

FRIDAY: *Majestically Sovereign*

Read: Isaiah 40:18-20 ¹⁸ To whom then will you liken God, or what likeness compare with him? ¹⁹ An idol! A craftsman casts it, and a goldsmith overlays it with gold and casts for it silver chains. ²⁰ He who is too impoverished for an offering chooses wood that will not rot; he seeks out a skillful craftsman to set up an idol that will not move.

<p>Reflect: Verses 12-26 form a “chiasm” – it’s a literary device that typically has the main point in the center. Envision an “x” with vs18-20 at the center, “Thursday” just outside of that, and “Wednesday outside of that. The point is that YHWH is incomparable! He is sovereign over creation (Wednesday), humanity (Thursday), and unique (today).</p> <p>Notice the irony of v20. If humans set something in place...it can be moved. The point, all we try to manufacture as God, or put in place of God, is futile. There is nothing like Him. A “craftsman” may be able to fashion some noteworthy pieces of art...but from where did those creative powers come?</p> <p>Nothing compares to YHWH. Nothing satisfies like Him. Nothing probes our inner depths like He can. Nothing can bring redemptive healing to our lives like Him. Sadly, even though we “know” that...our lives often don’t reflect it.</p>	<p>Respond: Try writing your own words (perhaps a poem) reflecting God’s majesty over A) creation, B) humanity, and C) His uniqueness. Will you share it with me nerb7@yahoo.com if you make one?</p> <p>Read Isa44:6-20. What modern parallels do you find in this text?</p> <p>Make a list of how God is incomparable and how He has impacted your life. Once again, feel free to share it with me, or others.</p>
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Pray: Pray for open doors (Col4:2-6) so God’s word can spread rapidly (2Thess3:1) and your boldness (Acts4:29) to speak about the unsurpassed greatness of our God. Pray for a productive and God-honoring board meeting this Sunday. Pray for Ed Asbury, Keith Krause, and Mike Haag – NLCC’s deacons. Pray again for the Teacher Training at the building tomorrow.

SATURDAY: *Only the Beginning...*

Read: Matthew 26:17-29

<p>Reflect: We’ve looked at a variety of things over the past several weeks. We’ve looked at Theology in general. More specifically we’ve looked at Theology-Proper (study of God), Bibliology (study of the Bible), Anthropology (study of man), Christology (study of Jesus), Soteriology (study of salvation), Pneumatology (study of the Holy Spirit), Ecclesiology (study of the church), and Eschatology (study of the last things).</p> <p>There is so much to learn about God. Yet we must always remember that what we learn about God is meant to propel us to action. God doesn’t want us to simply have head knowledge. What we know “up there” must move down to our hearts...and our limbs...</p> <p>We will revisit these topics in the future. Yet starting tomorrow (Lord willing), for two weeks we will look more closely at another important topic – the Lord’s Supper. There are a lot of questions about it, I know I can’t answer them all...but will we have open hearts and minds to what God’s word says?</p>	<p>Respond: How has your recent accumulation of information about God impacted your life? How is it visible to the outside world?</p> <p>Which of the areas preached on thus far interests you the most? Have you considered how you can study up on it yourself? Perhaps God would like you to lead a class on it at some point.</p> <p>Why is the Lord’s Supper so important? Why do we do it weekly at NLCC?</p>
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Pray: Thank God for another day of life – ask for His help to live it for His glory. Pray for all the God-fearing worship serves taking place around the world today and tomorrow; pray that God is glorified and lives continue to be transformed.

Theology Proper

May 25 – May 31

When you look at our world, it seems it’s spinning out of control...

- On December 26th, 2004, devastating tsunamis from the Indian Ocean killed more than 225,000 people in 11 countries.
- An earthquake in Pakistan on October 8th, 2005 resulted in around 73,000 deaths...
- A typhoon in Myanmar at the beginning of May could result in over 100,000 deaths.
- An earthquake in Yingxiu, China, on May 12th of this year, has left over 4,000 children as orphans and resulted in over 60,000 deaths already...estimates say it will likely climb to over 80,000.
- About 100 people have died in tornados in the U.S. this year – the worst toll in a decade.

