

# BELPRES CHURCH

## **Sermon Title:** How Big Is Your God?

Pastor Scott Dudley

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**Scripture:** Isaiah 40:12-26

<sup>12</sup> 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?

<sup>13</sup> Who can fathom the Spirit of the Lord, or instruct the Lord as his counselor?

<sup>14</sup> 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?

<sup>15</sup> 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.

<sup>16</sup> Lebanon is not sufficient for altar fires, nor its animals enough for burnt offerings.

<sup>17</sup> Before him all the nations are as nothing; they are regarded by him as worthless and less than nothing.

<sup>18</sup> With whom, then, will you compare God? To what image will you liken him?

<sup>19</sup> As for an idol, a metalworker casts it, and a goldsmith overlays it with gold and fashions silver chains for it.

<sup>20</sup> A person too poor to present such an offering selects wood that will not rot;

they look for a skilled worker  
to set up an idol that will not topple.

<sup>21</sup> Do you not know? Have you not heard?

Has it not been told you from the beginning?  
Have you not understood since the earth was founded?

<sup>22</sup> He sits enthroned above the circle of the earth, and its people are like grasshoppers.  
He stretches out the heavens like a canopy, and spreads them out like a tent to live in.

<sup>23</sup> He brings princes to naught and reduces the rulers of this world to nothing.

<sup>24</sup> No sooner are they planted, no sooner are they sown, no sooner do they take root in  
the ground, than he blows on them and they wither, and a whirlwind sweeps them  
away like chaff.

<sup>25</sup> "To whom will you compare me? Or who is my equal?" says the Holy One.

<sup>26</sup> Lift up your eyes and look to the heavens:

Who created all these? He who brings out the starry host one by one and calls forth  
each of them by name. Because of his great power and mighty strength, not one of  
them is missing.

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### **Transcript:**

I'm so glad that you have joined us for worship. My name is Scott. I am the lead pastor here, and we are just thrilled that you are joining us for worship on this Sunday in advent. We're glad you're here. The scripture reading comes from Isaiah chapter 40, starting with verse 12. And it says this.

"Who has measured the waters in the hollow of his hand, or 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 and the balance. 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. Have you not known? Have you not heard? Has it not been told to you from the beginning? Have you not understood Since the Earth was founded? He sits enthroned, above the circle of the Earth and its people are like grasshoppers. He stretches out the heavens like a canopy and spreads them out like a tent to live in. He brings princes to not and reduces the rulers of the world to nothing. Lift up your eyes and look to the heavens who created all these? He who brings out the starry host one by one and calls forth each one by name because of his great power and mighty strength, not one of them is missing."

So Holy Spirit use these next few minutes as we look at this passage of scripture and try to understand your word, to help us worship you and know you better, and be more focused on you. We pray this in your name. Jesus. Amen. Well, let me ask you a question. What makes you feel small in both a good and a bad way? Because it can be both. Sometimes in life it feels bad to feel small, but other times in life it can feel good to feel small. So for instance, a while back, I was talking to a guy from this church and I don't even know what we're talking about, but somehow I made the comment that growing up as a kid, I actually didn't get into very many fist fights as a kid.

And he said, "Well, because you're so little and you would have been creamed." No, obviously it was because I was more mature. Or there've been times I've been in the gym. This has happened to me more than once when someone will walk up to me and they'll say, "Are you Pastor Dudley?" And I say, yes. And they'll say, "Oh, you just look so much smaller up close." Okay. Don't be saying that, especially to people in the gym. Because I was looking in the mirror kind of thinking, wow, I'm kind of ripped. So that bubble was popped. That's when it feels bad to feel small.

But then there are other times that it feels good to feel tall, like maybe standing at the base of Hoover Dam and looking up and hearing the roar of the river move the turbines and generate massive amounts of electricity to light up Los Angeles and Las Vegas. It can be kind of scary, it can be kind of overwhelming, but also exhilarating and thrilling because it's so big and there's so much power. Or I remember one time I was camping in the Sierras and we'd hiked in about seven or eight miles and set up a tent and there was no light pollution and I could see the Milky Way. And there was this one star I looked at and I was staring at it for a minute and it slowly just disappeared behind this mountain peak.

