

CREATED FOR MAJESTY, ISAIAH 40:12-31

By Jay Wegter

INTRODUCTION: Through the ages men and women have lined up, paid admission, and passed through turnstiles in order to experience the role of a spectator. Greeks had their Olympic games, Romans their coliseum, Minoans their bull tumbling; but no people group on the face of the earth has surpassed the Americans in inventing pastimes. Consider that we have thought up everything from hog-calling to NASCAR racing to frog jumping to harness racing to pie eating (and the seemingly endless list goes on).

Mankind was put on the planet to subdue the earth, but in America once we conquered our enemies and tamed the land with the plow, we built athletic stadiums and arenas, instead of forts and stockades, and we erected theaters and symphony halls instead of barns and silos. But, does the multi-billion dollar industry of sports and entertainment exist simply as a cure for boredom? Scripture has the answer: you and I were created to behold and gaze upon the excellence of our God. According to Isaiah chapter forty-three and verse twenty-one, God says that *“the people whom I formed for Myself will declare My praise.”*

We were created to run on God. We were designed by God to be enthusiastic spectators of His excellence. We were created to take delight in His beauty, excellence, splendor, and perfections—to bask in the golden light of His wondrous works—exalting the wisdom, goodness, and power associated with His awesome deeds. But, even more, we were fashioned not as passive spectators, but to be energetically involved observers who pour out their praise and plaudits. I agree with John Piper who suggests that the satisfaction that comes from gazing upon excellence is not complete until we make a declaration of it in acts of praise.

This is also part of our design as spectators of God’s majesty and excellence—we are to derive satisfaction from reveling in, exulting in, and extolling His greatness—literally from telling of His wonders to all who will listen. *“But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God’s own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light”* (1 Pet 2:9). Here is the amazing thing: we are not boasting in our God as detached observers, but as those who have been made trophies of His grace and vessels of His glory.

We are to take care that we do not allow our created propensity to praise the God of excellence to habitually fall upon all lesser boasts. *“Let not a wise man boast of his wisdom, and let not the mighty man boast of his might, let not a rich man boast of his riches; but let him who boasts boast of this, that he understands and knows Me, that I am the Lord who exercises lovingkindness, justice, and righteousness on earth; for I delight in these things, declares the Lord”* (Jer 9:23-24).

I. Perceiving the Majesty of the Lord is a function of Faith in His Word

A. *Though God Almighty is everywhere, upholding all things by the word of His power, it is by faith in the Scriptures that we perceive and interpret His works.* God has given ample testimony of His attributes in His mighty works of creation and providence (Rom 1:18-21), but our faculties unaided by His revelation will not necessarily perceive His majesty. The blinding effects of sin obscure the glory of the Creator—even when His majesty is so evident in His works. Unbelievers may deeply appreciate a starry night or a beautiful sunset or a dramatic thunderstorm, but the ability to behold God’s majesty in

those phenomena is a function of faith in His revealed word. 2000 years ago thousands of people beheld Jesus up close, but most of them did so by natural sense alone (apart from the testimony of Scripture). As a consequence, they chose to forsake and despise Him, rejecting His messianic claims (1 Pet 2:7).

B. *If we, as the redeemed people of God made in His image, systematically neglect His majesty, there will be symptoms in our lives.* So also among the people of Judah at the time of Isaiah's ministry there were serious symptoms stemming from a refusal to contemplate the majesty of God elucidated in His Word. There are four major symptoms of neglecting His majesty which are repeatedly addressed in the book of Isaiah:

- 1.) ***Faithless pragmatism*** – the pragmatist is full of striving, he is too busy to be still before God. He is self-reliant. He trusts in the slogans: “If it is going to be; it is up to me” and, “Most every problem can be solved by common sense.” He has an inordinate self-willed trust in his own plans. He has abandoned waiting upon God—he leaves no room for God to work. Consequently he uses the world's methods which normally result in adopting the world's temporal values. In the case of wayward Judah, the nation ceased depending upon the Lord and instead hired mercenaries from Egypt “*to her own shame*” (Is 30:1-5ff.). The opposite of faithless pragmatism is trust in the Lord which goes far beyond what our limited understanding can perceive and comprehend (Prov 3:5-6; 16:3).
- 2.) ***Religious formalism*** – is cold, dead, outward orthodoxy which contents itself with the externals of religion. Spiritual exercises are reduced to something to salve the conscience—a good luck charm to maintain good fortune. The formalist has no heart religion or love to God. There is weariness of the Lord. This brand of departure from the Lord is also targeted by Isaiah: “*Because this people draw near with their word and honor Me with their lip service, but they remove their hearts far from Me, and their reverence for Me consists of tradition learned by rote*” (Is 29:13).
- 3.) ***Persistent idolatry*** – occurs when God is not perceived as the source of our supply, satisfaction, and security. If we are not glorying in the perfections of our God, then the world will parade its offers before us and seek to take hold of our admiration. Our hearts are ceaseless in their search for objects worthy of praise, loyalty, and devotion. If we are not feeding on the excellencies of our God, then the world will exert a powerful degree of seduction in its efforts to win our adoration. The issue of idolatry is always about perceived source—who or what is the real provider of my needs? With biting satire, Isaiah states that oxen and donkeys are smarter than idolatrous Judah, for they know who feeds and cares for them (Is 1:3).
- 4.) ***Hardened cynicism*** – consists of a negative outlook which fails to see God's hand in delays, obstacles, and chastisements. Cynicism betrays a self-pitying disposition dominated by an attitude of, “If God doesn't care; then I don't care.” The religious cynic has stopped believing that God has a plan that is for our good and for His glory. As a consequence, the cynic regards setbacks, testings, thwartings, disappointments, and inconveniences as evidence that God does not care. When this attitude begins to

