

A Voice From Heaven

by Carl Armerding

The sermon emphasizes the greatness and majesty of God, and the importance of recognizing Him as the ultimate source of wisdom and the only sufficient sacrifice for our sins.

Duration: 23:57

Scripture: Genesis 4:4, Genesis 8:20, Isaiah 40:12, Matthew 6:33, Romans 1:20, Romans 5:20, Ephesians 2:1-5

Topics: "God's Voice"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker begins by discussing the rules and regulations presented in a gracious manner. He then emphasizes the spiritual objectives of the camp, stating that it is not just about having a good time, but also about finding answers to important questions. The speaker highlights the awe-inspiring surroundings of the camp, such as the mountains, streams, trees, flowers, birds, and animals, as evidence of an all-wise and all-powerful Creator. He encourages the audience to recognize the greatness and importance of God, and to seek a personal relationship with Him. The sermon also includes a reference to the book of Isaiah, specifically chapter 40, where the speaker explores the concept of God's measurement and control over the elements of the universe.

Transcript

This time, let's turn again to the book of Isaiah, chapter 40. Just to review a little bit, we've been taking up the earlier verses, the first eleven verses in three previous studies, in which we have noticed how relevant these messages are to the days in which we live. I think we'll discover the same as we go on now with this fourth meditation in the 40th chapter of the book of Isaiah, beginning at verse 12.

Who hath measured the waters in the hollow of his hand, and meted out, or measured out, heaven with a span, and comprehended the dust of the earth in a measure, and weighed the mountains in scales, and the hills in a balance? Who hath directed the Spirit of the Lord, or being his counselor, hath taught him? With whom took he counsel, or who instructed him, and taught him in the path of judgment, and taught him knowledge, and showed to him the way of understanding? Behold, the nations are as a drop of a bucket, and are counted as the small dust of the balance. Behold, he taketh up the isles as a very little thing, and Lebanon is not sufficient to burn, nor the beasts thereof sufficient for a burnt offering. All nations before him are as nothing, and they are counted to him less than nothing, and vanity.

Not long ago I spent a few days in the Rocky Mountains, where some hundreds of young people had gathered for a week of both spiritual and physical enjoyment. A good many of them had come from parts

of the country where there are no mountains, and where life on the whole is quite different from what it is in a camp, where they could enjoy a freedom of action which would be quite impossible in their hometowns. As a result, there was a great deal of hilarity and roosting as they gave vent to the pent-up energies.

As we listened and watched, some of us began to wonder if they would ever quiet down. But the ringing of the dinner bells soon altered things. Then, after they had fully enjoyed the delicious meal set before them, the leader of the camp arose to make some announcements.

A few necessary rules and regulations were presented in a most gracious manner. Finally, he spoke of the great spiritual objectives of camp. He remarked that we not only come together there to have a good time, but also to have some important questions answered.

In the nature of things, everyone has questions. Their very surroundings were bound to raise questions in their minds. The great mountains all around them, beautiful streams of water that never run dry, trees at least ten times older than most of those gathered there at that time, flowers that bloom where few ever came to enjoy their loveliness, birds whose songs are never heard on city streets, animals that roam where the foot of man seldom treads.

All these, as well as the gleaming stars above, bore unanimous testimony to an all-wise and all-powerful creator. The one who made and upholds all of these things must be great. He must be important.

What a thrill to know him, yea, to meet him. From the human standpoint, that seemed to be impossible. But he in whom we live and move and have our being, the one who gives to all life and breath and all things, invites us to come unto him with all of our doubts and our perplexities.

He has the solution to every problem, and the answer to all of our questions. In the portion of scripture now before us, we note that he actually raises some questions himself. He does not wait for some atheist or agnostic to do this.

He brings us, as it were, to the shore of the fathomless deep and asks, Who hath measured the waters in the hollow of his hand? Now, we know the hollow of a man's hand will not hold much. The Hebrew word here translated hollow is used only three times in the Old Testament. It occurs in 1 Kings 20, verse 10, where it is used with reference to handfuls of dust.