And so I stepped to the side and I could see the star again, but then watched it slowly disappear again behind the mountain. I was seeing the Earth rotate. I could feel the rotation of the Earth and look up at the Milky Way and it was just so big, and so overwhelming, and kind of spooky and scary, but also exhilarating and thrilling. That's when it feels good to feel small. Especially when facing a vast amount of power, like a dam or a universe that in many ways is there for you. And that's kind of what the prophet Isaiah is talking about in the verses that I just read. And it's written to the Israelites who have been conquered by the Babylonians and taken into exile in Babylon for 70 years. And they're missing home. And Isaiah is trying to say to them, your home is not in a place. It's in God. And he is a very, very big God. And when we understand how big God is, we have more hope, courage, peace and joy. When we understand just how big God is.

So how big is your God? Who is God to you? Is God just like a personal assistant whose job it is to make your life easier? Or do you see God kind of as a gas station attendant, whose job is to kind of fill you up every Sunday with a little spiritual pick me up to get you through the week? Is he your yes man, who just tells you what you want to hear?

Or is he your savior and your Lord? Our lives will be no bigger than our God. So how big is your God? Because the bigger our view of God, the bigger our sense of courage, hope, peace and joy. See so many of the problems that we face in life come from not really understanding the character of God.

So for instance, if I feel shame and guilt, it's because I'm not really understanding God's mercy. If I feel tempted, it's because I'm not really understanding God's holiness. And if I feel worry or stress or fear, it's because I'm not understanding how big God is. And Isaiah is writing to the exiles who next to Babylon feels very, very small because they'd been conquered by the Babylonians. And they're wondering, where is God? And why isn't he helping? And why is this so hard? And can you do anything about it? And maybe sometimes you have those questions too. You go through something and you're like, God, where are you? Why aren't you helping? And it's interesting. Isaiah doesn't offer a little self-help advice. He doesn't offer up a new theological or intellectual or scientific insight. He simply reminds Israel how big God is.

"Who has measured the waters in the hollow of his hand?" This wonderful image of God holding all the oceans in his hands. "Have you not known? Have you not heard? Have you not understood? Since the Earth was founded, he stretches out the heavens like a canopy and spreads them out like a tent to live in, lift up your eyes and look to the heavens. Who created all of these? He who brings out the starry host one by one and calls forth each of them by name."

Isaiah uses creation imagery as a way of saying God isn't just one God, among many in a Pantheon of gods, the way the Babylonian religion work. He is the God, the only God and he created everything. There are 1.5 trillion suns in just the Milky Way galaxy alone. And there are over a hundred billion galaxies in the known universe. There are more stars in the universe than there are grains of sand on the Earth and the God who created all of that is with you. And he is for you. And he loves you. And there is nothing that he cannot do. And if we get how big God is, a lot of life falls into place in three specific ways I want to talk about today.

First, when we understand how big God is it makes us humble, grateful and reminds us that God is bigger than our worst fears. So first, the majesty of God, the bigness of God humbles us. And that's so important because I think humility matters a lot. Humility is the source of many, many good things in life. So for instance, I think the most indispensable quality a leader can have is humility, which is why I'm glad I have so much of it. That's a joke. You got that, right? It's hard to tell. It's hard to tell online. Humble leaders. It's important to be humble because humble leaders get more done because they don't care who gets the credit. Humility is key to having good friendships, good working relationships, good marriages. Because if you're humble, you can admit when you're wrong, you can ask for forgiveness. You can say I'm sorry. Humility matters.

And the Israelites are in exile because they lacked humility. Because in their pride, they disobeyed God, they thought they knew better than God. They did things their own way. And so Isaiah writes to remind them, there is a God and you are not him. The

position of God has been filled. You do not need to apply for it. And the majesty of God reminds me that I am not a self-made person, my money, and my ability to earn it, my health, my life, my skills, it all comes from God. Now that doesn't mean we're not involved. And yes, hard work matters. But the ultimate source of everything is God. And one of the worst things that can happen to us is that we start to believe our own PR. I'm a self-made man. I'm a self-made woman. I did all of this by my own hands. That's why you end up with a stat that I've quoted to you before from my previous profession.

94% of college professors think that they are in the top 10% of their profession. 94% think they're in the top 10%. Were there any math professors in that survey? That's what happens to us when we start to believe our own PR. But it's not all up to us. If you're a great athlete in many ways, that's because you may have worked hard, but in many ways, that's because you won the genetic lottery and you got a body that can do certain things and allowed you to have certain abilities. That wasn't your doing. Or maybe you were raised in a family that encouraged education so you did well in school. Again, that wasn't your call. We are the creature, not the creator and everything we have, we owe to him.

