

## **Your God Is Too Small**

---

Rich Nathan

October 23-24, 2004

Prayer: Hungry For God

Isaiah 40:1-17

I've been doing a series on prayer over the last couple of months. Today what I'd like to do is to begin to discuss the issue of how we pray. We've talked a lot about the foundation for prayer; I'm going to continue discussing that today. The foundation for prayer is knowing who God is. But we also need to know how to pray. We need a track to run on. Where do you begin in your prayer? How do you continue in prayer? Where do you end?

Now, there are lots of different tracks to run on. Jesus gives us a track to run on in the Lord's Prayer. Let me give you a simple track that many people have found helpful in thinking through where you're going when you pray. The simple track is the acronym ACTS.

A  
C  
T  
S

Adoration  
Confession  
Thanksgiving  
Supplication

Today we're going to talk about adoration, or worship. The best place to begin in prayer is not with you, or your problems or issues, but with God. On the track that Jesus lays out for prayer, we see the same thing. The first statement in the Lord's Prayer is not: "Give us this day our daily bread." We don't begin with our petitions. We begin with worship: "Our Father in heaven, Hallowed be thy name."

The reason to start with adoration or worship is because the recognition of who God is forms the foundation for the rest of your prayer. The truth is that if you begin with yourself and your own situation, your own problems, you almost never will get off of yourself and consider God.

Here's the shorthand definition of worship or adoration. Worship is our response to God's revelation. Worship is our human response to what we believe God is like. Worship is our response to what God has shown us about himself.

Now, here's the problem. In 21<sup>st</sup> century America, we worship very little because there are a million forces that have made God very little. We have shrunken down worship because we have a shrunken down God. Almost never in history has God appeared so small to most people than the way that God appears to Americans in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. I believe this is true whether you are a follower of

Christ, or whether you struggle with issues of faith and don't consider yourself a follower of Christ.

Think about this with me for a moment. We in the 21<sup>st</sup> century are very aware of other religions in the world. We live now in a global village. Hindus, Buddhists, and Muslims do not live 7000 miles away from us in Central Asia. Rather, Hindus, Buddhists, and Muslims live on our street. They are our neighbors, friends, coworkers, and classmates. The issue of world religions and comparative religions has shrunk God down. Now many people consider the God of the Bible as merely one God among many. He is merely one option on the smorgasbord of religions. You worship the God of Christianity, someone might say. But we worship another God, or no God.

And not only has comparative religion shrunk God down, but in our contact with other cultures, the God of Christianity has been reduced further into merely the God of the West. In Asia, Africa, many people say: We're not going to worship Jesus. We're not going to worship the God in your Bible. That's an American God. That's merely a Western God.

And then under pressure from relativism, the God of Christianity, who has become the God of the West, is shrunk even further and that God becomes merely the God of you. Have you ever had a conversation with someone and said: Look, you really need to consider Jesus Christ. Christ is the only mediator between God and people. He's the bridge. He's the door through which you walk into a relationship with God. Have you ever had a conversation with someone and asked him or her to consider Christ and have him or her respond: Well, that's nice for you. That's what you believe. It may be true for you, but it is not true for me. My truth is different. I believe there are many ways to God. I believe there are many open doors, many paths, many ways to get to God. So in America, we shrink God further and God simply becomes the God of you.

And then this incredible shrinking God, under the force of subjectivism, is reduced down further to simply being the God of the religious part of you. God is not even the God of all of you. But in America today God becomes the God of just the religious part, the spiritual part of you. In the current presidential debates, this is a huge issue. Should my relationship with God affect my political decisions about abortion, race, the environment, or is my faith in God just something that is confined to my church life and my upbringing.

You know, the issue of shrinking God down is not only something that we Americans are dealing with in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. This has been a perennial issue throughout the ages. You see it in the history of God's people in the Old Testament. Is God merely one of the gods? Is he a local deity, someone who rules over the land of Israel, but he doesn't rule over the other lands. Is he someone who is just confined to religion, but he doesn't really play a role in economics, business, politics, or race.

Today as we continue in this series on prayer, I want to talk about worshipping God. Worship, adoration, as I said, is a response to what we believe God is like. We have shrunken worship. Worship is really hard for most of us because we have a shrunken God. And since most of us in America, whether we are Christians or not, believe in this incredible shrinking God. I've called today's talk, "Your God Is Too Small." Let's pray.

