got the nuclear weapons and the capabilities to deliver them?

Who's got the great economies of the world? The most economic strength, the political clout, the leverage over other nations in technology, in education, in all these different ways.

Well, little Israel was powerless before the great nations. She's just a little nation. And they were cause for great alarm. Isn't it true that the powerful things that men fear are also the things that men tend to trust in?

So, in fearing one powerful nation, Israel put her trust in other powerful nations, only to see it backfire.

So, she trusts in Assyria to save her from Syria, only to have Assyria prove not to be her deliverer, but her destroyer. And then it would be Babylon, Egypt, trusting in nations because they're powerful.

[8:51] They can help us. They can save us. And so, it's the nations that God says, okay, if it's the nations you fear, if it's the nations you trust, then let's do some comparing with the nations.

And as we do, we must put our own nation on the line as well. What does he say about the nations? Verse 15, surely, there's no doubt about this, the nations are like a drop in a bucket.

Kids, if you've got a bucket, you fill up with water at the house, and you're headed to the garden to water the vegetables, and if on your way, one drop spills out of the edge of your bucket, do you stop and turn around and go back and refill?

Or do you not rather say, what is a drop in a bucket? It is insignificant. It is not missed at all. And God says, that is the significance of the nations compared to me.

They are a drop in a bucket. They're regarded as dust on the scales. So you're at the farmer's market, and you're buying five pounds of potatoes.

[10:02] And you notice that when the shop owner last emptied the scales of potatoes to the last customer, that there is just a little bit of dust left on the scales.

You don't say, now wait a minute here. I want you to wipe that dust off before you weigh my potatoes. Why not? Because it's insignificant. It doesn't affect your five pounds. And God says, that's what the nations are. They're dust on the scales. In fact, he weighs the islands. Some people translate the coastlands as though they were fine dust. Just plop. Just a piece of dust is all that they are to him. So who's afraid of the big bad wolf? Who's afraid of the big bad Babylon?

A drop in a bucket. A piece of dust on a scale compared to our God. That's the mighty nations of today. Gather them all together.

[11:07] And the United... Well, we'll get to that later. But the nations are seen as no big deal compared to God. And then one of the nations is singled out for comparison by itself.

It's the nation of Lebanon. Verse 16. This was a nation known for its natural resources. Is that not what makes nations great? You got a nation of oil?

There's certain things that make that nation great economically. Well, here's Lebanon. And they were known especially for their forests. Their great cedars.

We have the mighty redwoods. Well, they had the mighty cedars of Lebanon. They were known all over the world. When Solomon wanted to build a temple for the Lord, they sent off to Lebanon to get those mighty cedars and to build the temple of the Lord.

And so the land is full of forests and pines and cedars. And this whole verse highlights God's greatness by showing how insufficient man's offerings are to him.

[12:21] Now, we've already discussed this a bit this morning in our worship. To sin against God is to malign or slander his greatness. When we sin against God, we treat him as if he were a nobody.

As if it's nothing to disobey him. It's nothing to say no when he says yes. And to say yes when he says no. So we diminish God.

We treat him as a nobody. And that offense and dishonor done to God's greatness must be removed by a sacrifice, he says. But here's our problem.

God is so infinitely great that the dishonor due to him by sin is also infinitely great. And that means that no sacrifice that we bring him is anywhere close to being worthy of his greatness.

or removing the offense done to his great name. Indeed, we've not seen the seriousness of our sin until we've seen the God against whom our sins are committed.

[13:28] That's what makes sin exceedingly sinful. The exceeding greatness of God the one sinned against. And it makes all of our sacrifices to him to appear so pitiful as they really are.

A couple weeks ago we were at Heather Martin's graduation party and out back there was this pile of firewood. There was to be a bonfire later that night.

My bedtime came first so I wasn't able to stay for that. But from Bremen it looked like the Northern Lights up there. A huge pile of wood stacked up.

