

BEHOLD YOUR GOD



*A series of sermons by
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Behold Your God - Chapter 1

"The Importance Of Thinking"

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Now we're turning within the Old Testament to the book of Exodus, the second book within the Bible, Exodus and chapter 33 - this is one of my favourite passages of Scripture, for it depicts for us the patriarch Moses, the father of Israel. And there he is, and within that great book he is receiving the law from God and, if you like, he has great experiences with God and many of them are recorded for us within the revelation of this book. And here we have one, in chapter 33 and verse 8 - and it says: "And it came to pass, when Moses went out unto the tabernacle, that all the people rose up, and stood every man at his tent door, and looked after Moses, until he was gone into the tabernacle. And it came to pass, as Moses entered into the tabernacle, the cloudy pillar descended, and stood at the door of the tabernacle, and the Lord talked with Moses" - isn't that a lovely expression? "...the Lord talked with Moses. And all the people saw the cloudy pillar stand at the tabernacle door: and all the people rose up and worshipped, every man in his tent door. And the Lord spake unto Moses face to face, as a man speaketh unto his friend. And he turned again into the camp: but his servant Joshua, the son of Nun, a young man, departed not out of the tabernacle".

If you look at verse 18, you find here the prayer of Moses as he stands before God: "And he said, I beseech thee, show me thy glory. And he said", God said, "I will make all my goodness pass before thee, and I will proclaim the name of the Lord before thee; and will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy. And he said, Thou canst not see my face: for there shall no man see me, and live. And the Lord said, Behold, there is a place by me, and thou shalt stand upon a rock: And it shall come to pass, while my glory passeth by, that I will put thee in a cleft of the rock, and will cover thee with my hand while I pass by: And I will take away mine hand, and thou shalt see my back parts: but my face shall not be seen".

In chapter 34, if you look at it, and verse 5 - you see another experience that Moses had with his God: "And the Lord descended in the cloud, and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name of the Lord. And the Lord passed by before him, and proclaimed, The Lord, The Lord God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, Keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children's children, unto the third and to the fourth generation".

If you turn to chapter 40 of Exodus, not only was there that answer to Moses' prayer: 'Lord, show me Thy glory', but here we find another instance where Moses beholds - and indeed the whole company sees - the glory of God. Verse 34, and after the tabernacle was formed and built: "...then a cloud covered the tent of the congregation, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle" - now don't read over that quickly - "the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle. And Moses was not able to enter into the tent of the congregation, because the cloud abode thereon, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle".

The word of God is full, isn't it, of experiences of men with God. Ordinary men, men who were sinful, shapen in iniquity, conceived in their mother's womb in sin - yet we read accounts of how they experienced God, sometimes in extremely supernatural ways and strange ways. We've read about Moses, and that never

fails to thrill me, how it says that God talked with Moses - not Moses talked with God, God talked with Moses! Can you imagine that? Walking into a tent and talking with God as a man would talk with his friend. That wasn't enough for Moses - it might be enough for me, or perhaps for you - it wasn't enough for him, and that teaches us a lesson that we should never, ever get to a situation where we have enough of God. And so he cries to God: 'Lord show me Thy glory' - we would've thought we had seen it, to stand talking with God as a man with his friend, face-to-face, it says, with God! Yet he cries: 'Show me Thy glory! I want more of Thee O God!'. So God says: 'Look, you can't behold Me in all My glory, you couldn't take it!' - what did the hymnwriter say? 'In light inaccessible', we cannot approach God without being exterminated by His great holiness, by His great light! But God says: 'I'll do this for you: I'll put you in the cleft of the rock, and I'll cover your face and I'll make all My glory to pass by you - you can't look upon it. But what I'll do is: when I get past you, I'll take My hand from off My eyes and you will see My after-glow - the great Shekinah glory that I leave, it's not even Me, but I leave it wherever I go' - and that is why, when Moses came down to the people, his face shone.

Isaiah 6, if you wish to turn to it, you read: 'In the year that king Uzziah died I saw the Lord' - I saw Him, and what does he say he saw Him like? '[He was] high', sitting on a throne, 'and lifted up, and his train filled the temple. Above it stood the seraphims: each one had six wings; with twain he covered his face, and with twain he covered his feet, and with twain he did fly. And one cried unto another, and said, Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory. And the posts of the door moved at the voice of him that cried, and the house was filled with smoke'. What great experiences men had with God. Ezekiel chapter 1, if you wish to turn to it, in verse 1 you read this at the beginning of another great prophecy: 'Now it came to pass in the thirtieth year, in the fourth month, in the fifth day of the month, as I was among the captives by the river of Chebar, that the heavens were opened, and I saw visions of God'.

I've entitled my message today: 'Behold Your God' - indeed the whole series I want to entitle with that, I want us to come and behold, to look upon our God. To contemplate what it means: that word and that Person, that great triunity in one - God Almighty. I want us especially this morning to think of 'The Importance Of Thinking' about God. I think it's self-evident as you look at these passages of Scripture, and you look at these men and their experiences with God Almighty, that it wasn't simply a quick look and then they forgot Him - but it was a look that when they beheld their God, it was life changing. They were never the same man or woman again! If you read Isaiah, you find in chapter 5 a great many woes that describe the situation of the nation at that time, and then all of a sudden the man that was withholding the blessing died - King Uzziah - and at times it takes those that are withholding the blessing, for God to deal with them - and God removed that man and then Isaiah could see God. That's what I want to happen for us in these Lord's Day mornings - for whatever is removing our sight and our vision of God to disappear and for us to stand, like Isaiah, and see the Lord high and lifted up, and that His train would fill this temple!

Ezekiel was downcast, wasn't he? He was disheartened - he was in the exile and there he was sitting at the river of Chebar with all those children of Israel that were brought out at the exile - and he was depressed and dejected! But all of a sudden Almighty God opened the windows of heaven and he saw visions of God! That's why, I believe, the writer to the Hebrews in chapter 12 and verse 1 says these great words: 'Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us' - such a great cloud of witnesses! Great men of God, great prophets and priests and kings who show us their experiences of God - and because of all them, ought we not also to behold our God?

In Exodus chapter 24, if you turn to it please, Exodus 24 and verse 13, we read of a man whom we have already read of in chapter 33. We read: 'And Moses rose up, and his minister', or his servant, 'Joshua: and Moses went up into the mount of God'. Moses had a servant called Joshua - and it is the Joshua that you read about in the book of Joshua, and indeed throughout the whole of the Pentateuch - this was the understudy of

Moses. Now I want you to see this: what a responsibility it was for Moses to show Joshua God, and to lead him into experiences with God as we see within this book. And that tells us - at least it tells me - that I have a great responsibility to influence others by contemplating God. In other words, when I start to contemplate who God is and what God can do, it will affect my life - and when He affects my life, my life in turn will overflow and affect others. That is exactly what happened with Moses and Joshua.

You find exactly the same happening in the book of Kings with Elijah and Elisha - it was the mantle of Elijah that Elisha took, wasn't it Elijah that Elisha followed and never took his eye off him? He asked for a double portion of his spirit - why? Because he saw the experiences and the blessings that this man Elijah had with God, and he wanted it! There is a great responsibility that not only we be blessed by God for ourselves, but we be blessed by beholding God for the benefit of others. It was the case with Paul and Barnabas, was it not? I'm sure that Paul taught Barnabas a great deal about beholding his God. Was it not the same with Timothy? Paul taught him, as his own son, about God and how to behave in the house of God, which is the temple of God, the church of God.

It's the case with us, isn't it, that often it is the lives of others, and it is the blessings of others, and the walk of others that impresses upon us to go after God. We are surrounded with so great a cloud of witnesses, that we want to press on as they have pressed on, we want to behold our God as they have beheld their God. We read biographies: Murray McCheyne, John Calvin, Martin Luther, D.L. Moody - we read of so many, and we read of their life that it's possible for a man or woman of like passions to follow God and to behold God and to be used of God - it excites us! Indeed I would go as far as to say this: that the greatest effect that you will ever have on others will be through your walk with God. The greatest effect that you will have on other people will be if you are beholding God.

Now, the opposite of that situation is found in the New Testament in Luke chapter 10, if you wish to turn to it, Luke chapter 10 - and we're just laying the foundation this morning as an introduction of why it's important to think upon God. Luke chapter 10 and verse 39, and we find the famous incidence in Bethany, where the Lord comes into the home of Lazarus' sisters, and there He is in a place where He loves. In verse 39 we read this: '...Mary, which also sat at Jesus' feet, and heard his word...', and a little bit on, you read: 'But Martha was cumbered about much serving'. So you have Mary who was at Jesus feet and heard His words, and then a little bit later you have Martha who is cumbered about much serving. And then the Lord says: 'Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things: But one thing is needful: and Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her'.

It is hard to behold God in a busy world - in fact there are times that I think it's nigh impossible to live as the world lives and to behold God in the way that He longs to be beheld. It can even be in the service of Christ - yes: was not Martha in the kitchen serving Christ, whatever she was doing? But there is one thing that is needful, there is one thing that is primary and foundational - which means that it must come first, and if it doesn't, it doesn't matter how much you serve the Lord, if you don't behold God you can't be anything for God! Yet we may have the prospect, as one writer said, of meeting an unknown God after death. Therefore it is our need - now - to behold God, to be at the Saviour's feet listening to His words, that chosen part that is good and better, that cannot be taken away from us.

In Genesis chapter 24 we find an instance where Abraham sends out his servant to get a wife for Isaac. And we read throughout that beautiful story - and if you're looking for a girlfriend or a boyfriend that's a good story to read, for it gives us what the will of God is for us and how to find it, for Isaac and Abraham were willing to accept God's will, no matter what she looked like! And here we have within this story an amazing verse that gripped me this week as I read it again - it says: 'Isaac went out to meditate in the field at the eventide'. He went out into the field to meditate at evening, and the next time he lifted up his eyes he saw his future bride! And if we go out, and if we meditate, we too will behold the King in all His beauty.

Joshua was the servant of Moses - if you look at chapter 33 that we were reading from, you find in verse 3 at the beginning of the chapter that still there was that promise of the promised land - '...unto a land', they were going to, 'flowing with milk and honey:', God says, 'I will not go up in the midst of thee; for thou art a stiffnecked people'. Yet still there was the promise of that land of milk and honey, the promised land. Now at the end of the book of Deuteronomy you find Moses dead, and then the next book you find is the book of Joshua. Now look: Joshua became God's conqueror, Joshua became the man that would stand there at the Jordan and would take the people of God into the promised land. Moses could not go because he smote the rock, you remember, and God said: 'It's not for you, but Joshua's going to go into the land - he is My chosen future deliverer'. Where did Joshua learn his example? With Moses. Where did he learn it? Verse 11. Now I believe that this is a message from God, verse 11: 'And the Lord spake unto Moses face to face, as a man speaketh unto his friend. And he turned again into the camp: but his servant Joshua, the son of Nun, a young man, departed not out of the tabernacle' - isn't that beautiful? He was young, he didn't have the responsibilities upon his shoulder of the millions of murmuring, stiffnecked, rebellious Israelites that Moses had - he didn't have that burden. And in the time that he didn't have that burden he redeemed the time, and he redeemed it with God, in God's presence. Now, young people: if you want to be anything for God, you've got to behold Him, you've got to be with Him - and when others leave Him, you've got to tarry in His tabernacle. This is where Joshua became God's conqueror - and this is where anyone will become a conqueror for God: in His presence, where he was remembering now his Creator in the days of his youth, while the evil days came not, nor the years draw nigh when he would say: 'I have no pleasure in them' - he didn't wait till it was too late!

The great human need today is to know God, and my friend if you're here and you're not saved, you've never had a conversion experience with the Spirit of God - you need to know God in salvation! You need to be saved or you'll be lost! It is the only way - Christ, the way, the truth, and the life - no other way to the Father, but by Him. You need to know Him through His death and His resurrection! But Christian: once you have known God in that capacity, you must now know God through contemplating Him, through beholding Him. And that is the importance - we could finish there! - the importance of thinking about God, that is why it is important to contemplate Him, to behold Him. But if that doesn't suffice, we can ask the question first of all: why contemplate Him? Why do it? J. I. Packer in his book 'Knowing God' - which he wrote before he got ecumenical - he gives one reason why we should know God. He says: 'Christian minds have been conformed to the modern spirit', I quote him, he says, 'It spawns great thoughts of man and leaves room only for small thoughts of God'. It spawns great thoughts of man and leaves room only for small thoughts of God - and what he is saying is this: a weakling view of God produces weakling saints of God.

We are in a battle today and it seems that we are downhearted at times because we feel that, as we look around at the world and the church, that we are losing the battle - although the gates of hell will never prevail against the church of Jesus Christ. But one of the pitfalls that we can fall into is to get preoccupied with maintaining the religious practices in a pagan world, and lose sight of God! A W. Tozer says: 'The church has surrendered her once lofty concept of God and has substituted for it one so low, so ignoble as to be utterly unworthy of thinking, worshipping men. This she has done not deliberately, but little by little and without her knowledge - and her very unawareness only makes her situation all the more tragic'. He goes on in his book to lament that he believes that this is the cause of a hundred lesser evils among us, that we do not take time to wait and to behold God. He believes that this is why there is a loss of spiritual awe in worship, in the divine presence, why we are not struck dumb as Moses was when the cloud filled with His glory the tabernacle. He believes it is one reason why we can no longer say that we are able to 'be still and know that Thou art God'.

What comes to our mind when we think of God is probably the most important thing about us. What comes to your mind when you think of God? The reason why that is so is because no religion, or people, or person,

has ever risen above its view of God. I'll give you an example from the Old Testament: you have Baal worship. Baal worship was passed down, right to the New Testament where we look - as we've been studying in Ephesians - at this awful temple of Diana and the ritual prostitution that went on within it. And we may think it's debauched and depraved and terribly immoral, without realising the thought, the religious theology that was behind it. Without going into too much detail, it was simply this: that their gods, many of them, were fertility gods - and they believed that the way they worshiped their fertility gods was with copulation with temple ceremonial prostitutes. Whether male or female, they would copulate with them, and they believed when they copulated that their god would be pleased with that worship, and he in turn would be fertile with regards to the ground and the fruit and the crops and the vegetables. And they believed that through this type of immoral worship that god would be pleased - now when you have a god like that, you have people like that! Isn't that right? Therefore a people, or a person, cannot rise above his own contemplation of God. If you believe in a god, like those in Islam, who is a wicked god, who is an angry god all the time - a god of wrath - you'll dress up women in black, you'll not let them out of the house, you'll have rules and regulations and all sorts of awful things done to your children, because that is the type of god you believe in. If you believe in Molech of the Old Testament, you will take your baby boy and feed him to the flames, because that is the kind of god you have! And that's the kind of person you become.

You see our thought of God determines our spiritual state and also our spiritual future. It is, without doubt, the mightiest thought that the human mind can have to contemplate God. Have you ever thought about that? We think of so many things, but do we behold God? Do we behold Him, realising that in this scene and in this dispensation that we are in in human form, and in the bodies of death that we are in, that we will never have a greater experience than contemplating God? You would know to look at the meetings that we don't believe that! For when we have a chance to stare into the face of God, we're staring into our pillow, or into the television set. When we have time to remember God's Son, we are remembering - lying in bed - what we did on Saturday evening. And then we come expecting the blessing.

In the Psalms, in 48 and verse 9, we read this: 'We have thought of thy lovingkindness, O God, in the midst of thy temple' - we have thought! We read in the book of Malachi, chapter 3 and verse 16 and 17, that God has a book and he says: 'Then they that feared the Lord spake often one to another: and the Lord hearkened, and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the Lord, and that thought upon his name. And they shall be mine, saith the Lord of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels; and I will spare them, as a man spareth his own son that serveth him' - those that are Mine are they that think of Me! And I vouch to say that if you don't think of Him, you're not His.

I'm not talking, and in this next few weeks we won't be studying dry theology. 'Theology' literally means, in the Latin: 'Theo' - God, 'Ology' - study. Study of God - and that is what we will be doing, but it won't be dry theology, but it will be [a] life changing - hopefully - study of great God Jehovah! Why contemplate God? Daniel tells us, in chapter 11 and verse 32: 'the people that do know their God shall be strong, and shall do exploits'. Do you want to do exploits for God? Do you want to be strong for God? Do you want to be put in God's book, because you're a precious jewel for Him? Then we've got to learn to behold our God - like Joshua, we've got to learn to tarry when others leave, and when others aren't there, and when others are cumbered about with many things, we've got to learn to tarry in the tabernacle with the Shekinah cloud of God's presence!

I want to read you a portion of a sermon preached by Charles Haddon Spurgeon on January the 7th 1855 in Newpark Street Chapel in the morning. And I want you to listen very carefully to what he says: 'It has been said by someone that the proper study of mankind is man. I will not oppose the idea, but I believe it is equally true that the proper study of God's elect is God. The proper study of a Christian is the Godhead. The highest science, the loftiest speculation, the mightiest philosophy which can ever engage the attention of a child of God is the name, the nature, the person, the work, the doings and the existence of the great God

whom he calls his Father. There is something exceedingly improving to the mind in a contemplation of divinity. It is a subject so vast that all our thoughts are lost in its immensity, so deep that our pride is drowned in its infinity. Other subjects we can compass and grapple with, in them we feel a kind of self content and go our way with the thought: 'Behold I am wise'. But when we come to this master science, finding that our plumb line cannot sound its depths, and that our eagle eye cannot see its heights, no subject of contemplation will tend more to humble the mind than thoughts of God. But while the subject humbles the mind, it also expands it - he who often thinks of God will have a larger mind than the man who simply plods around the narrow glow. The most excellent study for expanding the soul is the science of Christ and Him crucified, and the knowledge of the Godhead and the glorious Trinity - nothing will so enlarge the intellect, nothing so magnify the whole soul of man, as a devout, earnest, continued investigation of the great subject of the Deity. O, there is in contemplating Christ a balm for every wound, in musing upon the Father there is a quietus for every grief, and in the influence of the Holy Ghost there is a balsam for every sore! Would you lose your sorrow? Would you drown your care? Then go plunge yourself in the Godhead's deepest sea, be lost in His immensity and you shall come forth as from a couch of rest, refreshed and invigorated. I know nothing which can so comfort the soul, so calm the swelling billows of sorrow and grief, so speak peace to the winds of trial, as a devout musing upon the subject of the Godhead - and it is to which I invite you to study this morning'.

Does that answer the question why we should study God? We should study Him because it exceedingly improves our minds. Do you want your mind improved? Well, study God, don't study science, don't go to university - not that there's anything wrong with that, but you'll not improve your mind going there! Do you want to humble the mind? It will be through a sight of God that you will cry like Isaiah: 'Woe is me for I am undone!', you'll cry like Peter: 'Lord, depart from me for I am a sinful man!'. Do you want to [enlarge] your mind, expand your soul, enlarge your intellect, magnify the whole of your being? Have you a great wound in your soul this morning that you want a balm for? Do you want a quietus for your grief, a balsam for every wound and sorrow and loss? Do you want to drown your care? Do you want rest? Do you want to be refreshed? Do you want to be invigorated, comforted in your soul? Do you want those swelling billows and storms of sorrow and grief to cease? Do you want peace to be spoken to the winds of trial? Well then behold your God!

Our learning of God will give birth to a life of godliness. We must learn and contemplate upon God not only for that, positively for the help it is, but negatively - because to think wrong thoughts of God is idolatry. To assume that God is other than He is is idolatry. As one said: 'A God begotten in the shadows of a fallen heart will quite naturally be no true likeness of the true God' - it cannot be! And many of us have our ideas of God, and it's not God at all! For we have never beheld Him. He says to many: 'Thou thoughtest that I was altogether such an one as thyself, but I will reprove thee and set them in order before thine eyes'. That's what He said of the Romans - when they knew God they glorified Him not as God, neither were thankful, but became vain in their imaginations and their foolish heart was darkened because they didn't think right thoughts of God - do you see the importance of thinking right thoughts of God?

Finally, as we close: how do you contemplate God? Someone has called the Bible a photograph of the Almighty. That is what the word 'revelation' means - 'reveal', 'reveal-ation', to reveal God, His person. That is how you know God, through the word of God, the written word of the living God - and it is to take the word of God and do something that very few do today, a lost art: it is the practice of meditation. To take time, to take the word and to ask what it means, and to ask what it requires of my soul and my life, and my practices and my possessions, and my family - to take it and to make it yours and to make it part of you, and to chew the cud of the word of God until you inwardly digest it and it becomes part of your whole being. The written revelation of God, that is how you will know how to behold God for the Bible is a portrait of His character and all His ways of His doings, His plannings, His infinite holiness and His unlimited graciousness.

The old Puritans knew their God, the old Presbyterians knew their God - indeed one, from 1643-1647, was part and party to the Westminster Catechism. And it was being drawn up, and there came a point of reverent indecision when those assembly divines wanted to frame a concise but worthy definition of God - they didn't know how to speak within their catechism of who God was and what He was like - and they resorted to special prayer to find out what the mind of God was about this. They requested a young man, the youngest of those Westminster divines, called George Gillespie, to lead them in prayer. Gillespie, one of the four Scottish members of that assembly, prayed these words: 'O God, who art a spirit, infinite, eternal and unchangeable, in Thy being wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness and truth' - and unanimously it was decided that the answer had been given, and that is the definition that you find within the Westminster Catechism. How did they get it? They didn't get it with a degree in theology, they got it from beholding their God - and God was so much part of their heart, that when that man opened his mouth God could speak through it!

You behold God through the written word, and as we close let us read together from Hebrews chapter 1 as an introduction to the weeks that lie ahead, of probably the primary and indeed the most important way to behold our great God. Hebrews chapter 1 and verse 1: 'God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds; Who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high'. Do you want to behold God? Listen to the words of God: 'Behold My beloved Son'.

'Strangely I sensed Him everywhere,
The God I ached to find.
Yet could not find Him anywhere,
Above, before, behind.

Mystery amazing, love unknown,
In human form He stands
And calls me with tender human tone,
Uplifting nail-torn hands.

Yes, for in Jesus, God most high
Has come from heaven above,
To answer all my aching cry
With His redeeming love.

Oh, magnify the Lord with me,
My Saviour, King divine.
For in my Saviour now I see:
Lo, God in heaven is mine!

May, in these next few weeks, we behold God.

Oh Lord, the Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin. Oh Lord, we thank Thee that Thou hast revealed Thyself in Jesus Christ Thy Son. But Lord, we are called now to contemplate Thee, to consider Him, to look upon Him in whom the Father dwells and be lost in wonder, love and praise. We pray in these next weeks that Thou wilt bless our study, and Lord that we will not be puffed up with knowledge at the end of it, but that we will be filled with all the fullness of God. In Jesus name, Amen.

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Behold Your God - Chapter 2

"God Transcendent"

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Now we're turning in our Old Testaments to the book of Deuteronomy, Deuteronomy and chapter 29. Last Lord's Day morning we were in Exodus chapter 33, we were looking at the fact of how Moses met with God, and spoke with God as a man talks with his friend, face-to-face. And we noticed the tail-end of one of those verses that told us that Joshua the servant of Moses, his understudy - who later would become the conqueror of the promised land in conquest - was made great as he waited in the tabernacle with God, face-to-face, just as Moses, when Moses went out to deal with the children of Israel. He had not the responsibility of his forefather in the faith, but he took the time - when he had it - spending it with God and bathing in the presence of the Almighty. We looked last week at how it is so important, as we enter a study [such] as this, that we think right thoughts about God, that we learn that it is important to contemplate God. It is not left for the theologians or the 'high-browed' preachers, but it is for every child of God to come into the presence of God and learn of Him, face-to-face.

And so, as we laid the foundation last week about why we ought to contemplate God and how we contemplate God, we look at our first study on the person of God: "God Transcendent". And we are looking at chapter 29 of Deuteronomy and verse 29, and God has outlined the promises to the children of Israel in the passage that lies before us - it's the promises unto the penitent, unto those who will obey God, the children of Israel who will live by His commands and His precepts - He tells them that He will bring blessing upon them. And of course, you will know that throughout the whole of the first 5 books of the Bible that not only are the blessings of Israel outlined, but the cursings - if they do not walk in obedience and trust and obey in their God, He will curse them. And at the end of these precepts of what God will do for His people, we have in verse 29 this strange statement: 'The secret things belong unto the Lord our God: but those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children for ever, that we may do all the words of this law'.

You know that the book of Deuteronomy, in its very name, is the second giving of the law to Moses. It was given there, first of all, in Exodus 20 on Mount Sinai. And what the word of God is saying here is that God has been revealed in His law - God has been revealed to men and women through the precepts that we've already read in this book, by His blessings and by His cursings. And one of the basic lessons that we learn from these words before us is that God is a holy God, that is why His law was revealed to us. He is a righteous God, His eyes cannot look upon iniquity and therefore his law portrays and conveys that truth to us. But do you see what verse 29 is saying? There are secret things that belong unto the Lord our God that we do not know. Those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children's children forever, that we may do all the words of this law. There are things that God, in His mercy and grace, has revealed unto us as His children - but there are other things, things that no man or woman, or perhaps even the angel in its height, can know.

What God has revealed to us through the word of God is staggering. It's hard even to come to grips with His revealed will, His revealed character and persons - in fact, when we read the word of God and come into a deep knowledge of who God is in all His attributes and being, we are like Isaiah, we fall at His feet and say: 'Woe is me for I am undone!'. We have that experience of Peter when he said to the Lord Jesus: 'Depart from me for I am a sinful man!'. We have the experience of the great apostle Paul: 'Who shall deliver me from this body of death?'. But to think that what has been revealed to us is very little, in comparison to what God is

and the secrets that God holds within Himself about Himself. And the conclusion that we come to from a verse like this - and it seems even to be a contradiction in terms - that we, knowing God and beholding our God, enter into a journey where we begin to know the unknowable.

You remember those in Athens had, upon their temple, an altar to the 'unknown God'. And we praise God today that He is not such a God to us, for we have know Him in salvation, and - God willing - today we are knowing Him day by day in sanctification, and in a daily relationship with our Father through the Lord Jesus Christ. But yet, in a small measure, because the secret things belong unto the Lord our God - in a great measure He is still an unknown God. There are many paradoxes in scripture and this indeed is one of them: that we can know many things about God, yet there are still things that we do not know about Him. As you read these first 5 books of the Bible, you read of Jacob and Moses, and both of them are said on different occasions to have seen God face-to-face. Moses, in the tent of meeting; Jacob, as he wrestled with God. We read last week in Exodus 33 and verse 20, God said to Moses: 'Thou canst not see my face: for there shall no man see me, and live'. So you've a paradox right away - Jacob says that this place shall be called 'Peniel', for here where I wrestled I saw God face-to-face; Moses, in the tent of meeting, it says he saw God face-to-face and talked with Him face-to-face as a man with his friend. Yet in the same passage, you read in verse 20, that God said: 'Thou canst not see my face: for there shall no man see me, and live'. You remember the angel of God appearing to Samson's future mother and father, and Manoah's wife was barren. And one day an angel appeared unto them and promised them the birth of Samson, who would be a conqueror and a deliverer in the land. Manoah asked him his name and he refused to disclose his name to him, and you remember the story goes that, after the angel ascended into the flame above the altar, that Manoah despaired to his wife and turned around and cried - you read it in Judges 13:22 - 'We shall surely die because we have seen God'.

You see, to see God was death! To see God was fatal because God was such an 'other' one, so beyond us, so above us, something that we cannot understand or grasp in all of His power and being, that in the mind of Manoah, he knew - without an Old Testament or a New Testament - that to see God is to die. Indeed it's cemented for us in the New Testament - 1 John 4 and verse 12, John says: 'No man hath seen God at any time' - so you have a paradox, don't you?. Men who we read of seeing God - Jacob, Moses - talking to God, wrestling with God and perhaps in God's will in the weeks that lie ahead, we will look into that great paradox of how men could be said to see God and know God in this way, yet no man can see God and live.

The scriptures are full of paradoxes and mysteries. That is why I want to pause here for a moment and say, as Paul said to Timothy, without controversy: 'Great is the mystery of godliness'. There is a danger in the age in which we live that we bring everything down to a manageable level, where we feel that we have got God in a box, that we can understand Him, we can define Him, we can speak of all His attributes and his persons that are revealed to us - yet, in depth, we forget that the secret things belong unto our God and there is a measure of mystery and paradox in God. Let us never lose the mystery of God. Is that part of our problem today: that we have lost the awe and the reverence of the unknown? Those secret things that no man can know, that great glory of God that no man can see and live, that great person of God that no human mind can hold and sustain. Old W.P. Nicholson said that today's society spells God with a small 'G' and man with a capital 'M'. And if I can say anything to you this morning, especially to the young people, it's this: have high thoughts of God! Don't reduce God down to your level, don't push God into your understanding - and beware when contemplating and thinking about God that you do not strip God of the great mystery of His godliness.

The transcendence of God simply means that God is above us, that God is beyond us, He is unreachable in His character and in His person. It simply means that He excels us, He surpasses, He is independent of us, He is all-sustaining, self-sustaining within Himself - He needs nothing but Himself. Do you think God needs us? No, God doesn't need us, neither was God obliged to create us, was He? It was the choice of His will! He didn't have a missing part in His life, and he decided that He needed to fill it by making creation. Nor, in our sin, is God obliged to save us. Now, we must grapple with these issues: God does not need man, but man

needs God - but God does not need him! Only for the fact that He chose to create him, only for the fact that He has chosen, in our sin, to save us and has promised that He will do such - but God gains nothing from us, or indeed from anyone or anything outside of the universe.