Despite the upheaval it appears the natural world is in at times...it is magnificently ordered by our God. If earth was a little further away from the sun – we’d freeze; a little closer – we’d fry. If earth’s gravity was a bit less forceful – we’d fly off into space; a little stronger – we’d be crushed. There are four powers in the Universe that are basic to its structure: 1) a weak nuclear force, 2) strong nuclear force, 3) electromagnetic force, 4) gravity. All are in set parameters and if changed, even a little, life wouldn’t be possible. There are also 24 other parameters in the Universe and 45 additional ones on earth. Life can’t be an accident. The chances of it being an accident are 1 out of 10 to the 10th to the 123rd power. There isn’t enough space in the known universe to write all those zeroes.

- I can’t fathom, nor understand the above paragraph...but I figured I’d share it. ☺

Isaiah 40 (and other places in the Bible) makes it clear that God has created everything. On top of that, Romans 8 indicates that creation has suffered from the Fall of mankind – it, like us, doesn’t behave the way it should. Therefore, we don’t need to concern ourselves with the apparent ‘amuckness’ of nature. Ultimately, God has all of that under His control.

Yet it’s not just the weather and natural forces that seem out of balance...

- Drug lords are taunting cops and military personnel with higher pay in Mexico. When that doesn’t work they release “death lists” – and many cops quit and flee for their lives. Some parents recently lost custody of their infant son after posting him for sale on e-Bay for \$1.60.
- Do you recall the massacre at Virginia Tech last spring?

If we can’t do anything about nature (other than be good stewards of it – which we are to be; cf. Gen1:28-31; 2:15), what about the problems in mankind? That one we have the ability to impact. Will we “comfort” people with God’s love (Isa40:1-2)? Will we care for them as He does (Isa40:10-11)? God doesn’t get tired (Isa40:28) – will we rely on Him for strength to do His will?

A proper view of God is vital. Without it we run into problems. “Theology Proper” deals with God. May we be life long learners of Him and His greatness.

Monday: *Comfort in the Big Picture*

Read: Isaiah 40:1-2 ¹ Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. ² Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her that her warfare is ended, that her iniquity is pardoned, that she has received from the LORD's hand double for all her sins.

Reflect:

Reading Isaiah as a whole is a daunting challenge – the book is long. However, simply backing up into chapter 39 is enlightening. There we see Hezekiah make a big mistake by allowing some Babylonians to see the treasure rooms. Doom is predicted (39:5-7)...and Hezekiah doesn't really care (39:8).

On top of a king who doesn't care, what is to become of Isaiah's earlier promises of God's blessings for Israel (e.g., Isa9:1-6)? Has God (His word) failed?

Those words of doom, accompanied by the aloofness of a king who should care, form a stark contrast to the "comfort" of these verses. Here Isaiah brings the big picture back into view. Although exile was on the horizon for God's people, it would be of a limited duration. Ultimately, God is always good.

Pray: Pray for a heart that hears and obeys God when He initially speaks to you. Thank God for His grace – be specific in your thanks. Pray for this Saturday's Teacher Training provided by College Press at our building.

Respond:

Verse two amplifies and expounds on verse one. How often do we not "hear God" the first time? Fortunately He is faithful with His pursuit of us.

Notice that pardon was "received" from YHWH, not "taken" nor "demanded" by Israel. There's a word for that...grace. How has God been graceful to you lately?

Receiving "double" for sins seems harsh – doesn't it? Perhaps we don't understand what's being said here. The word may imply God has dealt with sin in a way beyond our comprehension. In either case...isn't it gracious of God to forgive us?

Tuesday: *Our Hope Has Come*

Read: Isaiah 40:3-11 ³ A voice: "In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD; make straight in the desert a highway for our God..." ⁹ Get you up to a high mountain, O Zion, herald of good news; lift up your voice with strength, O Jerusalem, herald of good news; lift it up, fear not; say to the cities of Judah, "Behold your God!" ¹⁰ Behold the Lord GOD comes with might, and his arm rules for him; behold his reward is with him, and his recompense before him. ¹¹ He will tend his flock like a shepherd; he will gather the lambs in his arms; he will carry them in his bosom, and gently lead those that are with young.

Reflect:

YHWH is coming (and has come) to the aid of His people! It is the promise to which we must always cling – no matter what. The phrase "for the mouth of YHWH has spoken" indicates this comes straight from God Himself (e.g., Isa1:20; 58:14). It will happen.