#### Isaiah 40

Isa 40:1 Comfort, comfort my people,  
says your God.

Isa 40:2 Speak tenderly to Jerusalem,  
and proclaim to her  
that her hard service has been completed,  
that her sin has been paid for,  
that she has received from the LORD'S hand  
double for all her sins.

Let me set the context of Isaiah 40. The Israelites have been judged by God for their sins. We read about the causes for these judgments in such books as 1 and 2 Kings, 1 and 2 Chronicles, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel. Judgment fell on the Jewish people because of their idolatry, their injustice to the poor, their immorality, and so on. And the judgment was the Israelites were hauled off into exile by the Babylonians. The Babylonian Army swept into Israel about 600 years before the birth of Christ. They came from where present day Iraq is located. They killed tens of thousands of Jews. They looted and destroyed the city of Jerusalem. And most importantly, from the Jewish perspective, the Babylonians burned the Temple in Jerusalem down to the ground. The most holy place in all of Old Testament religion, the Temple, was desecrated by these pagans and ultimately destroyed. Thousands of Jews were forcibly displaced from the land of Israel and forced into exile in Babylon.

Now, a remnant of their descendents are asking the question from Babylon: Has God given up on us? Have we gone so far that we have sinned our way out of God's purposes? Have we gone so far that we have forfeited our covenant relationship with God? Has our sin been so great that God has rejected us forever?

Friend, have you ever felt that you have gone so far this time, you have done something so stupid that not even God could clean up your mess? Have you ever felt that you have screwed things up so terribly that not even God could straighten them out? Has the thought ever been in your mind that hole you have fallen in is so deep that not even the arm of God is long enough to reach you? You've just made too big a mess of it. You've caused too much damage.

Friend, we cannot minimize the damage we can cause by choosing to disobey God. We can cause damage to ourselves. We can lose our health. We can bring disease into bodies. We can open ourselves up to viruses and bacteria. We can ruin our lungs, liver and hearts. We can even ruin our looks through sin. If you look at the face of someone who has lived a life of disobedience to God, sin is etched into their faces. I wonder, are any of you suffering physically because of your sin?

We can damage ourselves financially through disobedience to God. We can lose our house, our car, our credit rating, and our jobs.

We can certainly damage ourselves emotionally when we sin. We can lose our peace. We lose our joy. Sin can cause us to become anxious, guilt-ridden, emotionally dead, irritable, depressed, and paranoid. Have you seen this in your life? These negative dark emotions that overwhelm you because you chose to disobey God? We can become compulsive, narcissistic, and irrationally jealous through sin.

Repeated sin can turn us into addicts, what the Bible calls “slaves to sin.” The Bible speaks to the issue of addiction.

Of course through sin we can hurt others. All of us, through our sin, have caused great harm to someone else. And some of us have caused great harm to many people. You may have destroyed a life through the sin of abortion either by procuring an abortion, or helping a girlfriend, a friend, or wife get an abortion. You may have destroyed a marriage through the sin of your neglect, or your selfishness, or your adultery, or your abuse or bitterness. You may have destroyed a relationship through the sin of unforgiveness, a stubborn unwillingness to be reconciled to another person. We can and we often have caused harm to our boyfriends, girlfriends, coworkers, bosses, friends, roommates, parents, even to our own children. Our words can wound. How many times have we wounded someone by something we said? Our looks can wound and so can our judgments, our bad counsel, and our failure to fulfill our obligations – legal obligations or moral obligations. We can hurt others through sin.

We know that we can damage our relationship with God through sin. Sin disrupts our fellowship with God. You can’t commune with God. You can’t enjoy God’s presence. You can’t feel his love while you are deliberately bringing God sorrow and grief.

Sin will hinder your fruitfulness in ministry. There is going to be a reduction in God’s power in your life. God will lower the impact of your life on others. God will reduce the influence you have step by step. Sin breaks the circuit so that God’s power stops flowing through us. Maybe not at the beginning, but over time

you will see less of God and more of the person working in their own strength because of sin.

Sin creates damage to us. It disrupts our relationship with God. Sin terribly wounds other people. We pay and other people pay a terrible price for our sin.