If you turn to Romans 11 you were read this of God's mind, and it's only one little attribute or part of God, yet His very mind, distinctly and accurately it says that God has no need of anyone. Verse 34 and 35: 'For who hath known the mind of the Lord? Or who hath been his counsellor? Or who hath first given to him, and it shall be recompensed unto him again?' - God is a self-entity. God is above us! God is beyond us! God does not need us! We must have high views of God. If we are going to think of God, we must realise that, before the creation of the world and the universe, God was perfectly blessed in Himself. Father, Son and Holy Spirit - that divine fellowship of love between those three Persons of one essence - there in eternity past, if we can say it, there was perfection, perfect blessedness. God did not need man nor creation! Creation added nothing to God, for you cannot add to God - and can I go as far as to say this: even Christ and His cross added nothing to God's divine being or to His glory. Now ponder that! Christ and His cross could not add to God, for God cannot be added to - yes, it revealed Him; yes, it manifested His glory and brought great glory to God and praise to His name; but it did not add to His essential goodness and greatness and holiness and godliness! God has never been without it, neither will He ever be without it. Oh, you cannot add anything to our God.

Turn with me to Isaiah chapter 40, and we see outlined by the great prophet the transcendence of our God, and it has to be seen by us in comparison to our own situation and how small we are. Isaiah chapter 40 and verse 15, and speaking of the nation the prophet says: 'Behold, the nations are as a drop of a bucket, and are counted as the small dust of the balance: behold, he taketh up the isles as a very little thing. And Lebanon is not sufficient to burn, nor the beasts thereof sufficient for a burnt offering. All nations before him are as nothing; and they are counted to him less than nothing, and vanity. To whom then will ye liken God? Or what likeness will ye compare unto him?'. Verse 22: 'It is he that sitteth upon the circle of the earth, and the inhabitants thereof are as grasshoppers; that stretcheth out the heavens as a curtain, and spreadeth them out as a tent to dwell in: That bringeth the princes to nothing; he maketh the judges of the earth as vanity'. Oh, we have a great God - can we just contemplate that for one moment? We have a great God! He is God and there is none other! He is God above all gods! He is above, He is supreme, He is exalted, He is a place that none can approach to! He is a being that none can strive after or even find!

One old biblical scholar said: 'Quite truly, how vastly different is the God of scripture from the God of the average pulpit'. It is not a great God, it is not the God that we read of in 1 Timothy 6 and verse 15 and 16: 'Which in his times he shall show, who is the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords; Who only hath immortality, dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto; whom no man hath seen, nor can see: to whom be honour and power everlasting. Amen'. There is no god like our God! Oh, that we could lift ourselves from the depths of our own human existence, our pitiful daily chores in life, the sphere of all our existence, that we could be pulled by His Spirit at this moment to see that God is transcendent!

The irony of studying God is that He is unknowable. Yet we will seek to try and know the unknowable. The first question I want to ask today is: What can be known? What can we know about God? And indeed that capitulates, perhaps, the greatest question of all the ages: what is God like? How do we define God? How can we describe God? And even though it's our purpose of studying God in these studies, and it's our intention to understand from God's divine revelation - the word of God - what He is really like, the paradox is that God is not like anything! Isaiah said: 'To whom, or to what, shall ye compare God?' - God is not exactly like anything that exists in this universe - in other words, He can't be compared to anything. The prince of preachers, no matter how eloquent he may be, is redundant in attempting to illustrate by any natural means possible what our God is like, for He is transcendent, He is above, beyond, superior to anything!

However, although that is the case, God - in revealing Himself through the word of God - has endeavored to reveal Himself to a natural world. That means, because He knows that we in our puny, finite human state could never really grasp what He is like and who He is, He has condescended Himself to describe Himself like natural things, so that our natural mind might understand. That's why within the word of God He incorporates many 'like' words, to say that God is like such-and-such, to describe Himself by comparing Himself to another thing - and, although He is not exactly like that thing, He borrows those things of nature to communicate what He is above nature, what He is beyond nature - and you could multiply all the comparisons of God within the word of God by infinity and still not come near to what God is in all His transcendence. It's amazing to think, isn't it, the lengths that God has gone to that we might understand! Can I say that He even may have stripped Himself of some of that mystery, in order that He might communicate to a natural world who He is and what He is like.

Let me give you an example, turn with me to Ezekiel chapter 1 and we were in this passage of scripture last Lord's Day morning. Ezekiel chapter 1, now I want you to notice every single word as we read them together, you remember in verse 1 it describes: 'It came to pass in the thirtieth year, in the fourth month, in the fifth day of the month, as I was among the captives by the river of Chebar, that the heavens were opened, and I saw visions of God'. He saw what no language could describe, and the point of Ezekiel was - keep that passage open because we're going to look at a few more verses - the point of what he is saying is this: he had no reference point, he had nothing to compare God with. He just says, 'I saw visions of God', he had nothing to interpret, there was no language that could describe the visions of God that he was seeing - and he saw something different from what he'd ever known in his whole existence, so what he does is he uses 'like' words. He uses comparisons, if you look at verse 13 he says: 'As for the likeness of the living creatures, their appearance', note that word, 'their appearance was like burning coals of fire, and like the appearance of lamps'. He didn't see burning coals of fire, he didn't see lamps, but he saw something that he couldn't describe, that he didn't know what it was, but it was like burning coals of fire, it was like the appearance of lamps. And as you read down this passage, the nearer he comes to the burning throne of God, the less definite his words become, the less specific and accurate they are. Look at verse 26: 'And above the firmament that was over their heads was the likeness of a throne, as the appearance of a sapphire stone: and upon the likeness of the throne was the likeness as the appearance of a man above upon it. And I saw as the colour of amber, as the appearance of fire round about within it, from the appearance of his loins even upward, and from the appearance of his loins even downward, I saw as it were the appearance of fire, and it had brightness round about. As the appearance of the bow that is in the cloud in the day of rain, so was the appearance of the brightness round about. This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord! He couldn't see the glory of the Lord and live, so God had to convey to him the likeness, the appearance of the glory of the Lord. Do you see what a glorious God we have? In light inaccessible hid from our eyes!

We are so poor that God has to describe Himself in likeness, in appearance, in the languages of 'as it were'. And it's no slavish literalism that God wants as we read the book of Ezekiel, because God cannot be put into our pitiful language, He can't be contained into our puny minds - and we need to beware that in all our doctrines that we take from the word of God, that we do not ever try to define the indefinable! We need to beware in contemplating God that we never ever put Him into our conception, for we tend - as in everything in life - to reduce God to our manageable terms. A. W. Tozer said this: 'The God of contemporary Christianity is only slightly superior to the gods of Greece and Rome - if indeed he is not actually inferior to them, in that he is weak and helpless while they, at least, had power'. What have we reduced God to? This great transcendent, superior, the secret things that belong unto Him - we have brought Him down and stripped Him of all His power, all of His sovereignty, all of His dignity and we have made ourselves god over Him!

Idolatry is when we move from what God is said to be like, to imagine that He is that way. For instance when we read that there was an appearance of burning coals, or we read that God appeared like unto the form of a man, that we make Him into a man - that's not what the word of God says. It's 'like' the appearance, it's 'like' the thing, it's 'as it were' - and that's why we reject idols and idolatry, because we can make an idol out of God. And the awful thing about it is this: that even our thoughts can become an idol, the way we conceive God in our minds, the way we have a picture of our Lord Jesus Christ looking a certain way, or God looking a certain way - if we have any picture in our minds of God, it is idolatry! Nicholas of Cushea (sp?), in his book 'The Vision of God', prays this prayer addressing Him - and this is what he says to God: 'If anyone should set forth any concept by which Thou canst be conceived, I know that that concept is not a concept of Thee'. Have you got it? If any man or woman, or book or picture, tries to depict God, it is other than God is because God cannot be depicted! He goes on to say: 'For every concept is ended in the wall of paradise' - I think that's beautiful. Draw a picture of God if you like, and make a statue, and have a picture in your mind of who He is and what He looks like - even the Lord Jesus Christ Himself - but Nicholas is saying that when we come to the walls of paradise, and when we behold the glory of God and perhaps even then are not able to look upon His greatness, we will know then it's all ended - all our concepts, all our puny thoughts, all the ways in which we have stripped Him, and reduced Him, and brought Him down, and de-qualified Him to everything that we can understand. He goes on: 'So to if any were to tell of the understanding of Thee, wishing to supply a means whereby Thou mightest be understood, this man is yet far from Thee'. If any man comes unto you and says: 'I've a way you can see God, I've a way that you can understand God or reduce God down to manageable terms' - he is yet far from God. 'For as much as Thou art absolute above all concepts which any man can frame' - do you know that God is above the Bible? That's right! We can worship the Bible - we don't worship the Bible, we worship God! He is greater than what the Bible depicts, He is greater than any language, He is greater than any vision, He is greater than any concept imaginable, any thought that can enter into the heart or mind of any child of God. He who is invisible can never be depicted.

What can we know about Him? The paradox is: we can know that we cannot know everything. The second question I want to ask is: how can we know? If we cannot know everything and the secret things that belong to our God, how can we get a little bit of a glimpse of His great transcendence? How can we enter into the rays of His glory, at least to be as the hymn says: 'Lost in wonder, love and praise' at the greatness of our God? If He is incomprehensible, how can we get to know Him? How do we satisfy the deep that calls unto deep within our souls, to know God, to long after God, to be truly satisfied in no one but God? Well the answer to that question, strangely, is another paradox. You see, God cannot be known by the reason of the mind - please listen: many make the mistake of thinking that they can know about God, and then they know Him. But God can only be known by the soul, the spirit within us that has been made to know God - that is the only way. And as F.W. Faber put it in his poem:

'God is darkness to our intellect,
But He can be sunshine to the heart'.

If you try to reduce Him into manageable terms, intellectually speaking, and you try to reduce Him and push Him into a theological treatise - you will fail! For He is darkness to the intellect, there is no mind of man that can conceive Him or can hold Him! - but oh, to the heart, to the soul...

How can we know God? Plainly, I believe the only way to know God is through revelation. Revelation: you see, this God is so great, this God is so above us, this God is so beyond us that we cannot conceive in our mind, or in our heart, what He is like. Yes, the pagan in the jungle can look at creation, and the sun, and the moon, and the stars and realise there is a Creator, and realise that there is another in the universe - but he can never contain, from looking at creation, the greatness, the magnitude, the dignity, the almighty nature, the holiness and righteousness and powerfulness of our God - it cannot be done! Zophar the Naamathite asked Job the question: 'Canst thou, by searching, find out God?'. You cannot, He can only be known when He

reveals, to the human heart, Himself. When He takes the word of God and it is preached, and that word of God is found on good ground in the heart of an unbeliever, and faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the word of God, and a revelation has taken place through the revelation of the word of God - God has made Himself known by His Spirit to a human being.

Of course, the word of God tells us no man knoweth the things of God but the Spirit of God. Paul said in 1 Corinthians 2:11: 'For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man?' - you know everything about you inside you, it's only your spirit that knows everything, the person you're sitting beside doesn't know everything that's in your soul, but only your soul and spirit can tell what is in you as a man. 'Even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God' - and if we are to know a God who is transcendent, a God who is above us, a God who is beyond us and unreachable, it must be His Spirit that reveals Himself unto us.

God isn't known through intellect or through reason - that's why we don't fall at the feet of the intellectuals. Why? Because John says in chapter 4 of his gospel and verse 24: 'God is a spirit'. God is a spirit! Paul says in 1 Corinthians 2:14: 'The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned'. And if man is dead, as Paul says and we have been learning, in his trespasses and in his sins - how can a man know God!? Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. Isn't it a wonder? Except a man be born from above, the supreme knowledge of God can be found only as the Spirit of God reveals the Christ of God in the gospel of God! Matthew 11:27, the Lord Jesus said it Himself: 'No man knoweth the Son, but the Father; neither knoweth any man the Father, except the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him'.

Where is the revelation of God? How can we know this unknowable God? How has God chosen to reveal Himself to us in a form and in a way that we can understand and manage and accept? Where is this revelation found exactly? Paul tells us: for God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, has shined in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. Isn't that wonderful? In Him dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily, and:

'Where reason fails
With all her powers,
There faith prevails,
And love adores'.

It's not knowledge, it's not sight but it is faith that is the evidence of things not seen. God does not reveal Himself to the head, He does not reveal Himself to the intellect, or to the emotions. He doesn't reveal to the eyes by sight, or the mind by imagination - but to the heart by faith and by love. Christ is God's complete disclosure of Himself. Oh yes, God still is incomprehensible in His essence and in His divine nature - but imagine, oh just imagine, that He has condescended to reveal Himself in the incarnation of His own Son.

God does dwell, for us, behind a cloud at times - doesn't He? It seems that we can't understand Him, that we try to behold Him but we're grasping in the dark of unknowing - and so we feel He can never, perhaps, clearly be seen by the light of understanding, nor felt by the natural senses that we have. Yet, believer, by faith - by faith - we can reach out and we meet Him in the Incarnate Almighty Word of God, and the hand - nail-scarred - of the Lord Jesus Christ pulls us towards God and whispers in His still small voice: 'Behold your God'.

I finish with the poem I finished with last week:

'Strangely I sensed Him everywhere,
The God I ached to find.
Yet could not find Him anywhere,
Above, before, behind.

Mystery amazing, love unknown,
In human form He stands
He calls with tender human tone,
Uplifting nail-torn hands.

Yes, for in Jesus, God most high
Has come from heaven above,
To answer all my aching cry
With His redeeming love.

Oh, magnify the Lord with me,
My Saviour, King divine.
For in my Saviour now I see:
Lo, God and heaven are mine!

Let us pray. And as we bow our heads together, there may be those who are broken hearted and in pain, those who are not well, those who are not saved, those who are believers living in sin - and if you would only behold the greatness of God, you would find your need.

Our Father, there is so much that we think we know, and so much that we do not know. Lord help us in this, to adorn ourselves with humility and to recognise that the secret things belong unto our God. To recognise, O our God, that Thou art holy and separate from sinners and above us and beyond us. Yet Lord, our hearts are warmed to realise that You reached down to us in the person of Your own Son. He was rich, yet for our sakes He became poor, and help us through His poverty to be rich. And may we be lost today in wonder, love and praise, beholding our God. Amen.

Transcribed by Andrew Watkins, Preach The Word - December 2000

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Behold Your God - Chapter 3

"The Holiness Of God"

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I hope that hymn blessed you, for it's a real blessing to my heart to read such great hymns like that. You know, there's a great dearth of good hymn writing in the day in which we live. There are some very good new chourses that are coming about - and hopefully, in days to come, we may sing some of those - some very sound ones theologically speaking, but there are some very unsound ones. The trend in hymn writing today is a focus off God and on self - but we need to get our focus back on God. That is the theme of these studies that we are doing these Lord's Day mornings, and if you have a gift of poetry in any shape or form - you're a poet and you don't know it - perhaps you could put your pen to writing poetry for God, for the saints of God to praise. It takes you to be a theologian to write hymns, you need to know your God, and men that wrote those hymns - old Presbyterians some of them, godly men - knew their God, you can tell from the expressions of their heart as they wrote praise to Him.

We're studying today in the book of Exodus again - our first study was in Exodus chapter 33, and today we're in Exodus chapter 15. And, as one brother was sharing with us this morning, Moses is a great man of God, he's a man who knew the presence of God in his life, perhaps - as was expressed already - in a way that no other saint in the Old Testament experienced. We're looking today at "The Holiness Of God", and we find in Exodus chapter 15 - a book of Moses, the second book - and verse 11, Moses is singing. And we find in verse one of that chapter, Moses sang "...and the children of Israel this song unto the Lord, and spake, saying, I will sing unto the Lord, for he hath triumphed gloriously: the horse and his rider hath he thrown into the sea'. And we were looking, [during] the Breaking of Bread, in Exodus chapter 20 at how God redeemed His own people by blood - He took them out of Egypt, He saved them out of the bondage and He saved them with a view of delivering them - and that's the picture: it's deliverance, that's what salvation means, to be delivered from something. And they are being delivered from Egypt, and you remember that they got to the Red Sea and they couldn't cross it, and the Egyptian soldiers were behind them, and they cried upon God. And Moses said: 'Stand and see today - look - the salvation of God', and the waters opened and they went through, and when they got to the other side of the Red Sea the waters closed again, and the horses and the riders and the armies of the Egyptians were drowned. And then Moses, at the other side of that great river, shouts and sings praises onto God and the whole people join together - and one of the expressions or stanzas within this great song of praise is found in verse 11: 'Who is like unto thee, O Lord, among the gods? Who is like thee, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders?'

Who is like unto Thee, O God? Who is like unto Thee, glorious in holiness? That's a wonderful expression, not just 'holy' but 'glorious in holiness'. In the Westminster shorter catechism the question is asked that we are asking: what is the holiness of God? And the answer is given back: 'The holiness of God is His essential property' - in other words, it belongs to Him and only to Him. It is His essential property, that simply means it's not only something He has, it is something He is. It is His very nature, it is His essential property. The great divines go on: 'Whereby He is infinitely pure' - He is not just pure, He is infinitely pure. They go on: 'He loveth and delighteth in His own purity' - who of us can say that, that we delight in our own purity before God? But He delights in Himself, He loves His own purity and holiness! And they go on: 'And in all the resemblances of it, which any of His creatures have'. So He loves holiness within Himself, and if He sees it in other creature - in other words, if His holiness is seen in another one that He has made, He rejoices in it

also. He has great delight and He loves holiness in anyone. They conclude: 'He is perfectly free from all impurity, and hateth it wherever He seeth it'.

What a picture of God! What a dreadful picture of God! Yet in its dreadfulness there is the glory, and that's what Moses is saying: 'He is glorious in holiness!' It's not just something to be feared it is something to bring praise to God for, it gives Him glory - and as the old puritan Thomas Watson said: 'Holiness is the most sparkling jewel of God's crown'. It is the name by which God is known. It is not just an attribute of God, but God's holiness is His very name. It's what He is called - if you like, it is His definition. Indeed the Psalmist said that, Psalm 111 verse 9: 'Holy and reverend is thy name' - and He's the only name that is reverend. He is called in Job, and right throughout the Old Testament, 'the Holy One'. Isaiah 6, that we looked at in weeks gone by, the seraphim - didn't they cry, 'Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts, the whole earth is filled with His glory'?

The Father is said, within scripture, to be holy for He was addressed by our Lord Jesus Christ as 'Holy Father' - the only Holy Father. The Son is said to be holy, you remember when the apostle was preaching, he spoke of 'Thy holy child Jesus'. The Spirit is the 'Holy Spirit'. Holy, holy, holy, thrice holy is our God - and that holiness is what makes Him glorious. If it's His power, His omnipotence, the fact that He is Almighty, that makes Him mighty - His holiness is what makes Him glorious, His holiness is what makes Him resplendent, the eye cannot look upon Him. And as those old divines said: 'His holiness consists in His perfect love of righteousness' - it is a 100% love of all that is holy. It doesn't fall short, it is absolutely perfect - indeed, within the word of God the metaphors and similes that are given to describe that great holiness is 'perfect purity', it is white, perfect whiteness, perfect light - the most pure light in which there is no darkness at all, it is absolute uncreated light. He delights in perfect righteousness.

That is the positive aspect, and the negative is: He has a holy abhorrence of all that is evil. The old prophet Habakkuk said: 'He is of purer eyes than to behold evil and cannot look on iniquity'. Sure even the things, if you look through the word of God, the things that are associated with God are made holy because of their association with such an holy One - they become holy! When Moses, in this same book, speaks of the burning bush, the ground becomes holy ground because God has spoken out of this bush. Within the same book, the articles that are formed for temple worship in the tabernacle are denoted as holy things because they are used to worship a holy God. The day that is set aside - one in seven - as the Sabbath, the day of rest within this book, it is described as His holy day. The place where He is to be worshiped is described as God's holy house, and later His holy temple. The outfit that the high priests were to adorn themselves with was holy - and indeed, the crown that they were to wear was entitled 'a holy crown' and across it was emblazoned these great words: 'Holiness to the Lord'. The Ark of the Covenant that represented God's holy presence with His people, was the holy Ark of God. The hill of Zion was God's holy hill. The city of Jerusalem was God's holy city. And heaven itself, where God dwelleth, is His holy habitation. And all those things aren't God, but they've only come near to God and been made holy by Him.

I want you to see this today: God is a holy God. He is inherently holy - that simply means that He's holy in nature. As I've said already, it's not something about Him - but He as a being, He is holy Himself. He's made up of holiness, just as the sun shining through the window here is made up of light, God is made up of holiness. His word, the expression of His thoughts, if we could say that, His hearts desire that is expressed audibly and linguistically within the Bible that we have before us, it is holy. It is right to call it the Holy Bible - in fact, it is said of it that, like silver, it is refined seven times, and seven is the number of perfection - it is perfectly holy! His movements are holy, His decisions, the choices God makes are absolutely holy. The Psalmist said it in Psalm 145:17: 'The Lord is holy in all of his works' - God cannot do anything that is unholy or that falls short from something that is absolutely and perfectly holy! Indeed, when He made this creation around us, before Adam fell in sin, it was very good, wasn't it? Because God can't make a thing that isn't very good.

He is originally holy, that means that all holiness begins with God. He began holiness, and any holiness that is in the universe follows His pattern - it's not a new holiness, it must reflect His holiness, because He is the originator of all holiness, the sum of all moral excellence found in the universe comes from God and God alone. All good gifts come down from the Father of lights, from glory - all holiness comes from Him - and it is such a holiness that, even in this universe of sin and wickedness and evil, it is unsullied from any of it. In Him is light, and God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all. He's the Author of holiness, that means He causes it in others. Not only did He begin it, but if it ever happens in your life or my life or anybody's life, it's because God has started it within your life! He made the angels holy - they are holy, they cry 'Holy' because they can come into the presence of God in their holiness - but their holiness is not their own, sure they could lose their holiness, that's why the fall came about wasn't it? Lucifer lost it and he was kicked out of heaven, and there was a whole band of angels lost it with him - they can lose it because it comes from God, it's not their own! And it's not equality of God, it's the essence of God - and it's no quality of any human being to be holy, it is because they are reflecting the holiness of God. Even the highest seraph in heaven, the greatest creature that God has ever created in the universe, the holiness that it has is from God!

He is transcendent in His holiness. We looked last week at how transcendent means to be above all things. There's nobody reaches Him in His holiness, that's for sure. 1 Samuel 2:2: 'There is none holy as the Lord, there is none beside thee, neither is there any rock like our God' - He's a wonderful God! Does that not thrill your heart today? Does it not? That we have a holy God who is transcendent in His holiness, absolutely holy, no angel can surpass Him in any form or shape! Old Thomas Watson said this: 'He is holier than any saint can be holy' - I have known some holy saints, and I have read some holy saints, but there is none holy as the Lord. Listen to what he says: 'God's holiness is pure holiness. The saints holiness is like gold in the ore, imperfect. Their humility is stained with pride. He that has most faith needs to pray: 'Lord, help my unbelief' - isn't that right? - 'But the holiness of God is pure, like wine from the grape it has not the least dash or tincture of impurity mixed with it. And though the saints cannot lose the habit of holiness, for the seed of God remains in them, yet they may lose some degrees of their holiness. Grace cannot die, yet the flame of it may go out'. Did the Lord not say to that church: 'Thou hast left thy first love'? The flame of our holiness can go out. 'Holiness', he says, 'in the saints is subject to ebbing, but holiness in God is unchangeable. He has never lost a drop of His holiness. As He cannot have more holiness because He is perfectly holy, so He cannot have less holiness because He is unchangeably holy'!

My God, how wonderful Thou art - are you getting the grasp, are you seeing a glimpse of the holiness of our God? He doesn't conform to a standard. We don't look at Him and say: 'Well, He's got A, B and C, so He's holy' - He is the standard! He is holiness in His essence! That is why Moses says it is glorious holiness. In fact, it is beautiful holiness - we worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness because holiness is God's beauty, holiness is what makes God beautiful. Stephen Charnock said: 'Power is God's hand', or His arm, 'Omniscience, all-knowing, is His eye. Mercy is His bowels. Eternity is His duration. But holiness is His beauty'. You see, this is how God is known - God is known, primarily, through His holiness. Whenever you read the word of God you don't hear His name expressed as 'His mighty name', do you? Never 'His mighty name', or 'His wise name', sometimes it is 'His great name', but more than not it is 'His holy name'. It is how God is known, it is His name, in fact He swears upon His name - and by swearing upon His name, Psalm 89 tells us He swears according to His holiness. Why does He do that? Because His holiness is the fullest expression of who He is!

I want you to see this, this is our God. He is absolute holiness and His holiness is what conveys to a world the greatness of Him. It is the name by which He wants to be known, it's the attribute by which He wants to be conveyed to everyone who comes near to Him. It's the fullest expression of what and who He is, it is the attribute of attributes - it makes Him beautiful! And if our God was to stamp a correspondence to us today - a

letter with a stamp of wax - it would be His holiness that He would stamp it with. If I can say it - I do not wish to be irreverent - it's His trademark. Holiness.

I trust you can see that we have such a holy God, and that is why in the vision of Isaiah 6 - if you wish to turn to it - the seraphim worshiped Him, crying 'Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God of hosts. The whole earth is filled with His glory' - and they worshipped Him with more wings than they flew for Him! Because God requires our worship in spirit and in truth, and when we catch a vision of God's holiness - if you look throughout the word of God at any person who ever saw God's holiness and glory (remember, they didn't see God) but anybody that came close to this glorious holiness, they fell prostrate, their knees went weak and they fell on their face before God! Some were described as dead men, some are described as being in a trance - we must move on, but this is wonderful.

Where do we behold the holiness of God? If we want to see it, where do we go? The first place I believe we go is His law. God's law - indeed, we're reading from it today, the first five books of the Bible and the ten commandments is God's law. Why do we go to His law to find His holiness? Do you know why? Because in His law He forbids sin in everything! He doesn't permit it now and again, or this instance, or this circumstance - He forbids sin absolutely, in thoughts, in words, in deed. He forbids sin in the holy place of the tent, the tabernacle. He forbids sin in any religious movement that He has within the word of God - the priesthood, He forbids sin. He forbids sin in the home between a husband and a wife, between a child and a parent. He forbids sin in the workplace. He forbids sin in everything!

And that's all - well, not all, but that's perhaps the primary reason - why God gave His law and He told them that ye may discern between what is unclean and clean, and between what is holy and unholy. If you want to know how holy God is, you'll look in His law. Paul said it in Romans 7: 'Wherefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good'. The Psalmist said: 'The commandment of the Lord is pure. The commandment of the Lord is holy, just and good. The commandments of the Lord enlighten the eyes. The fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever. The judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether' - and if you want to know the holiness of God, get to know the law of God. Draw near to Sinai's mount, draw to its foot and see the lightning, hear the thunder, see the smoke billowing in God's holiness, and realise that God's holiness is unapproachable - for we all fall short of it!

Where do we behold His holiness? Secondly we behold it in His cross - don't we? Magnificently we see it in Calvary, and at the same time, awfully and terribly, we see it in the Lord Jesus Christ. And it begs the question: how God must hate sin to do such a thing! How He must hate sin to demand blood, and demand the blood of His own Son at Calvary to make an atonement for it! Listen to this, Stephen Charnock said in relation to the holiness of God in the cross - and this thrilled my heart: 'Not all the vials of judgement that have, or shall be, poured out upon the wicked world, nor the naming furnace of a sinners conscience, nor the irreversible sentence pronounced against the rebellious demons, nor the groans of the damned creatures give such a demonstration of God's hatred of sin as the wrath of God let loose upon His Son. Never did divine holiness appear more beautiful and lovely than at the time our Saviour's countenance was most marred in the midst of His dying groans. This [He] Himself acknowledges in Psalm 22 - when God had turned His smiling face from Him, and thrust His sharp knife into His heart which forced that terrible cry from Him: 'My God, My God, why?'".

Do you see His awesome holiness? That's why, and we hear it quoted so often, why the hymnwriter said:

'Oh, make me understand it,
Oh help me take it in,
What it meant to Thee,
The Holy One,
To bear away my sin'.

Would you see God's holiness? Well, you're going to have to get to Calvary, that's where you're going to have to get to. You're going to have to get to an old bloodstained gruesome cross. Are you saved today? Are you? For you'll be damned for all eternity unless you get to that cross. Unless you get to where a holy God punished His holy Son that you might be forgiven, you'll never be saved, you'll lift up your eyes in hell, not in heaven! Believer, would you see the holy glory of God? Do you want to see it? Well then, oh hear that all important cry: 'Eloi, Lama, Sabachthani', draw near and see the Saviour die on the cross.