What a contrast in vs6-8. In essence it tells us that we (the flesh) are fickle, but God is unfaithful. We already know that. Yet there is hope. Just as there was a "cry" about the coming of YHWH to help in vs3-5, so here there is a "cry" about the lasting nature of His word (v8b).

It's a good thing those roads were improved – because God is now here. His coming was foretold (vs3-5) and now it has happened. Once again, this points to the faithfulness of His word (v8b). Don't miss the balance of ruling (v10), not by coercion, but with extreme care (v11).

Pray: Thank God for His faithfulness. Pray for VBS, it is coming soon (6/14). Pray for Bob Griffin, Larry Hayes, and Roy Andrews – the elders of NLCC.

Respond:

How has God come to your aid this past week? Have you thanked Him for it?

When was the last time your word to God didn't hold true? Have you confessed and asked for forgiveness?

Read Psalm 23. Thank God for His watchfulness over His people.

WEDNESDAY: *Creator of All*

Read: Isaiah 40:12-14; 25-26 ¹² Who has measured the waters in the hollow of his hand and 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? ¹³ Who has measured the Spirit of the LORD, or what man shows him his counsel?... ²⁵ To whom then will you compare me... ²⁶ ...not one is missing.

Reflect:

The "waters" and "dust" along with the "heavens" and "earth" express totality by contrast. It's a Hebrew way of saying God is the Creator of all! Yet notice how small creation is in comparison to God. All the water on earth in the palm of His hand – unbelievable!

The verb "marked off" in v12 carries with it the idea of knowing precisely what is involved. We might be inclined to say it is the "fine tuning" of something. That same verb is "measured" in v13. No one made God, nor does anyone know Him completely – He's too vast.

The ancients believed studying the stars could guide them in their daily living. How foolish! Oh, I forgot we have the horoscopes to help us with that today (note the sarcasm)... God put those stars there, and He keeps them there. Nothing compares to God.

Pray: Confess to God your desire to not hide parts of your life from Him – ask for the strength to 'let Him in'. Praise God for His creative works. Pray for Brent McCrory, the preaching minister of NLCC.

Respond:

What is the most breathtaking aspect of God's creation to you? Can you picture it being, literally, as nothing compared to God?

How can you open your eyes to see more of God's glory today?

The verb for "marked off" (v12) is also in Proverbs 16:2 and 21:2. Is there a part of your inner being you try to hide from God? (It's futile) It's for our own good that we not try and hide anything from Him.

THURSDAY: *God, Do You See This Problem?*

Read: Isaiah 40:15-17; 21-24 ¹⁵ Behold, the nations are like a drop from a bucket, and are accounted as the dust on the scales; behold, he takes up the coastlands like fine dust. ¹⁶ Lebanon would not suffice for fuel... ²² It is he who sits above the circle of the earth, and its inhabitants are like grasshoppers; who stretches out the heavens like a curtain, and spreads them like a tent to dwell in; ²³ who brings princes to nothing, and makes the rulers of the earth as emptiness...

Reflect:

The "nations" are representative of mankind (often those who don't know God). Their scheming is hardly noticed – merely a drop from a full bucket of water. Yet this isn't to say God is unaware of what is taking place (cf. Wednesday).

In the ancient world it was believed that the gods could be coerced into doing the will of humans through sacrifices and worship. Isaiah says there isn't even enough lumber in Lebanon (world renowned for supplying lumber – e.g., 1Kgs5:1-18) nor animals to offer enough sacrifices to control YHWH.

God is far above everything. He rules over the entire earth, even orchestrating the rise and fall of nations (v23). How important this is for the Jews in captivity to remember (cf. Isa39:5-7).

Pray: Pray for more workers for the harvest fields of God's Kingdom (Mt9:36-38). Confess to God you trust His ways – ask for help from Him if you struggle with that prayer. Pray for a productive and God-honoring meeting between the elders and preaching minister this Sunday.

Respond:

Is it hard for you to comprehend that YHWH has allowed such evil and oppressive governments throughout history? How do you reconcile that with your faith?

Are your prayers to God more of an attempt to coerce Him into doing what you want (cf. v16), or do you earnestly include things for which He has clearly told us to pray?

Read Romans 1:18-32. Pray for humanity to come to grip with the fact that there is a God, and we're not Him.