But here is the question the Jews were wrestling with in Isaiah 40. Does God utterly forsake us when we sin? Can we go so far in our sin that we sin our way out of a relationship with God? Can we blow it so badly that God will cease to be our Father in heaven and we will cease to be his beloved children? As Christians, we might ask the question: Can we lose our justification, our right standing with God? As Christians we might ask: Can we love our adoption? Can we stop being a child of God?

Listen to Isaiah's answer:

#### SLIDE

Isaiah 40:1-2

Isa 40:1 Comfort, comfort my people,  
says your God.

Isa 40:2 Speak tenderly to Jerusalem,  
and proclaim to her  
that her hard service has been completed,  
that her sin has been paid for,  
that she has received from the LORD'S hand  
double for all her sins.

Isaiah is shouting to the Israelites saying: Your God is too small. Don't shrink God down or limit his power or love even by the extent of your sin. Don't shrink God down even by the extent of God's discipline, however hard the discipline has been. Don't shrink the love of God down by that.

Isaiah speaks a word of comfort. Comfort, the Holy Spirit says, comfort the grieving heart of my people.

It is so easy whenever you get even a glimpse of how awful you've been, how much damage you've caused, and how absolutely perfect God is to believe that we may have sinned our way out of his favor forever. It is easy to believe, and this is what the enemy of your soul would have you believe, that you have lost your salvation.

It is easy to believe that a loved one, who clearly had embraced Christ has lost their salvation or any chance of future blessing from God. So many people do not come back to God. So many prodigals refuse to come home because they've lost their confidence in the Father's love.

Isaiah says: There's more to the story Israel, than your sin and God's judgment of you through exile in Babylon. There's more to the story than our sin and God's judgment. There's also atonement. Verse 2,

SLIDE

Isa 40:2 Speak tenderly to Jerusalem,  
and proclaim to her  
that her hard service has been completed,  
that her sin has been paid for,  
that she has received from the LORD'S hand  
double for all her sins.

Verse 2 speaks to us about atonement. Israel did not pay for her sins. It wasn't like the scales were balanced out by the exile. Your sins have been paid for by God's gift of atonement.

What is atonement? It is a biblical word. It is a God-given, utterly undeserved action of God, in which God punishes our sin and heals our broken relationship with him through the substitutionary death of another. Isaiah is going to tell us more about how atonement takes place in the 53<sup>rd</sup> chapter of Isaiah. He tells us about how our broken relationship with God gets healed by God's provision of a substitute, namely the Messiah, who will die in our place. Isaiah 53:5-6,

SLIDE

Isa 53:5 But he was pierced for our transgressions,  
he was crushed for our iniquities;  
the punishment that brought us peace was upon him,  
and by his wounds we are healed.  
Isa 53:6 We all, like sheep, have gone astray,  
each of us has turned to his own way;  
and the LORD has laid on him  
the iniquity of us all.

Why should God's people be comforted? Because God has provided an atonement to take care of our sin so that we can remain in relationship with him. The first verse speaks to us about the permanence of the covenant relationship between God and his people.

SLIDE

Isa 40:1 Comfort, comfort my people,  
says your God.

This is Old Testament covenant language. You are, despite your sin, still my people. You can underline that in your bibles. The Lord says: I am, despite your sin, still your God. And you can underline that phrase in your Bible – my people; your God.

Why do we worship God? Why do we begin our prayers with adoration? Because God has revealed to us that not even our sin, or the sins of a loved one, who truly belongs to God can limit God's determined purpose to save us. Not even our disobedience, not even a loved one's disobedience can cause a permanent rupture in our relationship with God, if we truly belong to God.

Friend, do you understand how great God's love is for you? That you cannot quench his love? God may discipline us severely. We and others around us may suffer terribly. But God will not forsake his own. This is one of the main themes of Isaiah 40-66. Listen to Isaiah 49:15-16,

SLIDE

Isa 49:15 "Can a mother forget the baby at her breast  
and have no compassion on the child she has borne?  
Though she may forget,  
I will not forget you!

Isa 49:16 See, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands;  
your walls are ever before me.