You see God's holiness in His law and in His cross, thirdly you see His holiness in His hatred of sin. I want you to think about this, because one sin in the Garden of Eden banished our forefather - one sin! How many sins do you think will damn us? If one sin cast us out of paradise, one sin will take us to hell! The smallest indiscretion, one sin against a holy God, is a damning sin - beware! You often hear it said that God forgives sin. I know what that means, but you know God doesn't just forgive sin. Some people have this picture of God just saying: 'Right, we'll forget all about it and I'll wipe the slate clean' - God can't do that, God is a holy God, God must punish sin. And the only reason we are forgiven is because Christ bore our sin, Christ bore God's holy wrath - for one sin would keep us out of heaven. You remember that it was one sin excluded Moses from the promised land, you remember one sin smote Elisha's servant with leprosy, Annanias and Saphira in the New Testament it was one sin about lying to the Holy Ghost that cut them out of the land of the living! Because God has set the standard for the universe, and to preserve His creation - get this - He must destroy whatever would destroy it. To preserve His creation, He must destroy all that would destroy it - and He must destroy sin! And God's wrath is His utter intolerance of whatever degrades and destroys His creation. Tozer said: 'He hates iniquity as a Mother hates the polio that takes the life of her child'.

Now let me ask you - we're going to spend a moment here with the unsaved - why do you live the way you do? Why are you living in sin? Why are you living, consciously, in rebellion against God? Do you know why? Because you don't know this holy God, because if you knew Him you wouldn't be living the way you are - it's as simple as that. Why do you live in sin if this is the holy One with whom you will have to do one day? Do you know why? Because your God is a one-sided God, we have made God like us! A wee child, when he offends you or does something wrong against you, you're not going to hold it against him forever, are you? My friend, if you sin one sin against God, God will hold it against you forever - forever! But you see, we want a God like ourselves, don't we? We want a God who will just wipe everything away, we want a God who will wink at sin and overlook sin and bless us anyway, regardless and in spite of our sin - but that's not our God! For our God says: 'Thou thoughtest that I was altogether such an one as thyself, but I will reprove thee'. And many have a god that they made like themselves, who can ignore sin and look over it - but this God must punish sin. He doesn't just forgive sin, doesn't just forgive it, He must punish sin! And if He doesn't punish it upon the Saviour, He'll punish it upon the sinner!

'The God', one man said, 'which the vast majority of professing Christians love is looked upon very much like an indulgent old man, who himself has no relish for folly but leniently winks at the indiscretions of youth'. But the Word says: 'Thou hatest all workers of iniquity. God is angry with the wicked every day'. What happens, what happens when a sinner - whether they're a believer or unbeliever - gets a glimpse of the glory of God? They say, like old Isaiah: 'Woe is me', they feel the awesome depravity of their own heart and their own sinfulness, they're overwhelmed by the presence of pure white light holiness. They say:

'Mine eyes have seen the King,
 Jehovah throned on high.
 Adoring myriads sing
 Veiled seraph's holy cry:
 'O, woe is me, undone am I,
 Before the throne I prostrate lie'.

That's what we need! Oh God, give us it, that's what we need! That's what we need, to see God glorious in His holiness! We don't need new plans, we don't need new strategies, we don't need new ways of preaching, we don't need new anything! We need God, and we need God's holiness! We need a glimpse of it, and until we see God my friends, we are absolutely finished - because unless we see God we become comfortable in our unholiness, but a vision of God's holiness makes us uncomfortable. You can't know the holiness of God just by thinking about it. You think the greatest holy thought you can about God and multiply it by the greatest number that you can - that's still not God's holiness. As old Tozer said: 'Quite literally, a new channel must be cut through the desert of our minds to allow the sweet waters of truth, that will heal our great sickness, to flow in'. God needs to cut a new channel in our minds, that He might reveal His holiness.

But as we close today, we ask another question: what should we learn from the holiness of God? We've learned where we can behold it: in His law, in His cross and in His hatred of sin. But what should we learn, what should we go away today different about because of His holiness? One: only on the grounds of the atonement can we approach God. My friend, listen! This is a holy God, holy, holy, holy - and if you want to get to heaven one day, if you want to have your sins forgiven, remember this: God has no evil in Him, and sin has no good in it, and sin that you are committing has deflowered the virgin soul and made it red with guilt, and black with filth. It is - the Bible says - the accursed thing, for sin strikes at the holiness of God, and He had to therefore strike it upon His own Son! Wonder of wonders, He was made sin for us that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him. And my friend, if you think a holy God is going to create a 'Plan-B' for you to get to glory...who do you think you are? This is the only way, God's way! God's holy way, the way of His holy Christ - and you must know that the only grounds of atonement that we can approach God by is the precious blood.

Secondly: we must realise that that holiness which demands holiness provides grace to meet that demand. That's marvellous, isn't it? What does the old hymnwriter say?

'So sinful, so weary,
Thine, Thine would I be.
Thou blessed Rock of Ages,
I'm hiding in Thee'.

That which holiness demanded, grace has provided in our Lord Jesus Christ. And this series is slowly becoming a commentary on what we've been studying in Ephesians, that we are blessed with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ. Aren't we? It's all Christ, isn't it? We ought to learn secondly, not only about the atonement, but to show great reverence toward God for He is holy. All we think about God must be holy, all we say about God, all that we do to God - if I can say that - in worship, and all that we do concerning the whole divinity and the divine Trinity must be absolutely holy! For God is greatly to be feared in the assembly of the saints, and to be had in reverence of all them that are about Him. In prayer, in praise, in the handling of God's holy Word, we need to put off the shoes from off our feet for we are on holy ground.

Thirdly: we should be holy. Both in the Old Testament and in the New Testament the saints of God were told: 'Be ye holy, for I am holy'. It's amazing, isn't it? God doesn't call us to be almighty, does He? He doesn't call us to know all things, or to see all things - and the irony is: the things He doesn't call us to do are the things that we try to do. We try to be almighty, we try to get through everything ourselves, we try to see everything before we see it, predict things, we try to know everything, know-it-all. But God hasn't told us to do those things, He's told us to be holy - which, ironically, is the very thing we don't do! God wants from us, most of all, that we live to Him in living like Him.

I've said it before, and I say it in closing: the only life that God is pleased with is His own life. And the only holiness that He will be pleased with is His own holiness, like a mirror reflecting from your life the holiness of the only wise God - so as we think about it, as we go away, what should we learn about this holiness? We should learn to submit to Him! To follow Him in His Word, to believe Him, to fellowship with the saints, to be anointed with the Spirit and to be often at the cross confessing our sins, and we will be holy. For God's desire has always been to redeem us from all iniquity and to purify unto Himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.

'Who is like unto thee, O Lord, among the gods? Who is like thee, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises and doing wonders?'. Lord, we bless Thee and we praise Thee that this God is for us - so who, or what, can stand against us? And we pray, in Jesus name, that that great holiness may be imputed to us, for we know that our sin was imputed to Christ. We say as McCheyne: Lord, make us as holy as saved sinners can be. Amen.

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Behold Your God - Chapter 4

"The Faithfulness Of God"

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Now we're looking, as I have already said, at the fourth study in our series: 'Behold Your God' - and specifically we're looking today at 'The Faithfulness Of God'. We're turning to 1 Peter - the New Testament this time - 1 Peter and chapter 4, and only one verse, and then we're looking at Psalm 37 - so if you want to find that as well, we're looking at one verse in it also. Let me just say, while you're looking for that passage, there has been found a jewel of great price (I don't think it really is of great price, but I don't want to offend anyone!) and it was found in the ladies toilets. So if you've lost that from your ring or from a necklace or something like that, it's up here and you can get it if you wish.

1 Peter chapter 4 and verse 19: 'Wherefore let them that suffer according to the will of God commit the keeping of their souls to him in well doing, as unto a faithful Creator'. 'Wherefore let them that suffer according to the will of God commit the keeping of their souls to him in well doing, as unto a faithful Creator' - now remember that term 'a faithful Creator'. And then turn over to Psalm 37, Psalm 37, a well-known Psalm, a great encouraging Psalm, verse 3: 'Trust in the Lord, and do good; so shalt thou dwell in the land, and verily thou shalt be fed'. Now that literally, in the Hebrew - 'verily thou shalt be fed' - translates like this: 'feed on His faithfulness'. So let's read it again: 'Trust in the Lord, and do good; so shalt thou dwell in the land, and feed on His faithfulness', or, 'be fed on His faithfulness'.

So there are two phrases concerning our God. Peter says He is a faithful Creator, and David encourages us to feed on His faithfulness. Now, faithfulness is a concept that isn't very - what would you say? - 'in vogue' in our world today. In fact, unfaithfulness is one of the outstanding sins of today - many of you in business will realize that - disloyalty and unfaithfulness. And also in the social realm, and especially we see it in our world in the marital realm, there is so much infidelity and unfaithfulness. Even within the church of Jesus Christ there are men who promise to teach and carry out the word of God as it is written in the apostle's doctrine and right throughout the whole counsel of God - but we find that when they get to their position, or when the world's pressure comes in upon them, or the pressure within the church, they fail to walk in those paths of righteousness and theoretically they're unfaithful to the word of God. There is unfaithfulness all around us in every single sphere, and indeed if we are honest with ourselves we must say that there are times that we are unfaithful ourselves, in transactions that we give, in the words that we speak, and more severely and seriously in our relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. There's a measure of unfaithfulness in our part, therefore it strikes us and it is totally foreign to us when we read a verse such as Deuteronomy 7 verse 9 that says: 'Know therefore that the Lord thy God, he is God, the faithful God'.

It's remarkable, isn't it, that there's no taint of doubt? It's absolute, 100%! And it staggers us - living in an unfaithful world, living around unfaithful people, and when we look at the unfaithfulness in our own heart - to realise that there is one who personifies absolute faithfulness, there is a 'Lord thy God, He is God, the faithful God'. Indeed the fact is that if He was not faithful and if He was not absolutely faithful, He would not be God. Paul said to Timothy, 2 Timothy 2:13: 'If we believe not' - in other words, in our context, if we are not faithful, yet God is faithful, 'he abideth faithful: he cannot deny himself'. It doesn't matter what we believe about ourselves, or what we see in the world around us, that doesn't matter really because God is - as we have learnt - transcendent. He is above all of this universe, all of our standards - in fact He sets His eternal holy standard, as we were looking at last week. And even if we believe not in this faithfulness, yet He

abideth faithful, He cannot deny Himself. If He was unfaithful, He would deny Himself, He would topple from His throne and He would cease to be God.

Perhaps one of His most radiant glories is God's holiness that we pondered last week. But you know, God has many glories, doesn't He? And this is another: His faithfulness. The Psalmist glorified in it in 89 and verse 8: 'O Lord God of hosts, who is a strong Lord like unto thee? Or to thy faithfulness round about thee?'. God is a strong God, and God clothes Himself - His aura round about Him, His sphere and environment is absolute faithfulness. Again the Psalmist in 36:5: 'Thy mercy, O Lord, is in the heavens; and thy faithfulness reacheth unto the clouds' - in other words, it is beyond us, it is above us, it spans us. It's no wonder that we have been singing the inspired word of God from Lamentations 3:22-33: 'His compassions fail not, they are new every morning'. You see, we've said it in weeks gone by: God is not a man that He should repent, nor a son of man. He does not lie, there is no unfaithfulness in Him, and we dare not compare Him to men or men's standards or men's attributes. And that's when we fall down, and indeed let me say this: that is when we fall down when we look at our blessed Lord Jesus Christ, when we compare Him to other humanity. Therefore we must - as the hymnwriter says:

'Judge not the Lord with feeble sense,
But trust Him for His grace.
Behind the frowning providence,
He hides a smiling face.

Ye fearful saints fresh courage take,
The clouds ye so much dread
Are rich with mercy and shall break
In blessing o'er your head'.

Why? For we have a faithful Creator! I want that to be branded upon your heart today: a faithful Creator! It's as if - or at least it should be as if - we've inherited a fortune! A faithful God! When all are unfaithful, when we are unfaithful ourselves, we have this great One, this One who is God, who is a faithful Creator! That is why the Psalmist David, in our Psalm 37, tells us to feed on His faithfulness. Do you feed on His faithfulness? Do you use that as your diet of the soul? That's what I want us to do now, as we look at the word of God, I want us to feed on the great faithfulness of our faithful Creator. And do you know what will happen if you do that? You will find mental relief. The Lord knows there are many of us need that, isn't that right? But if you learn to feed on your faithful Creator, you will find mental relief. And that mental relief will go beyond your human suffering, because it means that you are beginning to realise that there is a God greater than the universe, there's a God greater than the 'falling-shorts' within our world, greater than the failures, greater than the infidelities, greater than the indiscretions - there is a faithful God and, wonder of wonders, glory to God, He's our God!

We can feed on that today. Now, I know the world can be so frightening, and we hear so many things that come in upon us, right into our hearts and grip us with fear and anxiety - but when we realise that He is faithful, and He is our God we ought to have no fear! Sidlow Baxter observes this: 'The faithfulness of God is like a gigantic archway, spanning human history from its beginning to its ending'. God's faithfulness like an archway, right from the beginning to the end of time. And he goes on to describe how that archway spans the pillars of God's attributes, what do I mean by that? Well, you will know - hopefully - through studying these Lord's Day mornings, that to understand God we must see all His attributes as one. He isn't just faithful, but He is loving, He is angry, He is holy, He is omnipotent, all-powerful, all-knowing, He is omnipresent, He is everywhere. He has many attributes and parts to His being, but you can't separate those - just like you can't separate God Himself, or you can't pull you apart, you have many parts but you can't separate those. And in the same way, God's faithfulness - as Baxter says - is arching over all of His

attributes, you can't pull any of them apart and make them separate or single entities of themselves. And that's seen within His faithfulness: no one of God's attributes contradicts another of His attributes - in other words, God's love never contradicts God's justice. That's what some would teach today, that it doesn't matter really what you do, God will just love you anyway and take you to heaven: universalism. But that's taking one of God's attributes and looking at it and forgetting about His justice. But the justice of God and the love of God together mean that God's justice came down on Christ - hallelujah! - and His grace was shown toward me.

It's the same with God's faithfulness, it harmonises with absolutely everything. Now I want to show you this: there are seven pillars that you find of God's attributes, and every single one of them, that arch of God's faithfulness overflows it. The first is God's righteousness. You see, if God was not faithful what would His righteousness mean? It would mean absolutely nothing. You see, God cannot go back on His word, He is absolutely righteous in everything He says and everything He does - and you see there God's faithfulness in His righteousness. In His omnipotence, in other words all-powerful, He is Almighty God - God never starts a thing and is unfaithful to finish it, isn't that right? When God starts a thing, God carries it on and God accomplishes it and brings it to completion - so you can see there in His omnipotence, His faithfulness overarching it. Thirdly, God is truth, isn't He? He does not just say the truth, He is the truth. Now, untruth and faithfulness don't go together, so you see there again marked and stamped on God's truth is His attribute of faithfulness. His immutability, and that simply means 'Thou changest not', He never changes. Jesus Christ is the same today, yesterday and forever, and God is the same, He never changes, there is never any deviation or declination in His goodness, or in His grace, or in His anger, or in His mercy - and that is absolutely trustworthy, absolutely faithful. Then there is His wisdom, if He's to be wise then He has to be faithful - He's got to know everything before we know He's faithful, isn't that right? We couldn't say that God did something faithfully if He didn't know all the facts, if some of the facts were hidden from God and He made a wrong decision. But He is the all-wise God, and that makes Him faithful! He's a God of love, and when I know He is a God of love, and loves me, I can be sure that He has only good for me - isn't that wonderful? You see, the love of God reeks of the faithfulness of God, it's got the grains of it right throughout it!

There are seven texts corresponding to those seven truths, corresponding to faithfulness of God, in the New Testament that I want to bring you to today. And it shows this: that the God of the Bible is the one and the only true God. The first is the faithfulness of God in forgiving, 1 John 1 and verse 9, you may need to turn to it, you may not: 'If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness'. Now you know that verse well, and that speaks of the righteousness of God in faithfulness, doesn't it? If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just - Greek word 'righteous' - He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins, and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. His faithfulness and His righteousness are linked together in forgiveness, isn't that wonderful? God is faithful in forgiving.

Now, let's explain it: because the Saviour died, because the Lord Jesus Christ was crucified and God laid on Him the iniquity of us all, a righteous and a holy God can now forgive - and this is the point - now can forgive righteously. In other words, He's not papering over the cracks, He's not turning a blind eye to our sin, but He is being a holy God and He is completely, legally and righteously pardoning us - and because of that He is faithful and just, faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. So, listen: you can be sure that God, according to His righteousness, according to His faithfulness, has forgiven your sin - hallelujah! Do you know that? You can be sure because He's faithful. He's stamped the seal of His faithfulness upon your soul if you're saved, if you're trusting in the blood of Calvary, if you've put your faith in the grace of God found in Christ, the bleeding Lamb at Calvary. If you've done that, hallelujah, God will forgive you.

You'll remember last week we said that God can't just forgive sin, and He can't! His holiness demands justice, that's another of His attributes. He requires atonement, and without the shedding of blood there is no

remission of sins, without atonement He could never be faithful to forget but now He Himself, the great Judge of sin, becomes the sacrifice for sin and He judges His own sin at Calvary. And that holiness that demanded a sacrifice provides the Lamb - God will provide Himself a Lamb! Bless God, He did. It's wonderful to think, isn't it, that this God, this holy God, this faithful God, this righteous God received the chief of sinners and He did it righteously. That's what Paul says in Romans 8:31: 'What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us?' - verse 33 - 'Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth.' - or in other words: it is God that counts us righteous. Who can throw anything at you and say 'You did this, you did that, you did the other'? It is God, God who condemns you, it is God who justly makes you righteous, how can anything be against us when God is for us? Wonder of wonders, and this is mighty, listen to this: 'He is faithful and just to forgive us' - faithful and righteous to forgive us - 'our sins, and cleanse us from all unrighteousness'. He is righteous, a holy God is righteous in cleansing sinners from unrighteousness. No wonder the hymnwriter said, as we heard this morning:

'Because the sinless Saviour died,
My sinful soul is counted free.
For God, the just, is satisfied
To look on Him and pardon me'.

He is faithful in forgiveness. Secondly, in 2 Thessalonians 3 and 3 we find this verse: 'But the Lord is faithful, who shall establish you, and keep you from evil'. It reads like this: 'But the Lord is faithful, who shall establish you, and guard you from evil'. Now, we've seen God's faithfulness in forgiving, and this is God's faithfulness in protecting. He will establish you and will guard you - now that's His omnipotence, His all-powerfulness, that's God's faithfulness in His omnipotence - that great arch spanning over that pillar of omnipotence! It's lovely to think that God's guarding us, and in the Greek language that's a military term, it means 'to garrison around'. Think of it! Not even Satan himself can penetrate the great bulwarks of God's omnipotence! We are protected by God. Now, there are times, mark, that our outward man and our outward boundary sometimes can be penetrated by the Devil himself - but around the spirit of God's elect there is fiery circle and, if Satan should try or attempt to get in there, he will get scorched because God is faithful to protect us in His omnipotence!

Now listen: maybe you're here today and you're not long saved, and you're having trouble with things, [and Satan says to you] 'You're not saved! You couldn't have done what you just did and be saved!'. He's telling you: 'You can't go to the meeting the way you are, all that sin that you've been committing all week and you're going to portray that you're this great spiritual Christian?'. Now, maybe you're a secret backslider, and you're backslidden, and your heart's backslidden - you know it, but others don't know it, everybody else thinks you're OK - and the Devil's telling you: 'Well, if you come back to the Lord everybody will wonder what's happening! You'll be embarrassed, they'll be surprised because they thought you were alright, and you'll be embarrassed and maybe your family will be embarrassed'. Are you a Christian wanting to go on with God but the Devil's telling you 'You'll never amount to anything, look how many times you've failed before. You've tried that before and, sure, you've failed'? Listen: shut him up by laying your hands on God's protecting faithfulness! He will establish you - yes, the Devil's powerful, in fact he's probably the most powerful creature that He created, but remember this: that the Lord has beaten him under the ground by His own blood! He has crushed him and we shall overcome him by the blood of the Lamb and the power of His testimony. So look: don't listen to him, but grab hold of the great faithful protecting power of God and use it! When temptations come and when the doubts enter your mind, and the worries, and the fears - put an end to them, in fact put an end to them now and today! Do you believe God is faithful? 'Oh, I believe He's faithful' - well, step out upon it - now! Put your foot of faith out and, today, fall upon that bed of roses of His faithful protection. The old hymnwriter said in another verse:

'When Satan tempts me to despair,
Telling of evil yet within,
Upward I look and see Him there
Who made an end of all my sin!'

Do you look up? He's faithful in forgiving and in protecting, and then He's faithful in promising. Hebrews 10 and verse 23, you read this: 'Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; for he is faithful that promised' - He is faithful that promised, that's His faithfulness in promising. It literally reads like this: 'Let us hold fast the confession' - that's more outward, when you tell people all about the Lord - 'hold fast the confession of our hope' - that's what it literally means, the hope that lies before us. Now that is the faithfulness of God's truth, you have confessed Jesus Christ as Lord, and that is God's truth - and because of that God will be faithful to bring you to your final destination and Christ will come again for you one day, and that is your hope that is in God's truth. In fact, verse 25 of Hebrews 10, we see this statement: '...as we see the day approaching' - He's coming soon, you know. Sure, you can see it all around, you'd need to be blind not to see it, and He's coming for us! And it doesn't matter what the world says, it doesn't matter what some modernistic, liberal theologian says - it doesn't alter God's truth and indeed God's faithfulness in His truth. He said it, we can rely on it. It is God's word, He has promised it. Well might they say: 'Where is the promise, then, of His coming? Sure, you've been saying this for years! Where is the promise?'. We respond: 'Though it tarry, it will not tarry' - why? For He is faithful that promised.

Do you see it? That goes for all the promises of God, you can have faith in them because they're absolutely faithful, because they rely on God's truth and God's truth is faithful. Do you believe God? 'Imagine asking a Christian 'Do you believe God?! Of course I believe God, aren't I a Christian? Don't I read my Bible? Don't I try my best, by the grace of God, to live it everyday?'. You know, that must be the hardest thing for me in my life: to just nakedly, without any qualifications or trying to make a deal with God, just believe in Him! Just hang on to Him! In the essentials, to believe God and leave those things resting upon His promises. We can give a loyal adherence and an agreement to His promises, but do we take up the faithfulness of God's promise and believe? And if you need any thing today, that's what you need! You need a good dose of the promises of God! You need to rely on God's word, in your prayer life claim His promises, look for them and claim them and see them! You need to do it in your life of worry, my friend, for it'll wreck you, it'll destroy your health and it'll warp your mind - and if you don't decide that you're going to be careful for nothing, but in all things by prayer and supplication [with] thanksgiving [make your] requests to God, if you worry about nothing, pray about everything, God will give you the peace of God that passeth all understanding. But you have to do it, you have to take God's word, His promises, you have to stand on them, you have to act upon them, you have to believe on them. If you want to be blessed by God, and father and mother you want your family to be blessed by God, you're going to have to get the promises of God out and start claiming them. Take His word and believe it, and what a medicine that would be to calm your nerves, just to believe in God! You remember in Luke chapter 8 verse 50 we read these words: 'But when Jesus heard it, he answered him, saying, Fear not: believe only, and she shall be made whole'.

Fourthly, He is faithful in producing. 2 Corinthians 1:18 and 20: 'But as God is true', and that word is 'faithful', 'as God is faithful, our word toward you was not yea and nay. For all the promises of God in him are yea, and in him Amen, unto the glory of God by us' - that's His immutability, that's His unchangeableness. He says: 'You're not going on our word, you know! God is faithful!' - this is not what Paul the apostle says, it's not what David Legge says, not what the Iron Hall says - this is what God says! He is faithful and He will produce! Now this isn't just empty faith, this is evidence of that faith in our lives - you can actually see the produce of God's faithfulness in your life. God is not only faithful to promise, but He is faithful to perform in us what He has promised! Sure, all the Old Testament promises, weren't they fulfilled and filled up in our Lord Jesus Christ and His coming? And all the promises of the New Testament are fulfilled in us! All the promises of God in Him are yea, and in Him Amen, unto the glory of God by us! Grab

hold of that! 'By us!' In my life, yes, in your life - in your life the promises of God, and that word 'Amen' just means 'let it be so'. Will you let it be so? Will you start believing in God? Start trusting that He will produce in your life what you've longed for, what you've hoped for, what the word of God says you can have in the Lord Jesus.

A saintly old grandmother, she was a godly woman, used to rejoice in the promises of God. She would rock in her rocking chair with the Bible open on her knee, looking at her favourite passages. And there was times that she would doze off in that old chair, and woke up again and began to read. But there was one day she dozed off, she never awoke - and the Bible was left open on her knee, and when her family came in to find her they found it open, and they took that Bible. Her son took it and he began to read it day by day, with his wife, before the Lord. And day by day, as they were reading, they would come across little passages, and etchings and jottings that she would have made at the side of the margin - and they would find these two letters 'TP' all the time, right beside verses. And they noted it, and they didn't know what it meant until eventually they came to it written in full beside one promise - she had written: 'Tried and Proved'. How many promises can we write that beside? God is a forgiving God, and many of us can write it beside that, can you?

God produces in us, God protects us and then, again, fifthly: God sanctifies us. He is faithful in sanctifying. 1 Thessalonians 5:23 and 24: 'And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Faithful is he that calleth you, who also will do it' - and that is the arch of God's faithfulness over His holiness. What does God call you to? He's called you to holiness, and if you're not called to holiness, you're not a Christian. That's no new doctrine by the way, that's what I've just read from the word of God - if you don't want to be holy you're not a Christian, Christians want to be holy because God's life is in them! That's what God has called them to: to be holy in their lives. But how hard it is to be holy, I don't underestimate that, but God calls us to it. But God, as always, never calls unless He enables - and He calls you to be holy, and here's the verse in 1 Thessalonians 5: '...who also will do it'. He's going to do it, don't you worry about it, He'll do it! But the implication there is: if you will let Him. He'll only do it if you let Him - if you don't want to be holy, He's not going to make you holy. But God will be faithful in sanctifying you - the God that calls you to be holy is faithful in His holiness and will do it! Now beware of looking for it in yourself, like many do, for you'll not find it in yourself - but if you believe God, be encouraged today if you're seeking God to take that step towards God in holiness. Don't fear it will fail, don't fear it will go wrong like all the other times, but just believe God is faithful and will do it!

Sixthly: He is faithful in temptation. 1 Corinthians 10 and 13: 'There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is' - let's hear it - 'faithful'. 'God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it' - now that is the faithfulness of God over the wisdom of God. 'Boy, this temptation's terrible, you don't know what I'm going through. It's alright for you, you've no problems, you're a Pastor' - huh! Temptation? Tell me about it. Temptation - but temptation according to the wisdom of God. Now, God tempteth no man, that's what we have from the word of God - don't blame God for your temptation. Satan tempts you, but God is the one - if I can say it reverently - who holds His hand on the thermostat of your temptation. He will never let it get to hot for you. He is faithful, that's His wisdom - He's wise, He's not going to put you under something and you're going to break, and your Christian life's going to be over! That's the Devil tells you that! Listen, think about it, it's him says: 'Oh, here we go again, on your face again, you're just going to give into it like you've always done!' - that's the Devil, that's the accuser of the brethren, for God is faithful, He makes a way of escape, He will make you able to bear it!

One of the open secrets to temptation in life is to see it as God sees it - and that's not to trip you up, it's because God is wise and God is faithful, and just like the rough winds and the rains strengthen the little sapling of a tree until it grows stronger, and stronger, and stronger, and can withstand those puny winds that

nearly blew it over before - God is just tempering the wind for you so that you can get stronger, and stronger, and stronger, until you're in glory and you're like Christ. Will you trust His wisdom, that He's made a way of escape in your temptation and you can be, and are able, to bear it?

Seventhly and finally: He is faithful in keeping. And what a beautiful note to end on today, 1 Corinthians 1:8 and 9: 'Who [God] shall also confirm you unto the end, that ye may be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is faithful, by whom ye were called unto the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord' - that's His faithfulness in love. You know the thought that came to me when I was reading that passage? It's this: He'll get us there, isn't that wonderful? He'll get us there! When no one else could get us there, He by His own blood will get us there. And one day, because He's a faithful God, because He said it, we will stand before Him righteous, pure. For Peter says we are kept by the power of God through faith, unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last day. The old saint was gardening and a man stopped by him and said: 'How are you keeping?', and he says: 'I'm not just keeping, I'm kept!'. Isn't that beautiful? Do you know you're kept? You don't need to worry! You're kept! You're there! And if you're not saved, you can be kept today if you would believe that faithful God!

'The soul that on Jesus has leaned for repose
He will not desert to its foes.
That soul, though all hell should endeavour to shake
He'll never, no never, no never, forsake!'

Will you eat of His faithfulness now? Will you eat, drink and be merry in the faithfulness of God? Why not reach out this morning, Christian, and hold on to God's faithfulness? And if you're not saved, if you confess your sins and repent and turn from them, He will be faithful and just to forgive your sin, and to cleanse you from all unrighteousness.

Father, we thank Thee that Thou art faithful. Oh, Lord that we should even tell Thee that Thou art faithful! But yet, we must know that and we must come to know it, and learn that in our lives we can rely upon Thee. We ought not worry, fear, fret, but feed upon Thy great faithfulness, for we have - even in our suffering - a faithful Creator. Lord, we believe - but help Thou our unbelief today, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ we pray, Amen.

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Behold Your God - Chapter 5

"The Power Of God"

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Now we're turning in our Bibles to two readings, one short and one not so short. Job 26 is our first reading from the word of God, Job 26. And as I said earlier in the announcements - and I don't want to overstate it, but I don't feel I can overstate it - please do, tonight, make an effort to bring people along. The gospel will be preached, and you may find that they'll come more readily to this meeting tonight, they'll enjoy the meeting - as most do enjoy Christmas - but they'll also hear the gospel, and that's what's important. So please do make an effort and remember it in your prayers.