Some of you maybe have heard me tell a story about Albert Einstein, who arguably the smartest man ever, and he was on a train from Princeton one day and the conductor came down the aisle and asked him for his ticket and Einstein checked his pockets and couldn't find it. Checked the seat, couldn't find the ticket. So the conductor said, "That's okay, Mr. Einstein, everyone knows who you are. We're sure you bought a ticket." So the conductor kept going down the aisle and then turned back and Einstein was on his hands and knees, looking underneath the seat, looking all around him. And the conductor came back and said, "No really Dr. Einstein, we know who you are. It's okay." And Einstein said, "Well, I know who I am too, but I don't know is where I'm going." He forgot where he was going.

Life has a way of reminding even the smartest of us, we're not as smart as God. Has a way of reminding us that we aren't God. Has a way of reminding us that we aren't nearly as in control as we think we are. And when we understand that, how big God is, it makes us feel small, but it can also make us feel safe because he is for us. And when we understand how big he is, we worry less. And that's when feeling small feels good. Now I need to say something. Feeling small is not the same thing as feeling insignificant. Feeling small is not the same thing as feeling insignificant. Those are two different things.

Because you see the God who made those hundred billion galaxies is for you. He calls you by name. He knows the number of hairs on your head, which for me, doesn't take a big God. But for some of you, it takes a big God to know that. Psalm eight says this in the King James version, because sometimes King James just says it best. Psalm eight, "When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars, what is man that thou art mindful of him and the son of man that thou visiteth him." It says he visits us. And that's what we celebrate at Christmas. That vast and majestic though he

is God came himself in the person of Jesus to have relationship with us so that we could be up close and personal with him. As big as he is, he's also very close, very personal, very intimate. The God who spun the Milky Way is also Emmanuel, God with us. You are small, but very significant because the God of the universe loves you and comes to you.

And when we recognize that, all of that, that makes us humble, which leads us to a second, really good thing in life. And that is gratitude. Gratitude comes from humility because see pride blinds us to how much we've been given. But humility acknowledges that yes, maybe we worked hard. Yes, we were responsible for some of it, but ultimately humility reminds us that we owe God, our thanks and we owe other people are thanks. And gratitude just feels better. Gratitude just feels better. I mean, rather than being focused on what we don't have. Focused on, what's missing. Gratitude focuses us on what we do have. And that just feels better than being stressed out and anxious about what we don't have.

When we understand how big God is, it humbles us, which leads us to be grateful, which just feels better. And finally, when we understand how big God is, that reminds us that he is bigger than our worst fears. God is bigger than our worst fears. And that brings courage, and hope and joy.

If you think about it, worry is denying the sovereignty of God. Back to point number one, that lacks humility. Underneath worry, and I'm a worrier so I understand this. I've gotten better, but I understand how worry works. Underneath worry is an assumption that I am in control. And if I just think the right thing, say the right thing, do the right thing, push the right button, pull the right lever then I'm going to be bigger than this problem that I face. In a way it's usurping the place of God. I'm in control, not God. And it's like the old saying, what's the difference between you and God? God never gets confused and thinks he's you. And worry is sort of an assumption that I am in ultimate control. And yes, there are some things I control and yes, I should act on those things, but there are other things that are bigger than me but they are not bigger than God.

The text says, "Surely the nations are like a drop in the bucket. Before him, all the nations are as nothing. He brings princes to naught and reduces the rulers of this world to nothing." Now, other nations that are referred to in this text, the other nations, they're the Israelites' worst nightmare, because they have been conquered by other nations. So through Isaiah, God is saying, I am bigger than those nations. I am bigger than your worst nightmare. And I will overrule every evil thing that comes your way and what is meant for evil, I will overrule it in your life and I will turn it to good. And that's easy to say, isn't it. And we know it to be true, but it is awfully hard to believe it in our hearts when we are going through some painful stuff. And many of you are going through some painful things. Loss of a loved one, scary diagnosis, unemployment. It's hard to believe, but it is true. God's promise is that he will overrule every evil to make them the eventual servant of your joy.

Now it needs to be sad. God's ways aren't our ways. So his solutions are often different than the solutions we would like to see happen. Part of God being bigger than us is he doesn't always fit into our logical boxes, but God will use everything for good. Israel didn't want the exile, but God used it for good to purge them of their idolatry and their lack of injustice. He overruled the exile that was meant to destroy the Israelites and their faith. And in the end, it just made both bigger and stronger. Some of us have seen this through the pandemic like COVID is evil. COVID is evil, but God can bring good out of it. And some of you have experienced this, growing closer together as a family, or it's brought you closer to God or at bare minimum, taught us not to take for granted simple things like being able to go to a restaurant or be with extended family. And maybe we'll be more grateful for those things when we can do them again.

