

OUR GOD IS INCOMPARABLE!

Today's Text: Isaiah 40: 12-31

Extracts:

Behold, the nations are as a drop in a bucket, and are counted as the small dust on the scales. To whom will you liken God? Or what likeness will you compare to Him? Have you not known? Have you not heard? Has it not been told you from the beginning? Have you not understood from the foundations of the earth? It is He who sits above the circle of the earth, and its inhabitants are like grasshoppers. "To whom then will you liken Me, or to whom shall I be equal?" says the Holy One [Is. 40: 15, 18,21,22, 25]

There is the story of two visitors to Nigeria (a European and an American) who were arguing about which continent had made the most contribution to human development. They were in a taxi taking them to the Lagos international airport. The European voted for his ancestors who had built powerful empires that tamed the "barbarians" of every continent and gave them today's three international languages- English, Spanish and French. The American drew attention to his ancestors' great strides in scientific discoveries, such as the invention of electricity, air travel, the computer and landing a man on the moon. Both of them turned to the Nigerian taxi-driver and asked, "Tell us, what have your people contributed?" The driver stopped the car, looked back at the visitors and replied with a confident smile, "Peace of mind!"

*In deed, if you look at economic statistics, the ten richest countries in the world (measured by Per Capita Gross Domestic Product) are from Europe and America¹ and all but one of the ten poorest are from Africa.² Yet, the ten countries with the highest suicide rates in the world (suicides per 100,000 inhabitants per year) are all European!³ One conclusion that we can draw is that material success cannot guarantee human happiness that hardly finds any mention in international statistics or **Guinness World Records!** In other words, you can be materially rich but spiritually bankrupt! So, why do we continue to compare countries only on the basis of material well-being? God is asking us the same question today. How dare we compare Him with man-made things? Can an ant bruise the elephant? That is the theme of today's lesson.*

¹ www.aneki.com/richest.html

² www.aneki.com/poorest.html

³ www.aneki.com/suicide.html

1. No level playing field no comparison!

The *Guinness Book of Records* (now simply called *Guinness World Records*) is published annually. It records achievements in every field of human endeavour. If you want to know the world's tallest, fastest, heaviest, etc., you go to that book. As old records are broken and new ones are set, the book promptly updates them. Therefore, all over the world, people are working hard to enter that book.

However, in order to give every competitor a fair and equal chance to win, there has to be a level playing field. In other words, the competition must take place in a setting that favours (or disfavors) all *equally*. That can be done if the following conditions are met:

a) *Measurable criteria must be agreed and understood by all*

All the competitors must know the rules of the game and how they will be applied. For example, the fastest is the first to breast the tape. That is why the world record for the 100 metres dash is under ten seconds. What if, for example, we were to change the rule to define the fastest as "the last to breast the tape"? The race would never end because everybody would be running backward instead of forward!

A good example from the Bible is the contest between the prophet Elijah and the prophets of Baal. Elijah knew that he was alone against 450 prophets of Baal. How was he going to have a level playing field against such a multitude in a physical combat to prove which side was serving the true God? He proposed as follows [1 Kgs 18: 20-24]:

"Therefore, let them give us two bulls; and let them choose one bull for themselves, cut it in pieces, and lay it on the wood, but put no fire under it; and I will prepare the other bull, and lay it on the wood, but put no fire under it. Then you call on the name of your gods, and I will call on the name of the Lord, and the God who answers by fire, He is God." So all the people answered and said, "It is well spoken."

The rules were clear and measurable: a bull per side, cut up and put on the wood but without fire. The side on whose sacrifice fire fell was serving the true God. Both parties agreed and accepted the rules. In such a case, the outcome would be acceptable. In deed, when fire fell on Elijah's sacrifice, "all the people *saw* it (and) they fell on their faces, and they said, "The Lord, He is God!" [v. 39].

b) *The criteria must be consistently applied*

You do not change the rules or shift the goal posts when the contest is already in progress, unless there is evidence that some of the contestants have employed unacceptable tactics. For example, Ben Johnson was stripped of his 100 metres record setting gold medal at the Seoul Olympics in 1988 because it was discovered that he had used performance-enhancing drugs.

