

Camrose Way Housegroup

27th September 2023

Incomparable: The God who is like no other

Question 1: When might people find it difficult to trust God?

This is to get us thinking about the theme of the two passages, which is to trust God over the idols. The question is designed to tease out how our circumstances can make trusting God difficult.

Remember that trusting means handing over control.

- When a problem seems too big for God to solve; when we mortals cannot see a solution. (e.g. the war in Ukraine; global warming)
- When God appears not to respond to prayer in our timeframe
- When we are in a situation which seems hopeless

Isaiah 44:6-20 – The LORD, not idols

6. 'This is what the Lord says – Israel's King and Redeemer, the Lord Almighty: I am the first and I am the last; apart from me there is no God.
7. Who then is like me? Let him proclaim it. Let him declare and lay out before me what has happened since I established my ancient people, and what is yet to come – yes, let them foretell what will come.
8. Do not tremble, do not be afraid. Did I not proclaim this and foretell it long ago? You are my witnesses. Is there any God besides me? No, there is no other Rock; I know not one.'
9. All who make idols are nothing, and the things they treasure are worthless. Those who would speak up for them are blind; they are ignorant, to their own shame.
10. Who shapes a god and casts an idol, which can profit nothing?
11. People who do that will be put to shame; such craftsmen are only human beings. Let them all come together and take their stand; they will be brought down to terror and shame.
12. The blacksmith takes a tool and works with it in the coals; he shapes an idol with hammers, he forges it with the might of his arm. He gets hungry and loses his strength; he drinks no water and grows faint.
13. The carpenter measures with a line and makes an outline with a marker; he roughs it out with chisels and marks it with compasses. He shapes it in human form, human form in all its glory, that it may dwell in a shrine.
14. He cut down cedars, or perhaps took a cypress or oak. He let it grow among the trees of the forest, or planted a pine, and the rain made it grow.
15. It is used as fuel for burning; some of it he takes and warms himself, he kindles a fire and bakes bread. But he also fashions a god and worships it; he makes an idol and bows down to it.
16. Half of the wood he burns in the fire; over it he prepares his meal, he roasts his meat and eats his fill. He also warms himself and says, 'Ah! I am warm; I see the fire.'
17. From the rest he makes a god, his idol; he bows down to it and worships. He prays to it and says, 'Save me! You are my god!'
18. They know nothing, they understand nothing; their eyes are plastered over so that they cannot see, and their minds closed so that they cannot understand.

19. No-one stops to think no-one has the knowledge or understanding to say, 'Half of it I used for fuel; I even baked bread over its coals, I roasted meat and I ate. Shall I make a detestable thing from what is left? Shall I bow down to a block of wood?'
20. Such a person feeds on ashes; a deluded heart misleads him; he cannot save himself, or say, 'Is not this thing in my right hand a lie?'

Question 2: What qualities of idols are given in verses 9-20?

This is to help people see and bring out the humour of how Isaiah describes the folly of idolatry. He emphasises that they are made by human hands and made of simply wood. I think we're supposed to chuckle at this description (if it wasn't so serious)!

- Ridiculous!
- Worthless
- Know nothing
- Understand nothing
- Blind, eyes plastered over
- Shaped in human form
- A block of wood
- The same wood is used to make an idol and for cooking and heating
- Detestable
- A lie!

Question 3: What qualities of God are given in verses 6 to 8

There is a complete contrast between God and the idols. The purpose of the contrast is to show how much more sense it makes to trust God.

- The LORD
- Creator: Light, darkness, prosperity, disaster
- Sustainer: Metaphor of rain
- Redeemer: Brings salvation and righteousness (acting in accordance with divine or moral law, free from guilt)

Question 4: Idolatry is anything we put our hope and trust in instead of God. Where do we see this in the world and in our own lives?

We want people to realise the reality of idolatry today, and to 'look in the mirror' and see the danger of it in our own lives. Gently challenge people to try and identify their own idols. This can be hard for people, so please be prepared to be vulnerable yourself so the group may be encouraged to be vulnerable.

- Money
- Career
- Belongings – a nice car
- Influencers
- Gigabit internet

Question 5: How can we resist the temptations of these idols?

When faced with the temptation of an idol, we want to see how God is greater in comparison, and so need to remind ourselves of the truths about God. Help people do this when with other Christians but also to think of ways they can do this in day-by-day life.

Remember how unimaginably great God is.

Think ... how would life be without God. How would life be without our idols

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

God has promised to redeem his people.

BUT has promised that Cyrus, a pagan King would carry this out!