Isaiah is here talking about one huge bonfire. Do you hear it? You get all the trees in Lebanon and you stack them up and then you get all the animals in those forests and you put them on the altar and you light a match to it and it all is insufficient to blot out one of your transgressions because God is so great and your sin against him is so great.

He's infinite. That's what he's telling us. With what shall I come before the Lord and bow down before the exalted God?

[14:56] Micah says. Shall I come before him with burnt offerings with calves a year old? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams with 10,000 rivers of oil?

Shall I offer my firstborn for my transgression the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? No, whatever we would offer could we use the timber of Lebanon for firewood and all of its animals for the sacrifice?

It would be totally insufficient for such a great God. Chapter 53 of Isaiah waits to show us the only sacrifice worthy of God was made by God himself.

It was God on the cross offered up to God. Nothing but the blood of God the Son could take away the sins of man.

Isaiah is rebuking our small thoughts of God when we worship him. Do we have an idea of the greatness of the one before whom we're coming?

[16:10] Only the sacrifice of Christ God offered to God is a sacrifice worthy of him. And you see that in the nation of Lebanon.

and then he gathers all the nations together. So think of the United Nations. Think of that parade of nations at the Olympics each time they roll around.

The mighty nations and here they are not now considered individually but gathered together with all their resources pooled.

All their armies their technologies their economies their education and knowledge. And he says in verse 17 before him all the nations are as nothing.

As nothing. They don't even register on the scales there's zero zilch. They are regarded by him as worthless and less than nothing.

[17:08] Now nothingness in itself is a hard concept to grasp. We define it in terms of the negative. It's the absence of anything. But what is that?

What is nothing? But what is less than nothing? You see how Isaiah is stretching the mind and the language to just show us the things that look so mighty to man all the nations of the world together piled together.

They're less than nothing compared to God. No comparison. So Israel who's going to stop God's promises from being fulfilled?

Those promises about Israel's glorious future of all the nations of the earth saying come on let's go up to Jerusalem and worship before her God there. Who's going to stop that promise?

Who's going to stop all the nations from being blessed through this pitifully tiny persecuted nation Old Testament Israel? What about the mighty nation of Babylon?

[18:22] What about them who destroyed our nation and now we're in captivity and we've been here almost 70 years? What if Babylon won't let us go?

How will God's promise be fulfilled? Well it seems there was another great nation and leader who said I won't let you go.

It was Pharaoh of Egypt wasn't it? A great obstacle to man but 10 plagues later he was more than willing to let them go.

He's nothing to God less than nothing what are obstacles to man are nothing to him. God receives the same challenge from all the nations that LeBron would receive from a five-year-old none less than none what seems so mighty to us is nothing to him.

So here's comfort you see that's the purpose of this letter comfort my people this chapter comfort my people they're down in Babylonian captivity let them know that the nation before whom they are powerless is itself even more powerless before their God.

[19:45] Have you thought of the way the nations stand in front of the mighty promises of God from being fulfilled that God would say that my name will be great among all the nations you know there are nations where his name isn't great today but he said it would be he said that my gospel must be preached in all the nations and then the end will come there are nations that won't let missionaries in there are nations that stand in the way well God is telling us what are those nations whatever they feel like to you there are nothing and less than nothing to him and maybe it's not the nations that you fear maybe it's not the nations that are the problem for you maybe it's your own situation in life maybe it's a person in your life whatever it is that causes you to worry whatever gives you fear that threatens you with some loss that makes you feel so so helpless before it that makes you question whether Romans 8:28 could really be true of you how could

God work this together for my good well who's going to stop it from happening when this God is the promiser nothing is a threat to him to whom will you compare God so when you look at your problems do you see them in comparison to God that's the application do you see your problem in comparison to God or in comparison to yourself is God anywhere in the picture at all you must get him there because that is your comfort Christian that is your comfort our troubles have a way of making us forget God or else to think of him in a diminished way as if he's unwilling or unable to make a difference in our lives in this particular problem the next time you feel your helplessness your hopelessness before your problem the next time you're feeling worried stop comparing the problem to you and start comparing your problem to him before whom all obstacles are as nothing measure your troubles against him and his resources not your own puny resources now you can be sure these nations nations did not look like a drop in a bucket to little