"The Power Of God" - Job 26 and verse 14: "Lo, these are parts of his ways" - and we have been learning in recent weeks that that is all we can know. We looked at that especially in 'God Transcendent', that He is above us and the secret things belong unto our God. So, therefore, these are only parts of His ways that we are looking at. "But how little a portion is heard of him? But the thunder of his power who can understand?"

And then we turn to Habakkuk - almost at the end of your Old Testament - Habakkuk and chapter 3. Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk and then Zephaniah - Habakkuk 3 and beginning to read at verse 2. And we have dealt in detail with these verses in the Bible readings last year* but what I want you to gather from this reading is the power of God. Verse 2: "O Lord, I have heard thy speech, and was afraid: O Lord, revive thy work in the midst of the years, in the midst of the years make known; in wrath remember mercy". Now I want you to try and picture this in your mind: "God came from Teman, and the Holy One from mount Paran. Selah. His glory covered the heavens, and the earth was full of his praise. And his brightness was as the light; he had horns coming out of his hand: and there was the hiding of his power. Before him went the pestilence, and burning coals went forth at his feet. He stood, and measured the earth: he beheld, and drove asunder the nations; and the everlasting mountains were scattered, the perpetual hills did bow: his ways are everlasting. I saw the tents of Cushan in affliction: and the curtains of the land of Midian did tremble. Was the Lord displeased against the rivers? Was thine anger against the rivers? Was thy wrath against the sea, that thou didst ride upon thine horses and thy chariots of salvation? Thy bow was made quite naked, according to the oaths of the tribes, even thy word. Selah. Thou didst cleave the earth with rivers. The mountains saw thee, and they trembled: the overflowing of the water passed by: the deep uttered his voice, and lifted up his hands on high. The sun and moon stood still in their habitation: at the light of thine arrows they went, and at the shining of thy glittering spear. Thou didst march through the land in indignation, thou didst thresh the heathen in anger. Thou wentest forth for the salvation of thy people, even for salvation with thine anointed; thou woundedst the head out of the house of the wicked, by discovering the foundation unto the neck. Selah. Thou didst strike through with his staves the head of his villages: they came out as a whirlwind to scatter me: their rejoicing was as to devour the poor secretly. Thou didst walk through the sea with thine horses, through the heap of great waters. When I heard, my belly trembled; my lips quivered at the voice: rottenness entered into my bones, and I trembled in myself, that I might rest in the day of trouble: when he cometh up unto the people, he will invade them with his troops".

*See *"Majoring In The Minors: Habakkuk"* on our Bible Studies page at www.preachtheword.com

Our verse that we read from Job tells us that God is incomprehensible. In other words, we see a certain amount of God but we cannot see all of Him, and specifically Job is talking about God's power. In a small

measure we can see God's power, but we can never know the full extent of His great power. His power is infinitely more lodged in Him than we can ever imagine.

In this chapter, Habakkuk 3 and verse 4 - a great depiction of the power of God - look down at it. At the end of verse 4 you read this: '...there was the hiding place of his power'. Where was the hiding place? This great depiction of God's power as He walks through the land, as He destroys His enemies, as He rides upon the waves, as He thunders from the heavens with His great voice - there was the hiding of His power. Isn't that remarkable? This was not the disclosure of God's power, this is the hiding of it! This is what God does when He hides His power - what must God be like when He discloses it and opens it up to all men and to the whole world?

When Abraham was 99 years of age in Genesis 17 and verse 1 it says: 'The Lord appeared to Abram, and said unto him, I am the Almighty God; walk before me, and be thou perfect' - I am the Almighty God, El-Shaddai. That is where we get the word 'omnipotent' from, 'almighty'. It is a direct translation, if you like, from the Latin: 'almighty' - 'omnipotent'. 'Omni' means all, 'potent' means power - God is all-powerful.

John heard the voice of a multitude, he said it was as the voice of many waters, many thunderings throughout the universe, declaring the sovereignty and the powerfulness of God and it went like this: 'Hallelujah! For the Lord God omnipotent reigneth'. God's sovereignty and his omnipotence must go together: God cannot be omnipotent unless He is sovereign, He can't be all-powerful unless He is in all control - they go together, they cannot exist alone. As one person has said: 'To reign, God must have power, and to reign sovereignly He must have all power'. This is what omnipotence means: 'almighty' - 56 times in our English Bible we find that phrase, 'almighty', and every single time it refers to God, for God alone is almighty. And God being almighty, it means that He possesses something that no one else can possess, no creature can be said to have absolute potency, they cannot be all-powerful for this Almighty God has an inconceivable plentitude of power. He overflows with power, He is all-powerful - and because He is all-powerful it means that He is equal and above every single power that there is in the universe.

If you think about it for a moment, it is inconceivable that He is all-powerful to our minds, but it is also inconceivable that He is not all-powerful. How could you have a God that is not all-powerful? Imagine God, willing to do something, but not having the power to carry it out. It doesn't make sense! That is not God, that is a mere creation of man's mind! But this almighty, all-powerful God, when He wills He can do, and He must be all-powerful to be all-God. Thomas Watson, the puritan, put it like this: 'Take away a King's power and we un-king him. Take away God's power and we un-God him'. His power is equal to His will, what He wills He does - and praise Him, He has the power to do it! He says Himself in Isaiah 46: 'I will do all my pleasure...I have spoken it, I will also bring it to pass; I have purposed it, I will also do it'.

Power and authority are often confused with one another, because they are not one and the same thing. You see, you can have authority, but that authority can be resisted by men. They can try to usurp it, they can have a coup d'etat in a nation, try to overthrow the throne and the government, they can resist authority. But power is a different thing, because to bring power and authority together means that God Himself, being almighty, has His authority but He has the power to carry it out. As His holiness is His beauty, as we saw in weeks gone by, His holiness is the beauty of His attributes, this power of God is what gives life to all that God is and all that God does. Think about it: what would be the point of God having a great plan in this universe, in all of His wisdom, in all of His love toward us, in all of His faithfulness that we were thinking about last week, but He is impotent to carry it out?

Doesn't work like that, sure it doesn't? It's that chain, it's that pillar again that we were thinking about, that rainbow, that arch that goes over all the pillars of God - and we could say that, just as we learnt last week that the arch of faithfulness goes over all God's attributes, we can also say that the arch of His power goes

over them as well. If He hasn't the power to be what He says He is, He is not God! Without power, His mercy would be feeble pity. Without power, His great and precious promises would be all hot air, isn't that right? They would mean nothing! But as Stephen Charnock says: 'His threatenings would be a mere scarecrow - but God's power is like Himself: infinite, eternal, incomprehensible it can neither be checked, restrained nor frustrated by the creature'. Didn't the Psalmist say that in 89:6? 'For who in the heaven can be compared unto the Lord? Who among the sons of the mighty can be likened unto the Lord?'. Daniel 4:35: 'And all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing: and he' - God - 'doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou?'

What a mighty God! Does that not thrill your heart? That that is the God we come to today, that is the God we worship, a God who is almighty, a God who is omnipotent, a God who has all power! Where then can we see this almighty power of God? That's what I want to look at first of all, and then we will look at: what does it mean for us to know this almighty power of God. But let's look at the first point first of all: where can we see the power of God? Now, it is true to a certain extent that God has delegated some power to His creatures. He gave Adam jurisdiction over the earth, He delegated some of His power. But you know, when God did that and when He does it in our lives to give us a measure of will and freedom, He does not relinquish any of His own power. He doesn't demean Himself, or exhaust Himself in any measure of any of His great power. He never gives His power away. As Spurgeon said: 'God's power is like Himself, self-existent, self-sustained. The mightiest of men cannot add so much as a shadow of increased power to the omnipotent One. He sits on no buttressed throne, and leans on no assisting arm' - isn't that right? And what God gives us power to do, it does not relinquish Him of any of His great power, for He is the great source and the originator of all power - and if you would learn that, it would be a medicine to your soul! It would be a medicine that would purge out this old sin-sick world if they would realise, if they would hear from the voice of God, what Job heard: 'Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth? Declare if thou hast understanding!'. You see, the power of God buries the pride of man.

Where can we see it? Where can man see it? Well, first of all you can see it in creation. Sadly our world today sees laws of nature, rather than the power of God - isn't that right? When great catastrophes happen and when things go wrong all around the world, or things go right, it's always the laws of nature or the hand of man in it all - but God's power is ignored! In Job 9 and verse 8 we read this: '[God] treadeth upon the waves of the sea' - do you know what that is? That is God's uncontrollable power - I don't mean that He can't control it, but you can't. You can't control God's power, and this world can't control God's power - just like the waves (and we've been seeing it, haven't we, in the floods in England and here in Northern Ireland), men can't control it, it is above them, it is beyond them. And what Job is saying is God's power cannot be controlled, He treadeth upon the waves of the sea! In Job 22:14 we read this: 'He walketh in the circuit of heaven' - do you know what that is? The universality of His presence, He is everywhere, He walks in the circuit of the heavens, we cannot escape Him, He is beyond us, He is above us - and then in Psalm 104:3 we read: 'He walketh upon the wings of the wind!' He treadeth upon the sea, He walks in the circuit of heaven, and He treads on the wings of the wind.

Isn't it amazing that it doesn't say that He runs or He flies? It says 'He walks', because that great power that He has is in perfect control. It never loosens out of His control, He is in all power, all control. In the swiftness of His actions, He is sovereign, He is almighty - and surely when you look into the sky on a dark night and you see all the beauties of creation in the stars, do you not think to yourselves: 'Where do they come from? How did they get there?'. And to think to ourselves that they came from nothing - God had no material to work with, He created the material out of nothing and then worked upon that material. The great divine Architect had no tools, He worked with His own power and He spoke one word and creation came into being. The old Christian said, and said rightly: 'The world cannot make a fly' - isn't that right? They can't make a fly, but God made this universe in one infallible word! The Psalmist says: 'God has spoken once,

twice have I heard this: that power belongeth unto our God'. And that's all He needed for creation, one word and it sprang into being - hallelujah, what a God!

You can see it in creation. Secondly you can see it in preservation - Hebrews 1 and verse 3, not only did He create it, but He upholds all things by the word of His power! Oh, many a man and many a scientist has created a thing and it's got out of control and he ceases now to control it - isn't that right? But not our God, for what He wills He has the power to do, and He has the power to sustain. He is almighty in His preserving power, thirdly: He's almighty in restraining natural corruption. You look around the world today and you think to yourself: 'Things couldn't get any worse' - but can you imagine, for one moment, how worse things would be if it wasn't for God's sovereign hand curbing iniquity, curbing corruption? Iniquity would drown the world; sin would fill our lungs and drown us to hell if it wasn't for God pulling down the floodgates! God does that in His restraining power.

You can see it in redemption, fourthly, and this is the most beautiful. We'll be thinking not too long from today about the Lord Jesus Christ and His birth. And at the virgin birth in Luke 1:35 and 37, we read this: 'And the angel answered and said unto her', Mary, 'The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God...For with God nothing shall be impossible' - hallelujah! What a God! The world, in sin and nature's night - but this great God has the power to redeem a world of sin, this great God has the power to bring clean out of unclean, to bring perfection out of an imperfect womb of a sinner. This almighty God is able to preserve the Lord Jesus Christ from the attacks of Satan until He gets to the cross. This great God, in all His omnipotence, is able to bring death from the grave into new life. This God is able to set at His own right hand in the majesty on high, a perfect Man! What a God - this is the God in His all-power who will come in His Son, in clouds descending from the heavens, and will take His own redeemed people to be with Himself in glory.

Think about it! What power could unite two natures, the nature of God and the nature of man, and fuse them together in one person? That's almighty power! That is omnipotent power! And what power could put away sins forever by the blood of His cross? Only almighty power, for only almighty power could redeem a world of sinners lost. Only almighty power could incarnate - and that's where you see it also: in the incarnation, and you see it in the life of the Lord Jesus, for He spoke to the leper and what did He say? 'I will, be thou clean' - and immediately the leprosy was cleansed. He spoke to dead Lazarus: 'Come forth!' - and Lazarus came forth. John 11, they're out in the boat, the winds and the waves are tossing them to and fro: 'Carest Thou not that we perish Master?'...'Peace be still'...'What manner of man is this that even the winds and the sea obey Him?' What power! What power!

Sixthly, you see it in conversion. Do you know that there's greater power in conversion than there is in creation? Because in creation there was no one that opposed God, sure there wasn't? There was no sin in the world, but in conversion He had Lucifer to deal with, in conversion He had this world to deal with, and in conversion He had my old black, deep-dyed, depraved heart that opposed Him! But He's an Almighty God, and He was able to overcome my heart by the power - Ephesians says - that raised Christ from the dead and set Him at the right hand of God, that was the power that it took Him to convert me! What power! Sinner, if you're here today and you're not saved, it's going to take a power greater than that made those trees and the birds out there to save your soul. But the magic of it all is that that power is here, that power is in the Gospel and it's available to you if you would only take it! The old puritans got it right you know, they knew that it took more power to convert than it does to create. Listen to what one of them says: 'God has salvation and damnation in His power. He has the key of justice in His hand to lock up whom He will in the fiery prison of hell. He has the key of mercy in His hand to open heaven's gate to whom He pleases'.

The Psalmist said in Psalm 8, of creation, that creation was the work of God's fingers; but in Luke chapter 1 and verse 51, we read that salvation was the work of God's arm. You see, it takes more - it takes God arm to save you! And whereas creation was one miracle, one spoken word, conversion is many miracles every single day that we live and breathe in this world, miracle after miracle - and God is speaking word after word after word to bring a new creation into being. What power of God! Is it no wonder that it was declared of the Lord Jesus Christ: 'He is able to save to the uttermost', for He is almighty! Now you remember that, my unconverted friend, you remember that: that you cannot continue to harden your heart against God forever, because He is more powerful than you even think He is. That's what Ephesians 3:20 [says]: 'He is able to do exceeding abundantly' - He's greater than you think. Julian the Emperor, he found that out - he was wounded in battle and he was wounded fatally. He was an enemy of Christ, the Gospel and His church - and as he lay there dying, the history books tell us that he threw his blood into the air and he shouted: 'Basisti Galae' (sp?) - 'Oh, Galilean, Thou hast overcome!'.

You see, this man Christ Jesus always overcomes, and there's a day He'll overcome you, my friend, if you don't turn to Him. And it's better to meet God with tears in your eyes than with weapons in your hands, for this is great power. This is the power of God, this is the power that shut the lion's mouth, this is the power that made fire not to burn, this is the power that made waters to stand like walls, this is the power that caused the sun to go ten degrees backward on the dial of Ahaz, this is the power that cast the greatest cherub from heaven into hell, this is the power that locked his own angels up in a dungeon for all eternity, this is the power that made Nebuchadnezzar to chew grass like a bullock - for the powers are ordained of God. And my friend, by Him even Kings reign, and Prince Charles would need to remember that, wouldn't he? Our own Royal family and every prime minister and President are where they are because God's power has permitted it.

Seventhly, His power can be seen in judgement. Oh, that you would see His power in judgement - for when God smites, no one resists Him. Ezekiel 22: 'Can thine heart endure, or can thine hands be strong, in the days that I shall deal with thee? I the Lord have spoken it, and will do it'. You can look at the flood, you can look at Sodom and Gomorrah, and you can look at the Egyptians in the Red Sea - and what if God, willing to show His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much long-sufferings the vessel of wrath fitted to destruction - what if God should destroy you in hell? He has the power to do it.

Secondly: what should we learn from this power of God? The first thing I want us to learn today is that He must be reconciled to. Have you got that? This great, omnipotent, Almighty God must be reconciled to - why? Because God, one day, will display His power by incarcerating men and women in the lake of fire, and He has the power to preserve their body and their soul supernaturally for all eternity! That's what it means: that it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God! Does that power not make you tremble? It made Habakkuk tremble, it made his belly tremble, it made his bones into rotteness, it made him fall before the face of God - and if you are a rebellious sinner in this place it ought to make you tremble. God is all-powerful in His justice and in His judgement. The Lord Jesus said: 'Fear not them which kill the body but are not able to kill the soul, but rather fear Him which is able to destroy body and soul in hell!' He says to you today: 'Fear ye Me not? Saith the Lord, Will ye not tremble at My presence?'. Jeremiah asked the question: 'Who knows the power of His wrath?'. Nahum: 'His fury is poured out like fire, the rocks are thrown down by Him'. And the Psalmist implores you today, as I do, from Psalm 2: 'Kiss the Son, lest He be angry with thee' - it's time for reconciliation, that's what it's time for with God. You need to be reconciled from your sin, you need to turn from it and turn to God - for if you don't that great judgement of power and omnipotence will fall upon your head.

Can I ask you: would you not rather have God for you than against you? I mean, this is crazy, isn't it? To stand and spit in the face of God, and shake your fist in front of Him out of rebellious sinfulness when God could wipe you off the face of the earth in one second! Would you not rather that this all-powerful,

omnipotent God was for you than against you? For the power of God, the word says, is against the wicked - and it's not a shield to protect you, but it's a sword to wound the sinner that is unrepentant! You see, some children that grow up in Christian homes, because they've been taught all their life that God is love and that God loves them and God cares for them and that God will protect them, they live on in their sin thinking that - that's nonsense! God is angry with the sinner every day! And unless you have the blood of Jesus Christ over you, you'll be damned my friend. That's the thing you need to learn from the power of God, that He must be reconciled to.

The second thing is this: He requires worship. He requires it. Imagine a gigantic, absolute power - that He is not just some kind of impersonal influence or force, but He is a person, a person whom we can approach as our Father. He's the great I Am, yet you and I in Christ can speak to Him in the most intimate human language that exists. Tozer said that, he said: 'The worshipping man finds this knowledge a source of wonderful strength for his inner life. His faith rises to take a great leap upward into fellowship with God, who can do whatever He wills to do, for whom nothing is too hard or difficult because He possesses power absolute'. Sure, when this God's revealed to you, do you not feel like falling on your face? Do you not feel like it? I'm asking a question: do you feel like it? For we ought to! We ought to fall at His feet as dead and worship Him!

Thirdly, He must be reconciled to, He requires worship, but He must be trusted. He must be trusted. He, God, this Almighty One, can do everything as easily as He can do anything. He does everything without effort, He doesn't expend any energy, He never gets tired, He never needs to be replenished, He never looks outside of Himself for help or energy - and it's to this One that we need to come and trust. 2 Chronicles 16 and verse 12 we read about Asa, and it says there: 'Asa in the thirty and ninth year of his reign was diseased in his feet, until his disease was exceeding great: yet in his disease he sought not to the Lord, but to the physicians'. He might have known that God had all power, but he didn't trust Him in it. You see, that's what God wants of us, if you're His child that's what He wants. He wants you to come and recognise that He's omnipotent, that He's all-powerful and He wants you to bring your diseased feet - whatever they may be - and trust them not to physicians, but trust them to Him.

A.B. Simpson, Presbyterian Pastor in America years ago, was in his middle-age, he had broken health and was deeply discouraged, disillusioned and despondent. He was ready to quit the ministry, but one day he heard an old Negro spiritual that went like this: 'Nothing is too hard for Jesus, no man can work like Him'. He writes that it went like an arrow into his heart, he said it was like a medicine of faith to the body and to the heart and to the soul and the spirit. And he found that he had to go away from all his concerns, and he went into a place of quiet to spend time with God. And after a few days in the presence of God, he rose completely cured, he went forth in the fullness of joy to found what has become the greatest missionary organisation that foreign societies have ever seen, and for 35 years after that encounter with God he laboured for Christ. What happened to him? His faith in God was seen in the limitless power of God. He got hold of it, he connected with it, he got to grips with it, he plugged into the great omnipotent power of God and it made all the difference to him!

Oh, there's an old lie that goes about, it's a philosophy that says that God's at a distance. 'God's far off, God's transcendent so why would He want anything to do with you? Why would He care about you? He doesn't even care about this planet, never mind your individual life!' - and that goes into the minds of young people and adults, and they feel that God is at a distance, He's too great or concerned to be involved in the affairs of my insignificant life. But when you look at this, this power of God is different for it tells us that there's no prayer too hard for Him to answer! There's no problem too difficult for Him to solve! There's no need too great for Him to supply! There's no passion too strong for Him to subdue, no temptation too great for Him to deliver us from! For the Psalmist says: 'The Lord is my light and my salvation, whom shall I fear? The Lord

is the strength of my life' - His great power can be the strength of your life and my life, of whom shall I be afraid!

The apostle says: 'He is the eternal power' - do you know what that means? You don't need to worry about tomorrow! For His power is eternal and it will be as great tomorrow as it is today and as it was yesterday! You don't need to worry! This power is the source of encouragement to our hearts, is it not? Jeremiah saw it as such when he said: 'Ah Lord God, behold thou hast made the heaven and the earth by thy great power and stretched out arm, and there is nothing too hard for thee!' Do you believe that? Put your hand up if you believe it, now come on - do you believe it? He says it, He is able to save to the uttermost. He is able to succour them that are tempted, He is able to keep you from falling, He is able to build you up, He is able to establish you - 2 Corinthians 9:8: '... and God is able to make all grace abound towards you'. And even when we reach the last great enemy, death, He shall change our vile body that it may be fashioned like unto His glorious body according to the working whereby He is able even to subdue all things unto Himself. He is able, hallelujah! He is able - I'm not able, you're not able, you are weak, you are sinful, you're tempted, you're discouraged, you're broken hearted, you're mourning - but He is able, He is able! And even what God cannot do - in that He cannot sin, He cannot lie, He cannot deny Himself - even the things that He cannot do are for you! He'll never fail you, He'll never forsake you - but His irresistible, inexhaustible, eternal power is there for your taking.

One saint was ill and a friend asked him: 'What if, after you trusting God for so many years, He would fail you?'. And that old man replied: 'Well, He would lose more than I would. I would only lose my soul, but He would lose His great name'. El-Shaddai, God Almighty, and He is your God. Hallelujah! He is your God.

Let us pray, and bow our heads. And let me just say that if you're not saved, God is able to save you now, right now. He is able, He is all-powerful to save you no matter how far away from Him you are - He can, and will, save you. If you're backslidden, no matter what those barriers are, God can overcome them and God can bring you through. Your problems, your trials, your heartaches, your temptations and the sin that so easily besets you - God is able for it, but you have to let Him do what He will do. Will you hand it over to Him now? Will you? By an act of faith say: 'Lord, I relinquish this and now I let Thine all-power take over'. Why not do it and know the great peace of God?

Father, we thank Thee that we don't come to a midget God, we don't come to an impotent, powerless being who waits on man to serve Him. But we thank Thee that we come to Almighty God, it is written upon Thy thigh: 'King of kings, and Lord of lords', Thou art above all things and we thank Thee for Thy great love in the Lord Jesus Christ. But we say this Lord: it would matter how much You loved us, if You hadn't the power to save us and bring us to Yourself, and we thank Thee that in everything that is Your will toward us You have the power to carry it out. So we pray: Lord, have Thine own way, Thou art the Potter, we are the clay. In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ we pray, Amen.

Transcribed by Andrew Watkins, Preach The Word - January 2001

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Behold Your God - Chapter 6

"The Love Of God"

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We're turning in our Bibles to the book of 1 John, 1 John and chapter 4. For six weeks now we have been going through a series entitled 'Behold Your God', we have been contemplating the character and the nature of our great God - who He is, what He is like and what our God does. We're continuing in that series today, looking at a very topical subject indeed, as it is Christmas Eve, 'The Love of God'. In 1 John chapter 4 and verse 8, we read these words: "He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love" - verse 16 - "And we have known and believed the love that God hath to us. God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him".

Then, if you turn with me to Ephesians chapter 3 - in our Bible readings we have been going through Ephesians - chapter 3 and verse 14. We find here the prayer of Paul the apostle for the church at Ephesus, and we indeed can apply to ourselves that this is Paul's prayer for us - and indeed, in that the Holy Spirit inspired it as Paul wrote it, it is the Spirit's prayer, and God's desire and God's sovereign will for every child of God. Verse 14: "For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, That he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man; That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, May be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; And to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God".

Let's take a moments prayer: Our Father, we thank Thee for such a vast subject as the love of God. We thank Thee before we even delve into these depths unfathomable of Thy grace and goodness to us. We want to just thank Thee that Thou art a God of love - and today, as we contemplate the gift of a Saviour, we can see it. It is self-evident in that little parcel of flesh that God loved the world and He gave Himself for it. Father help us and bless us, those who need a touch from Thyself, those that are never experienced that love of God shed abroad in their heart - that today the light of Thy great gospel may shine unto them, and that this great Saviour that was given may become theirs personally. For it is in His name we pray, Amen.

The love of God is a tremendous subject, and I don't attempt even to dabble in the waterside of this great vast subject. It is a tremendous subject, yet at the same time - the other side of the coin is: it's extremely misunderstood. Very few people, biblically speaking, really have a grasp of what the love of God entails. Repeated twice already in our reading, in 1 John chapter 4 and verse 8 and verse 16, there were these three words: 'God is love'. Many have said that to know the love of God, as a human being here on earth, is indeed heaven upon earth. Paul's prayer for his church was that every single believer under heaven would know, by the Spirit of revelation and knowledge, the great love of God towards every believer. I wonder do we know it today? As the poet said of Christmas:

'Oh vast surprise, that wondrous incarnation!
Creation's God new-born in Adam's race,
To bleed for sin and bring us free salvation.
A wonder dwarfing matter, time and space'.

God is love - isn't that a wonderful statement? God is love, not 'He is like love'. Of course, 'God is love' is not the complete truth about God, for as we have been learning in weeks gone by there are many attributes of God, there are many things that we can say of God - and it certainly doesn't mean, as some in the world interpret it, that 'Love is God, for God is love'. The thing that we call 'love', the affection or the action of the will that shows that we are concerned and have compassion upon others, some have interpreted the fact that God is love to say: 'Love is God' - so they worship love itself. That is not what the word of God means when it says 'God is love'. We could say of a man or a woman that we know who is particularly compassionate: 'He, or she, is kindness itself' - you've heard it said, haven't you? 'They are goodness', or, 'they are love itself' - but we're not saying that that man or that woman is literally, exactly love or kindness or goodness, but it describes their nature, it describes who they are. And when we say today from the word of God that 'God is love', it's not a denial of all His other attributes, or what He is as a person. It doesn't mean that God is love and everything else is excepted and excluded in His great nature. But what the word of God is saying is that this great attribute of love, is more than simply an attribute, it is a declaration of God's nature. God is love! It is a summing up of what God is to every believer, to every person who has come into a relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ through His death. We can say: 'To me, God is love'.

We've been learning that many of God's attributes are like an arch that cover all of His attributes, all of the things about Him. We learnt that God's faithfulness is over all of His attributes, everything that God does and is is faithful. Well, we could say this week that God's love is like an arch over every other of His operations and His attributes. That the love of God is the nature that makes possible everything that He is and does and has - and because He has no beginning, it has no beginning; because He is transcendent and He is out of all limits, this love has no limits; and because He is holy, He is spotless and He is pure, this love is pure, this love is reliable, this love is perfect because He is.

It would be foolish, as we look at 'God is love', to forget that the word of God says more about God than 'God is love'. The Scriptures teach that God is Spirit, John 4:24, that is His nature, He is made up of Spirit, He doesn't have a body. 1 John 1:5 says: 'God is light' - so God is not just love, but God is Spirit and God is light. The first of the 39 articles says this: 'God is without body, without parts and without passion' - isn't that good? He is without a body, He is Spirit, you cannot contain Him. He is invisible, He is everywhere, He is Spirit - He has no parts, in other words you can't divorce His love from His faithfulness, you can't divorce His love from His justice and His wrath and His holiness. He is without parts! He is without passion, there's no fluctuation within God, there's no excesses, there's no declension in Him, He is absolutely perfect - God is Spirit. God is light, again we find that in 1 John, and John was saying to his readers: 'You've moved away from the moral life that is of the child of God'. That's what had happened, they'd slipped up and they were living in sin - that's why you find, within that little book, John continually mentioning how the child of God does not continually live in sin. And what John is saying, 'God is light', is 'God is holy, God is perfect' - he says: 'God is light and in him is no darkness at all'. Purity, holiness, perfection, impeccability!

So therefore, God is love - but don't forget this, whatever you do, that God is Spirit and God is also light. Now why do I cover that ground before we go into this great subject? Do you know why? For many in this world, as I said at the beginning, this is a tremendous subject but it is greatly misunderstood, for many folk who talk about the love of God don't know the love of God in their life. They've never experienced it, they think that the love of God is something that He pours on all humanity indiscriminately, that He blesses people regardless of whether they be His child or the child of the devil, or no matter how they're living their lives. To many in the world, and sadly in the church, the love of God is a weak, insipid, indulgent, sickly sentiment. In fact we could say that it is less of worth than many of the loves that we show one toward the other, it's something even below all of that. But the love of God is not indulgent, it's not soft, it's not divorced from morality and justice and His holiness - for God's love is a holy love, because God is a holy God. God's love is a perfect love, a spotless love, a just love, because that is our God - for our God is a God who loves righteousness and hates iniquity!