Here at our church, one of our struggles has always been, how do we build community and how do we help people go deeper in their faith especially since everyone is so busy, it's hard to get folks to show up, to do the things that help you do that? But this fall, we had over 700 people in all in groups. And some of that is probably because there's just not as much to do. And so people had some time to do an all in group. And so many of you that were part of it said that you grew in your faith, feel connected to people more than you did before the all in group. We're doing it again in January so if you didn't do one last fall, please do one in January.

I have watched this pandemic bring out the best and the most creative side of this wonderful staff that I get to work with. Our music people that you ... Our AV team who's here right now, our family life team, finding new ways to connect, new ways to worship. I've just seen their creativity blossom. I'm excited about what the staff has thought up for our online Christmas Eve services so I hope you're going to be part of one of those online services. I'm excited to see some of you in the drive through that we're having this afternoon and next Sunday afternoon, to give you some stuff that's actually going to help your worship on Christmas Eve. The pandemic is not good, but God is at work through it because he is bigger than COVID.

Recently, we heard from one of our ministry partners in Athens doing work with Muslim refugees. And they used to bring large groups of people from the refugee camp to Athens, to their center for worship and training. But they haven't been able to do that because of COVID. So they've been praying and asking God, okay, how do we do our ministry now? How do we get to these refugees? Well, then they got a call from an Iraqi refugee in one of the camps. And he said, "I heard about you and I need you to teach me about Jesus." And he told them his story. He said, "I was in Iraq and I was sentenced to death for political reasons. And three days before my execution, I had a dream. And someone touched me on the shoulder, in my dream and told me the same way I died and got resurrected three days later, three days from now, you will be released from jail."

And this man said, "I didn't believe that could happen." But then on the third day, there were these major demonstrations in Iraq, which set off a chain of events in the government that eventually made them that day, release him from prison. So then he

went to Athens and he said, "Now I need to know more about Jesus. I need you to teach me about this Jesus who showed up in my dream."

So our ministry partner visited this person in the refugee camp a few days later and then said he would be back the following week. And this Iraqi man said, "Well, if you're coming back, can I bring some people with me to meeting? Because I've been telling a lot of people about Jesus and they want to learn about Jesus too." What the Iraqi government meant for evil, God overruled it and turned it to good for this man, for the people in the refugee camp who are finding hope in Jesus and for our partner in ministry, who figured out how they can continue to minister to refugees during COVID. God is bigger than the Iraqi government. And when we focus on how big he is, it gives us more courage, and hope and joy. And not even death can defeat us because God overruled that one too when he came himself in the person of Jesus died to pay the just price for our sins and was raised from the dead three days later. And if we follow him, we will rise again too.

So practically speaking, homework, action step, just one for this week, just one to work on and practice. And that is minute by minute, turn our worries and hopes over to God. Minute by minute, I have to do this constantly because it's not one and done. It's constant, quick, incessant prayer throughout the day. Jesus, I'm in this meeting and it's stressing me out, but you are bigger than this meeting. So Lord, I give it to you. Help me see how big you are, help me see the good you want to bring out of this? Jesus, I'm looking at my grades and I don't like them, but Jesus, I know that you are bigger than my grades and my future is not in the hands of these grades. My future is in your hands. So Jesus, I give this to you. Help me see how big you are.

Minute by minute, give your fears, also, even your hopes, your dreams, your victories, give it to God and ask him to help you see how big you are. When I do this, it helps with the worry and the stress. It's just I have to keep doing it over and over and over. So minute by minute practice that this week.

About a year ago, I mentioned to you a family from my former church whose six year old son died of cancer. And there's a lot in that story that I didn't tell you a year ago. And some of which I want to tell the rest of that story. I want to tell you now. For this family was obviously a terrible, long, horrible ordeal. Most of the church was praying for this family, but sadly, after multiple treatments and surgeries, including an amputation, it became clear that this six year old boy was going to die. And he knew that. The six year old boy knew that. And I can't imagine that. That has got to be the worst pain imaginable. And I know some of you have gone through this pain of losing a child and it's got to be horrible. Well, the children's pastor in my former church, name's Jane Van Antwerp, she actually writes our blue box sermons for us here.

