



Chapter 4

A PROPER VIEW OF GOD AND MAN

Every problem a person has is related to his concept of God. If you have a big God, you have small problems. If you have a small God, you have big problems. It is as simple as that. When your God is big, then every seeming problem becomes an opportunity. When your God is small, every problem becomes an obstacle.

Every disciple should have a clear understanding of:

- (1) who God is, and
- (2) who he is.

You will never have a proper understanding of who God is until you understand yourself. The converse, however, is also true. You will never have a true understanding of yourself until you understand who God is. These two ideas are mutually dependent. The two questions of who God is and who we are find answers in Isaiah 40-66. Let's consider some passages.

THE NATURE AND CHARACTER OF GOD

Isaiah 40:3-5: "The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, 'Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low; and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain; and the glory of the Lord shall be revealed and all flesh shall see it together, for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it.'"

The Bible teaches that God is a glorious, self-manifesting God. The whole purpose of the devotional life is to see His majesty and become

absorbed with His glory. We read in verse 4 that God has removed every obstacle standing in the way of our fellowshipping with Him. We see, then, that the Lord is the initiator of the relationship. For us to know God is His idea, not ours. Christianity is unique among the religions of the world in that it consists not of man seeking God, but God seeking men.

Isaiah 40:10,11: "Behold, the Lord God will come with strong hand, and His arm shall rule for Him; behold, His reward is with Him, and His work before Him. He shall feed His flock like a shepherd; He shall gather the lambs with His arm, and carry them in His bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young."

Notice the delicate balance between God's strength and power on the one hand, and His extreme gentleness on the other. Our God is a powerful God, for by Him were all things created (see Isaiah 40:26, 28). The psalmist says, "By the word of the Lord were the heavens made; and all the host of them by the breath of His mouth" (Ps. 33:6). Science has taught us that energy is the substance from which matter is made. God created the universe by the sheer power of His Word. His Word is creative energy.

The illustration in Isaiah 40:11 is that of a shepherd tending his flock. It teaches us that the Lord will do two things—feed us and lead us. He has made all of our needs His responsibility. So also is the burden for giving us His direction.

Isaiah 40:13,14: "Who hath directed the Spirit of the Lord, or being His counselor hath taught Him? With whom took He counsel, and who instructed Him, and taught Him in the path of

judgment, and taught Him knowledge, and showed to Him the way of understanding?"

These questions are rhetorical, the answer obviously being no one. Why is it that no one has ever been a counselor to God? Or that no one has ever shown Him the way to go? Simply stated, it is that He has never had to ask. He Himself said, "I am God, and there is none else; I am God, and there is none like Me, declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, 'My counsel shall stand, and I will do all My pleasure'" (Isa. 46:9,10).

Isaiah 40:15-17: "Behold, the nations are as a drop of a bucket, and are counted as the small dust of the balance; behold, He taketh up the isles as a very little thing. And Lebanon is not sufficient to burn, nor the beasts thereof sufficient for a burnt offering. All nations before Him are as nothing; and they are counted to Him less than nothing, and vanity."

This puts the world in its proper perspective. It is easy to look at the wrong things and become discouraged—the decadence of the human race, our own propensity for evil, our inability to control ourselves, the fact that our increased technology has often only added to our problems—all of these are enough to make many people cynical and bitter. If it is not war, then it is crime. If it is not crime, then it is scandal. If it is not scandal, then it is natural disasters. Something is always wrong.

World powers do not shape the destinies of men; neither do the economic, political, or philosophical leaders of the world. God says the mightiest of nations is less than a drop in the bucket, and as insignificant as a tiny speck of dust on a balance. He is in control!

Isaiah 40:28: "Hast thou not known? Hast thou not heard, that the everlasting God, the Lord, the creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary? There is no searching of His understanding." The Lord God never grows tired, never runs out of ideas, never is at a loss as to what to do or where to go.

He is in perfect and absolute control. He never makes mistakes. If we would believe this, a lot of our problems in life would be solved.

There are only two persons who can hurt you—you and God. Satan cannot hurt you. This fact comes through clearly in the Book of Job. We read of the conversation between Satan and God (see Job 1) in which Satan says that he cannot touch Job because God has built a "hedge" around him. This is true for every believer. The devil cannot touch him except by divine permission.

The wonderful message of the Bible is that God has our best interests at heart. He does not want to hurt us. He thinks only good thoughts about us. He desires the very best for each one of us. So, God has restricted Himself in that He cannot hurt us because of the promises He has made to us.

