

## God is Like...

### Isaiah 44:6-11 (NIV)

<sup>6</sup> "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. <sup>7</sup> 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. <sup>8</sup> 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." <sup>9</sup> 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. <sup>10</sup> Who shapes a god and casts an idol, which can profit nothing? <sup>11</sup> 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.

Analogies, similes, comparisons – these are some of the things we need to understand something new, something different from us. God is very different than us. So, he lays out descriptions of himself and what he is like so that we can understand him better. "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." (verse 6)

The LORD is a King. Now, maybe when we think of a king, we think of Buckingham Palace and the royal family, people born into this royal lineage, living in luxury, eating bon-bons, being more figureheads than actual rulers. But a king in Isaiah's day would lead the charge into battle, be on the frontlines fighting for his citizens, putting his life on the line for their protection and prosperity, to keep them as a part of his kingdom. This King who goes into battle for us is also "Almighty," a phrase more literally translated as the Lord of armies, powerful armies at his command, so that he will never lose a battle and will successfully defend and protect everyone in his kingdom.

The LORD is a Redeemer, a family protector of sorts. The Redeemer is one who would buy a family member out of debt or out of slavery, something they couldn't break free from. The LORD paid the price to release us from our captivity to sin by living perfectly for us, keeping all of God's law for us, and then shedding his blood on the cross to pay our debt of sin. By doing so, he has released us from the chains of sin, death, and the devil. We now belong to him. This is how we came to be citizens in his kingdom.

The LORD is the first and the last. As Jesus would say later, "I am the Alpha and the Omega." (Revelation 1:8) No one comes before God, no one predates him. He did not emerge from the history of the world. He is independent of everything. In fact, everything is encapsulated in him. Nothing is outside of him.

The LORD is a Rock. He is solid and stable. He is someone worth building on because he will not crumble underneath you. He will not fail you.

As we pile up all these descriptions, we have to wonder if there is any thing else in existence that compares. But before we weigh in on that question, there is one more attribute the LORD reveals to us here in Isaiah 44. "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." (verse 7) The LORD not only knows the future, but he lays it out there for us to know. He tells us what is coming and that he is in control of it. He does this throughout his Word, the Bible, both in the Old and New Testament. Telling the future and being right every time sets the LORD apart from everything and everyone else in existence. There is no one else like him.

But this trait, this characteristic, of foretelling the future that actually happens, does this turn people away from the LORD? Here in Isaiah, the LORD has already laid it out that in about 130+ years, the Israelites would be taken from Jerusalem and Judah and into exile in Babylon. When someone gives you bad news like this, news that you don't want to hear, there's always a part of us that seeks confirmation bias. We go to other sources, other people, get other opinions to back up what we think. We want someone to prove us right. When the Israelites heard that the Babylonians would come and take them away from their land while also plundering and destroying the temple, this would not make them feel good about the God they were following, even while he can and does tell the future. Is this future of gloom and doom what led some Israelites to seek other gods, make other gods who will tell them what they want to hear, that everything is going to be okay, that they will prosper in this land and live in peace and security? In hearing a dark future, did the people reject God and then make and follow other gods so that they could convince themselves that they controlled their future? Did they hate God for telling them that their future was so bleak? Do you hate God for knowing the future and not changing it?

God knew all that would happen in 2020: the pandemic, the riots, the wildfires, all of this. Yet, he didn't stop it. He is the Almighty, the LORD of Armies, our King, our Redeemer, the First and the Last, nothing happens outside of him. He's in complete control. So, why allow all these awful things? Maybe you don't even need to focus on what has happened in 2020. Maybe it's enough to see what has been happening in your personal life. God knew that your loved one would die. He knew that. Why didn't he stop it? God, if you have this ability to not only know the future but also change it, why don't you? Don't you have a moral obligation to make our lives better? You know the pain and suffering we will go through, you know the event that will happen to cause all that, and you still let it happen. Why does the God who knows the future allow such dark times in our lives? Why doesn't he just create a happier timeline without a pandemic, without injustice, without death, without suffering, with peace, kindness, and compassion by all and for all?

In looking for an answer to this question, we turn to other things to get us through life. These are the idols we make. They may not be the images and the statues that the Israelites made, but they are the same in function and purpose. "Who shapes a god and casts an idol, which can profit nothing?" (verse 10) We make idols, trust in other things to get us through life, because we don't like how God operates knowing the future yet still allowing darkness, pain, and suffering.

What good is it for us to turn away from God and trust in someone or something else? "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... Let them all come together and take their stand; they will be brought down to terror and shame." (verses 9, 11) Idols are made by humans, and so they do less than what humans do. If we can't control the future, how possibly could any idol created by the most skilled and intelligent of us do anything better? We still don't know the future, and we still can't control it – let alone anyone or anything else. If we trust in something other than God to get through the future, we will be brought to shame and terror.

Last week, the LORD spoke through Isaiah saying, "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts." (Isaiah 55:9) We have to admit that we don't see the future and that we don't see the whole picture. We see a slice of it. Right now, the slices of the present that we see are filled with change, with fear, with suffering, with pain. We know that this is not what we were created for. We were not made to suffer. Yet, we are suffering. How do we reconcile this with our God who knows the future and controls it with his power? God calls us to trust in him, that there is no one else like him, no God apart from him. He calls us to trust that his ways and thoughts are higher than ours. He knows the future. He controls it. So there are things that God knows that we don't. There is an overarching story being told greater than the paragraphs of it that we're reading right now.

When things first went dark in the world, when Adam and Eve first disobeyed the LORD in the Garden of Eden and brought sin and death into our world and into our lives, the LORD could have destroyed it all and started all over, changed it all by wiping us out. He could have done it at the flood and not let Noah and his family survive. But he preserved human life, allowed us to continue on. Why? If he had just wiped us out, none of us would exist, and we would all be lost. In knowing the future, God laid out the plan before us all. He said that he would send the offspring of the woman, of Eve, who would crush the devil. God laid out the plan before us all that even though we are evil and we perpetuate evil in this world, he would come and rescue us from it. That future with a Savior for all people took shape over the years until the plan was fully realized in every foretold detail in the God Man Jesus Christ. Knowing the future, God shaped it so that the most people would come to know Jesus, to know that he lived perfectly for us, that he crushed Satan for us, rescued us from the prison of eternal suffering in hell, that he thwarted death and will kill it completely for us on the last day, that he has prepared for all of us a life in heaven with him where they will be no more pain or suffering or mourning or death, no more injustice, no more hatred, no more brutality, no more heartache. He knew our future. He laid it out there for us. He made it happen so as to save us and everyone else while also giving us the free will to love him or not.

The LORD is like none other. He knows the future and proclaims it to us. Not a single time has his foretelling of the future proven false. He has laid out for us that we have a future with him, that even as dark times come, even as we experience pain and suffering, we are pointed to the God who knows and controls the future, to trust only in him, and look forward to our future in heaven.

Because the LORD is like none us, because he is our King, our Redeemer, the LORD Almighty, the First and the Last, our Rock, and the one who declares, lays out, and accomplishes the future, we know where our story goes. We know that we have a happy ending. We build on him, on the story of our future that he gives us. We trust that his ways and thoughts are higher than ours. He knows how to save the most people. Therefore, "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." (verse 8) We trust our God who is unlike anything or anyone else who tells and controls the future. Amen.