

The Majesty of God (and our smallness)

Dec. 2, 2018

To KNOW Christ and one another more deeply,
To CARE for one another in truth and in love,
To GROW as followers of Jesus.
- CG Mission Statement

Worship: Psalm 34:1-7

(Here is a psalm/song to help your group as you worship.)

Read and meditate on Psalm 34:1-7 as a group.

Icebreaker

If Hollywood made a movie all about you, what would the title be and why?

Text for Discussion: Isaiah 40

Turn in your Bibles and read this passage aloud together.

Aid for Discussion: Sermon Summary

We live in a time of increasing discord and uncertainty. An epidemic of loneliness is spreading, which has led to waves of fear and anger in and among us. These are frightening times... but they are not unique. Israel in the days of Isaiah found itself in the throes of similar upheaval. By all appearances it was a religious nation, but when push came to shove, their hearts trusted in something else. We too have lost our fear (our reverential awe) and therefore our trust in the Lord. We have lost a sense of our place in His creation, causing us to place our hope in all the wrong things, believing they offer what only a loving and holy God can provide (Is 30:15).

We need to relearn what it means to trust God. But this is hard enough in good times. The true test comes when God asks us to trust Him when our path is hidden. Such uncertain, hopeless times have always been the proving ground of trusting God. We're afraid because we don't trust God (Mark 4:40), and we don't trust God because we don't fear Him (Ex 14:31). How then are we to experience the goodness of God in the midst of our storms?

Isaiah wants us to become experientially convinced of God's incomparable greatness, while also wholly convinced of God's tender, personal goodness. For then, we will learn to fear His holy name and see that we can trust Him. Isaiah 40 is a call to awe, but first it is a call to comfort (v2), to quiet our troubled hearts. The chapter then offers images – masterpieces – of God's incomparable power and goodness.

The span of the whole universe is a mere handbreadth to God. The vast oceans, the boundless starry skies, the majestic peaks... these are infinitesimally less than the grandeur of God. The works of man are like a drop from a bucket; our history, mere dust on the scales of time. Nothing we could ever do would put God in our debt or at our disposal. Our best is utterly insufficient (v17). And yet, our Father is personal and abounding in love (v11). Despite our smallness and faithlessness, He knows each of us completely and personally and gathers us in His arms, drawing us to His heart.

Our Father sees us with perfect clarity. Just as He knows each and every star in the vast cosmos by name, He cares about every moment of our lives. He rules the world down to the last detail. So how could we ever think that God is ignoring us? His apparent delays do not translate into a lack of care or ability. Our questioning merely exposes our own frailty and the absurdity behind our lack of trust.

So again: we must recapture a sense of awe for God's glory – both His utter transcendence and absolute goodness. The Lord is the everlasting, infinite and eternal (v28), who meets us in the midst of our weariness.

And our strength will be renewed when we settle down in complete dependence on Him, resting our hope in His sovereign care (v31).

By giving up our frantic efforts to deliver ourselves and turning expectantly to God, we can find rest in the midst of whatever storms that threaten us. For at the same time He is majestic and holy and awesome, our God is our personal, tender, deeply caring Father. Do we know this is our God? This is the story of Christmas: where the Good Shepherd became the precious Lamb. Jesus is where the righteous justice of God and His merciful love come together. O come, let us adore Him, Christ the Lord.

Guiding Question of the Week

(This question is intended as a target for the whole conversation. Do not ask for responses now. It will be repeated later in the study.)

What do you fear and what do you learn about God in vv. 12-17 that can calm your fear and help you stand in awe of him?

Questions for Discussion

(Remember it is better to wrestle deeply with two good questions than gloss over many. Sub-bullets are intended for potential follow-up.)

- What in Isaiah 40 causes you to say, “Wow!” and why?
 - Discuss how Isaiah 40 is a message of comfort and strength for God’s people?
 - What specific comfort did God want his people to hear in vv. 1-5?
 - How are you comforted and strengthened by these verses?
- God’s people are referred to as lambs (v 11) and as grasshoppers (v 22). What do we learn about God in the use of these two words?
- Answer the questions asked in vv. 12-14, 18, and 25. What do these verses teach about God?
 - What are some ways we can re-capture a sense of awe in God’s transcendent majesty?
 - What opportunities do you have to talk about God’s majesty with others?
 - Tell about the last time you shared God’s majesty with another. What was the outcome?
- As a nation, we no longer fear God which is why we are so afraid of everything else. What do you fear and what do you learn about God in vv. 12-17 that can calm your fear and help you stand in awe of him?
- Have you ever despaired in a similar way to v. 27? In what ways would vv. 28-31 bring you comfort and courage in such times?
 - From v. 31 are there any conditions to receiving strength from God? Explain your answer.
- We read of God’s coming to his people in vv.3-5, 9-11 and giving them strength in vv. 27-31. How is our Lord Jesus Christ the embodiment of this?

Prayer

Pray a prayer of response using the acronym ACTS:

A - Adoration – Praise God in light of what Isaiah 40 teaches about his character.

C - Confession – Confess sin in response to what Isaiah 40 teaches.

T - Thanksgiving – Thank God in light of what is seen in Isaiah 40.

S - Supplication – Ask for growth in the areas of truth in Isaiah 40?

Experiment of the week

(A suggestion for engagement in following the way of Jesus this week)

For the next 3 weeks, as a family or with some friends use a concordance to do a Bible study on how often God’s people are called to give thanks and for what they are to be thankful. Make lists of your discoveries, journal your reflections and life applications, and discuss with others.