

God's Power

5afterEpiphany

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Isaiah 40:21-31

Grace, peace, and mercy be to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

“To whom then will you compare me, that I should be like him? says the Holy One.” In Old Testament times, there were numerous false gods to which the Israelites were tempted to compare God. More than that, even the very elements of creation were worshipped in those times, as though they were gods. In New Testament times, the names of those idols changed, and the worship of parts or all of the creation continued. Today, there are still some who worship false gods or created things. Yet in our text, God reminded the Israelites, and us, that He alone has ““(s)alvation and glory and power”” as the multitude proclaim in Revelation chapter nineteen.

This morning we'll consider the three aspects of this quote from Revelation: looking intently at God's power, His glory, and His salvation, through the lens of our Old Testament text.

Verse 1

“Do you not know? Do you not hear? Has it not been told you from the beginning? Have you not understood from the foundations of the earth? 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; who brings princes to nothing, and makes the rulers of earth as emptiness.”

Prior to the Babylonian Captivity, God called Isaiah to speak these words to His people in advance. Through Isaiah, God questioned them thoroughly. “Do you not know? Do you not hear?” In other words, don't you remember that God is your God? Just before our text, God asked, “To whom then will you liken God, or what likeness compare with him? An idol! A craftsman casts it, and a goldsmith overlays it with gold and casts for it silver chains.”

Through these words, God reminded His people Israel that He was not something that they made that they could influence Him. He was not an idol that they dreamt up and fashioned of their own knowledge. He was not their creation; but they were His. To Him, their works were as convincing as those of grasshoppers to us. Grasshoppers then, as now, did not influence human beings as to which way to go; rather, they took flight, jumping out of the way of human beings. So, too, God did not jump when the Israelites came near; but rather, they would have no choice but to jump out of His way as He did what He desired.

After all, this was God, the One who created the entire universe, the world and everything in it. It was He who put princes into their positions of authority. He would have no need to bow to the whims of humanity. Rather: humanity depended on Him for everything, just as the Israelites would depend on Him and His deliverance through the impending Captivity.

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, “Do you not know? Do you not hear? Has it not been told to you from the beginning?” We are not the ones with power. God is the One with all power—the power to let catastrophe happen should He choose it, or to save us should He decide to. He is not an idol fashioned by craftsmen. He does not depend on us; we depend on Him. “Scarcely are (we) planted, scarcely sown, scarcely has (our) stem taken root in the earth, when he blows on (us), and (we) wither, and the tempest carries (us) off like stubble.”

Verse 2

“To whom then will you compare me, that I should be like him? says the Holy One. Lift up your eyes on high and see: who created these (that is, the stars)? He who brings out their host by number, calling them all by name, by the greatness of his might, and because he is strong in power not one is missing. Why do you say... ‘My way is hidden from the Lord, and my right is disregarded by my God’? Have you not known? Have you not heard? The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He does not faint or grow weary; his understanding is unsearchable.”

God originally spoke these words to His people Israel, questioning them once more. He asked them who created the stars of the night sky, and He answered the question for them. He, the One true God, had created the stars. He set their positions in the night sky demonstrating His majestic glory as the King of Creation. As the King of Creation, God does not sleep. He created the night as well as the day. There was no time at which the Israelites could make plans hidden from Him. What is more, He understood all of their intentions, both the righteous ones and evil alike.

God’s power now, as then, includes His omniscience—His knowing everything. Times may have changed, but the fact that God knows all of our intentions hasn’t. And the fact that God is aware of everything that happens behind closed doors or in the middle of the night hasn’t changed either.

“Have you not heard? The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth.” God has created you and knows everything about you—from every plan you make to the number of hair on your head. He knows you better than you know yourself.

Verse 3

And God Himself “does not faint or grow weary, (but)...He gives power to the faint, and to him who has no might he increases strength. Even youths shall faint and be weary, and young men shall be exhausted; but they who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint.”

God had Isaiah prophesy these words to the Israelites before they would enter the Babylonian Captivity. Some of the Israelites seemed to have lost faith. Yet God encouraged those who had retained their faith: He Himself would be the One who would be giving power to the faint and to the one who had no might. Those who would “wait for the Lord”—that is, those who would continue to hope and put their faith in Him and His power—they would mount up with wings like eagles. Freedom would come from the Captivity, but what is more, freedom would come for all those in the captivity of sin.

Today have we not heard the news? Do we not know? God has sent His Son into the world as God manifested in human flesh. Jesus, God’s Son, would preach and teach a while longer, but would ultimately go into captivity in our place. At His baptism, Jesus received the sins of the entire world of all time. He even received your sin. These He took with Him on to the cross at Calvary. There He would pay the price of your sin—captivity in the devil’s kingdom, being completely separated from the love of God the Father. But God did not leave it there. Jesus would say from the cross, “It is finished.” His work in paying for our sins was completed, and the reign of the devil was finished as well.

Satan's time is limited. He has been defeated at the cross, and all those who are waiting for the Lord are getting to hear the Good News that the price for their sins has been paid and that Satan's time is coming to an end. This Good News gives wings to the believer. It lets all who believe run without losing their breath. It does this now, but even more at the Day to come. This power is granted to us by God, who knows us so well and who sent His Son to make us His dear children.

From all this, we can see God's power. He has shown His power in creation, having made all of creation rather than only parts of it as the Old Testament and New Testament supposed "gods" could do. His majesty is shown in that He continues to rule over His creation, keeping the stars in their proper alignment and in keeping watch over everything both day and night. Finally, He has shown His power of salvation in sending His Son to bring us out of the captivity of sin. That is the power of God, in and through our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ; and that is why to Him belong "(s)alvation and glory and power." In Jesus' Name. Amen.