You see, like in everything in life, we have Hollywood counterfeits - don't we? The way the world perceives things. Let us not perceive the love of God the way the world does. In Romans 5 and verse 5 we find this verse, listen: 'The love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us'. The love of God is shed abroad in our hearts - now, not love for God, but the love of God. Now the verb there 'shed abroad' - do you know what it means? It means 'tipped up', it means 'poured in', it's the word that was used of the Spirit at Pentecost, when the Holy ghost came and baptised all of those believers - and what Paul is saying here is that love is poured in like that into the child of God. As one translation puts it: 'God's love has flooded our inmost hearts' - it is a free flow of a large quantity of God's love, it is an inundation of God's goodness towards His children.

Isn't it lovely? It's in the perfect tense, and that simply means this: that it was settled at one point in time, it's a completed action but we are in the good of it now. It's like the valley that has been filled with water one day in a great storm, but for the rest of the years it stays full. The love of God has been shed abroad in our hearts, and that's what I want us to meditate upon this Christmas Eve. The love of God! Can I ask you: has that been tipped up into your heart? Has it been infused into your being? Have you received, in your life, an inundation of the love of God, flooding into your inmost heart? Let us look at this love of God.

There are seven things that I want to leave with you. First of all: the love God is a gracious love, isn't it? That's the nature of love itself, grace, grace and mercy! If you read history you find that Greek and Roman gods were very like men, in fact many of them were eroticised by human woman, many of them fought together like men, brawling in the street - that's in mythology of course. But this God that we have, He is so above us, so beyond us that Paul the great apostle had to invent another word to describe His great love. He invented 'agape', for this is above human love, above the love of family, filial love and friendship, and all kind of sexual love between a man and a woman - this is the transcendent love of God. You see, it's a gracious love, for the objects of God's love were the objects of His wrath - that's the amazing thing! We tend to love people for who they are, if they're related to us, or what they're like, if they're good-looking, or if they're nice to us, we will show love toward them - but this is a gracious love, this is an agape love, this is a love above all loves that He shows toward us in that while we were yet sinners... what a love!

Does that not thrill you? That the wrath of God abided upon your head, but now the grace of God is being tipped up into your heart! What a love! The unlovely, the unlovable, have inherited free, unearned, unmerited grace, unqualified - nothing in you, nothing in me that could attract God to us, in fact everything in us that would repel anything holy, anything righteous, anything good - yet God, in His grace, has come to us. Paul could say: 'In my flesh, in me, dwelleth no good thing. A mass of corruption, a mass of depravity and sin and iniquity, but God has lavished His love toward us' - gracious love! Didn't He say to Israel in Deuteronomy 7: 'The Lord did not set his love upon you, nor choose you, because ye were more in number than any people; for ye were the fewest of all people: But because the Lord loved you, and because he would keep the oath which he had sworn unto your fathers' - it's got nothing to do with who you are, it's got nothing to do with what you have done. It's free, unmerited grace poured into the heart of a degenerate, depraved sinner. As the poet said:

'What was there in me that could merit esteem,
Or give the Creator delight?
'Twas even so Father, I ever must sing,
Because it seemed good in Thy sight'.

Hallelujah! What a gracious God, what a gracious love is this - and let me tell you, that is why he could say: 'We love him because he first loved us', and that's the order of it, don't put it round the other way! If He hadn't loved you in grace, you would have never loved Him! But He poured His grace upon you, He loved

you 'ere you knew Him - and before you had one ounce of love for Him, He loved you. He can't love you more - isn't that wonderful to hear this morning? He can't love you more, you can't earn it, but all you can do is learn more and more about the love of God, that gracious love.

Secondly: it's an eternal love. You find that clearly in the Scriptures, because if God is eternal - think about it - His love must be eternal, indeed everything that He is is eternal. Jeremiah 31 verse 3: 'I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee' - now if that doesn't prove that it's got nothing to do with you, I don't know what will! He loved you before there was even a you! Think of that - imagine, when only God in His foreknowledge knew there would be a you, God loved you! 'According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will' - oh, so many people get so taken up with trying to explain that truth, so tangled up about what it means and how, sometimes, it doesn't make sense - do you know what? They miss the enjoyment factor! They miss how this is to be enjoyed! That God's love is an eternal love, He loved me before I was even born, His love had no beginning for me, His love will have no ending for me - there's nothing I can do, or think, or act, there's no place I can be too far away from God that His eternal love cannot love me. Does that not thrill you?

It's gracious, eternal - and thirdly: it's unlimited, for God is infinite, isn't that right? That's what the catechism says: 'God is infinite in wisdom, in power and in love'. In other words, this love is unlimited, you can't fathom it - the great depth of His love, you can never delve the depths of this love. In its height, you can never climb it or scale it, you can never measure its length or its height for it is love passing all knowledge. Isn't that what we read from Ephesians? It's beyond us! In Ephesians 2:4 he says: 'His great love wherewith he loved us', Ephesians 3:18,19: 'May be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fullness of God'. God is transcendent, you know what that means, we learnt that He is above everything - and you see if God's above everything, His love's above everything to! It's beyond us, and oh, that we this morning might fathom its breadth, its length, its depth and its great height. Oh, that we would realise today that no tongue - not my tongue, not the greatest tongue of any preacher - could ever express the great love of God...that the greatest mind that there is upon the earth cannot comprehend or truly contemplate this great love. The highest mountain cannot reach its heights, the deepest ocean cannot delve its depths, the furthest crevice in space is not far enough for the love of God! It's higher than the heavens, it's deeper than the sea, you can never exhaust His love! Oh, that that would thrill you, that that would saturate your being - whether you're saved or not - that this love of God is unlimited, and no matter where you are today you have more than you need of the love of God! Faber put it like this:

'For the love of God is broader than the measure of man's mind,
And the heart of the Eternal is most wonderfully kind'.

Oh, what a gracious love, what an eternal love, what an unlimited love. And as we sit today, looking tomorrow - at Christmas Day - what a saving love! Isn't it? 'Hereby', John says in chapter 3:16 of his first epistle, 'perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us' - that's the highest expression of love ever, in the whole universe. That is the way God has displayed, demonstrated His love, it is the expression of it, the representation - 2 Corinthians 5:19 '...that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself', that eternal God, that gracious God, that unlimited God, that transcendent, sovereign, eternal, powerful, holy God was in Christ! That's what the incarnation is about, and don't you miss it this Christmas whatever you do: that God was in Christ. He is God, God of God, Light of Light - and there, Romans 8:32: 'He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?'. Have you ever seen a mother nursing her baby, and she's tired as she nurses and feeds it - and the wee baby's plump and she looks gaunt and thin, but she's far from complaining. She doesn't whinge, but in

fact she looks down and gazes with eyes shining with happiness and pride at the little child that all her energies, all her love is being poured into. She's laying her life down for that child - and the word of God says greater love hath no man than this is, that a man lays down his life for his friend.

Oh, my friend, have you got that thought? Come on now! Forget about all this Christmas nonsense of drapings of tinsel and trees and everything - this is where it's at! The love of God in Christ, laying His life down for you! The greatest love of all, for every good love gives to its own, and Christ gave to you. Oh, my friend, Christ gave His blood for you, Christ gave His soul for you, He poured it out an offering for sin there at Calvary! The cross is the crowning proof of God's love, John 3:16, the ten words of divine revelation right from the beginning right to the ending of all time, it couldn't be better summed up than the ten words of divine revelation: 'God loved the world, He gave His Son that whosoever believeth [should not] perish [but] have life'. Think of it, this great God loved! Who did He love? He loved the world! How did He love? He gave! Who? His Son! Why? That whosoever! What? Believeth! And here's the thing: shall have - that's a powerful word, isn't it? Have - there's no doubt about it, for this saving love is able to save to the uttermost all who come unto God by Him. This great love - if you would only, my friend, let it be tipped and poured and inundate your heart, you would realise the great love of God toward you. If you doubt the love of God, just you look at Calvary, just look at it. Look at it now and see that form of one hanging on the tree, who was a babe in a manger, who was given for that purpose, who was sent into the world to be the Saviour of the world, who in that little form of a baby, the very blood going through His veins would later be shed for the sins of the world - what a love!

Praise God, fifthly it's an unchanging love, for our God is unchanging. In John 13 verse 1 it says the Lord Jesus: '...having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end'. There's very little love like that, isn't there? Love that will love no matter what the cost, love that will love no matter what way you turn out, or no matter what you do, or no matter what you say right into the face of the one that's loving you. This One will love you unto the end - and it can't be compared to human love. It's without passion, there's no fits - He doesn't love you one day and hate you the next day, His love doesn't go down in a metre and then came up again to a peak - that's not the love of God! It has no notions, it has no fluctuations - it's not a fancy of His hope, that He wishes He could love you. The word of God says: 'His love is as strong as death', it says: 'Many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it' - nothing can separate it from those who have embraced it, isn't that what Romans says? 'What shall separate us from the love of God', what will do it? We are more than conquerors in that love - death, life, angels, principalities, powers, things present, things to come, height, depth, any other creature shall not be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus. Hallelujah! Can you shout 'hallelujah'? Shout it! Hallelujah for the love of God in the Lord Jesus Christ!

'Forever His, forever only His.
Who the Lord and me shall part?
With what peace, and rest, and bliss
Jesus fills the loving heart.

Heaven and earth may fade and flee,
Firstborn light in gloom decline.
But while God and I shall be,
I am His and He is mine!

Think of it! While God is alive - and He lives for evermore - I am His and He is mine! Is He yours? Do you know that unchanging love? Come on! Do you know it? I don't mean do you know about it, I'm asking you has it been tipped into your heart? Has it been poured, have you experienced it in your life? Sixthly: it's a disciplining love. We were looking at the disciplining of children not so long ago in our Bible reading, and

we saw that true love disciplines. And we find with God that those He doesn't accept, He sends to hell, and that is His punishment for rejection of Him - and even those He receives, He punishes them, He disciplines them: 'For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth'. It's not pleasant, but it's profitable, and it's to stop believers being condemned by the world - and there's times in our lives when God needs to iron out some of the wrinkles and the creases in it, isn't that right? Leeman Strauss (sp?) said that when his mother chastened him she said it would hurt her more, and she had tears in her eyes. And God is not some kind of sadistic overlord in heaven, but He knows what is best for us. So God says, Isaiah 63: 'In all their affliction he was afflicted, and the angel of his presence saved them: in his love and in his pity he redeemed them; and he bare them, and carried them all the days of old' - and we have a Great High Priest who is touched with the feelings of our infirmities.

God will not bestow happiness upon those who live outside the realms of His holiness. Let me repeat that: God will not bestow happiness upon those who live outside the realms of His holiness. So, He disciplines us, He brings us into line. 'God's love' - this is the perception some people have - 'is an antidote for all trouble', that's far from the truth, but can I ask you: perhaps what you're going through today, is it God honing you, is it God making you better and eventually you will come forth as gold? It's not maybe because you're sinning, but God is disciplining you, and He wants you one day to be conformed to the image of His Son - do we believe this? Do we believe Romans 8:28: '...that all things work together for good to them that love God'. We must go through heartache, we must go through trial, and the thing is: often it is because God loves us, and God wants us to be like Him.

Seventhly and finally: this love is a benevolent love. Benevolent - it's good! Think of a mother, and we've all seen this, the mother remains happy when the child is in danger - you've seen it - and you think: 'How can she behave like that, or talk like that, or get on like that when her wee child is so ill?'. And we begin to ask the question: 'I wonder how much she really loves them?'. This is remarkable to me: that God has bound up His own final happiness in our happiness. God is self-sufficient, that's right; God is sovereign - but the amazing thing about it all is this: He who was free and is free has chosen to bind His own heart with our happiness forever. 'Herein is love, not that we loved God but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins' - He has chosen to bind His own happiness and satisfaction to our happiness and our satisfaction! He was able to survive without us before creation, He's able to survive without us now and He always will be - but He has chosen to make us happy to make Him happy!

It is said of George Mueller that on his desk he had a little sign and it said this: 'It matters to Him about you'. Isn't that beautiful? It's a literal rendering of: 'He careth for you' in 1 Peter 5:7 - it matters to Him about you! God, in His love, brings us into a relationship where we can enjoy Him, where He can do His best, God's best for us - imagine that! God doing His best for me! He is - and the other side of the coin to that is: we ought to do our best for Him. You may disagree with me on this, but I do not believe that everyone is loved the same. I believe the word of God teaches that those who obey show a greater love for the Lord Jesus and have greater grace poured upon them - for He said this in John 14:23: 'If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him' - that's a special love. That's a love that comes in response to obedience.

As we close I want to leave with you a verse, it's 1 John 4:18, this great book of love - listen to it: 'There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love'. You know the child that gets lost in the supermarket, and it gets into a frenzy and into a panic, and it's distressed looking around, and it feels vulnerable and it feels danger - and that is the way so many people feel today. Our society is wrecked by fear and by anxiety and distress and worry, and even those who belong to the Lord are living like that! And as long as we are willing to live in the world, and to be satisfied standing, trembling, in the arms of chance and this world system - we will fear! If you want to continue to go down a carnal Christian route, if we want to continue to live in our sins without Christ, fear

will come to us - and as the word of God says, fear hath torment. And how many people are tormented with fear? The word of God's right you know - clear as a bell! If you fear, you will be tormented - and the only way, my friend today, to deal with your fear is to enter into the secret place of leaning upon the arm of God, leaning upon the arm of the love of God!

Oh, isn't it wonderful? A. W. Tozer said this: 'Let a man become convinced that nothing can harm him and instantly for him all fear goes out of universe. The nervous reflex, the natural revulsion, the physical pain may be felt sometimes - but the deep torment of fear is gone forever. God is love, God is sovereign, His love disposes Him to desire our everlasting welfare and His sovereignty enables Him to secure it'. Oh, we learnt, didn't we, that what God wants to do He has the power to do. And today, you see where you sit, if God wants to deliver you from fear that brings torment, He can do it now. Why do we grumble? Why do we become discontent? Why are we resentful when God takes us down a certain path in life and we feel distrustful, fearful, depressed? Maybe our Christian life is becoming lukewarm, informal and half-hearted, and our loyalties are divided - why does that happen? Because we are not resting in the love of God!

Handley Moule was the Bishop of Durham, and there was a colliery disaster. And he went down with his Bible in his hand - as the man of God that he was - to bring some comfort to these people who had been bereaved and were mourning. And he didn't know what he was going to say, he was lost for words, and he opened his Bible - and the Lord opened the Bible - at a particular place where he had a bookmark. And you've seen these bookmarks, on the one side it says 'God is love', and on the other side there was a mass of tangled and coloured threads. And old Handley Moule lifted up that bookmark and showed them the side that was tangled coloured threads, and he said: 'This is the disaster in your life, it doesn't seem you're going to see through it, things you can't understand' - and as he turned it over, he said: 'But behind it all there is a loving God'. Isn't that true?

You know, as I was studying this I realised - as we have been contemplating God - that as we think at this Christmas time of the gift of the Lord Jesus, the supreme thing is not how much of God that I know, but to realise how much God knows me - and to realise this: that those little baby hands that were sucked in a cradle in an old cattle stall, one day at Calvary my name was graven upon them. That's how I know that I am known.

Our Father, we remember the epitaph that Thy servant Wesley had upon his grave: 'The best of all: God is with us'. And Father, at this Christmas time we remember Immanuel, God with us - the Saviour sent to save from sin - and we thank Thee for Him, and we pray Lord that someone here today would meet Him as their Saviour and would be saved. Hear us in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ we pray, Amen.

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Behold Your God - Chapter 7

"The Sovereignty Of God"

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The Sovereignty of God' - and our reading is taken, our first reading, from Isaiah chapter 46, and our second reading from Daniel chapter 4. I will be asking you to look at a few Scriptures together as we go through this study - and let me say that we're not looking at any main passages of Scripture, as we haven't been doing really in these studies in the last few weeks. When you take a comprehensive theme within the word of God, such as the sovereignty of God, or the faithfulness of God, or the love of God, it's almost impossible to stay in the one passage of Scripture and do an exegesis of that. So please forgive me for that, but that's the nature of the word of God and the nature of these themes right throughout it. We want to get a panaroma of this theme of the sovereignty of God, so we will be looking at various Scriptures together.

Isaiah chapter 46 and verse 10 - one verse - we'll read verse 9 just to get the lead-in: "Remember the former things of old: for I am God, and there is none else; I am God, and there is none like me, Declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure". Then our second text is found in Daniel 4, Daniel 4 and verse 35 - we'll read verse 34: "And at the end of the days I Nebuchadnezzar lifted up mine eyes unto heaven, and mine understanding returned unto me, and I blessed the most High, and I praised and honoured him that liveth for ever, whose dominion is an everlasting dominion, and his kingdom is from generation to generation: And all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing: and he doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou?".

Let's take a moments prayer: Our Father, we come and we acknowledge Thee as the sovereign God. We bow before Thee as Thy creatures, and we ask Thee to have Thine own way with us this day, to move among us, to move within us - Lord, to bless us, to correct us, to instruct us, to encourage us and enthuse us after Thy great purposes in Christ. Lord, touch those that must be touched, heal the broken hearted, strengthen the weak, and save the lost. For we pray these things in the name of the Lord Jesus, Amen.

As I was pondering and seeking the Lord over what to speak to you upon today, at the beginning of a new year and at the end of an old year, I was very reluctant to come out of the studies that we have been doing because I believe that that is God's will for us in these days: to behold our God. That's why we looked at the love of God last Lord's Day, as we were thinking of Christmas - and what a subject to look upon! As we look into an uncertain and indefinite new year, what greater subject could we take than the sovereignty of God?

Now, in a modern sense, and in modern political science, this is foreign. To say that there is a God, in fact, is foreign, let alone to say that that God is a sovereign God and that He has sway in heaven, as Daniel has said, and also in the kingdom of men on the earth. Indeed, sadly to say, also in the religious sphere the sovereignty of God is foreign - many have denied it, many have watered it down. And indeed, within modern man in general today, sovereignty is said to be 'in the individual' - that we, as human beings, are the authors of our own destiny and our own fate, and therefore if there be a God out there, He is not concerned with the affairs of men, He has no such plan or counsel, but we determine our own destiny and our own fate. 'Our fates', they say, 'are activated when we determine by our own will: whatever will be, will be'.

As we look into the word of God and into His counsels in the Old Testament and in the New Testament, I find that that perception of God - the perception of the moral and modern contemporary age in which we live - no more resembles the Almighty of the Scriptures, than a 15 watt light bulb resembles the glory of the noon-day sun. It is so far removed and so different, that you cannot find a God like that within the word of God.

Now, as we study this great subject, 'The Sovereignty of God', there are three questions that I want us to ask of ourselves as we look at it. The first is this: what is God's sovereignty? What exactly is this great thing that we call the sovereignty of God? The second question I want to ask is: why is it a problem to some people? Why can the world, and some even within the church, not accept that God is a sovereign God? And the third thing I want to ask is this: what difference does it make to you? It is not simply a theory or a theological precept or treatise, but what difference does this personal God's sovereignty make in your personal life?

So let's look at the first question: what is the sovereignty of God? Well, to give a definition of God's sovereignty, it's simply this: it is the right of God to govern and control the universe which He has created. He is the Creator God, and therefore it is His right to govern that universe and do as He pleases. We've been learning in recent weeks how God is all-powerful, He is almighty, He is omnipotent, He is supreme. We've learnt that God is transcendent, there is none above Him, there is none beyond Him, or none like Him - He has all supremacy. If you like, the sovereignty of God is the exercise of that supremacy, it is that all-power in action, it is God's ability to use the power that He has in the way that His own divine counsels will and will have. Because of that we must conclude that this God can be subject to none - we've said that He is beyond us, we cannot influence Him, we cannot bring Him down to our level and we cannot ascend to His great level. There is none like Him and there can be none who He is subject to.

Think of this, just for a moment, as we ponder the sovereignty of God. Can you imagine God asking permission of someone? Of course you can't! For that is His right, that is His prerogative to do as He pleases - He is God, He asks permission of no-one. Can you imagine Him applying or making application to a higher authority? No! Why? Because there is no higher authority to God, He is above all, He is supreme and the sovereignty of God is the exercise of that supremacy that He has. Now, this is within the word of God, Isaiah 46 and verse 10 that we have read says He is: 'Declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done'. God is declaring beforehand the things that will be done, it says He declares them in His own counsel: 'My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure'. As one has said: 'The sovereignty of God is none other than His Godhead', it is His Godhead, it is His nature. God - if He is God - must be a sovereign God, He must be in control, He must be! As Daniel says in chapter 4:35, that all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing compared to Him, He must do according to His will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay His hand, or say unto Him, What are You doing?! No one can say that to a sovereign God.

To put it into modern language, and into language that we can really understand and grasp, we can say that: 'God does as He pleases'. That's the bottom line - God is answerable to no one, He's not answerable to us, or any in the hordes of heaven, or the hordes of the damned. God is His own interpreter and God will do what pleases Him. The Psalmist says that, Psalm 135 verse 6: 'Whatsoever the Lord pleased, that did he in heaven, and in earth, in the seas, and all deep places'. This is profound. We often say of folk that they run riot, 'He is a law unto himself' - and we usually say that in a negative sense, but we can say it in a very positive sense and almighty sense of Almighty God - that He is a law unto Himself! He is answerable to no-one, He does as He pleases. We said in weeks gone by that God doesn't do what is right, sure He doesn't? What God does is right, for God is above all, He is supreme.

Now, I submit that these things are very deep, these things are very hard to understand - in fact these things, at times, can become uncomfortable for us in our mean and finite sense. But nevertheless, we must grapple

with this - as we behold our God, we must behold Him as the word of God portrays Him and reveals Him. Jehoshaphat, on one occasion, made a prayer to God - I want you to turn to that: 2 Chronicles chapter 20 and verse 6. 2 Chronicles chapter 20 and verse 6, and he prays to God these words: 'O Lord God of our fathers, art not thou God in heaven? And rulest not thou over all the kingdoms of the heathen? And in thine hand is there not power and might, so that none is able to withstand thee?', so Jehoshaphat is asking a question in a prayer. The answer to that question - not the specific answer, but the answer that we would be getting if we were asking that question from the word of God - is found in 1 Chronicles 29 and verse 11, if you turn to it. 1 Chronicles 29 and verse 11, keep the question of Jehoshaphat in your mind - 'O Lord God of our fathers, art not thou God in heaven? And rulest not thou over all the kingdoms of the heathen? And in thine hand is there not power and might, so that none is able to withstand thee?'. The answer comes, verse 11 of chapter 29: 'Thine, O Lord, is the greatness, and the power, and the glory, and the victory, and the majesty: for all that is in the heaven and in the earth is thine; thine is the kingdom, O Lord, and thou art exalted as head above all'. Jehoshaphat asked: 'Is there one above Thee? Is there one beyond Thee who is Lord, who is God in heaven?' - and we could be asking that today, as we look around a world that seems to be in chaos, that seems to be breaking down morally, environmentally, in every conceivable realm it seems to be falling to bits, we ask: 'Is there a God in heaven?'. The answer is given: 'Yes, Thine, O Lord, is the greatness, Thine is the power, Thine is the glory. Thou art exalted head above all'.

Now, what we're saying is this: what is God's sovereignty? The answer: God does as He pleases, only as He pleases, and always as He pleases. In Isaiah 46, that we read from, we read this: 'Remember the former things of old: for I am God, and there is none else; I am God, and there is none like me...I will do all my pleasure' - I will do My pleasure! If you go into the book of Daniel, you see his prophetic view, and he sees there the times of the Gentiles - and that simply is all the kingdoms and dynasties from Daniel, as he saw it, right up to the second coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, when He will come to the earth and He will set His feet on the earth, and set up His kingdom that will reign from shore to shore. There, as Daniel sees that vision, the theme behind it all is simply this: that God sets up kings, God puts down kings, and God does as He pleases in the kingdom of men. And the theme of Daniel is this: that in all His dealings with men, He would teach them - Daniel 4:25 - 'Till thou know that the most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will'.

What is the sovereignty of God? It is this: God does, and can do, as He pleases. God wants the world in the 21st century, entering the year 2001, to realise that He will do what He pleases, that He rules in the kingdom of men and He giveth it to whomsoever He will'. As we enter a new year, God is saying to us: 'I am God in more than name. I am God in more than feeble men's theology. I am God in action as well as name. I am God upon the throne. I am the sovereign, all-powerful, Almighty God who worketh all things after the counsel of My own will. I am the sovereign God!'. That is what God's sovereignty is. We haven't even entered into how it relates to mankind and man's responsibility, and we may never do that this morning, all I want you to see is not 'behold man', but 'behold God!'. God is sovereign, God will do as He please. In the life of this universe, in our world, in our church and in your individual experience, God is sovereign! No wonder it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the Living God.

Now, let's look at our second question: why is it a problem to some to understand that God is a sovereign God? I mean, it seems quite clear from scripture and I understand that also. It's clear what God has said, we've read it: 'I do My own pleasure. No one stays My hand, I do as I will and as I please'. God has that right - we have established it - as Creator of this universe, to rule as He will. But the fact remains that this doctrine - in fact, I would say there's no other doctrine that's hated more by men. They can't stand that God is in control, they can't stand that God is sovereign - and even, sadly, some Christians cannot get to grips with this great truth that God is sovereign! They will let God love, they can let God love unlimitedly - that is the way He loves, hallelujah! We were looking at it last week, there is no limit to God's love, there's no depths that we can fathom, there's no heights that we can reach - but men in our world, even those that are outside of

Christ, will let God love all He likes. Men will let God create, they will let Him create a universe, they will let Him continue that creation in sustenance, and sustain everything that is around us and keep everything in consistency - men will let God do that. They will let God do anything, but they will not let Him be sovereign!

Spurgeon said: 'But when God ascends His throne, His creatures gnash their teeth'. Now, it is not my intention to get into controversy today - for there has been controversy raging round this subject for centuries, and I'm not going to enter into that today. But what I want to do is for you, as a child of God and a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, to see the great beauty that there is in the sovereignty of God for you. That's what I want you to do, I want you to behold your God who is in control! He is in control of this world, no matter what you see, no matter what you think, and He is in control of the life that you're living at this very moment in time.

Now let's think about this - it's important that we think. Men talk about freedom, and for God to be God - as A. W. Tozer says - He must be all-knowing, He must be all-powerful, and the third thing is He must be absolutely free. If God is to be sovereign He's got to know everything, isn't that plain? There can't be anything that's shut out from God's mind, or He can't forget about anything or overlook anything, for the decisions that He would make in that light would be false - He would be doing them wrong, in ignorance of things that are concerning Him and concerning a decision that He may make. So, God must be all-knowing to be all-sovereign.

God must be all-powerful to be all-sovereign, mustn't He? This is foolish, to think that God could have a will and wouldn't be able to carry out that sovereign will because He was impotent, no power! But the third thing is this: He must be absolutely free. 'I do as I please', God says - that means He has no interference, there is no one who stays His hand, there is no one who changes God's mind, He has freedom. Now freedom is bandied about, it was the theme and the national anthem of the 60's and it still is today. Men want freedom, don't they? They want to be free from all restraints - and the sad thing is in their sinner-ship, when they look for that freedom they find that they bring themselves into more and more bondage to sin. Freedom is hard for our minds to conceive and to imagine, because there is no absolute freedom in this universe - it just doesn't exist! God alone is all and absolutely free!

Now, let's think about this: there is the expression 'as free as a bird', isn't there? And you know what that means, that a bird can just jump off a pinnacle and just float into the air and soar away. 'As free as a bird' - and you know what that means, it's talking about only one sphere of that bird's existence: the fact that it can fly - and it seems, as we look and we can't fly, 'Boy! That bird is free!'. But that statement 'as free as a bird' is foolish, and it's not an absolute statement because birds are not free! It's not true freedom at all, for that bird has instincts, that bird has fears that are built into it, that it will not run into danger, it'll fly away from predators, that bird has to be dictated to where it will go because of the weather - you'll not see the birds out in the rain and in the snow. It's not absolutely free, it can't fly in air pressures that aren't suited to aviation, it can't go to a place where there is no food supply, it won't go there because it's not free - only God is free! That's what I want you to see, that in the natural realm, in our world all objects are dependent upon one another. This is a whole world - God has made it this way - of dependency. You can see it in the food chain, where we need our food - and there is that chain of the men eating the beasts, and the beasts eating the grass and so on. It goes round and round, and you can see the beasts free in the field, you can see me driving down the road free in my car - but we are not absolutely free, there are things that we are dependent upon, and if they are interfered with we will suffer.

Now, that's important to get that into our heads today: that we are not absolutely free. The only one that is free is the sovereign Almighty God! Now, why is it a problem to some to conceive of that? Well, of course, the obvious problem is that if God is all-sovereign, well that means they're not in control and they're not the

final one to be answered to. Governments don't like you talking about the sovereignty of God, they laugh at it. Prime Ministers, and Presidents, and Kings, and Potentates don't entertain the idea - they want to believe that all authority rests with them! In every individual man and woman there is that little kingship of their own life, where they say: 'I will not have this Man to rule over me'. It's the old problem of pride, isn't it? The mother of all sin.

But we'll not deal with that for just a moment - I want to deal with what I believe to be the main problem: why people cannot, even Christians, accept the sovereignty of God. It is this: the presence of evil within our world. People ask the question: 'Why do the wicked flourish?', the Psalmist asked it in Psalm 37. Why is it that wicked people are getting on in the world, getting to the top of the world, yet the righteous are trodden under foot? That leads to another question: has God got a part in men's sins? If God is sovereign and God is in control why does God let all these men do all these terrible things - has God ordained this in some perverse, strange way? You can understand those questions, can't you? The reason why we do understand those questions is we have minds like [that] ourselves. And we think of the Lord - and as the hymnwriter has said, as we've been singing: 'We judge the Lord in feeble sense'.