Another good example can be found in Scriptures after the prophet Elisha had miraculously struck blind the army of Syria that he then led to Samaria, the capital of the northern kingdom of Israel. Under *the rules of war*, captives are to be treated well. However, when the king of Israel saw his enemies brought helplessly into his own capital city, he said to Elisha, “My father, shall I kill them?” The prophet replied, “Would you kill those whom you have taken captive with your sword and your bow? Set food and water before them, that they may eat and drink, and go to their master” [2 Kgs 6: 18-22].

Unless those conditions are met, you are not comparing like with like. In the case of God and idols, there is no basis for comparison. That is the point that God is making to us through the prophet Isaiah. To prove His point, God has proposed certain criteria for measuring Himself against other gods. What an unfair contest!

2. But with what/whom can you compare God?

Isaiah lived on this earth about 700 years before the birth of the Christ, that is, about 2,700 years ago. At that time, there was no electric power. There were no sophisticated gadgets for examining outer space, and there was no air travel. Yet, when he wrote about God, Isaiah said, “It is He who sits above the *circle of the earth*, and its inhabitants are like grasshoppers” [Is. 40: 22]. When you realize that scientists did not “discover” the spherical shape of the earth until the 16th Century A.D., that is, only about 500 years ago, and that even today with sophisticated radar, they are still merely “peeping” into outer space, then you can believe that Isaiah was speaking by the inspiration of God. Therefore, it is God that is speaking to us and you had better pay attention!

God was tired then as of now of people comparing Him with one thing or the other. There are so many religions and each one claims to be worshipping God. That is the basis for calls for ecumenism that could be coordinated at the level of the United Nations. That cannot be true otherwise why should we have so many religions? On the other hand, some religions claim that their God is the true God. That is the basis for intolerance and persecution of “infidels,” that is, those who do not share their views. That cannot also be true because why should human beings defend God if He is in deed superior to them? Why should a person who kills himself in the name of God be called a martyr and not a suicide? The only way to resolve this matter is to let the true God speak for Himself. That is what He has done through Isaiah.

Twice in this short chapter, God asked, “To whom then will you liken God? Or what likeness will you compare to Him?” [Is. 40: 18, 25]. His answer is that He is incomparable! Let us examine this on the basis of the criteria that He mentioned to Isaiah:

a) *Is your God the self-existent Creator?*

The true God is “the everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth” [v. 28]. Compare that God with idols that are made by human hands, by workmen, goldsmiths and silver smiths [vv. 19-20]. Of such gods the Psalmist writes [Ps. 115: 2-6]:

Why should the Gentiles say, “Where is their God?” But our God is in heaven; He does whatever He pleases. Their idols are silver and gold, the work of men’s hands. They have mouths, but they do not speak; eyes they have but they do not see; they have ears, but they do not hear; noses they have, but they do not smell; they have hands, but they do not handle; feet they have, but they do not walk; nor do they mutter through their throat. Those who make them are like them; so is everyone who trusts in them

Every now and then, Satan may come into idols to give the impression that they are gods, such as when Pharaoh’s magicians were able to turn their rods into snakes. However, the everlasting God always reveals the lie, such as when Moses’ snake swallowed up the magicians’ [Ex. 7: 8-12]. These days, idols can take various forms, such as evil human role models, pornography, horoscope, transcendental meditation, faith in evolution, addictions, etc. To be carnally minded is to succumb to the bait of idolatry.

b) *Is your God self-knowing?*

Through Isaiah, God raised the following questions, “Who has directed the Spirit of the Lord, or as His counsellor has taught Him? With whom did He take counsel, and who instructed Him, and taught Him in the path of justice? Who taught Him knowledge, and showed Him the way of understanding?” [Is. 40: 13-14]. The answer to each of those questions is certainly “Nobody!” But how many Nobel Prize winners do you know who were self-taught? Which of them is as knowledgeable as Adam that God permitted to name all the cattle, birds and beasts that He had created [Gen. 2: 20]? God created Satan and atheists, and “He who built the house has more honour than the house” [Heb. 3: 3]. So, how can they speak more “authoritatively” about our lives and destiny than their Maker? Think!

c) *Is your God all-powerful?*

The true God is so powerful that “the nations are as a drop in a bucket, and are counted as the small dust on the scales.” All nations before Him “are as nothing, and they are counted by Him less than nothing and worthless” [Is. 40: 15, 17]. From His throne in heaven, the inhabitants of the earth look like grasshoppers and their princes are nothing and He can make their judges useless [vv. 22, 23]. So, who can you compare with Him?

