

The Servant's Incomparable God

Isaiah 40.12–31

Sermon

My 1st great challenge every AM: not getting out of bed, before I get out of bed, finding my glasses. Like many of you I try to leave them on my nightstand in the same place every night. But too often accidentally knock them off & I spend my 1st waking moments trying to figure out where they landed. Wo them life is a blur, depth perception is off, lights too bright & shadows too dark, words imposs to read. Oh I could get by if I had to, not entirely blind. But everything would be off.

Text today: Isa 40 (p. 500). § Been read throughout worship service. In it see a pair of qs repeated 2x: *do you not know? have you not heard?* (21, 28). Neg qs anticipate pos ans: “didn’t you see the game last night? haven’t you read the news?” Q’er assumes we do know & have heard. But neg qs carry at least a hint of surprise: “didn’t you read the report? haven’t you read the assignment?” Way neg qs are asked, assumption that person being asked should know but for some reason doesn’t, has heard but for some reason hasn’t really considered the implications. Like me wo my glasses: can’t see something that’s there. & q’er is saying, “Put your glasses on, you’re missing something really big.” §

So what are we missing? Two ans to that q, bc this q directed towards two dift groups. & there’s an imp diff bet what 1st group is missing & what 2nd group is missing. So let’s start w 1st group: to whom does Isa direct these two qs 1st (21)? Clear his **audience** is **universal**: everyone, everywhere. Talking about them: *nats* (15), *islands* (= coastlands or perh landmasses, 15), *Leb* (16), *all nats* (17). Also talking to them (18): *you* = pagan worshipers of vv. 19–20. G saying something everyone everywhere is missing. G addresses all peos in all places at all times & says, “Don’t you know? You should. Haven’t you heard? You have. But you’re still missing something absolutely enormous.”

What they're **missing**: the immensity of G. Ergo opening series of rhetorical qs. Stand on beach & look at as much of ocean as you can: it all fits in *hollow of his hand* (12), w all the oceans you can't see. Look down at sand, take biggest bucket you can find & fill it up, how long can you carry it before you have to set it down? Yet G picks up every grain of sand on that beach & every other beach of the world & carries it around in his *bucket* (12). Listen to pres cand's discuss foreign policy, Iran deal, crisis in Syria, financial collapse in Greece, wars in sub-Saharan Africa, poli tensions in Far East, human trafficking in central —not to mention our own issues w poverty/injustice/violence/100 other probs—& compared w immensity of G *all nats like a drop in the bucket* (15). Not saying they are meaningless to G (17): not that G cares nothing for us & our petty probs, but that in comp to him nats & our probs are tiny (*before him, by him* not in sense of “in his regard” but “nearby him/up against him”). Nats so small as if they don't even exist. Immensity of G greater than we can conceive. G so vast that he set up whole universe like a mom who sets up a tent in her backyard for her children to play in (22). & his immensity includes power over what happens on earth he made: rules over greatest/most powerful/imp leaders (23–24). Here today, gone tom. Stout reminder this wk w so many heads of state coming here for UN GA & Francis' visit. Where are powerful peo who came 5/25/50 years ago? *No sooner planted/sown/take root than he blows on them* like a dandelion & *they wither*. Yet G who brought them to power 5/25/50 yrs ago still *sits enthroned above circ of earth* (25) & will be long after we too wither & are no more. Whole universe reports to us the immensity of G (Ps 19.1–2). *Don't you know? Haven't you heard?* § Ergo Paul (Rom 1.20): through *creation of world* everyone can know G's *eternal power & divine nature*. All of it declares him.

Ergo relig impulse (18–20). Peo everywhere inherently recog there must be some greater force, some lasting power, some divine being or beings who made all of this. But for most peo this psg argues that their relig

impulse directed wrong way. § Look for best they can find: *gold* (19) or if poor *wood* (20) & make something that is as permanent as they can construct—immovable, won't *topple*, bigger than themselves. Yet altogether misses the point. Peo recog a bigger force that stands behind all that we can see, so they take some of what they can see & worship that. We know G has created the world so we take some of that creation & create something ourselves that we then worship. How foolish!

Existential obj: “Doesn't describe me. I don't worship phys objs.” Maybe you haven't carved a totem to worship in your apt or poured a golden image to pray towards. But if we limit our conception of idols to phys objs made for worship, we've missed the point. Ezk 14.2 — *idols of heart*. § Luther's [Larger Catechism](#) on 1st comm: “A god is that to which we look for all good & in which we find refuge in every time of need.” Maybe you don't look for all good through a statue in your living room, but you look for it in your productivity. Seek refuge not in a Buddha but in pleasure. Find your value not in a false god but in your body image. Idolatry not just bowing down to golden or wooden objs, but taking anything in creation & elevating it to Godhood. We're fools.

Philosophical obj: “Relig impulse explained another way than as a clue to reality of G. Concept of G result of evolutionary need for self-pres & survival.” § [Richard Dawkins](#): “Relig behavior an unfortunate byproduct of an underlying psych propensity which once was useful.” IOW peo created concept of G bc helped them survive. Had nothing to do w whether there really is a G, ergo not reliable for telling us truth— & now we know better. But major prob if you hold this view: if you can trust your thinking only to tell you what will help you survive & can't trust your thinking to tell you what's actually true, then you can't trust your thinking to tell you whether nat selection is true either. Must live in perpetual doubt. Darwin: “The horrid doubt always arises whether the conviction of man's mind . . . are of any value or at all trustworthy” (qtd here's, 219). Ergo can't even be sure G isn't there. Put glasses on.