dominate, a person tends to lose tenderness toward God and become blinded to divine love and kindness. Apart from repentance, the cynic will continue down a dangerous road of habitual impenitent doubting. In the book of Isaiah, God addresses this sin in the following chapters: 22; 28; 29; 31; 40. The line epitomizing cynicism is, “*Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we may die*” (Is 22:13b).

II. God readjusts us to Himself by granting us transforming Views of His Majesty

A. *There are times in which God may affect a mighty cure of spiritual ills simply by having a person look and believe. We think of the example taken from the wilderness wandering in which Israelites bitten by fiery serpents were healed by looking upon the brazen serpent.* This is also a theme running through the book of Isaiah—that the cure for so many of our spiritual maladies entails fresh views of God’s majesty. This is particularly true of Isaiah chapter 40. God brings remedies to our spiritual problems by a fresh sight of His majesty—by the knowledge of Himself received, believed, and loved—by His supremacy adored, embraced, and relied upon.

B. *God’s wisdom, might, and goodness in creation reveal His majesty.*

Isaiah 40:12-17 – *In verse 12* it is God alone who has given each of these regions (*water, heavens, dust, mountains*) their proper quantities. He chose the materials and weighed them. The *anthropomorphisms* such as ‘hollow of His hand’ are meant to show the smallness of man in contrast to the sovereignty of God. The universe is dwarfed before Him—this is to put us in our place as the creatures of His hand. We dwell on a balanced earth that does not totter (note the principle of *isostasy*; the earth’s crust has a relatively equal mass in all places regardless of thickness). “*He established the earth upon its foundations, so that it will not totter forever and ever*” (Ps 104:5). (But, we see also the fact the earth *totters* when under divine judgment—Isaiah 24:20.)

In addition, the earth is precisely the right distance from the sun in order to sustain life. This calculated distance is but one of many finely tuned parameters which permit life on our planet. In addition, mankind is just the right size to subdue the earth. He is midway between the size of a molecule and the planet itself. Also the Van Allen radiation belt generated by the earth’s magnetic core (a core likely made of liquid nickel and iron) deflects the harmful solar wind that streams out of our sun. The existence of these parameters is in keeping with God’s testimony in Scripture: “*He is the God who formed the earth and made it, He established it and did not create it a waste place; but formed it to be inhabited*” (Is 45:18).

C. *God’s majesty is seen in His role as omniscient Governor.*

Verses 13-14 – In the paragraphs above, verse 12 speaks of His omnipotence, while these two verses speak of His omniscience. He has the fullness of all knowledge and wisdom. He possesses absolute wisdom—He is the cause of all things in their pristine original form. All things derive their meaning from Him. All truth exists only because of Him. The only reason we know anything for certain is because God knows everything—every fact in the universe. The welfare of His creatures is dependent upon His knowledge of all facts. Facts are related, but the sum of the whole is within the mind of God. To be

in touch with reality therefore is to be related to God in Christ by faith—for He is the one true God who knows and controls all.

Verses 15-17 – God rules over the whole of the human race which is divided up into nations. But the sheer weight of governing billions of individuals is no more a burden to Him than a drop clinging to the side of a bucket is a burden to the man carrying it. The task of God’s governance has no more weight to Him than a fleck of dust upon a steel scale or balance. The heathen nations are dispersed on islands and land masses, but to Him who carries and upholds the entire universe, all of this is like a tiny particle of dust. What a vanishing insignificant particle then is man then when compared to Yahweh.

Verse 16 affirms that everything which could be exalted by man falls incomparably short. There is not enough wood to sustain a sacrificial fire of a sufficient magnitude to honor Him. For 100,000 earths blazing white hot from pole to pole would only amount to less than 10 percent of the mass of our sun (which God has made for His own glory). Let us remember that God receives nothing from us which benefits Him. “*For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen*” (Rom 11:36).