This, therefore, narrows the field. The only person who can ruin your life is you—no one else. Certainly other people cannot hurt you except with divine permission. If this were not so, it would mean that God is not in control of the destinies of His people. We would then have the ridiculous situation of picturing God wringing His hands in heaven saying, "I sure hope that My servant does not get hit by an automobile or killed in a plane crash."

No one can touch your life but you, and the Bible does teach that it is possible for a person to ruin himself. You are your own worst enemy. But if you are walking by faith and in obedience, and God is who He says He is, then no one else can ruin your life; no one else can make you miss the perfect will of God.

Isaiah 42:1-4: "Behold My Servant, whom I uphold; Mine Elect, in whom My soul delighteth; I have put My Spirit upon Him; He shall bring forth judgment to the Gentiles. He shall not cry nor lift up, nor cause His voice to be heard in the street. A bruised reed shall He not break, and the smoking flax shall He not quench. He shall bring forth judgment unto truth. He shall not fail nor be discouraged, till He have set judg-

ment in the earth; and the isles shall wait for His law."

This passage is a prophecy relating to Jesus Christ. Jesus said that judgment belongs to Him (see John 5:22,23). The judgment He exercises is according to truth, and it is absolutely consistent with Himself. We have already seen that He never becomes discouraged or faint-hearted over the iniquity of the world. Our God will bring forth judgment and equality to this planet called Earth.

Isaiah 42:8: "I am the Lord; that is My name; and My glory will I not give to another, neither My praise to graven images." The Lord reminds us again and again that He will share His glory with no one. Paul made the same point when he wrote that there are not very many wise and noble people in the kingdom of God (see 1 Cor. 1:26-29). Instead, God gives wisdom to the base and the despised when it is to be used for God's glory.

The Jewish religious leaders called Peter and John unlearned and ignorant men (see Acts 4:13), and yet these unlearned, ignorant fishermen wrote seven of the New Testament books. These seven books are so profound that, through the centuries, great minds have not been able to fathom their depths.

Isaiah 43:11-13: "I, even I, am the Lord; and beside Me there is no saviour. I have declared, and have saved, and I have showed, when there was no strange god among you; therefore ye are My witnesses, saith the Lord, that I am God. Yea, before the day was I am He; and there is none that can deliver out of My hand. I will work, and who shall let [hinder] it?"

The Bible teaches that God is man's Saviour. He and He alone can save. Consequently, He alone is our security. What He is saying here is: "Beside Me there is no security." Our government through its welfare programs seeks to give its citizens security. Corporations promise employees security through pension plans, medical programs, increased wages, better jobs, and stock options. We are told that man can

create his own vehicles of security. In reality, only God can save, only God can deliver, only God can redeem. Only God can give man true security.

We have hardly scratched the surface of these great closing chapters of Isaiah regarding the character and nature of God. How easy it is to see—when we are able to grasp a vision of His greatness—that all of our problems and anxieties are rather insignificant.

THE NATURE AND CHARACTER OF MAN

Isaiah 40:6,7: "The voice said, 'Cry.' And he said, 'What shall I cry?' 'All flesh is grass, and all the goodliness thereof is as the flower of the field. The grass withereth, the flower fadeth; because the Spirit of the Lord bloweth upon it; surely the people is grass.'" This is how God and the Scriptures view man—not as the great, self-sufficient maker of his own destiny but similar to the grass of the fields, here today, gone tomorrow. James, the brother of the Lord Jesus, put it this way, "For what is your life? It is even a vapor, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanishes away" (James 4:14). In order to understand man, this is where we must begin.

The brevity of life helps us realize the importance of giving ourselves to the right thing. The psalmist said: "For he seeth that wise men die, likewise the fool and the brutish person perish, and leave their wealth to others. Their inward thought is, that their houses shall continue for ever, and their dwelling places to all generations; they call their lands after their own names. Nevertheless man being in honor abideth not: he is like the beasts that perish. Be not thou afraid when one is made rich, when the glory of his house is increased; for when he dieth he shall carry nothing away: his glory shall not descend after him" (Ps. 49:10-12, 16,17).

What was true in the day of the psalmist is true today. "They call their lands after their own names." The states of Maryland, Louisiana, Pennsylvania, Virginia, North Carolina, all stand as a testimony to this! A man in one of the

cities of Michigan had a great deal of wealth. Boulevards, schools, and libraries are named after him because of his philanthropic contributions. Just before his death, he came to the city fathers and told them that he would give to them all of his wealth if they would be willing to name the city after him. Brevity of life causes man to cling to it and to reach out for immortality in whatever form he can find it.