Listen to what Hosea the prophet says to a prior generation of Jews who sinned greatly against God and brought God's judgment against them. Hosea 11:8-9:

SLIDE

Hos 11:8 "How can I give you up, Ephraim?  
How can I hand you over, Israel?  
How can I treat you like Admah?  
How can I make you like Zeboiim?  
My heart is changed within me;  
all my compassion is aroused.

Hos 11:9 I will not carry out my fierce anger,  
nor will I turn and devastate Ephraim.  
For I am God, and not man—  
the Holy One among you.  
I will not come in wrath.

When you get a glimpse of God's persevering love for you, when you have this magnificent truth revealed to you, that God will never give up on you, and he will never give up on a loved one who is his child, the only appropriate response is worship. It is adoration. Hymn writers have celebrated the unfailing persevering love of God for generations. Listen to the words of Charles Wesley's hymn,

Depth of mercy! Can there be  
Mercy still reserved for me?  
Can my God his wrath forbear,  
Me, the chief of sinners, spare?

I have long withstood his grace,  
Long provoked him to his face,  
Would not harken to his calls,  
Grieved him by a thousand falls.

Lord, incline me to repent;  
Let me now my sins lament;  
Now my foul revolt deplore,  
Weep, believe, and sin no more.

Still for me the Savior stands,  
Holding forth his wounded hands;  
God is love! I know I feel,  
Jesus weeps and loves me still.

When you hear words like this, does it move your heart to want to worship? Or how about this hymn written in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, “Marvelous Grace of Our Loving Lord.”

Marvelous grace of our loving Lord,  
Grace that exceeds our sin and our guilt,  
Yonder on Calvary’s Mount outpoured  
There where the blood of the Lamb was spilt.

Sin and despair like the sea waves cold,  
Threaten a soul with infinite loss;  
Grace that is greater, yes grace untold,  
Points to the refuge, the mighty cross.

The second question facing the Jews, who were in exile in Babylon was this: Since God desires to rescue us from Babylon, does he have the power to do it? Is God able to deliver? After all, Babylon was the mightiest empire the world had ever seen up until that point. They had hundreds of thousands of troops, thick walls protecting the city, chariots by the thousands. Yes, maybe God loves me. Maybe I can’t quench the love of God. But can God actually do anything about an enemy this powerful?

Yes, God loves you. But what you are facing is cancer after all - big C cancer, the thing you’ve dreaded for years, the disease that may have taken your mother, father, brother or sister.

Yes, God loves you. But this particular addiction has been with you for years. You’ve struggled with homosexual feelings, or pornography, or an eating disorder, or substance abuse, or cutting for as long as you can remember. Can God deliver you from those things?



Yes, God loves you. But this depression, this panic disorder, this lust, this anger, this jealousy comes on you almost like a mugging from out of nowhere. You feel powerless against these waves of emotions. Can even God overcome these dark emotions in you or the dark emotions in a loved one?

Can even God repair a marriage that is as broken as yours? Or rescue a child that is as rebellious as your child? Or save a person that is so hardened to God?

Listen to Isaiah's answer to the question: Can God deliver us from Babylon? Can he do it? Isaiah 40:12-17,

#### SLIDE

Isa 40:12 Who has measured the waters in the hollow of his hand,  
or with the breadth of his hand marked off the heavens?

Who has held the dust of the earth in a basket,  
or weighed the mountains on the scales  
and the hills in a balance?

Isa 40:13 Who has understood the mind of the LORD,  
or instructed him as his counselor?

Isa 40:14 Whom did the LORD consult to enlighten him,  
and who taught him the right way?  
Who was it that taught him knowledge  
or showed him the path of understanding?

Isa 40:15 Surely the nations are like a drop in a bucket;  
they are regarded as dust on the scales;  
he weighs the islands as though they were fine dust.

Isa 40:16 Lebanon is not sufficient for altar fires,  
nor its animals enough for burnt offerings.

Isa 40:17 Before him all the nations are as nothing;  
they are regarded by him as worthless  
and less than nothing.

Isaiah, through a series of rhetorical questions and sarcastic comments rebukes the thinking of the Jews in his day and, by extension, rebukes our own thinking. Isaiah is repeatedly saying to us, he's shouting to us, he's screaming at us: Your God is too small. The reason you struggle so much, the reason you have so little faith to pray, the reason you are not absolutely overwhelmed in worship is this: your God is too small!