Verse 17 states that the nations are regarded by Him as null and void, as emptiness and vanity. They are slated for non-existence—for a spiritual desolation, like pre-creation unformed chaotic matter. Therefore they are as good as nothing at all. God turns man’s accomplishments back into dust (Ps 90:3). Like Nebuchadnezzar’s image—the nations are destined to be crushed to powder and blown away (Dan 2:35). They will be shaken into oblivion so that the stone cut out without hands, Christ’s kingdom, may fill the earth and the people of God might inherit a kingdom which cannot be shaken (Heb 12:27-29).

D. The majesty of God reveals the sheer folly of idolatry.

Verses 18-20 – Nothing can bear comparison with God. There is nothing in our experience which can remotely be equated with Him. He is altogether other. Therefore to depict the divine by means of an idol is absurd. It is spiritual suicide and spiritual insanity to make a portion of God’s creation into that which is to be worshipped. In reality, the actual place where idols are manufactured is the heart of man. The allure of idols has always been the illusion that man can control the deities by obligating them.

Verses 21-24 – By means of divine revelation, the true knowledge of God was given to the Patriarchs from the foundation of the world. The question in verse 21: “*Do you not know? Have you not heard?*” is an indictment condemning Isaiah’s listeners for closing their eyes and ears to the teachings of divine revelation. Unlike the natural, or carnal reasoning of Plato and Aristotle, the true knowledge of God could never have been discovered by human investigation (1 Cor 1:21). The wisdom of God must be revealed by God to us in His self-revelation, the Holy Scriptures.

E. God’s goodness fills the creation. In verse 22 the text alludes to the thin layer of earth’s atmosphere which when viewed on edge from space looks like a glowing blue veil. Just how thin is our atmosphere? The distance covered in an eight minute drive on the freeway, if traversed vertically would take you into a region above the earth which could

not support life. The air in our environment is approximately 20% oxygen and 78% nitrogen. If that order were reversed, there would not be a forest standing because forest fires would be an instantaneous explosion rather than moving waves of combustion.

In verses 22-24, God's sovereignty is in view again. Because God is omnipotent; there is nothing so high or impressive or mighty in the world that He cannot effortlessly bring down and reduce to nothing (see Dan 4:34-35; Prov 21:30; Job 12:23). Nothing more is needed than the 'breath' of Yahweh. In Isaiah chapter ten, the Lord refers to Assyria as His ax, His rod of correction. God disciplines the nations sending one against another. He raises them up and then leads them away in chains. He sets their bounds and brings them to judgment. Even wicked Pharaoh was raised up for God's glory (Rom 9:17). (See also Ps 76:10; Prov 16:4; 21:30; 1 Pet 1:24-24.) I am reminded of the poem by Shelley which speaks of man's fleeting glory:

I met a traveller from an antique land
Who said: Two vast and trunkless legs of stone
Stand in the desert. Near them, on the sand,
Half sunk, a shattered visage lies, whose frown
And wrinkled lip, and sneer of cold command
Tell that its sculptor well those passions read
Which yet survive, stamped on these lifeless things,
The hand that mocked them and the heart that fed.
And on the pedestal these words appear:
"My name is Ozymandias, king of kings:
Look on my works, ye Mighty, and despair!"
Nothing beside remains. Round the decay
Of that colossal wreck, boundless and bare
The lone and level sands stretch far away.

"**Ozymandias**" is a sonnet by Percy Bysshe Shelley, published in 1818. It is frequently anthologized and is probably Shelley's most famous short poem. The central theme of "Ozymandias" is the inevitable decline of all leaders, and of the empires they build, however mighty in their own time. The 'Younger Memnon' statue of Ramesses II in the British Museum thought to have inspired the poem. **Ozymandias** was another name for Ramesses the Great, Pharaoh of the nineteenth dynasty of ancient Egypt. The sonnet paraphrases the inscription on the base of the statue: "King of Kings am I, Ozymandias. If anyone would know how great I am and where I lie, let him surpass one of my works."

Verses 25-26 – The finite mind cannot truly conceive of infinity. We have no mental category for things endlessly immense. Our text bids us to look to the heavens and consider the innumerable stars. Not one is missing—He leads them forth like a flock each night. It is a shame that unregenerate astronomers should use the study of galaxies in an effort to explain away the need for the glorious work of our Creator. The Hubble 'hopefuls' thought that their telescope would let them peer at the outer boundary of what they call "the big bang." They wanted to see the boundary of time—the edge of the universe so that they might explain the mysteries of our origin without reference to God.