Isaiah 47:8-10: “Therefore hear now this, thou that art given to pleasures, that dwellest carelessly, that sayest in thine heart, ‘I am, and none else beside me; I shall not sit as a widow, neither shall I know the loss of children.’ But these two things shall come to thee in a moment in one day, the loss of children, and widowhood; they shall come upon thee in their perfection for the multitude of thy sorceries, and for the great abundance of thine enchantments. For thou hast trusted in thy wickedness; thou hast said, ‘None seeth me.’ Thy wisdom and thy knowledge, it hath perverted thee; and thou hast said in thine heart, ‘I am, and none else beside me.’” Because man strives for immortality in the wrong way, he runs contrary to the purposes of God. The subject of this passage is Babylon, but it can be readily applied to all of mankind.

In a famous passage prophesying the coming Jesus Christ, Isaiah writes, “All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned everyone to his own way” (53:6). Again, the prophet wrote, “But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags; and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities like the wind, have taken us away” (64:6).

A proper perspective of God and man shows us that all of the evil and calamity that falls upon man is a product of his own folly and sinfulness. Conversely, all of the good that falls upon man is a product of God’s grace and mercy. The natural man takes issue with this. He, in violent disagreement, could turn this around and say that all of man’s achievements, his blessings, and his progress are attributed to his own ingenuity and greatness. However, when calamity and disaster strike, he is quick to blame God.

People who have trouble attributing all that is good to God and all that is evil and wrong to the sinfulness of man understand neither the character of God nor the character of man. Now, we must be quick to remind ourselves that circumstances often enter our lives that are a reflection of God’s perfect plan but which we, because of our lack of perspective, interpret to be evil. Take, for instance the cross of Calvary. If you and I were with the disciples on that eventful day, we, like they, would no doubt have seen the crucifixion as a tragedy. Likewise, if we had been with the women at the tomb on that Sunday morning when they found it empty, we, like they, would have concluded that a further calamity had struck, that somebody had stolen the body.

However, with the perspective of 2,000 years, we view both the cross and the empty tomb not as calamities or disasters, but as triumphs and victories. Often a seemingly adverse circumstance will strike, such as the loss of a loved one, and from our perspective it has all the marks of a tragedy. But from God’s perspective, it may very well be the unfolding of a higher and more beautiful plan.

GOD’S COMMITMENT TO MAN

Much of Isaiah 40-66 is Messianic, and by and large the promises contained in these chapters are either to the Messiah or to the nation of Israel. However, the Holy Spirit promises, “The counsel of the Lord standeth for ever, the thought of His heart to all generations.” (Ps. 33:11). Just as we can see in these great chapters the nature of God and man, we can also draw some principles and promises for our own lives.

Consider the promise God makes to us in Isaiah 58:10-12: “And if thou draw out thy soul to the hungry, and satisfy the afflicted soul; then shall thy light rise in obscurity, and thy darkness be as the noonday; and the Lord shall guide thee continually, and satisfy thy soul in drought, and make fat thy bones; and thou shalt be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water, whose waters fail not. And they that shall be of

thee shall build the old waste places. Thou shalt raise up the foundations of many generations; and thou shalt be called, ‘The repairer of the breach,’ ‘The restorer of paths to dwell in.’ ”

Your light will rise in obscurity. The Lord will assume responsibility for guiding you. During the dry periods in your life, the Lord will satisfy your soul. You will have the privilege of becoming the foundation of many generations. But all of this is qualified by an “if.” If you draw your soul to the hungry and afflicted. If you will devote your life to this kind of goal and objective, God will in turn prosper you beyond your wildest imagination.

This is God’s commitment to man. In His love, He saves us through the finished work of Jesus Christ and then He blesses and prospers us so that as we take on the character of Jesus Christ, we can effect a change in the lives of other people. All of this in turn spells “purpose” for the believer. This is what disciple-making is all about.

Let me urge you to look further at Isaiah 40-66. Read through these great chapters three separate times. The first time through, write down all you learn about the nature and character of God. In your second reading, write down all you learn about the nature and character of man. The third time through, write down all that you learn about God’s commitment to man. This third reading will stagger you. Having learned of His greatness and our tendency to sin, you will see how graciously He has dealt with us.