#### SLIDE – Isaiah 40:12

Isa 40:12 Who has measured the waters in the hollow of his hand,  
or with the breadth of his hand marked off the heavens?

Who has held the dust of the earth in a basket,  
or weighed the mountains on the scales

and                    the                    hills                    in                    a                    balance?

The answer to these four rhetorical questions is clearly this: No one but God. Only God can hold the Pacific Ocean in his cupped hands. Only God can measure the distance from one end of the Milky Way Galaxy to the other by stretching his fingers and saying: It's about this big. Only God can grasp the earth. Only God can pick up the entire Rocky Mountain Range and weigh it.

Our problem is that it is like we have a telescope in our mind. When we look at our problems, we look through the little eyepiece and our problems look enormous, like the mountains, the galaxy and the Pacific Ocean. But when we look at God, we turn the telescope around and we look at God through the big lens and we shrink God down. Isaiah says: God is incomparably huge.

Have you ever responded to the revelation of God's immensity with worship? Have you ever worshipped God simply because it suddenly occurred to you that God was infinitely large? Have you ever prayed to God with faith simply because you knew at that moment that the God you were talking to is enormous?

NT Wright, the great New Testament scholar, has a great illustration for us in stretching our minds to consider God's size. He said when he lived in Montreal, Canada, it used to amuse him when friends from England would come to visit. They would say to him: We're thinking of popping over to San Francisco for the day. They had no idea of the sheer size of North America. Quebec alone is larger than all of Western Europe. Often people look at maps in a World Atlas. They have England covering one page and the United States covering another page. They don't realize that the mapmakers are not using the same scale. So if the mapmaker used the scale they used for England, they'd have to spread the US map out on a table fold after fold until it covered half your living room.

Imagine an Atlas with you or your problem or the problem of a loved one on one page and God was on the other page. And both pages used the same scale. You have you on one side, your problem, your issue, or the issue of a loved one, and you have God on the other. How big do you think God's map would have to be? You would have to unfold it until it covered this room, then you would keep unfolding it until it covered all of Central Ohio. Then you would keep unfolding it until it covered the earth, our solar system, our galaxy, the universe, and you still would have an incalculable number of folds left to open.

Those of you who feel hopeless in your situation, you who feel overwhelmed by the size of the problems you are facing, have you ever considered the enormity of God?

Let me make this even simpler. Friend, have you ever stood next to something really, really big and been awed by its size. I don't mean standing by a Big Mac or a Whopper. I mean have you ever stood next to a Redwood Tree and realized

that this tree was living at the time of Jesus' birth? Have you ever been absolutely silenced by the magnitude of this living thing you are standing next to? Or have you ever stood on the rim of the Grand Canyon? Have you ever been next to something really big? Pike's Peak, or one of the Himalayas? How does it make you feel? Don't you feel awe-struck?

Well, get next to God. Get the scale right in your mind and you will be inclined to worship.

Isaiah goes on and says: God is not only incomparably big, God is also incomparably wise. Isaiah 40:13-14,

#### SLIDE

Isa 40:13 Who has understood the mind of the LORD,  
or instructed him as his counselor?

Isa 40:14 Whom did the LORD consult to enlighten him,  
and who taught him the right way?  
Who was it that taught him knowledge  
or showed him the path of understanding?

Isaiah turns from God's size to God's wisdom. We don't have to inform God about anything. God doesn't need your advice. We're always trying to advise God, aren't we? "Well, God, if I were you, here's what I would do. I'm not sure about your timing." Isaiah says when you pray you can trust God's wisdom. He knows what he's doing.

Have you ever worshipped God because you were awe-struck by the fact that God is really smart? When you pray do you say: you know I am talking to someone who is really brilliant? Let me give you an illustration. Do you know what it took for God to create the physical forces necessary to sustain life? Let me give you an example concerning the force of gravity.

Imagine a ruler, or one of those old fashioned linear radial dials that stretches across the universe. Some of you have old radio tuners, or a stereo receiver. But imagine that the lines on this linear radio tuner stretched across the universe in one-inch increments, billions upon billions of lines. Now, the entire dial would represent all of the forces in nature from gravity, which is the weakest force, to what's called the strong nuclear force that binds protons and neutrons together. Now, the strong nuclear force is like ten to the fortieth times stronger than the force of gravity. Let's say that represents the upper end of the range of possible forces. You have ten, followed by 40 zeros, lines on this radio dial.