But God gave them a rebuke amidst their arrogance. The telescope was given an assignment: examine a tiny portion of the night sky which appears black from earth's telescopes. That small portion of the sky was equivalent to a grain of sand held at arm's length against the night sky. The picture transmitted from Hubble left scientists breathless, speechless—for that black speck of outer space was actually a region filled with galaxies disappearing into untold distance with more galaxies beyond. Each of those galaxies had millions of stars. Man attempting to measure the 'big bang' booby-trapped himself—the universe wouldn't submit to his measuring tools—it was “whoops,” time and time again as the researchers had to revise the diameter of the known universe.

F. *The message of His majesty in our text is that God maintains the universe in all places.*

Early Hubble estimates placed the diameter of the universe at about 10 billion light years across. So to calculate that distance in miles one would multiply 10 billion times 186,000 (speed of light in miles per second) times 31,536, 000 (the number of seconds in a year). Now suppose you wanted to be the 'cosmic Columbus', explorer of the universe and you didn't have to worry about mortality. If you set out at the speed of light screaming through the universe at 186,000 miles per second after 1000 years you would have only traveled two inches of a 300 mile journey. These distances boggle the mind and let us know that we cannot take God's measure. In fact we cannot take God's measure any more than your golden retriever could take your measure (in 2016 the diameter of the universe has been upwardly revised to 93 billion light years).

III. Our Response to His Majesty is to be one of Wonder, Trust, Stillness and Waiting

A. *Have you ever felt neglected by God?* Have you been tempted to interpret His delays as the absence of care for you? Have you reacted to His, “Wait a little longer,” as “There is no blessing for you?” And, have you responded to His, “Be still and know that I am God,” with “I guess I better do this myself?” These are the common ways our faith is tested and refined. When we attempt to spiritually navigate by sight alone, we will forget that God's timing (though frequently appearing to be late) is perfect. We cannot create the blessing, earn the blessing or hasten the blessing we seek.

Verses 27-28 – Again, reflection upon His majesty is primary for our spiritual health. And, contemplating God's power and wisdom in creation is essential. The infinite might of Yahweh was exerted during creation week. But, the formation of the entire creation did not deplete any of His power. His work produces no weariness. It is therefore vital that our view of God be filled with the knowledge of His majesty. This is essential if we are to give Him our heart's trust without reservation. In order to abandon ourselves to His love, wisdom, and care, we must also surrender to His majesty and glory—understanding that His mighty attributes stand behind all of His promises. His holiness and love are coupled with his infinite understanding—He knows the precise point in time to interpose with His aid to us. To us it seems late—but so often in retrospect we observe the perfection of all His works of providence in our lives.

B. *What work must be performed in order to partake of the strength God promises to the weary?*

ANSWER: first define yourself as weary and lacking strength; then trust, waiting upon the Lord in patient reliance. The value of waiting upon God is continually endorsed in the Psalms (Ps 27:14; 37:7-9, 34).

Verses 29-31 – We live in a culture of the instant—a push-button economy driven by the choices of consumers—we want to be served now—we make or break corporations as we ‘vote’ with our spending dollars. Advertising continually imbues the consumer with the message that life is all about you. As a result, we have a false sense of power and control. No wonder waiting upon God abases our pride and reminds us of our utter dependence. For, we do not negotiate with God based upon Him receiving anything from us. We do not operate from a position of strength, but one of utter dependency—we have no basis for demanding anything. But we do have the promise of God that in Christ we possess unfathomable riches (Eph 3:8), and in Christ all of God’s promises to us are ‘yes and amen’ (2 Cor 1:20). Our text says that youths grow weary and stumble badly—even a small temptation or obstacle may cause them to trip and fall badly. But it is different for those who practice waiting upon the Lord. They will spread their wings and take flight and be lifted up over obstacles.

C. What is the promise? Because Yahweh is the object of their lives, they will rise above tribulation as if they possessed wings. This divine help is not merely to impart tranquility of spirit amidst our endeavors, it is ultimately to fulfill God’s design for the redeemed—that they might finish the course and be made fit to enter the presence of God.

By faith in Him we commune with Him, we ‘fly’ into the presence of the Lord and experience deliverance from the cares of this world. This is why waiting upon Him is essential. We find that the worries of life exert a ‘gravitational pull’ which bends and doubles us over so that we do not look upon our majestic God. How we need to look up and wait—drawing the strength upon strength promised to those who trust His majesty.

APPLICATION: The original lie whispered in Eden suggested not only that there is higher good than the glory and majesty of God, but also that humans may live successfully independent of God’s glory. Perhaps you have given little thought of God’s majesty of late. And as a consequence, one of the four symptoms of spiritual dullness described in our introduction is cramping your spiritual life right now. If so, confess your unbelief and neglect. Rid yourself of the common excuses for spiritual ‘drift’ such as busy-ness, repeated disappointment, and unfruitfulness. Ask the Lord to grant you the willingness to release control to Him and the willingness to be abased by waiting humbly and patiently upon Him. Then, set your heart to seek His majesty afresh with the holy expectation that God delights in strengthening and refreshing His beloved people.