

Chapel Message on Isaiah 40:25-31

by Dr. Jason Van Vliet

I'm not very good at remembering names. And I'm even worse at remembering relations. That is to say, I easily forgot who is related to whose brother-in-law's uncle's cousin.

Now I know that I'm not alone when it comes to the challenges of remembering names. Many people struggle with this. And then, moving to the other side of the spectrum, there are also people who are very good at remembering names. Even if they met someone decades ago, they can still pull the right name out of their memory banks with ease. But even such people do not come close to the mental capabilities of the Lord our God. Tucked away in Isaiah 40:26, there is a most remarkable little revelation. Not only did God create all the stars, he also "calls them each by name." Ps 147:4 confirms the same truth, "[The LORD] determines the number of the stars *and calls them each by name.*"

Let's attempt to work this out numerically. We live in the Milky Way galaxy. Astronomers estimate that there are between 100 and 300 billion stars in the Milky Way. Let's go with the conservative estimate of 100 billion stars. The LORD has a name for each and every single star in the Milky Way: *100 billion* names that he remembers. And he never mixes them up. (Is your head starting to spin yet? Mine is.)

But that's just the beginning. Astronomers estimate that there are 400 billion galaxies in the universe, each with an average of about 100 billion stars, just like the Milky Way. If you punch those numbers into the calculator you come to 40,000,000,000,000,000,000 stars. The LORD knows each one of them by name. And he never mixes even one of them up. (Is your head spinning now? Mine is.)

The point is this: the LORD, our covenant God, who is the everlasting creator, he has a mental capacity that is far, far beyond anything that we can even imagine.

And that's not all. Look at the end of v. 26. "*Because of his great power and mighty strength, not one of them is missing.*" In other words, by his providential power, he also upholds and sustains all of those 40,000,000,000,000,000,000 stars. Again, let's attempt to work this out numerically. The star with which we are most familiar, namely, the Sun, is 1.3 million times as large as the earth. It's very, very big. At the core of the sun 620 million metric tonnes of hydrogen are under going a process of nuclear fusion and turning into Helium. And that is the quantity being processed *per second*. Every second of every day, another 620 million metric tonnes of hydrogen are fused into helium in the sun's core. No wonder it's pretty bright! And the sun is only a medium sized star. There are a lot bigger and brighter ones out there in the universe.

Now, can you explain this? Can you comprehend this? What kind of *vast power* does it take to maintain and sustain all the nuclear fusion reactions going – simultaneously – in all those 40,000,000,000,000,000,000 stars. I don't have a numerical answer for you. But there is a Scriptural answer. It's take the *divine* power of no one less than the LORD our covenant God. He not only knows the stars by name, he also sustains each one of them—consistently and effortlessly. Why mention all of this? Briefly, two points:

- No matter how much you admire and exalt the wisdom and power of our God, you're probably still thinking too small about God. No, let's correct that, we *definitely* are thinking too small about the greatness of our God.
- This great LORD our God also "*gives strength to the weary and increase the power of the weak.*" No, he does not give us enough strength and understanding to become like God. That was Satan's lie in the Garden. And we're not going to be duped by his diabolic deception. We're not thinking, or even hoping, that we'll ever have understanding or power

like God does. But what we can be sure of this: he will give us the understanding and strength we need to do what we are called to do.

Now, of course, Isaiah 40 is a prophecy originally given to exiles in despair. And time prevents us from exploring all the redemptive-historical treasures that are waiting to be unearthed in this passage. But the basic message is clear. Younger, or older, it doesn't matter: we all run out of steam sooner or later—*mental* steam, *physical* strength, *emotional* staying power and yes, even *spiritual* stamina. Sometimes you come to the point when the tank is empty.

And when you reach that point, don't just try to dig deeper, looking for the internal reserve tank tucked away inside of you. Rather, as the prophet says, "*Lift your eyes and look to the heavens....*" (v. 26). Look to the one who "*sits enthroned above the circle of the earth*" (v. 22). Look to him, and hope in him, because those who do will receive the strength they need to walk and take the next step forward in his service.