Now, what we cannot do or allow ourselves to do, is deny what we have already established from the word of God because of the questions of men. But what I want to do is bring some reasons why I believe that these are problems for people, concerning the sovereignty of God and the presence of evil. The first thing is this: often God's providences - and that's simply another way of describing His sovereignty - they seem to run contrary to His promises. Now, listen to that: God's providences, what God does and what God declares, at times in our lives seem to go against all that God is and all that God has said. To put it in our language, we ask ourselves: 'This shouldn't be happening to me! I'm a Christian, why is God letting this go on my life? How can God let this happen?'.

Now, if you'd let me I want you to cast your mind back to David - and you remember in the early stories of David when he was out in the field with the sheep, being a shepherd, and God was working with him and moulding him. Old Samuel came to his home and he anointed David King - after looking at all the rest of Jesse's sons, he then anointed the smallest one and the youngest one: David. He was anointed as King, and that was the providence of God, God had declared: 'This man shall be King'. That was God's promise: 'David, you will be King' - but as the days, and the months, and the years went on we find that that promise, the providence of God seemed, in our eyes, to contradict it. What am I saying? I'm saying the promise of God was that David would be King, that he would have the crown - but we find Saul pursuing him, like a partridge over the mountains of the wilderness, ready to kill him. God's providence allowed that, God's providence permitted that - and there are times in our life that we have a promise from God, we read His word, we take it to our hearts, but everything that's around us seems to be going against that - but we need to realise today, if that's our situation, that there are times that that seems to be happening. It seems that God's providence is running contrary to His promises, but that is not the case! It's not the case!

If you think of Paul, remember in the book of Acts he was in the ship and God promised all the lives of those who were in the ship - but what began to happen? Imagine you as Paul, and God had given you this great promise, and then the ship starts to break up and you start to sink, and you think you're going to lose your life and the rest of the crew - yet every single one of them, God had promised they would be saved. It seemed that God's providence was running against God's promise, but what do we read? We read that in the broken pieces of that boat every single one of those lives was brought to shore. That's the sovereignty of God! It may seem in our lives that things are running against God's promises and God's ways, but God overrules, God is sovereign, God is in control - and if your life's boat is broken in pieces, listen, this is God's message to you as you go into a new year: you can float ashore even on those pieces! God's promises will not be overruled.

Secondly, another reason why people find this difficult is because the way that we take in life can be bitter and it can be sweet mixed together. We wonder: 'How can we have bitter things in our life? How can God allow bitter things and odd things to happen when He only wants good for us?'. It's like a chessboard, black-and-white, and our way from one end to the other seems to be chequered. And we know that hell, where the damned reside, is a place of bitterness; we know that heaven is a place of sweetness - but we also know, all too well, that earth on which we live is mixed with both sweetness and bitterness. It's like the rod and the manna that were in the Ark of God, the rod was for discipline and for leading, and the manna was for being fed - and it's like our earthly pilgrimage along the wilderness, that it's this mixture of bitter and sweet. But you must see, as David saw in the Psalms: 'I will sing of mercy and of judgement' - mercy and judgement! God overrules my life, no matter what is happening, God is in control - and like Joseph, even though he was sold into slavery, even though he was put into prison for a crime he didn't commit, even though he was down there in that dungeon and those that had promised him things reneged in their promise, this was said of him: 'But God was with him!' That's it! Even when the providence of God seems, in our feeble sense, to go against His will - God is in control!

Thirdly, one of the reasons why people have problems is this, as Thomas Watson the puritan said: 'God can draw a straight line with a crooked stick'. God can do anything, God can bring all things according to the counsel of His own will. What I mean is this: something that is evil from the hand of a sinful man, at the same time can be good from the hand of God. Now that baffles - don't ask me to explain that, because I can't explain it - but something that can be meant and motivated from the hand of a man for evil, God at the same time can be motivating it from His hand for good. That's powerful, but that is our sovereign God! Remember Joseph? His old brothers were envious, weren't they? They were jealous of the father's love and they sold him, they put him down a pit, and he went to prison - as I said - and got into all sorts of problems. But what was the sovereign will of God, what was His invisible hand behind it all? He knew that there was a famine coming, he knew that the people of Israel and all Israel, Jacob's family, needed to be fed - and at the end of the day what did He want to do? He wanted to get all that family up into Egypt. Isn't that amazing? From the evil hands of Joseph's brothers, God was able - and God intended, and God ordained the good of the children of Israel.

Remember Shimei's cursing of David? Remember he cursed him up and down? It was evil and it was wicked, and it was a terrible sinful thing to do, it came out of a heart of malice against David - but at the end of the day God ordained that cursing to be used to humble David for his adultery and for his murder. And at the end of the day, we look to Calvary, we look to the Lord Jesus Christ - and wicked men, murderous men took Him, and hung Him, and put Him to death humanly speaking, Judas sold Him and betrayed Him - yet we are given redemption by His blood. Isn't that wonderful? Isn't that wonderful, the sovereign God that we have - and we can look at our lives, and it's like looking into a smith's workshop, isn't it? And you look into the smith's workshop, and you see tools that are hooked - horrible things, horrid things, evil things, painful looking instruments whereby he does his work. But when we see the finished article, it's beautiful. Do you know why it's beautiful? Because of the master's hand. That is the sovereign God! That is my God! That is the God we worship, a God who is in control - and the reason why He permits evil in this world, and the answer to the world's question - they're shouting it so loud that they can't hear God giving the answer. 'Why doesn't He do something about it? Why doesn't He take control? Why doesn't He overrule the evil in the world that exists?' - it's answered! The answer is: He is overruling it. Day-by-day, moment-by-moment, He is permitting certain things that He might bring good out of it.

Here is my question to you today, as we close in our final moments (and by the way I've noticed that clock has a different time to my watch, so I'm going by the clock if you don't mind - it's a bit slower!). What does it mean to you? What does that sovereignty - what are you doing about it? Don't ask the world, don't sing to the world: 'God is still on the throne, and He will remember His own' when you're not living like it! That's the third question: what difference does it make to you? I'll tell you what it means, it means this: there's no blind

fate. It means that there is nothing by chance, there's no coincidence, there's no luck - and even the very rolling of a dice, the word of God says [in] Proverbs 16:33: 'The lot is cast into the lap; but the whole disposing thereof is of God'. God is the pilot of all things, God is in the driving seat - if I can say it - of all creation. And imagine this, child of God - let this sink into your mind: if this God is your God, the sovereign God is for you! He's with you, He's for you - but in a moment of sobriety, if that sovereign God is not your God, He's against you - and God help you, for He's is the only one who can if He is against you.

Imagine this - what must we do, what difference does it make? The first thing I want to say is this: you must submit to His sovereignty. That's it! People talk about the responsibility of man, well, this is the responsibility of man: that he submits to the sovereignty of God, isn't that right? That he submits to God's rule, he acknowledges that He alone is high in heaven, that He is the one with whom we have to do, that God is God of all. To recognise God as God, to recognise this - if you're not saved - that God's side will win, that sin cannot win, and that Christ says to you today: 'He that is not with Me is against Me'. There's no sitting on the fence.

The second thing is this: you must trust His sovereignty. It's not something you believe in your head - and I say this: there is no attribute of God that is so comforting to the believer as the sovereignty of God. Don't lose it, don't let men arguing about it make you forget it and say: 'I don't want to be bothered with all that'. Dwell on it! Meditate on it! For there's nothing more comforting - and let me say this: I believe this is the first way that God revealed Himself to men, in His sovereignty. The first book that was ever written was not Genesis but Job, and that's the whole theme about it: God is in control! God is above all! This is the God that we serve and we must submit, we must trust His guidance in the worst circumstances of life. In the most severe trials that we go into we must realise that God has ordained our path, but also this: that God can overrule it, that God is a God who answers prayer, that God can move. I believe there is little more important to you today, as we enter a new year, than the fact that God is on the throne.

Think about this as we close: if God didn't sustain the world, where would we be? I was talking to someone this week and he brought to my attention that if God just let it rain for a day, we'd all be in a real fix, wouldn't we? One day, you've seen what the snow has done, you see what the floods do over in England, you've seen what earthquakes and volcanoes can do - and yet, in everything that does happen, in meteorites that miss the earth by fractions, in the fact that if we were a little bit nearer the sun we'd fry, if we were a little bit farther away we would freeze, God is in control. God sustains, He is upholding all things by the word of His power.

Secondly: quietly learn to submit to the sovereignty of God. Will you do that? Just learn to submit! Can you do better than God? Can you plan your life better than Him? Imagine where we would be if we were left to ourselves! What I want you to do today is to go away and, like old Eli say this - when he heard all the terrible things that happened to his sons and happened the Ark of God, he said: 'It is the Lord, let Him do what seemeth good'. Can we say that? Can we say like Job: 'The Lord gave, the Lord has taken away' - and this is the key - 'blessed be the name of the Lord'? 'Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him'? Like the Lord Jesus Christ: 'Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in Thy sight'? Think of this: that your crosses in life fit better than your clothes, because God is the tailor, God has ordained them, God has made them for you - and the miracle of grace is this: that every single thing will work together for your good.

I know it doesn't seem it, but that's what God's word says. It's like the wheels of the clock, they seem to be going contrary, but they're all going in the one direction - and that is to put the clock forward, and to make it chime. No matter what's happening in your life, my friend, it's all for your good - and that should be a cure [for] fear, nothing should touch you because you realise that God in His loving providence will not permit any evil against His will. It should make us long for heaven and make us long for home. It's a problem, this sovereignty of God, it's a problem for me to understand, it's a problem for us all - in fact, there's times we

even doubt it because of the things that are happening in our lives - but there's a day coming when we'll know longer see through a glass darkly, but face-to-face we will see, and we shall know even as we have been known.

This is the God who brought Esther before the King out of all the virgins, but she was chosen. This is the God who brought ravens, who wouldn't even feed their own young, to feed the prophet of God - Elijah. This is the God who made the cock crow, this is the God whose invisible, sovereign hand is seen through the word of God, and seen in the book of Esther that doesn't even mention His name - why? Because the point is this: God is God in the affairs of men - and you, my friend - listen! - are the apple of His eye, and the eyelid of God's sovereignty day by day drops to protect you, and to defend you.

Oh, I wish we had longer - I'm sure you don't! Let me say this as we close: the book of Revelation is a letter to people who were persecuted. John was on the Isle of Patmos - and there is a word to describe the sovereignty of God in that book that is repeated, that you find nowhere else within the word of God. It's the word 'all-sovereignty' in English that's what it means, you find it in chapter 1 and verse 8: 'I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, saith the Lord, which is, and which was, and which is to come, the Almighty' - the all-sovereign, right throughout that book. Do you know what He was wanting those people to do? To lift their eyes heavenward and to see this: no matter what is happening in your life, there is an all-sovereign God who is in control.

'When statesmen have had their last party,
And despots have made their last threat.
When prophets are dumb with misgiving,
And forces of conflict are set.
When factions, misleading and treacherous,
Bring chaos where order prevailed.
When freedom, long cherished, is vanquished,
and leaders long trusted have failed.
When God and His word are derided,
And men call it useless to pray.
Remember that God is still sovereign,
and He has the last word to say'.

Our Father, we thank Thee for this blessed assurance, that we know not what the future holds but we know who holds the future. Lord, we ask that that deep, deep sense and security of Your guidance may be what garrisons our heart as we go forward into this new year. Touch hearts that must be touched, and bless us now as we part, Amen.

Transcribed by Andrew Watkins, Preach The Word - January 2001

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Behold Your God - Chapter 8

"The Mercy Of God"

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Now, we're turning in our Bibles first of all to Psalm 136, Psalm 136 - and then we're turning to Ephesians chapter 2 after that, if you want to find that portion of scripture. This is the [eighth] study in our series on Lord's Day mornings of the character and the attributes of our God, and we're looking this morning at the mercy of our God - the great mercy of God Almighty. The Psalm that I have asked you to turn to is a very well-known Psalm, simply because the mercy of God is put through it like a thread - after every verse you have this little group of words: 'For His mercy endureth forever'. Now, we'll not take time to read the whole of the Psalm, but let's read the first few verses to get the idea of the Psalmist behind this theme.

Verse 1: "O give thanks unto the Lord; for he is good: for his mercy endureth for ever. O give thanks unto the God of gods: for his mercy endureth for ever. O give thanks to the Lord of lords: for his mercy endureth for ever. To him who alone doeth great wonders: for his mercy endureth for ever. To him that by wisdom made the heavens: for his mercy endureth for ever. To him that stretched out the earth above the waters: for his mercy endureth for ever. To him that made great lights: for his mercy endureth for ever: The sun to rule by day: for his mercy endureth for ever: The moon and stars to rule by night: for his mercy endureth for ever. To him that smote Egypt in their firstborn: for his mercy endureth for ever: And brought out Israel from among them: for his mercy endureth for ever: With a strong hand, and with a stretched out arm: for his mercy endureth for ever. To him which divided the Red sea into parts: for his mercy endureth for ever: And made Israel to pass through the midst of it: for his mercy endureth for ever: But overthrew Pharaoh and his host in the Red sea: for his mercy endureth for ever".

Isn't that beautiful? Ephesians chapter 2 this time, Ephesians chapter 2 - and we have studied this passage of scripture in quite a lot of depth on a Monday night, but I just want to cast your eyes down to one particular verse and phrase within this passage. We'll read from verse 1: "And you", Paul says, "hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins: Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience: Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others. But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;)"

On that day when the Lord Jesus Christ bursts the clouds, and He takes us home to be with Himself - His blood-bought church that He has redeemed - and when we sit up there in heaven, and we sing the praises of Him who died, and we worship the Lord around that great throne, I believe that the sweetest song that we will have is the song of God's mercy. 'His mercy endureth for ever', 'kheh lay o-lawm hastoh' (sp?) - that's it in the Hebrew, right throughout that Hebrew song of praise: 'His mercy endureth for ever, His mercy endureth for ever'. I don't know whether this will happen or not, but as we sit in heaven, and as we have a moment to meditate and to ponder how we've got there - will it not be God's mercy? Will it not be the song of praise for what God has done, in pitying us and in having compassion on us, that will well from our being? When we think to ourselves: 'What right have I to be here?', and we think to ourselves of the cosmic rebellion that we all took part in by our sinful nature - when Lucifer was cast from heaven and the third of

his fallen angels came down, and when Satan entered into the garden, that subtle serpent, and man fell, and death came upon all men, and all are concluded under sin and under death - and when we think that we were party to the de-throning of the sovereign God of heaven...yet we are in heaven with Him.

We who, Paul says, were dead in trespasses and in sins. We who in a time past walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience - among whom we all had our way of life in times past in the lusts of the flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature children of wrath! Those who deserved the pangs of hell will be enjoying the pleasures of heaven. Those whose prospect was the excruciating torments of the lake of Gehenna, is now the ecstasy of eternal glory with God and His Christ for ever - all of mercy! Isn't that wonderful? Is it any wonder that three times in Psalm 136, the Psalmist invites God's people to thank the Lord for His mercy. That's what it begins with, look at it: 'O give thanks unto the Lord; for he is good: for his mercy endureth for ever'.

We believe that this Psalm was, perhaps, sung by two choirs - perhaps one of the choirs was a choir made up of priests and Levites, and the other individual singing was the high priest. You can just imagine the high priest singing out: 'O give thanks unto the Lord; for he is good', and that great congregation of priests replying back: 'His mercy endureth for ever'. Do you think we could do that this morning? I'll say the first bit, you say the second: [Pastor Legge:] O give thanks unto the Lord; for he is good...[Congregation:] for his mercy endureth for ever - powerful! Can you imagine it? How it would have sunk into the hearts of those sinners looking to a slain lamb, how God - who delivered them from Egypt - was merciful, and His mercy endured for ever! And this Psalm, like an 'interleaved' Bible, was teaching these Israelites to interleaf all things in life with the thought of the glorious mercy of God. Is it any wonder that Joseph Addison said this, as he penned his hymn:

'When all Thy mercies, O my God,
My rising soul surveys.
Transported with the view I am lost
In wonder, love and praise'.

What is the mercy of God? I want us to look at that first of all, to ask the question: what is this mercy? Secondly: where can the mercy of God be witnessed? And thirdly: what difference does God's mercy make to you? So first of all let's look at what the mercy of God is. If you were to define mercy, it simply is infinite, inexhaustible energy of God. It is His infinite, inexhaustible energy to be compassionate! His mercy is the manifestation of His love. We thought of His love a fortnight ago, well, this is how His love operates - this is the mechanism, the arm of God's love is His mercy. It is the result and the effect of His goodness - the Lord is good: '...for he is good: for his mercy endureth for ever'. His mercy is pity, He looks upon us and He pities us. His mercy is when He looks upon sin and He pities the guilt and the result of it, and He relieves!

You find God's mercy in the Old Testament, you find it in the New Testament - in fact, you find God's mercy four times more in the Old Testament than you do within the New Testament. We must banish the thought that the God of Israel in the Old Testament is an angry God of justice, a God of judgement; but the God in the New Testament, for the church, is full of mercy and grace and love. But our God - surely we've learnt this in the weeks that have gone by - our God is an unchangeable God! He is the same yesterday, and today, and forever! Although the New Testament, of course, is the full revelation of our God - and we don't know Him in all His mercy until we come into the New Testament - nevertheless God has always been, and always will be, a God of mercy...for that's what He is in Himself, mercy.

1 Kings 3:6, we read that God's mercy is great. Psalm 86, we read that He is plenteous in mercy. Psalm 103, from everlasting to everlasting is His mercy. Luke 1, He is tender in mercy. He is abundant, overflowing, 1

Peter says. Ephesians, that we read says: 'But God, who is rich in mercy'. And Psalm 103:11 says, for as high as the heaven is above the earth - that's God's mercy! Immeasurable, unlimited, eternal, stretching from age to age. It is the mercy of God that is the tugboat that draws the sinner's foundering vessel into the arms of God. It's what saves the sinner, the mercy of God. It is what draws him to a Saviour, that's what he says: 'The Lord is merciful and gracious...long-suffering...abundant in goodness'. In fact, when you go into the book of the Revelation - and indeed throughout the Bible - God is pictured and represented as being a great King, sitting on a throne with a rainbow about His throne. The rainbow, of course, is a representation of the mercy of our God.

Have you ever thought about that? That God, in the Bible, in His great revelation of who He is, is represented more in mercy than in anger. Definitely the mercy of God is deeper than the depths of His wrath and His indignation, for He loves to be merciful! He is more inclined to mercy than He is to wrath. It was Watson, the old puritan, said: 'For God, acts of severity are rather forced from Him, He does not afflict willingly'. It's like the bee in the summertime, busily going from one flower and its pollen to another - and what is it doing? It is [making] honey because it naturally does that, and it goes from a flower to a flower and eventually it goes home, and there in the honeycomb it makes its honey - it's natural to it. But then when a young child happens to annoy it, it stings! It doesn't sting naturally, but only when it is provoked - and that's like our God. God is naturally merciful, but when God is provoked He will be angered, but He loves mercy rather than anger!

Mercy is said to be the work of God's right-hand - most of us are right-handed, and that's simply what the word of God means: that it is the thing that God likes to use the most, His mercy. He is more used to His right hand, He is more used to exercising mercy. God does not, in a sense, want to inflict punishment - indeed, in Isaiah 28, it is described as 'His strange work', it is strange for God to punish people, He is slow to anger. When He punishes a nation in the book of Isaiah it is said of Him that He: 'hired a razor to shave them' - imagine God hiring anything! You would think God wouldn't need to hire anything or borrow anything! But in Isaiah it says He hires a razor to shave them in anger and indignation - as if it's not His own, He has to borrow this part to do an act of wrath!

Just think for a moment: imagine how God would be if He had no mercy. Imagine what the holiness of God would be if there was no mercy. Imagine what the justice of God would be if mercy had no part in it. But the mercy of God, just like that arch that we've been talking about, it overarches all His other attributes - and indeed, let me say this, that the mercy of God sweetens His other attributes. It's like old Moses, you remember, they came - the children of Israel - to the waters of bitterness and they couldn't drink from it, and what did Moses do? He cast the tree into the waters and made them sweet - and that is what the mercy of God is like to all His other attributes, it makes them sweet. It is one of His glories, it is one of the jewels in His crown - and in the very first week, as we were thinking about what it is to think right thoughts about God and contemplate God, we looked at Exodus chapter 33 and we looked at that wonderful encounter of communion of Moses with his God. He talked with God as a man talks with his friend, and we saw that in his brokenness, in his thirst after God - one who knew God in a way, perhaps, face-to-face that we will not know Him until we get to glory - he was able even to pray: 'Lord, show me Thy glory!' And the answer that was given back to Moses was this: 'I will make all my goodness pass before thee, and I will show thee mercy'.

That's what God wants to show to the world. In fact, even God's enemies receive mercy, it's like the dew that falls on the thistle as well as the rose. God's mercy - the sun shines on the righteous and on the unrighteous, and not just those that dwell in the presence of God. You remember Pharaoh, we read about him in this Psalm, as he was crossing the Red Sea pursuing, as a predator, after the Israelites - Pharaoh's head was crowned, and God had shown him mercy to put that crown upon his head. Even though his heart was

hardened, his head was crowned! For the Lord, the word of God says, is good to all; the Lord is merciful to all.

Now let's make a digression for a moment, because it's important to understand the difference between God's grace and God's mercy. At a quick glance you would imagine that there's very little difference between the two, but I want you to think of the angels for a moment. If you think of eternity past, and you think of heaven - no creatures in the sense of men and women like you and I, but the angels are in the presence of God. And let me say that the angels experienced the grace of God, they experienced the goodness of God, for they were dwelling in His presence and that is the grace of God - to dwell in His presence. They were serving God, and no creature - even an angel - can serve God without His grace. The very fact that two-thirds of the angels didn't fall shows that God's grace preserved them, God's grace pulled them back from their sin and their rebellion. Yet in all of their grace they never, ever knew the mercy of God.

If you think about it, the fallen angels, in 2 Peter 2 and 4 it says this: 'God spared not the angels that sinned, but cast them down to hell, and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved unto judgment'. Those angels that fell from heaven, they never knew the mercy of God! And even the ones that didn't fall from heaven never knew it either, because you have to sin to know it. But it's not just sinning, it's sinning and having the grace of God restore you in mercy - and only a human being can know that. You see, what mercy is is simply this: human misery, human degradation, human depravity, human deadness in their trespasses and in their sins - and a God taking pity and compassion, and love and goodness, and coming down to relieve that pain! That's mercy, and what mercy it is!

Secondly: where can the mercy of God be witnessed? There are several places that it can be witnessed, and the first is this: in all life, all life. The puritans, who were right in a lot of things, distinguished in their theology between the general mercy of God and the special mercy of God. 'The general mercy of God', they said, 'is to all creation' - as the Psalmist says, 145: 'The Lord is good to all: and his tender mercies are over all his works'. Even the brute beasts, the animals in the field, even the very sparrow that falls - the Lord Jesus Christ says - God has mercy upon them and pities them. 'The earth', the Psalmist says, 'is full of thy mercy' - that is the general mercy of God, shown to all. Then there is the special mercy of God, and that is shown to those whom He saves. Those who have faith in Him, God lavishes His mercy upon them. He's described - a child that trusts in God - as being a vessel of mercy. God has restored him from judgement and justice. The child that has known the mercy of God has been saved that God may make known the riches of His glory to them.

You know it in regeneration, I hope to God it's happened to you! Like Paul on that road to Damascus, he had no thought of God - that's what he says! He was in ignorance of who the Christ was, and he's walking down that road going to kill Christians, going as the enemy of God - and out of the blue God arrests him! Boy, is that mercy. And God lets the scales fall from off his eyes, to see his sin - that is the special mercy of God, to be pitied, to be rescued from judgement and hell. And let me say this today: that mercy is not shown to everyone! No, it's not. It's not shown to men who are rebellious, it's not shown to young people who are proud and say: 'I don't need the mercy of God' - for the word of God says in Luke 1: 'His mercy is on them that fear Him!' If you don't fear God, you'll know nothing of the mercy of God. Listen sinners, Romans says: 'Not by works of righteousness, but according to His mercy He saved us. So then it is not of him that runneth, but of God that showeth mercy!' Do you know the mercy of God? If you don't know the mercy of God my friend, it's because of your proud, bold, sinful, deep dyed, damnable heart!

This special mercy, God lavishes it upon whom He wills who has faith in Him. This is a sovereign thing, this is the God of all gods who says in Romans 9: 'For he said to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion...Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth'. This is a baffling thing, that the Lord harden men against

Him? Now don't be confused about this, because men are very responsible for every single thing that they do - and let me say that God doesn't make a man evil, God doesn't make a man reject Him, that is given to your own individual choice. But let me say this: when God Almighty, the sovereign God decides to withdraw His influence in grace from your heart, your heart will harden! Oh, that men would know this! That if God decided to take His gracious sunshine away from your heart, He wouldn't need to harden your heart...it would harden itself. It's like when the sun sets, the temperature goes down and the frost comes across the road. You wouldn't dream of saying that, because the sun has gone out, that the sun hardened the ground. Did the sun harden the ground? No! But that gracious influence of God, that is why we say to you today - in the light of the Gospel - Pharaoh hardened his own heart! Because God took His grace away from him, his heart became hard - and God says to you today: if you hear His voice, harden not your heart! How terrible that on that judgement day, if you should stand before the Lord Jesus Christ, and it would be the mercy of God that would indict you! Imagine that! The very goodness of God would damn your soul, because you rejected it!

His mercy is in all life. Secondly, His mercy is in our circumstances. Now, you believers here today, this is for you. Psalm 103 says: 'For as the heaven is high above the earth, so great is [God's] mercy toward them that fear him'. 'To us', Corinthians says, 'He is the Father of mercies' - that means this, believer: everything in your life, every circumstance, everything that has happened to you, there is the mercy of God in it! It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed, is it not? Indeed, I'm led to believe that there is a place in Sicily, and it's situated in such a geographical place that the sun never, ever is out of sight, never. That's like the mercy of God in our believing lives, God's mercy is never absent, God's mercy is never invisible, it's never empty - and what a humbling thing, that even in our trials and our tribulations the God of mercy has His hand in it.

Thirdly: you can witness the mercy of God in redemption. Imagine this: the mercy of God without the atonement of Christ. Can you imagine that? I can't. The mercy of God is impotent without Calvary. It has no power, it's no good to you - and that means this: that sinners can't cast themselves on the mercy of God and reject Calvary! Oh, there's so many doing that! 'I'll wait till I get to heaven and maybe God will let me in. It doesn't matter what religion I am, we all worship the one true God, and if He's a God of love and mercy He'll let me in' - God has no mercy apart from Calvary! For it was the mercy seat. In the Old Testament, the Ark of the covenant - the lid that was on top of it - wasn't it called the mercy seat? And that was the God-appointed place where Moses would commune with God, that's the place where the high priest, once a year on the Day of the Atonement, would sprinkle the blood, that was the place associated with covering and the removal of sin - through the blood God has mercy! The Lord Jesus Christ is His mercy seat. You see, Calvary is where God meets the sinner and extends mercy. Wasn't it said, prophetically, of our Lord Jesus Christ in the Psalms, 85: 'Mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other' - the mercy seat! Have you been there? Have you been to Calvary? Oh, the hymn writers have put it well in all their different ways. One modern one puts it like this:

'Come worship at His feet,
Where wrath and mercy meet
And a guilty world is washed in love's pure stream'.

We were singing it this morning:

'Great is the Gospel of our glorious God,
Where mercy met the anger of God's rod.
A penalty was paid and pardon bought,
And sinners lost at last to Him were brought'.

Many a morning when round the table we've sung:

'Jehovah bade His sword awake,
Oh, Christ it woke 'gainst Thee.
Thy blood the fiery sword must slake,
Thy heart its sheath must be'.

Why? Because of the mercy of God.

It's seen in all, it's seen in your circumstances, it's seen redemption - and let me say this very soberingly, and this has shook me as I've been studying this: God's mercy is witnessed in hell. That's a strange thing, isn't it? Even, think of it, when the lost are cast into the lake of fire it is an act of God's mercy. It's not from your point of view, if you're not saved - but from heaven's point of view it is. You see, hell is the casting out forever of all sin. Forever! And is it not the mercy of God that in the new Jerusalem we read that there shall in no wise enter into it anything that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination? Can you imagine walking down the streets of gold and hearing blasphemy in one ear, and hearing the name of the Lord thy God taken in vain in the other? Can you imagine that? No! The mercy of God is towards the righteous - those who believe - so much that God won't have it, and every sin is damned in hell.