Israel no they look like a flood that's what Isaiah 8:7 and 8 said that the Assyrians were going to sweep over them like a flood and it would cover the land up to their neck that's not a drop of water in a bucket that's a flood but what looked like a flood to Israel looked like a drop in a bucket compared to God you see so who are you comparing your problem to yourself it will overwhelm you

to God that's where comfort and hope are strengthened and gripped with God's greatness your troubles will shrink before him which is big which is small your trouble or your God big problems only stay big before a small God a big God shrinks them down to proper size so he's compared himself to the nations the mighty nations secondly or thirdly creation nations now the idols we see it at the end of verse 18 what image will you compare him to now why is

God comparing himself with idols again because these are the things that men attach greatness and power to the idol gods of the nation seem so powerful I mean they equip the Assyrians and the Babylonians it seemed that their idols were giving their armies sweeping victories while Israel's God seemed to go down in defeat before them and Israel defeated Israel had to hear the taunts of the nations around them saying where is your God after all and we remember Sennacherib's boast that no gods of the nations were able to stand before him well the nations were sadly mistaken weren't they thinking that Israel's God was inferior to their idol gods but something even sadder is when the people of God who know better start thinking like the world about their own God as if idols had something better to offer them now that was ever the temptation of

Israel living among the idolatrous nations that and it was one of the very reasons for which God sent them away into Babylonian captivity their idolatry it was their punishment for their idolatry and Isaiah has a lot more to say about idols in this next seven or eight chapters and he'll speak with ridicule he'll speak with sarcasm about the idols and expose them for what they are but idols are God substitutes things that we put in God's place and we only turn to idols when we grow dissatisfied with God when we think that someone or something else would take better care of us would give us better joys bigger pleasures more peace more prosperity then do we put other things and people in the place of God and give them God like status in our life fearing them trusting them hoping in them expecting help from them to make life work for us and

[25 : 39] Isaiah knows that the world's idols only gain approval only gain appeal as God is diminished in our hearts so he's calling us to compare God and the world's idols take another look at your God see him for!

look a little! closer at the things that the world worships what image will you compare me to? verse 19 as for an idol a craftsman casts it and a gold smith overlays it with gold and fashioned silver chains for it notice it's man made how powerful can the idol be if helpless man made it secondly it's made to look impressive all it is is a hunk of cast iron and then this gold smith has overlaid it with gold to make it look like something it's not just a hunk of metal and then notice it has chains and this is this is the most telling thing of all the chains are the dead giveaway how powerful can it be if it needs metal chains to keep it upright if it can't hold itself up how is it ever going to hold you up in your time of need idolatry is stupid as well as wicked to trust in idols instead of the living

God and so he pours scorn upon the idols comparing idols to God verse 20 shows that there's an idol for everyone whatever your economic status a man too poor to present such an offering as gold and silver well he goes out and he selects from the trees wood that will not rot and he looks to set up an idol that will not topple he too has his idol but instead of being made with gold and silver he selects wood that will not rot after all you don't want your idol rotting do you and then he looks for a skilled craftsman not just any old craftsman!