Now, imagine you want to move the dial from where it is currently set an inch. You have billions and billions and billions and billions of lines and you just want to turn the tuner one inch over. If you did that, life on planet earth would not be sustained. One inch compared to the whole universe: do you know what would

happen? That small adjustment on the dial would increase gravity one billion fold. And if you increase gravity one billion fold, animals anywhere the size of human beings would be crushed by the force of gravity. In fact, the planet with the gravitational pull of the earth would only have to be 40' across. You could not have any stars.

God is so smart that he fine-tuned the radio dial on forces like gravity to the exact line out of ten, with 40 zeros following, possible choices. In other words, the force of gravity wasn't a good guess. God is amazingly smart.

If this kind of thing fascinates you, or if you have a son or daughter taking a high school or college level biology class, or asking questions about evolution, or maybe you or someone you know is wrestling with the issue of faith vs. science, I would encourage you to pick up *The Case for the Creator*. It is written by the award-winning, former legal affairs editor for the Chicago Tribune, Lee Strobel. I actually got that illustration of gravity from Lee Strobel's book, *The Case for the Creator*.

But one reason to trust God in prayer, to worship and adore God, is that God is really smart. God understands cancer. He knows the biochemical process by which it grows in a person's body. He understands cancer's secrets. He knows how to destroy it. There is no situation or person that perplexes God. God never says: Myself, (of course he wouldn't say "my God"), I don't know how to sort this out.

The most convoluted family situation, the most dysfunctional marriage, the most insane psychosis, the most twisted up business dealing - business person, counselor, small group leader, spouse, parent – you may be absolutely clueless regarding how to tackle and issue. But God can sort out the most mixed up problems. God, in his brilliance, can untie the most knotted up confusion.

God not only knows the answer to perplexing problems, God in his incomparable wisdom knows what's going on inside every human heart. Jesus Christ the heart-knower. That's what it says in Acts 1:24,

#### SLIDE

Ac 1:24 Then they prayed, "Lord, you know everyone's heart. Show us which of these two you have chosen

You can pray with confidence. Lord, you know every secret. You know every hidden motive. You know every scheme. You can see through every bit of flattery. Show me what's going on. Christ is so smart he not only knows what our issues are today, he knows what we will think, feel like, and need tomorrow. He knows everything that will come to pass.

In the gospel of John, Jesus on the night in which he was betrayed, tells us over and over again that he knows the future. John 13:19

SLIDE

Jn 13:19 I am telling you now before it happens, so that when it does happen you will believe that I am He.

SLIDE – John 14:29

Jn 14:29 I have told you now before it happens, so that when it does happen you will believe.

SLIDE – John 16:4

Jn 16:4 I have told you this, so that when the time comes you will remember that I warned you. I did not tell you this at first because I was with you.

We often second-guess God. We play Monday morning quarterback. Lord, why did you let this happen. Why didn't you intervene there? Wouldn't it have made sense for you to step in? Wouldn't it have made sense for you to prevent this?

Have you ever heard of the butterfly effect? There is a movie out with that title now – *The Butterfly Effect*. When mathematicians, students of what is called chaos theory, tell us that a small initial event can produce huge downstream consequences. The classic illustration is a butterfly flapping its wings in Central Park can affect the weather in South America. Tiny little things can be linked together in an unpredictable chain that causes bigger and bigger consequences.

Well, God is so brilliant, that he knows the flap of every butterfly wing and what it will produce. He knows what every little choice of ours will produce. He knows what every decision to go left rather than right will produce. To take this plane, rather than one earlier or later. He knows what will happen if we choose to comfort someone or not comfort them, if we choose to share the gospel with someone, or choose not to speak, to vote for this candidate and not another one.

Whom will you compare to the Lord? Have you ever worshipped God simply because God is incomparably wise?

And finally to a doubting, discouraged nation living in exile in Babylon, Isaiah says:

SLIDE – Isaiah 40:15-17

Isa 40:15 Surely the nations are like a drop in a bucket;  
they are regarded as dust on the scales;  
he weighs the islands as though they were fine dust.