Isaiah 45

5. I am the Lord, and there is no other; apart from me there is no God. I will strengthen you, though you have not acknowledged me,
6. so that from the rising of the sun to the place of its setting people may know there is none besides me. I am the Lord, and there is no other.
7. I form the light and create darkness, I bring prosperity and create disaster; I, the Lord, do all these things.
8. 'You heavens above, rain down my righteousness; let the clouds shower it down. Let the earth open wide, let salvation spring up, let righteousness flourish with it; I, the Lord, have created it.
9. 'Woe to those who quarrel with their Maker, those who are nothing but potsherds among the potsherds on the ground. Does the clay say to the potter, "What are you making?" Does your work say, "The potter has no hands"?
10. Woe to the one who says to a father, "What have you begotten?" or to a mother, "What have you brought to birth?"
11. 'This is what the Lord says – the Holy One of Israel, and its Maker: concerning things to come, do you question me about my children, or give me orders about the work of my hands?
12. It is I who made the earth and created mankind on it. My own hands stretched out the heavens; I marshalled their starry hosts.

Question 6: How do the situations in verses 9-12 help us understand the folly of trusting ourselves or others over God?

The question aims to recall what we heard about the potter/parent.

The potter decided what to create. The clay has no influence in the decision.

The mother/father created the child. The unborn child has no influence in the decision.

God created man. Why do we think we are wise enough to question his decisions?

Isaiah 45

13. I will raise up Cyrus in my righteousness: I will make all his ways straight. He will rebuild my city and set my exiles free, but not for a price or reward, says the Lord Almighty.'
14. This is what the Lord says: 'The products of Egypt and the merchandise of Cush, and those tall Sabeans – they will come over to you and will be yours; they will trudge behind you, coming over to you in chains. They will bow down before you and plead with you, saying, "Surely God is with you, and there is no other; there is no other god."'
15. Truly you are a God who has been hiding himself, the God and Saviour of Israel.
16. All the makers of idols will be put to shame and disgraced; they will go off into disgrace together.

17. But Israel will be saved by the Lord with an everlasting salvation; you will never be put to shame or disgraced, to ages everlasting.
18. For this is what the Lord says – he who created the heavens, he is God; he who fashioned and made the earth, he founded it; he did not create it to be empty, but formed it to be inhabited – he says: ‘I am the Lord, and there is no other.
19. I have not spoken in secret, from somewhere in a land of darkness; I have not said to Jacob’s descendants, “Seek me in vain.” I, the Lord, speak the truth; I declare what is right.
20. ‘Gather together and come; assemble, you fugitives from the nations. Ignorant are those who carry about idols of wood, who pray to gods that cannot save.
21. Declare what is to be, present it – let them take counsel together. Who foretold this long ago, who declared it from the distant past? Was it not I, the Lord? And there is no God apart from me, a righteous God and a Saviour; there is none but me.
22. ‘Turn to me and be saved, all you ends of the earth; for I am God, and there is no other.
23. By myself I have sworn, my mouth has uttered in all integrity a word that will not be revoked: before me every knee will bow; by me every tongue will swear.
24. They will say of me, “In the Lord alone are deliverance and strength.”’ All who have raged against him will come to him and be put to shame.
25. But all the descendants of Israel will find deliverance in the Lord and will make their boast in him.

Question 7: According to verses 22-23, what is God’s wish for all nations?

This is a chance to recall the idea that God’s desire is for the whole earth to know him.

That everyone to the ends of the earth will turn to him for deliverance.

Every one in the world will obey him

Every one in the world will tell of his power and will

Question 8: The chapters we have studied remind us how big God is and verses 22-23 reveal his plan. How should that help his people to trust him?

The aim is to draw together the purpose of chapter 45 and bring out its purpose as one of encouraging his people to trust him.

They should be in awe of God and realise that he is infinitely cleverer than they are.

They should realise that God has a plan.

Question 9: How should remembering the size and power of God help us trust him when we find that difficult?

A chance to consider how the image the potter/father etc addresses the difficulties we discussed in the first intro question. Also, worth exploring how we can help each other remember.

When we think that a problem is too big for God to solve, we need to reflect on things that he has done in the past

- Creating the universe
- Defeating whole armies with a word
- Using others to carry out his will

Question 10: How does seeing the extent of God’s plans for the world affect the way we treat non-Christian friends and family?

A chance to consider whether we share God's desire for "the ends of the earth" (45:22) to be saved and ask what difference this makes to my life.

- We should be upset that they are non-Christian.
- We should never keep our faith secret to avoid upsetting other people
- We should pray for them
- We should do something about it! Sensitive.
- We should trust God to do something about it

The text in purple is the reason the question is being asked.

The highlighted questions are application questions.