Why? Because this has got to look good and a good skilled craftsman! make that idol with eyes that look real David says eyes but they do not see ears yeah they got ears but they do not hear hands oh sure they've got hands they can't touch feet can't walk mouth can't speak great skill to make them look like something they're not great skill is needed to set up an idol that will not topple when it's bumped or the winds start blowing these are the great challenges to all idol makers to setting up an idol that will not topple you remember the Philistines defeated the Israelite armies and they took the Ark of the covenant and took it back to their temple of Dagon and they put the Ark of the covenant representing Yahweh Israel's God on the ground before Dagon's idol their God our God beat your God the next morning

Dagon was on his face he'd fallen down before the Ark of the covenant of Jehovah and oh they propped him up and dusted him off and the next morning they find him fallen this time his head fell off his hands broken off it's hard to find an idol anymore that won't topple and that's the point of Isaiah you better get a skilled craftsman to be able to set up an idol that will not topple the folly of trusting in what our own hands have made yet this is how low Israel would stoop not only forsaking the Lord the living God replacing him with lifeless idols the work of men's hands so in comparison to that behold your God what is he like well he's the uncreated creator who made and governs all

things by himself we're back to creation and we see it in verse 21 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 the

[30:03] Jews are being rebuked not only do they have creation shouting to us about God the creator but they had scripture they had the testimony of the prophets right down through the ages they had God's special revelation of scripture don't you know what God is like he's not like these idols come on read and compare see what your God is like what is he like he sits enthroned above the circle of the earth above the circle he sits enthroned who sits on thrones kings rulers and he sits on the throne above the whole earth so he's the king of kings he's the lord of lords he's the leader of leaders the ruler of rulers and he's not only the creator but he's the sovereign king over all he's made he's not like the deists claim that

God made the world and then he walked away from it no the Bible claims that everything that God made he now rules over in he controls and rules all that he has made his power and wisdom are seen not only in creating all things but in ruling all things in preserving and governing all his creatures and all their actions at all times so nothing happens in his world but what the one on the throne plans and executes and allows not one maverick molecule running around in the universe is what R.C.

Sproul said every molecule doing what the king enthroned above the circle of the earth wants the molecule to do for his own purposes in his own perfect wisdom he's got the whole world in his hands everything under his control he sits enthroned and he stretches out the heavens like a canopy he spreads them out like a tent to live in God creates the whole universe as easily as some of you pop up a little canopy in your backyard to keep the sun off of you that wasn't hard was it he stretches out the whole universe just like putting up a thin sheet pitching a tent no comparison between the living God who creates and rules over all things and the lifeless idols that make nothing but are themselves man made and God is such a great king the

Bible in comparing himself to the peoples of the earth say the peoples of the earth are like what hop hop little grasshoppers now how many of you have felt threatened by a grasshopper no takers here how many of you stayed up at night worrying about possibly tomorrow you might meet a grasshopper stop dead in your tracks and dread fear when you see it no but there are people in our lives who cause us to stay up late at night and lose sleep there are people in our lives that we were afraid of what they might do we're comparing them to us they're grasshoppers before our God compared to him they're nothing to be afraid of we must see them as such if we would feel the comfort that

God intends for us to have so God sovereign rule over all things all people it includes the great rulers of this world and these two were the source of great fear for Israel they commanded great armies but the one seated upon the throne above the whole earth brings princes to naught and reduces the rulers of this world to nothing these mighty world leaders strut across the world stage making their pompous threats!

[34:22] and boasts they're really something to behold but he reduces them to nothing from something to nothing so there's Sennacherib that mighty Assyrian king and he's he's boasting of how great he is and no nation and none of its gods could stand before him well he just hadn't met up with Israel's God yet had he when he meets up with Israel's God Israel's God reduces him to nothing and he has him cut down in his own homeland and temple of his God by his own two sons and yet God claims it's something that he did he reduces the rulers of this world to nothing even though he uses second causes even the two sons of Sennacherib this is the living and the true God the maker and ruler over all that exists and he's not afraid of grasshoppers he brought him to nothing back to the dust from which he came he brings down one and he raises up another that's the way he rules over the rulers of the world and so pilots flexing his political muscles in front of