Oh, it's mighty, isn't it? It's awesome to think, as we read in 136, that God overthrew Pharaoh and his hosts in the Red Sea for His mercy endureth forever. How could anybody say the like of that? That's their song of praise! 'God overthrew Pharaoh in the Red Sea, for His mercy endureth forever', for it was the mercy of God. My friend, we read in Revelation 19 - and if you're not saved, you sit up and you listen up! John says: 'I heard a great voice of much people in heaven, saying, Alleluia; Salvation, and glory, and honour, and power, unto the Lord our God: For true and righteous are his judgments: for he hath judged the great whore, which did corrupt the earth with her fornication, and hath avenged the blood of his servants at her hand. And again they said, Alleluia. And her smoke rose up for ever and ever!' That's like saying: 'Praise the Lord, the damned are damned'. Even the mercy of God in the likes of that? Do you know what that tells me? If I was a sinner, without Christ in this meeting, it would tell me of the foolishness of those who believe that God's mercy will see them through the end. 'I'll take a chance. I've lived alright, I haven't done anybody any harm. I go to my church, I try my best, I'm good to my family - God would never cast me into hell! His mercy endures forever!' - that is to forget, my friend, that He's a God of justice, that He's sovereign in His mercy - and if you hear His voice, for God's sake harden not your heart, for God may withdraw His grace and His mercy and you'll be lost! God says: 'I will by no means clear the guilty'. He says: 'The wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the nations that forget God'.

Imagine a man or a woman, and they don't wash themselves, they don't clean their teeth and their teeth are rotten, they don't wash themselves and there are germs crawling over them - all over their hair and everything, under their nails - and they are getting diseased because of it. Do you think God would withhold disease from a man or a woman that lived in that condition? Not on your life! Do you think God will lavish His mercy on a soul that has heaped sin upon its own head? I don't know what kind of a God that is, but it's not our God! Do you know something? You can make God's mercy your enemy. Like sucking poison out of a beautiful flower, you can have a deadly, deadly blow dealt to your soul!

Thirdly: what difference does God's mercy make to you? What difference does it make? First of all, let me say to believers in this meeting, this is the difference: you ought to show mercy. That's what the Lord said in the beatitudes, isn't it? Matthew 5:7: 'Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy'. James 2:13: 'For he shall have judgment without mercy, that hath showed no mercy' - if you don't show any mercy in your life, God will judge you without any mercy. Luke 6:36: 'Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful' - show mercy one to another!

Secondly: you ought to trust God's mercy. Isn't that right? That's what the Psalmist said: 'I will trust in the mercy of God for ever'. Listen! Will you please think about this: the mercy of God, right now, here and now, is a fountain open - and if you would just let your bucket of faith drop down, you could take a draught, and drink by faith of that well of salvation. If you're not saved, well, listen to me: God's mercy is open for you now - it'll not be open forever, but it's open now! It's open now and the Lord Jesus says, 'whosoever will, let him come and take of the water of life freely'. Imagine going to court and there's a judge there, and the judge is pleading with the person in the dock! Have you ever seen that? I've never seen it! The judge pleading with the person accused? But this is your Judge pleading with you to partake of His mercy. My friend, this is baffling! Imagine the fool that would refuse such a thing! God is saying to you, in His mercy: 'Allow Me to love you, be willing to let Me save you!' - mercy pleases God! But unbelief smothers it, and if you're not a believer here, the bowels of God's compassion are shut up for you, the wounds gaping and the sore of the Saviour that flow forth that medicine for all sin and shame and iniquity are closed over for you. There is no compassion, there is no joy, there is no virtue in the wounded Christ for you! But if you would just believe, if you would just trust in His mercy, like Wesley you'd be able to say:

'Arise my soul, arise.
Shake off thy guilty fears,
The Bleeding Sacrifice
In my behalf appears.
Before the throne my surety stands,
My name is written in His hands.

My God is reconciled,
His pardoning voice I hear,
He owns me for His child,
I can no longer fear.
With confidence I now draw nigh
And Father, Abba Father cry'.

Like another, you could say:

'There is a wideness in God's mercy
Like the wideness of the sea.
There's a kindness in His justice
Which is more than liberty.

There is a welcome for the sinner,
And more graces for the good.
There is a mercy with the Saviour,
There is healing in His blood'.

Will you trust Him? Now come on! Will you? Such great mercy enduring forever! Will you partake of it?

And finally, for every child of God in this place: you ought to obtain mercy. Yes, you can show it, yes, you can trust in it - but you know, we can obtain it. We can go in prayer to God and look at Him - not in robes of justice and robes of wrath, but we can see God clad and arched in a rainbow of mercy. Imagine coming to a God such as that, a God whose mercy is toward us - that should add wings to our prayers, to know that God is so great, God is so mighty yet God is for us. We ought to come boldly before our God, knowing that He is merciful. Like the old puritan said, you wouldn't dream of coming to a fire that was lovely and warm and

wondering was there any warmth in it for you - would you? No - it's blatantly obvious, and my Christian friend it should be blatantly obvious to you that if you come to God you will obtain mercy.

It says of Samuel that on one occasion he took a suckling lamb before God - and every believer in this place, if you could take the Lamb of God in your arms, slain before God, into His presence knowing that it's through that Lamb that you come; if you would come to the throne of grace on His perfect merits and His finished work you would hear this: 'My child, you have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feelings of your infirmities, but He was in all points tested like as you are - yet without sin. Therefore, My child, come boldly unto the throne grace that [you] may obtain mercy!' - to obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

Let's say it again: [Pastor Legge:] O give thanks unto the Lord; for he is good...[Congregation:] for his mercy endureth for ever - hallelujah!

Now, let's bow our heads together. There are folk here that aren't saved - imagine not being saved, and in the very midst of the mercy of God! Do you think you're going to get away with that at the throne, when the Lord says: 'You were in the Iron Hall on the 7th of January 2001, and I opened up the windows of heaven and poured My mercy upon you and you walked out and refused it'? My friend, it's like the lead that comes out of the mine - when it's taken out of there it's very cold, but when it's put into the fire it's very hot. If you come to Christ now, in the day of salvation, you will know the mercy of God - but if you reject it will be the very thing that will damn your soul. Will you come?

Child of God, things are hard, things have been difficult - but whatever you do, throughout it all don't miss the mercy of God in it, for if we didn't have it we would be consumed - but great is His faithfulness. Rest upon it today, and if you're here broken hearted, reach out by faith to that throne boldly, and obtain mercy that you need.

Father, we thank Thee for such a merciful God, tender, compassionate, loving and good. And oh, Lord, You love and long to lavish Your mercy upon those that You've created - but Lord, Your mercy will never contradict Your justice and Your holiness. I pray today that every soul in this building this morning will be a partaker of the mercy - the special, saving mercy - of Almighty God, and that we all, children of God, may know what it is to boldly come and know the mercy of God to strengthen us in our need. In the name of the Lord Jesus we pray, Amen.

Transcribed by Andrew Watkins, Preach The Word - January 2001

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Behold Your God - Chapter 9

"The Grace Of God"

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Ephesians chapter 1 is our passage for this morning. If you're visiting with us, this is our [ninth] study on Lord's Day mornings looking at the character of our God - we've entitled it 'Behold Your God' - looking at His attributes, and what it means for Him to be God. Our last study in this series was 'The Mercy Of God', a fortnight ago, and this is our next which is 'The Grace Of God' - which is related to His mercy.

We're looking at Ephesians chapter 1, and we've studied these verses in considerable depth in our Bible Reading, but we're only looking at a particular element of them this morning. Ephesians 1 verse 5 to begin with - verse 4 says: "According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will". That word 'predestinated' in verse 5 always relates to what we are to become in the Lord Jesus Christ. It's not so much speaking of a destination, whether it be heaven or hell, but speaking of a disposition that we will have one day when we are like the Lord Jesus Christ - and because we have been saved by His grace that is the plan that has been set in order.

Then in verse 6 Paul turns in to that great doxology of praise that is repeated throughout this epistle: "To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved. In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace".

I would vouch to say that there is no other word in the English language that describes the mind of God, and discloses His thoughts toward us, greater than this word 'grace'. In fact, the word itself is a beautiful word. It has been used in different ways within our English language to describe grace and beauty, but even in the Greek language it is called 'karos' (sp?) - that's the Greek word for grace - even it sounds beautiful to the ear. But even more beautiful than the word itself, is the theme behind it and its definition that we have within the word of God. Is it any wonder that Philip Doddridge wrote:

'Grace 'tis a charming sound,
Harmonious to the ear.
Heaven with echoes shall resound,
And all the earth shall hear.

Saved by His grace alone,
This is all my plea.
Jesus died for all mankind,
And Jesus died for me'.

We could define grace simply as this: that God's grace is Him taking responsibility for our situation. It is an attribute of God, and we have been looking at the attributes of God, but this is a little different in that this attribute is optional, it is voluntary. This attribute of the grace of God lies within His sovereignty - and what I mean by that is simply: God is not obliged to show grace toward His creation. He is a God of grace, but He is not under any obligation to lavish His grace upon us in the way that He has done, revealed within the word

of God. But the miracle of grace is this: that He has stooped from the heights of His majesty to the depths of our misery - and grace has only one direction: it is only exercised downward.

We learnt in weeks gone by that God is transcendent, that God is above all things and in everything He is transcendent - we cannot reach Him. So it's logical to realise that if God is to be gracious to any, He is gracious in a downward sense. Grace is often defined as God's unmerited favour, and that is exactly what it is. It is unmerited and it is unmeritable, you cannot earn God's grace, you cannot work for it or strive for it, it is something that God lavishes out of His free, sovereign will - optionally and voluntarily God shows His grace toward us, that's why it's a charming sound! That's why it's harmonious to the ear, that's why heaven and earth echo and resound, and all shall hear!

We've learnt in weeks gone by about God's divine justice, and we have seen that the wages of sin is death, and in God's holiness and in God's justice He demands the sinner's death. It is righteous, it is holy that He does so. But divine grace is that attribute of God whereby He intervenes, He comes in in mercy, He stays the hand of His wrath and justice and that great God sets the sinner free! What a wonderful theme! I'm glad today that this is the theme that we're studying on as we've come from the Lord's table, as we've sung the praises of the Lord Jesus Christ - to realise that we worship a gracious God! We looked a few weeks ago at how God's mercy is deeper than His wrath, we can say that of God's grace, His love, His goodness, His loving kindness endureth forever!

We could define God's mercy, as we did, as God withholding what we do deserve - we deserve hell; we deserve God's justice unrestrained, unexhausted; we deserve not even to live on this earth, not to be given domination of it and control; we deserve to go straight into an eternal damnation - but God's mercy is Him withholding what is our just dessert. If that is God's mercy, God's grace is His giving what we don't deserve. His mercy is withholding what is our right, His grace is giving us what is not our right. Indeed, J.M. Darby said this: 'Grace is great on the part of the one who gives it, and mercy is great on the part of the one who receives it' - and, oh, it is great, isn't it!? Great mercy! Great grace of our God!

You would wonder why a world rejects such grace. Indeed, as believers, as we walk in our pilgrimage on the earth, at times it's very hard for us to accept the grace of God and all that it means. If I could illustrate it to you in this way: if you imagine that you're invited by her majesty the Queen to go to the palace. She brings you into the palace to a great banquet, and you're seated at a table filled with the choicest foods. She, and her house, and her servants, make every effort for you to enjoy that hour in her presence. You have a wonderful time, and as you exit the palace the Queen stands at the door to greet you goodbye - and what do you do? You put your hand in your pocket and you dig down deep, and as you leave her you press into her hand a pound coin - and you're heard to say: 'Now thank you very much for your kindness, I've enjoyed it and I realise it cost you a lot to do what you did, and I want to help you a little bit for your kindness to me'. Now, what would that be classed as? I think in royal etiquette it would be classed as the insult of the highest degree! That 'Her Grace', if you like, brings one of her subjects into her presence, lavishes graciously upon them, and then they feel obliged to pay her back - it is an insult to the giver!

This is the problem that men and women in our world today, and even those in Christ, have with the grace of God - it's difficult for us to grasp it and accept it, why? Because of the old mother pride in all of us! Sin, the mother of all sins is pride, and we feel that we must have something to do with it, we must have a part, we want to contribute - but when God comes to us and He withholds His wrath in mercy, and He lavishes His grace in His graciousness, we find it hard to take in, don't we?

I want to speak to you on grace from three perspectives. First is past grace, the second is present grace, and the third is future grace. Let's look at the first: past grace. This epistle of Ephesians deals quite extensively with the subject of salvation, doesn't it? And we find, right at the beginning of this book, that salvation is a

salvation of grace. It starts with grace - why? Because salvation starts with God - that's so important for us to note in this day and age in which we live, where man is given all power, almost, in his own soul. 1 Peter 5 tells us: 'The God of all grace' - salvation is of the Lord, and therefore it is of the Lord of all grace. He even says Himself: 'I am gracious, I will be gracious'.

One of the reasons why men today find it hard to grasp the graciousness of God is because they have not found certain truths that they need to find as a foundation to enjoy the grace of God. The first is this: the moral state of man. Men today find it very difficult to accept the word of God, that all have sinned and come short of the glory of God, that there is no difference, no not one, that all are undone under sin. Because of that, man - and even some believers - try to compensate to cover over their inadequacies and their falling short from that grace of God. You see, you have to admit that you're a deep dyed depraved sinner.

The second thing that stems from that is the consequences of sin: that the wages of sin is death. But life today, in general across our world and especially in the West, has lost this concept of justice. They have lost the idea of punishment, that punishment is necessary - and even right down to the family home, we've seen it in recent days, discipline is ignored! Therefore, when it comes to God, there is not seen any need that God should punish sin and that God should banish sin away from Him. But the word of God teaches us that God visits sin upon the lawbreaker, and God comes to him in His wrath because of his sin.

So, there is the moral state of man, there is the consequences of sin, but thirdly there is the spiritual helplessness of man. Man is almost - and I say that's a big almost - able to do anything in the age in which we live! Therefore he has become intoxicated by his own importance, and I believe in many minds he feels that he can reach God of his own will, that he can stem the gap between God and him that is made from his sin. But the fact of the matter is this: that no-one can mend their relationship with God - and the sooner men and women, and believers, realise their moral state before a holy God, realise the consequences of their sinnership, and also realise that they are helpless to mend the gulf betwixt them and God, then they're on the first step to the grace of God! Toplady was right when he said:

'Not the labour of my hands
Can fulfil Thy laws demands.
Could my zeal no respite know,
Could my tears forever flow,
All for sin could not atone -
Thou must save and Thou alone!'

We've learnt that God cannot just forgive sin - that astounds some people you know, that God who is sovereign cannot just wipe sin away. I say this to you today, as we look at the grace of God, even the grace of God cannot just wipe the slate clean! For in the same way that God's grace cannot be separated from His justice, neither - and listen to this - can the grace of God be separated from the cross of God! Sin must be punished, and the wonder of it all - Hallelujah to the Lamb! - is that the Lamb of God takes away the sin of the world, that the justice of God can be placed upon the Lamb of God, and that the righteousness of God can be placed on the child of God! What a cost the grace of God is to God Himself. That grace comes, yes from the depths of God's divine attributes and being, but we must never ever forget that the channel of His grace flows in the Lord crucified, and the Lord risen again!

Oh, was that not the theme of Paul's discourse right throughout all of His epistles, as we've read today in Ephesians chapter 1: 'In whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins, according' - what? - 'to the riches of his grace!' You can't divorce the grace of God from the Crucified One of God, and that's what the world's trying to do today, isn't it? 'God's a God of love. God'll not send people to hell - if you worship God, and you look to Him, and live a moral life' - No! God cannot be separated from

the Christ of Calvary! In John 1 and verse 17 we read: 'For the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ'. Titus says: 'For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men' - hallelujah for the Lord Jesus Christ, the grace of God!

You can see Him in the Old Testament - isn't it wonderful to think, yes the Old Testament is a book of law, of course it is - but the Old Testament also is a window of grace. You can see it in the life of Noah, Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord. It was said to Moses: 'Thou hast found grace in my sight' - God has always been a gracious God, God can never be without His grace, just as the sun must shine, God must show grace all of the time. If there was no grace in the Old Testament you wouldn't have Abraham, the friend of God. You wouldn't have David, the man after God's own heart. You wouldn't have Samuel, the one who could hear the voice of God; Isaiah, who saw the Lord high and lifted up; and Daniel, who was on his face before God three times a day. If you hadn't the grace of God in the Old Testament, Hebrews 11 would be empty! But hallelujah, no one ever was, or ever shall be, saved apart from grace of God. From Abel right to now, whenever grace was found in any man it was found by Jesus Christ - of course, grace and truth came by the Lord Jesus, but yet He was the Lamb slain before the foundation of the world. Those that worshipped in the old economy through the promises, through the typical teachings and the prophetic pictures and the sacrificial offerings that they gave - were they not pointing towards the Christ of Calvary? Were they not looking forward to Him? And those that are saved after Him are looking backward to the cross, but they are all saved by His grace! All that ever came, came through that grace.

Now it's difficult for us to receive, and even as a believer - if I can illustrate it to you in another way. I remember being with Barbara in a restaurant one time. Maybe this has happened to you: you're sitting there and see someone across the room who you know, and you wave over to them. This happened, and after the meal they were finished and they came over to us and they had a little yarn, and then they went home and we thought nothing more of it. After we finished our meal we went up to pay the bill, and the lady behind the counter said: 'The bill has been paid' - now maybe that doesn't happen to you, but it happens to me now and again! The bill has been paid! Now, there's a mixture of feelings, isn't there? You feel: 'Boy, that's wonderful!', but with many of you - and you'll know what I'm talking about - deep down you think: 'It's been paid? Well, can I not leave a tip?'. Then you feel like going home and ringing the man and saying: 'Now, look that was out of order, it was very nice' - but you know, we feel that we must do something. And then we wreck our brains thinking about how we're going to pay it back, we have to buy a card, or get him a present or something like that - and we find it very difficult not to do anything for anything we get!

Isn't that the truth? In a world where everything has catches and fixes, we look for the small print - and anything that sounds like 'the grace of God that is free and unmerited and unmeritable', we say: 'There must be a catch in that! That can't be true! It can't be transparent, there must be something more'. Yet Paul says: 'By grace ye are saved through faith, that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God - not of works, lest any man should boast'. Just like oil and water don't mix, neither do faith and works. It's hard to accept, and it's harder even to accept that just as God is eternal, just as God is infinite, God's grace is eternal, His grace is infinite - you can't measure His grace, you can't limit His grace, you can't fathom it. How do you understand? You can't understand a grace that is wide as the sea - can't understand! The only way we can really get a bit of a grasp of what this grace is really like, is to compare the grace of God to our great need. That's why I was going over those three points about the moral state of man, the consequences of our sin, the spiritual helplessness of man - because unless you understand our dire need, you'll never ever appreciate the greatness of God's grace.

Sure, we can't even grasp the enormity of our sin, we can't even fathom the great sinners that we are - but what a miracle that we can know: that where sin abounded, grace hath much more abounded! Now think about that for a moment: till the day you die, or the Lord Jesus comes or calls us, we will have committed a complete number of sins. Now, you or I could never think of that number - it might be a number that's bigger

than we can count to - but it is a fact that there must literally be an exact number of sins that we have committed, and that is unfathomable, we can't really understand that. That, if you like, is how sin abounds in our life. But the grace of God cannot be fathomed, the grace of God is eternal because God is eternal - there's not a number of times where God can be gracious to you, and that's what that means: 'Where my sin abounded, grace hath much more abounded'!

Grace was a great cost...for we see Jesus, that by the grace of God should taste death for every man. Do you remember Manasseh? Do you remember him? You should read about him, if you've never read about him, in the Old Testament - he's a monster! The things that he did, the barbarity that he showed to his own children - he passed them, sacrificed them, to the fire! The Bible says he filled Jerusalem full of innocent blood, he perverted all society in principle and in practice, making the place worse - God said - than even the pagan nations round about that never knew God. Yet, when you read Manasseh's story, you find that at the end of his perverse, depraved life God showed grace!

Paul. A murderer, a blasphemer, walking on his way, breathing out threatenings and murderings, to Damascus to crucify the Christians - imagine this! From the very depths, the Lord says, out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh - and what was his mouth speaking? Blasphemies, murderings, threatenings - yet God, oh, the grace of God - God could meet a man like that, and God could turn him round by His grace, and he could become the noblest martyr and the greatest apostle that ever lived.

What about the Corinthians? Sure 'Corinthian' and 'Corinth' was a byword, it was like a proverb, a nickname for perverseness, immorality of every conceivable kind. They wallowed in abominable vice and outrageous injustice - yet Paul says in Corinthians to them: 'Such were some of you: but ye are washed, ye are sanctified, ye are justified!' Oh, that's the grace of God - do you know why? Because the grace of God starts with God - what is impossible with men is possible with God, and possible with the grace of God. The God who takes the initiative, the God who doesn't rely on us, the God who - in the garden, in His grace - prevented Adam and Eve from eating of the tree of life, lest they should live eternally under death and the condemnation of sin. The grace of God that slew an animal and covered their nakedness in the garden by the shedding of blood. The grace of God that in Genesis 3 promised them a Deliverer, a Redeemer, and a Saviour.

Oh, what grace - and what a curse there is on those that don't preach that gospel of grace that we find written in the book of Galatians. But what a wonder to realise that, because of that atoning death at Calvary - think about it - we can now approach the garden that we were once banished from, there's no flaming sword, the prodigal can return home as a son of grace - for salvation, start to finish, is all of grace. What a great message to be able to preach this morning!

That's past grace, and I trust that you've known it - and if you haven't you need to know it now! But secondly there is present grace, because salvation doesn't stop the day and hour you're saved. Salvation continues in grace. James tells us, chapter 4 and [verse] 6: 'But [God] giveth more grace. Wherefore he saith, God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble' - now that doesn't mean God gives more grace to some sinners than others in order that they be saved. That's not what it means, but it means that God gives grace to all His children, He provides the grace that they need. What am I talking about? I'm not talking now about saving grace, I'm talking about sanctifying grace and sufficient grace for our suffering. You could sum it all up with the word 'strengthening' - strengthening grace. Can I ask you this morning, believer, do you know anything about this sanctifying grace? Of course you do - but do you walk in the knowledge of it day by day in your life?

As we go to Ephesians 1, we see there that predestination is in relation to holiness, isn't it? That is the reason God saved us, not just to rescue us from hell, but to make us holy, to make us like His divine Son - that we might be conformed to His image. He saves us so that He can start that work, but He lavishes grace upon us,

day by day down here, so that we can become more like Him. It's wonderful to know that the grace of God that is able to save us is able to keep us, isn't it? It's great for me to wake up in the morning and know that my destination in heaven has got nothing to do with how well I live this day. Isn't it wonderful? To know that the grace of God is able to keep me from sin, to sanctify me positionally, but also to make me ready for heaven day by day by day, as He changes me into the image of His Son - is He keeping you? Of course He is - but do you know the knowledge of it? Are you aware of the deep assurance that the Lord Jesus is working in you day by day, He is changing you. Paul said in Corinthians: 'God is able to make all grace abound towards you, that ye always having all sufficiency, in all things, may abound to every good work'. Are you abounding in good works? Good works will not save you, but if you don't have good works the chances are you're not saved! For faith without works is dead! But wonderful to know that God doesn't leave us and say: 'You're saved now, you go on ahead and try your best to do good works' - the God that saves us by grace keeps us by grace, He lavishes abundant grace upon us in all sufficiency, in all things, that we might abound!

Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound. Christian, if you don't feel you're sanctified today, where the sin abounds in your life, grace can abound today. The grace of God can overcome your sin, it can overcome your backsliding, it can sanctify you in all sufficiency. That's why Peter said that we are to grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ - are you growing? Are you? Are you growing in that sanctifying grace?

That grace is also sufficient for suffering. We don't have time to read it but, in 2 Corinthians chapter 12 verses 7 to 9, Paul tells us that because of the many revelations that God gave him, God also permitted that he have a thorn in the side. Paul tells us that three times he prayed to the Lord that He would remove it, but the Lord told him this: 'My grace is sufficient for thee'. Now we can almost say that verse - because it's so famous - without realising the meaning of it. God is saying: 'There is a grace for you that is sufficient, in your suffering, to strengthen you for life's burden'. What is your burden? It's a burden greater than you could ever have a prospect of knowing - you thought this never would have happened to you. You thought what you're going through would have gone to someone else, it would have been written at the date in their diary, not for you - but your nightmare has happened! Is God's grace not sufficient for you? I don't underestimate what you're going through, but does God not say that His grace is sufficient? Does God not tell us in His own trustworthy word, that He will give us what we need in the time when we need it? When our labours are hard, when we are suffering affliction, when we're in spiritual warfare with all the hordes of hell, the enemy, when we're going through life's trials and in our bodily and spiritual weakness - does God not say it's enough? Does God not say: 'My grace is sufficient for thee, for in your weakness my strength is made perfect'?

There is a poem that I love, written by Annie Johnson-Flint, and it preaches itself - listen to it:

'He giveth more grace when the burdens grow greater,
He sendeth more strength when the labours increase.
To added affliction He addeth His mercy,
To multiplied trials, He multiplies peace.

When we have exhausted our store of endurance,
When our strength has failed ere the day is half done,
[When we reach the end of our hoarded resources],
Our Father's full giving is only begun,

His love has no limit, His grace has no measure,
His power no boundary known unto men,
For out of His infinite riches in Jesus,
He giveth, and giveth, and giveth again'.

Finally, there is future grace. That is grace completing everything, putting the icing on the cake. Do you know you're a possessor of eternal life? People think that you don't get eternal life until you die, and you get to the gates and somebody hands you a package, and says: 'Now put that on, that's eternal life' - we have eternal life now! The Lord Jesus said: 'I give unto my sheep eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand'. We are secure, the poet said:

'Engraved as in eternal brass the mighty promise shines,
Nor can the powers of darkness raze those everlasting lines'.

We're saved and saved forever! Now my question to you, believer, is this: considering the past grace of God that saved you, the present grace of God that keeps you, and the future grace of God that will get you to glory - are you relying on it? Are you living in the grace of God? Or are you striving, are you trying in the flesh or in your own works, to live the Christian life? So many do that I believe, they're trying to live, they're trying to pray, they're trying to witness, trying to understand the word of God - and they've been saved by grace, but now they're trying to the Christian life by works! And whenever you hear that word 'trying' beware! You see, that's the trap the Galatians fell into and Paul had to say very strong words to them: 'O foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you, that ye should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ hath been evidently set forth, crucified among you? This only would I learn of you, Received ye the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith? Are ye so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh?'. Do you know what he's saying? 'You were saved by the Spirit, do you think you're going to live this Christian life by the flesh?' - not at all, it's not lived by the flesh. Do you know how it's lived? By the grace of God. That's why he said to them, chapter 5 and [verse] 1: 'Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage'. As Newton said: 'This is the grace that will lead you safely home'.

We're in David's Palace, he has his family around him just about to dine. The walls are gleaming with wood and brass. He looks at Absalom with his good looks, Tamar with her beauty, he looks around them all to make sure they're all there - but there is one that is missing. All of a sudden from the depths of the corridor there is heard a 'clump, scrape, clump, scrape, clump, scrape' - Mephibosheth walks through the door, sits down at his own seat, the tablecloth covering his leg. That's what the grace of God is.

Let me say to you, as we close: there is grace for you today that no mountain could ever exceed. There's grace for you today that the deepest abyss could not fathom. There is grace that is able to break the greatest bondage ever known to man, that nothing has been able to break before - like the wildest horse that ever ran along an Arabian beach, there is grace that is able to break the back of such a beast in your life. Think of it! There is nothing too hard for the Lord that grace cannot tame - the grace of God can drive the devil out of your heart, the grace of God can say: 'Let there be light!'. The grace of God can lift the drunkard out of the gutter, the grace of God can take a gun away from a murderer's hand, the grace of God can make a woman of the night pure and clean of all her guilt, and nail her filth to the cross at Calvary and make her a virgin in the Lord! That's the grace of God...the grace of God can lift the dying, deep damned sinner and say: 'Thy sins be forgiven thee'.

Do you say:

'Prone to wander Lord, I feel it.
Prone to leave the God I love.
Take my heart, oh, take and seal it,
Seal it from Thy courts above.

Oh, to grace how great a debtor' - are you not a debtor? I am.
'Daily I'm constrained to be.' - every day
'Let thy goodness, like a fetter,
Bind my wondering heart to Thee'.

We've surveyed it in the past, the present, and the future. Let us bow our heads, and we are all in need of the grace of God, so this appeal that I make is to all of you. There is a wideness in God mercy, like the wideness of the sea - and if you were to just drop your bucket of faith down into that, there would be plenty to meet your need. Plenty! Whether you're saved or not, God can meet your need today - why not ask Him, by faith trust Him, that He is able.

Father, we thank Thee that Thou art a God of grace, a God of tender compassions and wonderful love. Lord, we bless Thee that grace has saved us, grace will take us home, grace is keeping us at this very moment - and on that day when we look on His face, we will tell the story: 'Saved by grace'. Lord, may we get in touch and tap into the grace that is available for us, and we come boldly now to the throne of grace to find that grace that we need at this moment. Lavish Your grace upon all the heads bowed in this place, and them that are not saved by grace - that through faith they would receive of the Lord today. Now, may the grace of the Lord go with us, Amen.

Transcribed by Andrew Watkins, Preach The Word - January 2001
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Behold Your God - Chapter 10

"The Unchangeable God"

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We're turning in our Bibles to James chapter 1, James chapter 1. We're looking at our [tenth] study this morning in our series 'Beholding Our God', the character and the attributes of the great God whom we worship. We're looking this morning at 'The Unchangeableness Of God', or to put it in theological terms: 'The Immutability of God' - God does not change. Let's read from chapter 1 of James and verse 17 - just one verse as we begin our study this morning: 'Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above' - we could stop there and preach a sermon on that, couldn't we? How everything that we get in life is good, it comes from God - and we live in a generation today of materialism, and even the church of Jesus Christ tends to forget that, and you can see it in the absence of giving thanks around the table. We believe that we've got the good things - don't we? - they haven't come from God above, but they have as the word of God says! '...and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning'.