In Ezekiel 13, verse 19, we find it used in connection with handfuls of barley. How great must be the hand that can measure the vast oceans, as if they were but handfuls of water. And then, inviting us to lift our eyes heavenward, he asks, Who it is that meted out heaven with a span? That which is immeasurable to us, he measures with the spread of his fingers, suggestive of what we do when playing a stringed instrument, for example.

If the suggestion be appropriate, we may well wonder what heavenly music still awaits the quickened ear. Finally, as if to remind us of our humble beginnings, he brings us back to the dust of the earth, which he has comprehended in a measure. The question he raises implies the magnitude of this.

He weighed the mountains in scales and the hills in a balance. He not only measured them quantitatively, but also qualitatively. The water we drink, the air we breathe, as well as the ground we walk on, are all delicately balanced compounds and mixtures.

The work of him which is wonderful in counsel and excellent in working. In the verse which we have just considered, we find all of the simple substances or elements which constitute the material universe. Here the Almighty invites us to enter his laboratory and to see him at work.

The departments of physics, geology, and chemistry are all represented here. How few of us ever stop to consider when we take a drink of water that it is a precise compound of hydrogen and oxygen. The air we breathe is a mixture of oxygen, nitrogen, and other gases, all in perfect balance.

And the earth on which we live is made up of elements, the importance and power of which bear witness to the eternal power and Godhead of him who brought all this into being. By means of the telescope and the spectroscope, man has been able to determine the size and the composition of the heavenly bodies as well. But all of this is intended to bring man to the conclusion that the hand that made us is divine.

Scripture informs us that that which may be known of God in this way has left man without excuse. Therefore, the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who hold the truth in unrighteousness. Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has showed it unto them.

For the invisible things of him, that is, his invisible things, from or ever since the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse. You'll find that quotation in Romans chapter 1, verses 18 to 20. Then, as if that were not enough, the Lord now invites us to enter another department of his great university in which we come to that which is abstract rather than concrete.

Accordingly, we have the question, Who hath directed the Spirit of the Lord, or, being his counselor, hath taught him? This question directs us to the source of the wisdom that planned all of these things. Who is the teacher in this great university? This is really a demand for an ultimate. If there were another who could direct and counsel as if there were another who could direct and counsel the Spirit of the Lord.

The fact that the Spirit of the Lord is named here reminds us that he is the first member of the Godhead who is named by name in Scripture. It was he who first moved upon the face of the waters to bring order out of chaos. Could anyone teach him? Job raised the same question in his day.

Shall any teach God knowledge, seeing he judges those that are high? Failing to get an answer from any of his friends, Job raises the question again and again. Where is wisdom found? And where is the place of understanding? And then he supplies the answer himself. God understandeth the way thereof, and he knoweth the place thereof.

For he looketh to the ends of the earth, and seeth unto the whole heaven to make the weight for the winds, and he weigheth the waters by measure. When he made decree for the rain, and a way for the lightning of the thunder, then did he see it and declared it. He prepared it.

Yea, and he searched it out. No doubt the Lord raises these questions here in order to bring us to the conclusion that there is no other source of wisdom. The child of faith does not have to grope in a maze of philosophical reasonings and doubts.

The great schools of philosophy have had ample opportunity to show whether or not they could, by searching, find an answer to these questions. It is evident that they have not succeeded. For after that, in the wisdom of God, the world by wisdom, or by its wisdom, knew not God, it pleased God by the

foolishness of preaching, to say them that believe.

And it is with great relief and satisfaction that those who believe can turn from the voluminous writings of men to the simple yet sublime statements of the word of God. And therefore they can sing, My heart is resting, O my God, I will give thanks and sing. My heart is at the secret source of every precious thing.