Isa 40:16 Lebanon is not sufficient for altar fires,  
nor its animals enough for burnt offerings.  
Isa 40:17 Before him all the nations are as nothing;  
they are regarded by him as worthless  
and less than nothing.

God is incomparably real. The Israelites living in exile, look at Babylon and say: Babylon is so big. Babylon is so strong. Isaiah says: Compared to God, all the nations, whether we're talking about Babylon, or China, or Iraq, or the United States, all the nations are a drop in the bucket. All the nations are so inconsequential they can't be weighed on a scale. They are like a speck of dust.

In fact, Isaiah says, compared to God all the nations are nothing. Isaiah 40:17,

#### SLIDE

Isa 40:17 Before him all the nations are as nothing;  
they are regarded by him as worthless  
and less than nothing.

The NIV translation from the original Hebrew ought to be rendered:

#### SLIDE

All the nations are as nothing in his presence. They are a part of nothing and are nothingness to him.

In fact, the word "nothing" doesn't even do justice to the Hebrew word "ayin," which literally means "there is not" or "not existing." Compared to God's reality, whether you consider Wall Street with all of its economic power, or Hollywood with all of its cultural power, or Washington, with all of its political and military power, or you consider the whole of America, or the whole of the United Nations, compared to God's reality these things aren't substantial enough to be said to exist. They are less than nothing.

I remember talking once to my Dad who worked in construction for about 40 years, and who was a pretty tough, cynical WWII veteran. My dad hit the beaches at Normandy before H-Hour, before the first big wave of the D-Day Invasion. I remember talking with my Dad about his need to open his heart and begin a relationship with Jesus as his Messiah and Savior. And in frustration, he slammed his fist down on the table. He said: Richie, I'll tell you what's real. A car is real.

Let me ask you, friend, what's real to you? What's got more substance, more stuff, more reality to you? What your parents say about you? What a friend says about you? What your boyfriend or girlfriend says about you? What your boss

says about you? What has more reality to you – what someone else says about you, or what God says about you? What's more real to you, be honest, the money you have in the bank, your investments, or your relationship with God. What's more real, the body you have now, or the body that you will have when you are raised from the dead to live forever on the new earth, if you are a follower of Christ.

For the vast majority of people, even those of us who are Christians, most of the time, God, angels, demons, what God says, the resurrection of the dead, these things are like smoke. They are like vapors. They are like immaterial ghosts. We would mostly go along with my father when the chips are down. My father said: I'll tell you what's real – a car is real. We would say: I'll tell you what's real. My bank account is real. I'll tell you what's real, what my boss said about me is real. My debt is real. My problems with my mate are real.

Think about the way we typically portray the Christian's future and how we think about eternal life. We think our future is floating around as disembodied souls, kind of see-through ghosts in this unreal, ghostly existence, floating on a cloud, playing a see-through harp. This is not the New Testament vision of the future. In the New Testament, our ultimate future is not that we Christians get rid our bodies; it is that we get new, even more substantial bodies. 2 Cor. 5:2-4

#### SLIDE

Meanwhile we groan, longing to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling,

2Co 5:3 because when we are clothed, we will not be found naked.

2Co 5:4 For while we are in this tent, we groan and are burdened, because we do not wish to be unclothed but to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life.

Right now we are living in a tent, Paul says, but in the future we are going to be living in an eternal concrete existence. Have you ever heard the saying: He's just a shadow of his former self? He's wasted away so much by this illness, by this disease, that he is just a shadow of his former self? The New Testament picture of the future, to borrow Tom Wright's phrase, we are right now just a shadow of our future self.

Let me ask you some questions in closing. How much have you shrunken down God? How big is God compared to anything you face? How smart is God compared to any problem you are trying to solve? How real is God compared to anything that you are relying on? How great is your God? Let's Pray.

## **Your God Is Too Small**

---

Rich Nathan

October 23-24, 2004

Prayer: Hungry For God

Isaiah 40:1-17

- I. The Incredible Shrinking God
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- II. God's Incomparable Love (Is. 40:1, 2; 49:15, 16; Hos. 11:8, 9)
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- III. God's Incomparable Size (Is. 40:12)
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- IV. God's Incomparable Wisdom (Is. 40:13, 14; Acts 1:24; Jn. 13:19)
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- V. God's Incomparable Reality (Is. 40:15-17)