Jesus saying don't you know I have power to crucify you or set you free Jesus says oh no you don't you would have no power except what has been given to you from above oh there's a throne higher than yours pilot and you only rule by his permission so it was with Nebuchadnezzar that mighty king of Babylon who would reduce Israel to captivity this is the god and he not only removes these mighty rulers but it's the ease with which he does it no sooner are they planted no sooner are they sown no sooner do they take root in the ground then he blows on them and they wither and a whirlwind sweeps them away like chaff compared to the eternal god they're like a bean sprout that's just poked its head up yesterday it is so vulnerable just a little hot wind and that thing shriveled

reduced to chaff and a wind will just take it away and there won't be anything there how easy is that it's like blowing out your birthday candle that's what he does and these mighty rulers wither and come to nothing so it was with nebuchadnezzar sennacherib herod hitler stalin polpot all the rulers of the world they are as nothing before him no comparison so where's the threat coming from behold your god and drink in the comfort and so god closes this section with that question the second time we've seen it in to whom will you compare me or who is my equal says the holy one now it's that description that name that god takes here the holy one that removes any thought of anything ever comparing to him the basic meaning of holy means separate from the reason the most holy place was holy means that it was set apart from all the other places if you wanted to meet a friend and have a chat and have a drink of coffee you wouldn't meet at the most holy place no it was set apart from all other places only the priest the high priest only once a year only with blood it was set apart it was holy and that is what is said of

God he's called the holy one the one that's set apart from all else there's none like him he is the other he's the! incomparable one the holy one he's in a class all of his own there's none beside me I am Lord and there is no other so what have we seen this morning God is concerned that our thoughts of him are not as big as they ought to be so he's stretching them by comparing himself to all the other things that men see as great or attribute!

greatness to and twice he brings us to this conclusion of his unmatched greatness more than twice over and over we come to see there's no comparison and that's the whole purpose for the exercise he wants us to see that nothing and no one compares to him now why is he doing that not just to maintain his honor but to comfort you remember that's the theme that's what he's after comfort comfort my people and you will only draw comfort from God to the extent that you know him so see his exceeding greatness and be comforted meditate on his greatness and drink in his comfort fear fear and discouragement!

fear and discouragement shows that we're comparing the problem to the wrong person us instead of God that's if there's fear and discouragement you can be sure your eyes are in the wrong spot a third application who God is guarantees what God says so God said many wonderful things about Israel how is it going to happen well it's the guy that makes the promise that makes it so certain so who's going to stop his promises from being fulfilled when it's the one who is all powerful wise who reigns a sovereign king over all he's made who's who's incomparable well who God is guarantees what God says and that's not only true of Old Testament Israel and of the church it's true of you my friend

[40:41] God has made some wonderful promises about you he's going to take away every tear he's going to remove every sin every trace of the curse he's going to make you just like his son he's going to keep you from falling he's going to work all things together for your good who God is guarantees what God says and lastly this is one of the real benefits of worship it takes our eyes off of our problem that tends to preoccupy us and places our eyes upon our great God if worship doesn't do that it's not worship it's not biblical worship anyway taking our eyes off of all the things that preoccupy us and focusing our attention on our great big God such that when we look again at our problems they don't look the same they look smaller

God because we have compared them to our God rather than to ourselves do you see what God is doing to bring comfort to his people will you fall in with his program will you make the meditation on God daily activity as you read his word we've done that again this morning by hearing his word preached let's do it as we sing and focus upon our sovereign king who reigns over all number two in your hymnal God my king thy might confessing let's stand as we sing number two in your trinity hymnal we humble ourselves before you our sovereign king the holy one to whom nothing can be compared nothing equals your wisdom your power your strength your your rule your control and your holiness how good it is for us that you reign we thank you that the

Lord Jesus by his blood has taken away our sins and made this great God to be for us and no longer against us and I pray that those who still have this God against them would be brought low to humble themselves and trust in the Savior the God man and his bloody sacrifice on Calvary God made to God in order to cover our sins draw them by faith this day and send us on our way comforted and encouraged this God is for us he lives for us he's with us and he'll never forsake us we pray in his name amen