In Jonathan Swift’s *Gulliver’s Travels* (1726), Gulliver recounted his experiences travelling through the world. In the Land of Lilliput, the people saw Gulliver as a giant who was a threat to their survival. However, in the Land of Brobdingnag, Gulliver was seen as only six inches high, an ant by comparison! We tend to see God in similar light. For example, how many of those Bible waving believers in Joel Osteen’s crusades can repeat the same gesture in Saudi Arabia? If an atheist will not teach from the Bible, why do believers who are scientists teach from Darwin? We make our God out to be the God of circumstances rather than for all times and in all places. All those human beings that we fear, that make us compromise our God, are in His eyes like mere grasshoppers, mere dust on the scales. If we can stand up like Daniel against the Babylonian king, then God will demonstrate His power and rescue us from the lion’s den.

d) *Is your God accessible?*

One would expect that a God who is all knowing and so powerful, who does not need anything from anybody, would be very difficult to approach. After all, “Lebanon is not sufficient to burn, nor its beasts sufficient for a burnt offering” [Is. 40: 16]. Yet, the true God, our God, is very approachable for “He gives power to the weak, and to those who have no might He increases strength.” He recognizes that we shall faint and be weary and may even utterly fall down. But He promises, “Those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint” [vv. 29-31]. To cap it, He sent His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ, to the world to die for our sins and we have been healed by His stripes [Jn 3: 16; Is. 53: 5].

How many powerful people can do that? Powerful earthly rulers would instead increase the yoke around our necks, as Pharaoh did to the children of Israel when Moses came to set them free [Ex. 5: 1-14]. Stringent security would be put around shrines and temples, especially in this terrorist era, so as to make it more difficult to access them. Thank God that He has made Himself accessible to us in spite of our waywardness.

3. Implications

Using the rules that God has revealed through Isaiah, the true God is incomparable to anyone or anything else. What are the implications of such reality to us? First, religious tolerance should mean that believers *should respect other religions but not their gods*. Second, the closer we get to this true God, the more He will reveal Himself to us for “no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God. Now, we have received ... the Spirit who is from God that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God” [1 Cor. 2: 11, 12] For example, God gave spiritual eyes to Isaiah 2,700 years ago to see the true shape of the earth. With spiritual eyes, Stephen was able to see Jesus Christ in heaven, standing on the right hand of God [Acts 7: 55-56]. On the other hand, today’s scientists who are relying on the spirit of man (a form of idol) and with sophisticated radar are still looking for more stars and planets in outer space with little or slow success!

4. Conclusion

Anne Rice gave up Christianity when she was a teenager and earned fame and wealth writing tales of vampires, witches and lust. Her husband died as a convinced atheist and her son is a gay activist. Now, at the age of 64, she has returned to her faith and is doing a novel on “Christ the Lord: Out of Egypt.”⁴ Why did she return to Christ? In her own words, there was “a yearning, a nostalgia, a grief... but I had this idea lodged in my head, I could never go back... the longing was tremendous. ... *I gradually realized I could return, that I could believe again.*” After seeing the “other side,” Rice was able to return to the true God because He is forgiving and accessible. In her words, “God is interesting again!”

Like Rice, you may have backslidden and are seriously considering returning. You may be held back by fear of what Satan and his evil forces could do to hurt you. I can assure you that Jesus has already overcome Satan and the world. He has paid for your freedom. You can return home now! Satan may be roaring like a lion to stop you. But remember, the lion may be the king of the jungle but in the city, he is a tourist attraction in the zoo or an entertainer in the circus!

Come back home. Our God is incomparable!

⁴ “Anne Rice turns to Jesus,”

<http://edition.cnn.com/2005/SHOWBIZ/books/11/07/books.anne.rice.ap/index.html>