But I say this psg directed at two groups of peo, two dift audiences. 2nd audience: **his peo**. v. 27 — q of v. 28 directed to *Jacob/Isr*, i.e., G’s peo. In a very imp sense the prob for G’s peo far more serious than for rest of world. Why? Bc all nats had to go on was what could see in creation: starry heavens, sandy beaches, wide oceans, high mountains. § In theo terms all have to go on is Gen Rev, how G reveals himself through creation, conscience, image bearers; what we learn about G from sci, culture, reason. But his peo had something more. In addition to Gen Rev, his peo have his word, what theos call Spec Rev. What we affirmed earlier: “we bel that G has graciously disclosed himself in the created order” (Gen Rev), “moreover he has revealed himself in human words” (Spec Rev). One thing to look at a starry sky & muse about what caused all of this, another to open a scroll/book & read, “In the beg G created the heavens & the earth.” As much as nats need to be awakened to reality of G, G’s own peo have a far more serious prob.

So what are they/we **missing**? Peo everywhere fail to see immensity of G, but for bels we fail to see immensity of G at work on our behalf. If all peo overlook G’s eter power & divine nature, then G’s peo overlook how G’s eter power & divine nature relate to them (28). § *LORD = Y*, cov name for G, makes promises, keeps promises. This L who has come near to you/revealed himself to you in his word, is the transcendent One, immense One, *everlasting G, Creator of ends of earth* (28). One who holds oceans in palm of his hand is One who holds his peo in the other. One who sets up universe like a tent is One who is dwelling place for his peo. One who calls each star by name knows the name of every one of his sheep. *Don’t you know this?* You should. *Haven’t you heard this?* You bet. We sing about it every Sun. §

So how in the world can G’s peo forget this? How could we have not only G’s creation but also G’s word & somehow forget how G’s eter power & divine nature relate to us, neglect what diff G’s immensity makes in our lives. Easy: circumstances. Remember context: Isa

foresaw Bab cap (39.5–7), concerned destruction of Jeru would destroy peo’s faith in 1TG, sent a word of hope ahead of time. So looking ahead to peo’s plight in Bab, he foresees what peo would say (27). § Two things: G unaware/does not see what’s happening & G doesn’t care. *cause* = justice, rights, vindication, what I deserve. *disregard* = pass by. For G’s peo what makes us forget reality of G/neglect G’s immensity as it relates to our everyday lives is our circs. Our exp always threaten to block out reality of G. Lose our job & say “G doesn’t see what I’m going through.” Lose our reputation & say “G doesn’t care about my reputation.” Lose our health & say “G hasn’t given me what I deserve.” Come Sundays & affirm all these great things about G, but then life happens & we q him. We don’t q whether he’s powerful, we q whether his power works for our good. We don’t q whether he’s immense, we q whether he’s concerned. We don’t q whether he’s eternal, we q whether he engages w us in time. “You don’t see what’s going on, L. You’ve disregarded my cause. You’ve failed to give me what I deserve.” When we say this we are guilty of a great *complaint*. § And yet at the same time we speak truer words than we know. No, not true that G fails to see what’s happening in our lives, but it is true that G has disregarded our cause/not given us what we deserve. You’re right—you deserve far worse. Ergo v. 16—even if we were perfectly holy, we still couldn’t offer a worthy sacrifice. But given our sin, nothing we can do to atone. And yet G has disregarded that, not out of injustice but in absolute justice. *disregard* = pass over. Ill of passover: blood on doorposts so that all w/in protected from death angel. Pic pointing forward to day when One would shed his blood so that all who are in him would escape what they truly deserve. What we deserve was given to J so that G could pass over our sin. In this both audiences converge into one. This is what creates the subgroup of G’s peo w/in the broader universal audience—not merit, not spir, not relig, but J. In his death we are protected & in his res we have new life. G has not disregarded you, G has not passed over you, for in J G has passed over your sin, in J you are his child. So run to J. Rest your life on him.

Ergo concluding exhortation of this psg: § *hope in the L* (31). *hope* = lit. “wait.” Indicates “complete dependence on G & a willingness to allow him to decide the terms” (Oswalt, 74). If G is truly immense (holds oceans in palm of his hands, carries all sand around in his bucket, sets up universe like a tent) & he has bound himself in cov w me (sealed in blood of X), then I can trust him w timing. If he handled my biggest prob—my sin & the judgment that should have come w it—& he did it w unrelenting love & inflexible justice, then he can take care of every other issue in my life. By his grace I can wait for him/hope in him/lean confidently into him & expect that he will not only do what is best, but that he’ll do what is good; not only do what is right, but do what brings delight, bc that’s the kind of G he is.

But so hard to wait. So hard to be patient. & psg gives us one key indicator to tell us whether we’re trusting him or not: *weariness* (29–30). More than just tiredness. Ill of storage reorg w Brooks this past Tues: finally tired him out! Tiredness can be fixed w a good night’s sleep; weariness runs far deeper. We worship, but our love runs cold. We follow, but our feet get heavy. We believe, but our faith is weak. Weariness an indication that we’re not seeing G as he is. But thank G, your life doesn’t hang on slender thread of your faith. Your life hangs on immensity of G who spread out the heavens like a tent & who loves you so much he has made you one with his Son. It’s bc of who he is that you can rest your weary heart in him. So open your eyes, put on your glasses, and look. The G who made you, the G who loves you, the G who sent his S for you is there.