The path of judgment and the way of understanding are all as clear as day to him. And by faith we may walk in this path and in this way with him. If we take judgment here to mean decision, then we can see how walking with him in this path of decision will save us from costly error, and the way of understanding will give meaning to all that we do.

Having considered that which is philosophical as well as that which is scientific, we come now to that which is political. What about the grave problems which are vexing the minds of the world's greatest statesmen and politicians today? What about the international situation just now? What does the future hold in store for this or that nation? Compared with him of whom we have been thinking, behold, the nations are as a drop of a bucket and are counted as a small dust of the balance. Behold, he taketh up the isles, or perhaps it should be rendered the continents, as a very little thing.

One authority translates this last, Behold, he taketh up the isles as an atom. In other words, the biggest continents on this earth, great and immense as they look to us, are but an atom in his sight. And other similes used in this verse are equally striking.

What serious-minded student of geography or of geopolitics would ever think of likening the nations to a drop that falls unnoticed from a bucket, or to the fine dust on a pair of scales which makes no perceptible difference in the weight of that which is being weighed in the balances? But the sacred writer goes even further and says, All nations before him are as nothing. They are counted to him less than nothing and vanity. How great must he be of whom such language can be used with propriety! But we have yet to consider that which is more wonderful and more important than anything we have considered thus far.

Our scripture goes on to say, Lebanon is not sufficient to burn, nor a beast throughout sufficient for a burnt offering. That brings us to that which is definitely spiritual. Among the offerings listed for us in the book of Leviticus, the burnt offering takes the first place.

But the order of experience is generally the opposite of that. Accordingly, it is placed here as the climax or acme of all that has been before us. Without it, our lesson would not be complete.

Would to God that that were recognized in our educational and political programs today. In their zeal to eliminate religion from the curricula of our schools, men have eliminated God as well. As far as political organizations are concerned, it is noted with sadness that when the United Nations Conference on International Organization was held in San Francisco in 1945, God was even mentioned.

There has been an attempt to make up for this by setting aside a room at headquarters in New York where members may go to pray if they so desire. But so long as this is optional and secondary, one can hardly expect the blessing of God upon the deliberations of that organization. And the same must be said for anything that we undertake, whether it be in national or international affairs, or whether it be in our own individual matters.

If we would enjoy the blessing of the Lord, we must give Him the preeminence in all things. In view of the greatness and the majesty of God implied in the verses we have just considered, we are not surprised to

learn that Lebanon is not sufficient to burn, nor the beasts that are out for a burnt offering. From the very beginning, men seem to have had a sense of what was due to God in this way.

When Abel brought unto the Lord the first things of his flock and the fat thereof, as we read in Genesis 4, he was no doubt carrying on a tradition handed down to him by Adam and Eve. And we read of Noah after the flood, that he builded an altar unto the Lord, and took of every clean beast and of every clean fowl, and offered burnt offerings unto the Lord. Likewise Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and others.

But all of them must have known full well that no offering that they could bring would be adequate on the one hand to express the worship due to the Lord, or on the other hand to atone for their sins against Him. When the Queen of Sheba came to Solomon to prove him with hard questions, she came with a very great train, with camels that bear spices and very much gold and precious stones. But after she had heard his wisdom and seen all its glory, there was no more spirit in her.

She may well serve as an illustration of what we would feel like if we were fully aware of the glory and majesty of the Lord when we come into His presence with our offerings. But in our case matters would be complicated by the fact that we come as offenders more often than we do as worshipers. And if the gravity of an offense is measured by the dignity of the person offended, how grave must be the offense of those who have sinned against one who is infinitely holy and righteous.

To illustrate this, let us suppose that I have deliberately injured some dirty little ragamuffin simply because he annoyed me by his presence. Let us also suppose that on another occasion I give similar treatment to another boy of about the same age but quite different otherwise. Let us say for the sake of illustration that the latter is a lad of noble birth, perhaps even heir to a throne.

