

# Coach House Church BEACONS

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## WELL BEYOND OUR IMAGINATIONS

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30TH JULY 2020

A couple of weeks ago, I went on holiday by myself for a few days in Filey. Like many people, I'd become sick of my surroundings and I hadn't gotten away properly in months. At the same time, it was a decisive opportunity for me to spend time with God, which I'd been avoiding or simply hadn't materialised in the wake of a trash routine.

Nature rarely speaks to me in a spiritual way, but on this occasion, high up on the cliffs and looking out to sea, it did. It was only across a span of water which terminates in France on the other side – a short journey and distance. It was a clear and sunny evening, and yet, I couldn't see any land on the other side of the water. I could see ships that were miniscule specks on the horizon, and that was it. I was alone at the time, and couldn't see anyone around so I actually started praying out loud for a while. As I observed this scene before me, I realised that God had created all this vastness (whatever the precise process). I couldn't even see where the sea terminated and France begins. It's a small channel of water, but looked absolutely vast. If I couldn't even observe the extent of this, how much larger would it be looking out to the Atlantic or Pacific oceans?

I was dealing with spiritual difficulties which had persisted for a long time; they felt hard and sometimes irresolvable. Within the scope of my small mind, holed up in my room at home, or in the microcosm of the city, this way of thinking easily took off and dominated. I was under my problems and felt helpless.

However, as I prayed and observed the immense sea before me and the world around me, I realised that God had created it all. Every atom exists by his power, he knows every single detail. He casually holds power over the whole universe.

The sea in front of me was just a tiny sliver of it. Even the oceans. I felt the strong sense that God had mastery over all his creation – he is, in the true sense, the lord. If he was lord over all that, then is he not lord over me? Is he not lord over the problems I faced? Wouldn't it be a comical misjudgement to think that my circumstances were somehow 'above' the God who created the universe? Isn't it strange to think that something in God's universe could have mastery over God, in his own universe, which he created? Obviously it's absurd. Romans speaks of nature testifying to the power and nature of God, this was one such moment for me. Whatever things felt like, whatever apparently objective realities I saw in front of my face, they were conditioned by my small thinking and inability to see the full picture. Nature just 'is', it stands in front of us everywhere and is a testament to God's power.

Since that time I've been thinking and praying for people who have backslidden in their faith: deliberately, unknowingly, unhappily, happily, circumstantially, and everything in between. Here is my logic, if God has power over the universe so completely and in all things – even things as vast as the universe, isn't it equally a mockery to think that the Devil has the power to snatch people out of God's hands and break off the possibility of eternity spent enjoying God? God has every power (literally) at his disposal to change our hearts and minds and remind us that we have a creator.

I remember by name in my prayers every single person who I have encountered in my life who has walked away from God for whatever reason. This is not because I am righteous or better, but precisely because I have found myself at the same point many times before. God has remembered me, so I should remember them. I have received more grace than many people, so if God can revive me, he can revive them too. Jesus loved Judas no more than he loved Peter, Paul or John. If God lavishes his love on the ungrateful, why shouldn't I? I often want results, but the results aren't the point – even if none of those people returns to God, we serve a God who has lavished his love on us –even though we are utterly unworthy of it, and as Romans tells us: 'while we were still sinners' who were far from God. Think about it: God reached us at a time where we didn't care about God, and got us to care about God.

I want to take the Bible seriously when it describes people who walk away from God, and don't want to undermine the fact that this does happen. Even so, we limit God and give up on ourselves and others way too easily. We think up our own arbitrary standards for how far is too far, and how bad is too bad, how lost is too

lost and so on. This limits the limitless love and power of God. In other words, we determine things through our own sight and standards. I believe that this is a natural limitation that we live with as finite human beings. We make judgements based upon what we know, even when we do so in humility. And even when we try to make judgements through the lens of our faith in God, and his power. But nevertheless, God's thoughts and ways are higher than our ways. Who's to say where God's limits are? In humility we can make judgements, but God truly knows, and we must recognise that we don't even understand the half of his power. More specifically, his power is directed towards us in love, and with the desire that all people come to share in his life and peace.

I want to end this beacon with some words from the books of Isaiah. They bear further reflection and were originally addressed to the people of Israel who had wandered from God, been smashed with a horrific exile as punishment, and were hoping for restoration. These same words are offered to us by God:

***6 Seek the Lord while he may be found;  
call on him while he is near.***

***7 Let the wicked forsake their ways  
and the unrighteous their thoughts.***

***Let them turn to the Lord, and he will have mercy on them,  
and to our God, for he will freely pardon.***

***8 "For my thoughts are not your thoughts,  
neither are your ways my ways,"  
declares the Lord.***

***9 "As the heavens are higher than the earth,  
so are my ways higher than your ways  
and my thoughts than your thoughts.***

***10 As the rain and the snow  
come down from heaven,  
and do not return to it  
without watering the earth  
and making it bud and flourish,  
so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater,***

***11 so is my word that goes out from my mouth:  
It will not return to me empty,  
but will accomplish what I desire  
and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.***

***12 You will go out in joy***

*and be led forth in peace;  
the mountains and hills  
will burst into song before you,  
and all the trees of the field  
will clap their hands.  
13 Instead of the thornbush will grow the juniper,  
and instead of briars the myrtle will grow.  
This will be for the Lord's renown,  
for an everlasting sign,  
that will endure forever."*

*(Isaiah 55:6-13)*



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