She went to their house for a pastoral visit. And since you can't really talk theology with a six year old and it wouldn't do any good anyway, in a brilliant pastoral care move, with the parents sitting right there, Jane said to the little boy, his name was Matt, "Let's



draw some pictures, Matt." So they started drawing and Jane just kept asking Matt what he was drawing. And he was drawing things six year old draws, fire engines, houses, cars, things like that. And Jane just kept asking him questions about what he was drawing until finally Matt asked Jane what she was drawing. And she said, "Matt, I am drawing things that last forever. Do you know what lasts forever, Matt?" And he said, "Yes, I do. My mom and dad will last forever. And Jesus lasts forever. And when I die and go to heaven, I will last forever." And it was a holy moment.

We're in the middle of so much pain. There was this moment of courage and hope and peace for Matt and his parents. Why? Because Jane reminded them how big God is. God is bigger than cancer. Bigger even than death. He himself died in the person of Jesus, but he didn't stay dead. And if we follow him, we don't stay dead. And we will also last forever. And after Matt died, his mom told the whole church and I'm quoting her here, told the whole church, "It may seem strange, but we've never experienced God so powerfully as when we were in the middle of our suffering. So that experience has been a blessing to us, a source of strength and joy. Don't get me wrong. Matt's cancer and death brought us profound and deep pain and it still does." And she said, "I scoured the scriptures. And nowhere did I find God promised to exempt his followers from suffering. But I did find many promises almost on every page that nothing, not even death, can separate me from God. And that he is always with me even in the darkest time. And God kept those promises.

God worked within Matt to help him face death, without fear and live the life he had left with joy. Even while he knew he was dying, he laughed and saying, and even with one leg would ski and play soccer. In our last conversation before he died, Matt talked about heaven as being a happy place that he looked forward to. And then he said, mom, the angels are singing hallelujah. And then he kissed me goodbye. And he went to sleep. And those final hours were the holiest moments we've ever experienced. There was joy in our tears. We felt God's presence and that room was Holy ground. God didn't take death away, but he took away it's sting. And in its place made us feel his faithful and abundant love. And I know for sure there is a heaven and I know for sure I will see Matt there again one day."

And throughout this whole experience, God began to change Matt's mother's perspective and some of her desires and her priorities. And so a few years after he died, she took all of her business skills and she now leads a nonprofit that helps under-resourced kids get job training and find jobs because her heart was to help kids, out of this whole experience. God gave her a heart for kids, and now she leads this nonprofit. Now all of that took years, years, and pain like never goes away. They still have grief. They still have pain and they need to turn to Jesus minute by minute. But through it all, God overruled death and brought new life out of it. Where they knew to their core, that heaven is real, that God is real and that he is with us. And in that they found strength and hope and a new calling for their lives.

And sometimes God does a miracle like he did for that Iraqi man that I told you about a minute ago. Other times he meets us in miraculous ways in the middle of our pain. But in all ways, God is always bigger than your worst nightmare and will turn everything toward your good. So what seems big in your life right now, whether it's a victory or defeat, good or bad, a hope or a fear, what feels big in your life? Because compared to God, they're all very, very small. So this week, minute by minute, just give it all to him and ask God to remind you how big he is and find your courage and your hope and join him.

There's a children's song many of you know, and I'm doing hand motions in a few minutes in our children's worship portion, and you might want to stick around for that. So I might as well do hand motions here for this children's song. Kind of makes the point I'm making. Some of you know this song. Our God is so big, so strong and so mighty. There's nothing our God cannot do. There's nothing our God cannot do. That is his promise to you and to me. God is bigger than COVID. God is bigger than a financial crisis. God is bigger than that breakup that's so painful. Bigger than our fears, bigger than our worries. God is even bigger than death. Have you not known? Have you not heard? Has it not been told to you from the very beginning the Lord, our God is the everlasting God? And he has got you and me, and he's got this whole wide world in his hands. So find your strength in him.

So Jesus, thank you that you are bigger than anything we face. Easy to say, so hard for us to believe in difficult moments. So Lord, in our difficult moments, show us how big you are so that we have your hope and strength and joy. And in our exuberant moments, help us to remember to whom our gratitude is due. And that is to you. Show us your majesty and we will respond. We pray this in your name. Jesus. Amen.

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**Discussion Questions:**

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1. What is the intended effect of all the rhetorical questions?
2. How do the works of our hands compare with those of God? When do our own work and our own efforts become idols?
3. From these verses, what must the exiles to whom this is written still learn about God before they can return to their homeland?
4. Do these verses bring comfort and hope to you? If so, why? If not, why not?
5. How does the majesty of God affect you?