Whereas what I did to the ragamuffin was scarcely noted, this offense results in my arrest followed by severe punishment. Why the difference? The gravity of my offense was measured by the dignity of the person offended. The glory of God is the standard by which all of us have been measured, all have sinned and come short of the glory of God.

Therefore even the sacrifices which He Himself commanded in Old Testament times are not sufficient. For the law, having a shadow of good things to come and not the very image of the things, can never with those sacrifices which they offered year by year continually make the comers thereunto perfect. But in those sacrifices there is a remembrance again made of sins every year.

For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins. The Old Testament sacrifices were like paper money. They were accepted by the Lord just as paper money is accepted today as legal tender for all debts, public and private, according to the statement printed right on the face of our paper money.

The paper money merely represents the silver on deposit in the treasure of the United States of America. If the paper money were destroyed, the government would not lose one penny. It has no intrinsic value.

Nevertheless, it is acceptable everywhere because of what it represents. Likewise, the Old Testament sacrifices were accepted because of what they represented. They were types or symbols of our Lord Jesus Christ.

But he is the only sufficient sacrifice. My sins deserved eternal death or eternal separation from God because I had sinned against an infinitely holy being. And nothing but an infinite sacrifice could put away

my sins.

The Lord Jesus provided that when he gave himself for me on Calvary's cross. Sometimes we are asked why a sinner should be punished eternally for sins committed during a lifetime of less than a century. Such a question loses sight of the fact that the length of one's life has nothing to do with the amount of punishment our sins deserve.

The Scripture tells us that men will be judged according to their works, not according to their years. We all know that it is possible to do in a minute that which can never be undone. We cannot measure the sufferings of Christ by the number of hours that he hung upon the cross.

It is the character of the sufferer as well as the nature of sufferings which give infinite value to what was accomplished there. And that is why those who trust in him as a personal savior receive eternal life, whereas those who reject him receive eternal judgment. So you see the question as to why men should be punished eternally is not based exactly on the number of sins which they have committed, although we agree that there is such a thing taught in Scripture as punishment according to our deeds, but it's even more so because of the person against whom we have sinned.

This is a much more important thing, and that is it that makes sin so terribly solemn. It's because it's against an infinitely holy and righteous being such as our God is. And then on the other side, as we've already pointed out here, the fact that the Lord Jesus suffered only a few hours, as it were, upon the cross, three hours in the daylight, shall we say, and three hours in the dark, when he cried out, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? He was enduring all that anyone will endure in eternity to be absolutely and eternally forsaken of God.

In other words, dear friends, if you want to know what eternal punishment is like, you just need to study the gospel records of the crucifixion of our Lord and what he endured there. This is the answer to the question. So many people are so bent on measuring things out in terms of days and years and sometimes even hours and minutes, but that isn't the way God figures this thing out.

Neither do we when, as we've already pointed out in this little meditation, here's a person who in one moment does a deed which can never be undone. Take, for instance, the person who murders another. That may have been done with one shot or one blow, but after it's done, there's no way of recalling that life here.

Likewise, one who has been robbed of her virtue can never have it restored. We all recognize that here are things which, even though they were done in a moment, they have consequences that go on for years and years and years. And I believe this will answer the question as to why eternal punishment is meted out to those who have lived perhaps less than half a century.

But God in his wondrous grace has made ample and sufficient provision so that the vilest sinner need not despair. Here is hope for the hopeless, pardon for those who are condemned, cleansing for those who are defiled, and life for those who are dead in trespasses and in sins. Yes, dear friends, and the fact that God is still sending out this message today after all these years proves how gracious God is.

You know, he could have withdrawn his offer long ago had he wished, and no one could have blamed him for it. But he's left all these years roll by, and the message going out as never before, and the fact that you're listening to a reproduction of it now is evidence that God is using every method in his power to

reach your heart with the message of his grace. God grant that not one who listens to these words shall fail to avail himself of the priceless blessings through faith in Jesus Christ our Lord.

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