Many folk read the word of God, and if believers were honest, read the Bible and try to read it as much as they can - but they conclude the word of God to be in the past. What I mean by that is that it's a historical, chronological record of things that happened in a bygone age, thousands of years ago - it's historical. But the time distance, as they read of cultures and practises of old, that time difference seems to make a distance of another kind - a reality distance. We tend, whether consciously or subconsciously, to relegate the word of God to the past. There's a time distance so, we conclude, a reality distance. 'That was what God said then, that was the way God was then, that is the way He behaved to those particular people' - but we ask ourselves, at times, as we read Numbers and Exodus and various other books of the word of God: 'What is the relevance of these pages to my life? How does it relate to me in my personal experience, working 9 to 5, five, six days a week? How does this book speak to me?'

Because of this failure to bridge this reality gap through the distance of time, many folk resign themselves to following afar-off. They look at these pages and 'That's the Bible' - they make a separation between the spiritual and the secular in their life. Their job is the secular; the church, and the word of God, and the Bible Class, and the prayer meeting is the spiritual - but those two entities seem never to collide or even to assimilate together, but that is where we have to get. We have to get to the position where God is all our life, where God Himself saturates all our being, all our existence until there is no separation, there is no demarcation between the secular and the spiritual, and we begin to find out that the word of God has an awesome relevance within our life.

It is the journey of moving from knowing God's word, to knowing the God of the word. The reason why this God - Abraham's God, Jacob's God, Moses' God, Daniel's God, all the great prophets - minor and major - all the patriarchs of the word of God, the Apostles, the Lord Jesus Christ, all the church fathers - the reason why this God can be known is that He never changes. He is immutable, the unchanging God, He is always the same - and yes, there are cultural differences that we have to account for in the word of God, historical differences and features that these pages bring to us that we cannot bridge. We cannot go back in time to those days, we are in a modern, contemporary world - but the Bible was written, not to show us how these people lived, but to reveal to us the God they knew, for them that know their God shall do exploits.

The miracle of grace, and the miracle of this book that is living before us, is that the God that they knew can be known by us today. We can know Him in the same intimacy, in the same relationship, day by day, simply because He is the immutable God. He never differs from Himself. He never differs from what He used to be - and within the great Godhead there is no concept of growth, development, change. There is no variation within the Trinity, God is the immutable, unchangeable, eternal God - ever the same. So, as we look at such a vast subject as this, we must ask the question: how is God unchangeable?

That brings us to our first point: God's nature doesn't change. Who God, in essence, is never ever changes. The word of God says He is from all eternity: 'From everlasting to everlasting Thou art God'. He is described as the Eternal King, the Immortal God, the One who alone is immortal. Psalm 90 that we read from in our prayer says: 'Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever thou hadst formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, thou art God'. Before creation, before matter came into existence, God was there - unchanged from what He is at this moment in time. The Psalmist in 102:26 says of creation: 'They shall perish, but thou shalt endure: yea, all of them shall wax old like a garment; as a vesture shalt thou change them, and they shall be changed'. Isaiah says: 'He is the first and He is the last' - and that is repeated in the apocalypse: the first and the last, Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, the unchangeable, eternal, immutable God!

This brings, immediately, the distinction between the Creator and the creature. The Creator is immutable, the creature is mutable. The Creator is unchangeable, the creature is changeable. And all of creation is tarred with the brush of changeability, mutability. All that we see around us is subject to change, simply because it is not eternal, it has a beginning and it will have an ending - but this great Divinity, our great God Jehovah, never changes! He has no beginning, He has no ending, He can't grow any older, He never gains any new strength or loses any abilities that He ever had. He never matures, He never develops, He never grows stronger or weaker or wiser!

It's hard to conceive this, isn't it? The hymnwriter tried to conceive it well, I believe, when he said:

'We blossom and flourish
As leaves on the tree.
We wither and perish,
But naught changeth Thee'.

In the book of Daniel we find that men's kingdoms that they pride themselves in - and our own United Kingdom seems to do it at the moment - they have a head of gold, but they have feet of clay. The heavens, which we look out at at this moment, are the oldest record of God that we have - yet those records, one day, will perish, they will disappear, they will be burnt up in smoke to bring on the new heavens and the new earth. We ourselves, in our own flesh, are subject to change, decay - and even as believers, in our everyday spiritual life we are prone to fainting and, at times, to sprinting. One day we are down in the dumps, depressed by the circumstances of life, and the next day we can be up in the clouds - cloud nine - with great spiritual strength and zeal and enthusiasm. Even our health fluctuates like that, doesn't it? Our moods, our health, our psychological well-being, we're up and down on a spiritual roller coaster at times. But God never changes.

You see, if God changed He would have to change in [one of] two directions. He would either go from better to worse, or from worse to better. He can't go from better to worse because He is perfect - and because He is perfect He cannot go from worse to better. He cannot change in anyway - it's impossible, even when we begin to think about these things, to conceive of it. In fact, when we start thinking of God getting better or God getting worse, we have ceased to think about God! Because God cannot get worse or better - and whatever men hold to, if he can grow, if he can mature, if he can develop, I don't care what you call him, he's

not God! God is immutable, and that is why He is God. We say with the church father of old: 'All that God is, He has always been; and all that He has been and is, He will ever be'. Nothing He said about Himself in history, in the biblical record, will ever be changed. Nothing that the prophets revealed of Himself, nothing that they said, will ever fall away - it will always remain! That is why, within the word of God, the Lord is compared to a rock - a rock that is immovable, a rock in the midst of the ocean of His universe. And whilst the whole entire ocean surrounding is continually fluctuating - and as the word of God says, the wicked are like the troubled sea when it cannot rest - God is a rock!

You remember what Jacob said concerning Reuben - and I believe it can be applied to all the descendants of Adam's race - they are unstable as water. Thomas Watson, the great puritan, said of men: 'Their minds are like a sick man's pulse which alters every half hour'. That's what creatures are like, that's what all of creation is like - in fact, Jude the apostle, when talking of men (specifically apostates, but we all have that depraved nature within us) he said that they were like waves of the sea, tossed to and fro, they're like wandering stars, wandering forever from one point to another - they're not fixed! That is the reason that we proclaim in the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ that no man, no matter who he is or where he is, can be depended upon. That's why God says: 'Put not your trust in princes, nor in the son of man in whom there is no help' - isn't that right? People are fickle. God's creatures change at every whim. We can't put our faith in them, because people like you today and then hate you tomorrow - remember the multitude in the word of God that cried of our Lord: 'Hosanna to the Son of David!', but they quickly changed their mood about Him: 'Away with Him! Crucify Him!'.

But this One we think of today is the Father of Lights in whom there is no shadow of turning, or variableness, or change of any kind. What a great comfort, what a great blessing to our souls - as we realise how human nature cannot be relied upon, but to be able to proclaim from the word of God, as a salve to our souls, that God can! God is faithful, God can be relied upon - and no matter what our friends are like, or our relatives, or our fellow human beings in all their fickleness and mutability - there is a God who is stable, there is a God who is always the same, His purpose is fixed, He is there whose word is sure, that we can stand upon it! The permanence of His character assures us that we can trust in Him. Isaiah said: 'For the mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed, but my kindness shall not depart from thee; neither shall the covenant of my peace be removed, saith the Lord that hath mercy on thee' - what a God! What a fact to let your heart be filled with today: that no matter what changes in this world, the affections of God toward us as His children will never change! He will never love us less, because He cannot love us more. He will never pour His wrath upon us, because His wrath was poured upon His only begotten Son - that is the God who we worship today! That is the God that we come to, that is the God in whom our faith is, and that is the God whom we approach in prayer!

How wonderful to think - isn't it such an encouragement to pray, to come to a God who is unchangeable. As Charnock said in 1670 - and God hasn't changed since then: 'What comfort would it be to pray to a God that, like the chameleon, changed colour every moment? Who would put up a petition to an earthly prince that was so mutable as to grant a petition one day, and then to deny it another?' - but that's not our God, He changeth not. Our God has established His ways, He is set, He is firmly set and established - and He says to us today upon His unchangeableness: 'Come to Me. Come to a God as I. I am unchangeable!', and if we ask anything according to His will, He heareth us! He is immutable in His essence. There was never a time when He was not, and He will never cease to be - and because of that we can build everything upon our God! God's nature doesn't change.

Secondly: God's character doesn't change. Creatures are prone to illness, aren't they? Some of them dementia, and all of us when circumstances come in like a flood we find that our human character can be altered in certain ways. To a specific individual we all have different tastes, don't we? Different opinions, different outlooks on life of every kind. Our temper can change radically at times, we seem to take on a

'Jekyll and Hyde' character. But in the book of Exodus we read that God reveals Himself to Moses in chapter 3 and verse 14: 'I AM WHO I AM' - simple, isn't it? Simply profound, when we think of that fact - a shortened version of that statement is the word 'Jehovah', the name of God, 'Yahweh'. The One who was, the One who is, and the One who ever shall be - the eternal, unchangeable God that we know and love! This wasn't a description of Him Himself, but it's a declaration of who He is in self-existence. Not who He is in essence, but how He has continued through all time, is continuing, and will continue forever - self-existent, the immutable, eternal, never-changing God.

Now we've been looking at His attributes in the weeks that have gone by, and we have noted many things about them - but one of the things we note today is they will never change. So, if you heard about the love of God a few weeks ago, or the grace of God, or the faithfulness of God, or the mercy of God - and you've gone through a week of absolute turmoil and trial and tribulation, and you're maybe sitting here and [thinking] 'That was last week, and when I was in the emotion and the thrill of that meeting, hearing about the great God that I had - oh, it was great! I could have taken on the world, but now because of what happened this week...' - God's the same! His grace hasn't changed, His attributes haven't died or been diluted - the God that you heard about last week is the God of grace this week! Oh, it's wonderful. Whatever He has been, He will always be - God's character does not change.

Thirdly: God's truth does not change. We're all human here (I hope!), we have met people in our lifetime that don't say what they mean - many of them. Hypocrites and liars, and let's face it: we're all prone to it, we're all prone to bearing false witness, and trying to appear what we aren't really internally. The reason why men and women are like this is because they don't know their own mind at times - they're double-minded, unstable in all their ways, tossed to and fro like the chaff in the storm. They change their mind and they change their opinion - that's why you can get believers who believed in one thing 20 years ago, and they've just done a 360 degree turn the other way, they believe in something totally different. We're all guilty of that, but in Psalm 119 - that great testimony of the word of God - in verse 89 and verse 152 we read this: 'For ever, O Lord, thy word is settled in heaven. Concerning thy testimonies, I have known of old that thou hast founded them for ever'.

Isn't that so refreshing? In a world that is plagued and poisoned by relativism and political correctness, and 'Whatever you believe, that's truth for you, and what I believe is truth for me - but don't you try and make your truth my truth' - like Pilate as he stood before the Lord Jesus Christ and asked that question that this old dying world is asking at this moment: 'What is truth?'. You hear the Buddhists, you see them all, we hear Islam, we hear the Jehovah's Witnesses that come to my door, Roman Catholicism - what is truth? The world is confused, and God says: 'My word, My truth is settled in heaven! It will never change. I have established My testimonies, My decrees - My word is like Me, it is timeless' - and praise the Lord, it's not a relic of a bygone day, it's not something that we relegate to a certain dispensation, it's alive and it's in heaven today and it will never change! As the Lord said: 'Not one jot, not one tittle will be removed. Heaven and earth may pass away, but my words will never pass away'.

His nature never changes, His character doesn't change, truth doesn't change, and His purposes don't change. God's plans, God's eternal counsels, are immutable - He never changes His will. The prophet Balaam, in Numbers 23 and [verse] 19, tells us that in the famous verse where he says: 'God is not a man, that he should lie; neither the son of man, that he should repent: hath he said, and shall he not do it? Or hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good?'. This is a confusing verse because, if you're familiar with the word of God, many people read the word of God and they turn to Genesis chapter 6 and verse 6, and it says there that God repented that He ever made man. Then they turn to Numbers 23 and it says that God never repents, and then you get the wisecracks that say: 'The Bible contradicts itself'. You turn to the prophet Jonah, chapter 3 and verse 10, and it says: '[The Lord] repented of the evil, that he had said that he would do unto [Ninevah]' - and

there you have it again! God says He doesn't repent, and then He goes and repents - what kind of a God is that?

Some object to these truths within the word of God, but if you're a believer here (and perhaps you've been doubting about these facts) ask yourself, first and foremost, this foundational question: does the word of God contradict itself? No - Amen! (It wasn't loud enough!) No! You should all be saying 'no'! It doesn't, it cannot contradict itself! So, if you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, you've got to set that foundation first of all: God cannot lie. Then, when you do that, there's a simple explanation for the whole thing. We looked at the prophecy of Ezekiel a few weeks ago, and we looked at how God has not an appearance, God is a spirit, God is spirit. He doesn't have a body like you or I, He doesn't have hands and He doesn't have eyes, He doesn't have a head and He doesn't have feet - but yet within the word of God you read about the hand of the Lord, you read about the eye of the Lord being on all His children, you read about the mouth of Lord - 'the mouth of the Lord has spoken'. Now, does God have a mouth? Does God have arms - 'that is not short that it cannot save'? No! Of course He doesn't, but what God does do: in His book He is revealing Himself to us, and because our mind is so poor in grasping the eternal and the infinite, God - if I can say it - deigns and comes down to our linguistic level to communicate Himself to us.

Now, once you establish that, you've no problem when He wants to convey to us that He's looked upon us in grace by saying that He's changed His mind. He's trying to convey to us what He has done: 'It repented the Lord that he had made man' - He looked at their sin, their wickedness, only evil continually, and all their thoughts that were an abomination to Him; and He wanted to convey His anger, His pain for their sin. What about Jonah? 'God repented of the evil, that he had said that he would do unto them'. Listen to this very carefully: there may be a change in God's work, but there cannot be a change in God's will. Now please note the difference between those two things: He may will a change, but He cannot change His will. Let me quote a puritan: 'God may change His sentence, but not His decree'. I can illustrate it if you think of a king who causes a sentence to be passed upon a criminal, who he intends to let free - this has happened in law. The king, by his judicial status and by the law of the land, must pass that sentence upon that crime - that is his eternal counsel - but if he wishes, he can let that man free. Do you get the difference?

Here we have [it] in Jonah: God must condemn the Ninevites for their sinfulness and their abomination, God must pronounce judgement and His intention to judge us - but God, in His grace, exercised mercy upon them. Isn't it wonderful? God doesn't change - and though men may say He changed, the reason why His mind cannot change and He does not reverse His plans is that He is not like a man that He should repent. What we do as men and women is: we have a lack of foresight, we don't know what the future holds, we can't anticipate things as we're planning them - and that's why we have to change our plans at times, because something cropped up that we didn't account for. Sometimes it's not a lack of foresight, but it's a lack of power. We want to do a thing, we would like to carry out something in our life, our purposes and our desires, but we haven't got the power to execute our plans. But our God is omniscient, our God knows everything, our God can see into the future with His blessed foreknowledge, our God is omnipotent, all-powerful. He doesn't have a lack of foresight, He doesn't have a lack of power, because He's God omniscient and omnipotent!

'Change and decay in all around I see,
Oh, Thou that changest not, abide with me'.

Could I just digress for a moment to those who are not saved in our meeting? If you're unrepentant, it is a fearful thing to fall into [the hands of] a God who never changes. A God who never changes what He has said about sin, a God who has promised that you will be judged after death and you will stand before the Great White Throne, and He will not change His decree that 'the soul that sinneth, it shall die...and whosoever is not found in the book of life shall be cast into the lake of fire'. He has declared: 'Therefore will

I also deal in fury, mine eyes shall not spare, neither will I have pity - and though they cry in mine ears with a loud voice, yet will I not hear them! What a fearful thing! Some people tell me, as I talk to them about their soul: 'Well, I'll take a chance. I'll get to heaven and I'll hope that the good outweighs the bad - I don't care what the word of God says and what the revealed Christ has said - I'll get to heaven, and maybe this God of love, this God of mercy, will have mercy upon me and He'll let me in!'. This is the God that never changes - is He going to change just for you? Is He going to change His plans, is He going to let His nature be trodden in the dirt for atheists, and agnostics, and false religionists to point the finger and say: 'God changed His mind!'. The only way that God will change His mind toward you is because of the work that He has done at Calvary, in order that He might change that final end for you. And my friend, if you want to get into heaven you're going to have to go by God's way, and you're going to have to trust in the bleeding Lamb of Calvary.

Fifthly: God's Son never changes. I would love to have sung this morning: 'Yesterday, today, forever' - let's sing it:

[Pastor Legge and congregation sing]:

'Yesterday, today, forever,
 Jesus is the same.
 All may change,
 But Jesus never,
 Glory to His name.

Glory to His name,
 Glory to His name.
 All may change,
 But Jesus never,
 Glory to His name'.

But someone points the finger and says: 'But God did change - the Godhead changed when the word of God became flesh and dwelt among us, was that not a change?'. We look at that, and we say: 'Well, maybe it is a change - did God change? How can the immutable God change in that way?'. Well, the fact is that if God's divine nature had changed to be human nature, it would have been a change. Or if a human being had been changed, as some believe, into a God-man - well then you could say that God had changed. But the fact of the word of God is this: the Lord Jesus had two distinct natures - God and man in one person. That's not a change. There's the sun out there, isn't it? When the cloud comes in front of the sun, the sun hasn't disappeared, has it? The sun hasn't changed. And when the flesh - the holy, sinless, spotless flesh of the Son of God - veiled the word of God, the eternal Son, there was no change in the Godhead!

'Veiled in flesh the Godhead see,
 Hail the Incarnate Deity'.

Oh, it's wonderful, isn't it? That His touch has still its ancient power, and because He never changes He is able - still able - to save to the uttermost all who come unto God by Him, seeing He ever liveth to make intercession. He never changes.

Sixthly: our world changes. Doesn't it? The world around us...and the best way we can understand the unchangeableness of God is to compare it to the changeableness that we know within our environment. In God, change is impossible, but in man changelessness is impossible! Man's world is in constant flux, as A. W. Tozer said: 'Each man appears for a little time to laugh and to weep, to work and to play, and then to go, to make room for those who shall follow him in the never-ending cycle of life'. If you've ever studied English

literature, you'll find this out in some of the great philosophers, intellectuals, and poets: a great deal of their theme is despair. I remember coming out of English classes, at times, depressed at the outlook and the world view that these men and women had! - because all they could see around them was this continual change, and as they contemplated they despaired more and more because they couldn't do anything about it.

What a refreshing thing it is to turn to the holy writers in the word of God, and look at this change in a positive manner. Men and prophets who found that that change that they find in life can be cured! It can be helped by an unchangeable God - and the change that belongs to a fallen world around us, and in our fallen nature, God is able if we trust in Him to change all of that! It's an amazing thing that, for the child of God, change now works for us. Isn't that amazing? We were thinking in the breaking of bread of how death can work for us now to bring us to glory! Our greatest enemy has changed, because God in His great powerfulness can make change work for the believer in his own life, so that - as the apostle says - 'But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord'.

But you know, although God can make change work for us, change is still very distressing, isn't it? It's hard to bear, and it doesn't make us completely happy, and instinctively we seek something that never changes. We are bereaved at the passing of familiar things and familiar people. Faber put it like this:

'Oh, Lord, my heart is sick,
Sick of this everlasting change
And life runs tediously quick
Through its unresting race and varied range.
Change finds no likeness to itself in Thee,
And wakes no echo in Thy mute eternity'.

If we're following after God we will never ever be satisfied with change, and we will never be satisfied with this life. [Seventhly] and finally: God's changelessness requires our change. Although change and decay in all around we see distresses us in a fallen world, it's also a great blessing from God - and this is what I want you to see as we close our meeting. It's a blessing from Almighty, for the possibility of redemption, the possibility of salvation and an eternal home in heaven lies in God's ability to change us and to make a change in us. It lies in the ability of our lives, by the Spirit of God working within us, to change from a liar to someone who is truthful, to change from a thief into an honest person, changing from being filthy into pure, proud to humble - and so radical is that change of conversion that Paul calls what we used to be 'the old man', and what we have become 'the new man'. That's a change! That's a blessed change! A change of God in the inward. Hebrews says, with regard to the covenants - what a great change! - 'He taketh away the first, that he may establish the second'. Praise God that there is change.

As we close today, Thomas Watson said this - and this is what I want you to do: 'Get an interest in the unchangeable God - then thou art, as a rock in the sea, immovable in the midst of all changes'. Do you know what Isaiah said? 'Cease ye from man' - cease ye from man! Be done with men, forget about following men, forget about looking to yourself and look at this God! Stop trusting in a reed and trust in the rock! Trust in the Lord Jesus Christ who is the boat tied to the rock who is God, who says: 'I will never leave thee nor forsake thee...I will be with thee even unto the end of the age'. Ach! What else can we trust in? Health leaves us, friends leave us, loved ones leave us - but, like Noah's dove, if we would just flow into the ark of God's unchangeableness. Remember, the dove couldn't put its feet on anything else - everything else was sea, movable - but when he got into Noah's Ark...

They that trust in the Lord shall be like Mount Zion, which cannot be moved. Though our friends and men forget us and forsake us, and you know what it's like - their attitude changes toward us in their affections,

they revise their opinion of us with the slightest cause that they have. But how wonderful to know that God says to every one of His children today: 'I AM WHO I AM, I changeth not'. He is always in a receptive mood to receive us, He never changes His affections toward us - today He feels the same toward us as the day He sent His only begotten Son into the world to bleed and to die for us. His attitude toward the sinner is exactly the same today, as His outstretched arm says: 'Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest'. He never compromises, He never needs to be coaxed, He is the Lord that changeth not. All we have to do is align ourselves to Him.

'Fountain of being, source of good,
Immutable Thou dost remain,
Nor can the shadow of a change
Obscure the glories of Thy reign.

Earth may with all her powers dissolve,
If such the great Creator will.
But Thou forever art the same:
'I AM' is thy memorial still'.

Let's bow our heads and come to the unchanging God, who is always toward us in grace and mercy and love if we know Him. Let's rest by faith in His unchangeableness. Our Father, we thank Thee that though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea, the earth be removed, and the heavens shatter like glass - there is a God in heaven who will never be moved. There is a God whose word will never be changed, there is a God whose Son is always able to save - and, our Father, in the midst of our decay and death, we thank Thee that we have trusted in the One who is the resurrection and the life, and if we believe in Him we shall never die. Father, help us to rest by grace and through faith in Thy unchangeableness, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ we ask it. Amen.

Transcribed by Andrew Watkins, Preach The Word - February 2001

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Behold Your God - Chapter 11

"The Omnipresence Of God"

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Our text this morning, and our passage of scripture, is Psalm 139. A very famous Psalm to do with God in general, and there are many attributes of God that are found listed within this Psalm - but we're going to just read the stanzas that refer to the omnipresence of God as we study this subject together this morning.

Let me say that - last week I think it was - we had a watch, now we have a key and a watch! So if you are less of a key or a watch, please do come up here and I'll leave them sitting up here for you to take.

Psalm 139 and verse 7, David expressing this great doctrine of the attribute of God's omnipresence says: "Whither", where, "shall I go from thy spirit? Or whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there: if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea; Even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me. If I say, Surely the darkness shall cover me; even the night shall be light about me. Yea, the darkness hideth not from thee; but the night shineth as the day: the darkness and the light are both alike to thee".

One Sunday morning a lecturer in a theological college was sharing a seat on a train with a small boy as he went to church. This was recorded in the Philadelphia Bulletin, if you want to look it up - if you have a Philadelphia Bulletin - but you'll have to believe me and take my word for it! The boy was holding in his hand his Sunday School lesson leaflet, The lecturer sitting beside him was interested, and asked - in a friendly way - a question of the young boy. He said: 'Can I ask you a question?'. 'Yes sir, you can'. 'Tell me my boy', continued the man - thinking to have some fun with the lad - 'Where is God? If you can tell me where God is, I'll give you an apple!'. The boy looked up at the theological lecturer sharply, and promptly replied: 'I'll give you a whole barrel of apples if you can tell me where God is not'. Isn't that right? The child had more wisdom!

As A.W. Tozer said: 'The notion that there is a God, but that He is comfortably far away, is not embodied in the doctrinal statement of the Christian church'. We do not believe that God is in heaven alone, that God is separated from us, that we are far from God in a geographical sense. That is why I want us to first of all ponder the presence of God, as we begin our study this morning in His omnipresence. Then secondly, I want us to learn that we need to practise the presence of God within our lives.

So let us look, first of all, at this fact that we must ponder the presence of God. Now, let's dissect this theological word 'omnipresence'. The last word, you will recognise, comes from the root 'to be present' - and that simply means 'to be close'. We can say that God is here, and that to bless us with the Spirit's quickening power. It means that He is here among us at this moment, literally He is next to us, He is present. Now when we put the prefix 'omni' in front of it, the Latin word that means 'all', we get the universality of it. God is omnipresent, God is 'all with us' - all of Him is with us, all of the time, in every single place - He is close to everything, He is next to everyone. Literally, in the Latin, it means 'to be at hand'.

Now, that's a sermon in itself, isn't it? That our Almighty God, the transcendent God, the God of love, the God of grace, the God of mercy, the God of justice and holiness, is always at hand - always! This fact of the

omnipresence of God is taught with great clarity right throughout the word of God - and it would take a lot of effort to misunderstand its teaching there. It's very clear that God is round about us, always, in all senses, all of the time.

Now if we're pondering the presence of God, the first place, perhaps, that we will find it is in creation. I want to quote to you part of a sermon by a man called Gilfillen (sp?) - now, I don't know him, but what he has to say is very good. Listen to this, speaking of the Hebrew mind with regard to the omnipresence of God in creation, he says this: 'To the Hebrews the external universe is just a black screen concealing God. All things are full of, yet all distinct from, Him. The cloud on the mountain is His covering, the muttering from the chambers of the thunder is His voice, that sound on the top of the mulberry trees is His going away. In that wind which bends the forest, or curls the clouds, He is walking - that sun is His still commanding eye, whither can they go from His spirit, whither can they flee from His presence. At every step, in every circumstance, they feel themselves God-enclosed, God-filled, God-breathing men with a spiritual presence lowering, or smiling, on them from the sky, sounding in a wild tempest, or creeping in panicked stillness across the surface of the earth. If they turn within, lo, it is there also - an eye hung in the central darkness of their own hearts'.

God is as present as the air - that is the fact - He is all around us. As Ralph Waldo Emerson said: 'Nature is too thin a screen, the glory of the omnipresent God bursts through it everywhere!'. All around us we can see that, if we have eyes to see, that God is around us in creation - we can see Him. As the Psalmist said, there is no place in heaven, earth, or hell, where men may hide themselves from God's presence. God is in His creation, God is here in His universe, He is present, He is not detached - 'From a distance God is watching us'? No! God is here!

Now, we must be careful, as we ponder this fact of God in creation, that we avoid the error of pantheism. Pantheism simply believes that not only is God omnipresent, but God is in everything. In other words, God is in this pulpit, He is in the carpet, He is in the trees - that God is not a personality, but God is omnipresent. But we don't believe that: we believe that God is omnipresent, and God is an undeniable person, transcendent - although He is here, He is far removed from simple material things. This is why people can bow to wooden gods, bow to the trees, and the wind, and the sea, and the mountains, and worship them as gods - but that is not the God that we have. God, in scripture, is clearly set forth and testified as a personal God. God in three persons, blessed Trinity.

So, we see clearly - I hope - that God's presence can be pondered in creation. But secondly, God's presence is pondered in His own attributes, God's attributes that we've been meditating on these ten weeks or so. We've learnt that God is eternal, now that means that if God is infinite, God cannot be restricted to any area of geography, any space of land - there is no limit to God's presence. So if you put it like an equation: God's eternity plus His person, equals omnipresence. If God is eternal, He must equal omnipresence, He must be everywhere if He is an infinite God. William Newton-Clarke said: 'If God is not everywhere, He is not true God anywhere' - isn't that right? If God is God, He must be everywhere!

Now there are two ways that I want to bring this to you this morning, how God is omnipresent in His attributes. The first is: He is creation's environment. Now we've touched upon creation, but this is taking it a little further. It means this: that the finite creation does not contain God, like the pantheist believes - this desk contains God - but God is far greater, far bigger, who contains His creation within Him - and there is a difference. You see, there is no place beyond God for Him to be, there's nothing that exists beyond God. Everything that exists dwells within God - if I can illustrate it to you like this: just as the sea is the environment of the fish; and the air, the atmosphere, is the environment of the bird; God is the environment of His creation.

I'll quote another man, Hilbert of Lavarden (sp?) wrote this many hundreds of years ago: 'God is over all things, God is under all things, outside all things, within - but not enclosed, without - but not excluded, above - but not raised up, below - but not depressed. Wholly above, presiding. Wholly beneath, sustaining. Wholly within, filling'. Now we cannot understand that - and the moment we do understand it, we have understood God and He has ceased to be God. This is God's omnipresence - and to put it plainly in the words of a little child who was asked: 'Why is there but one God?', he said: 'Because God fills every place and there's no room for another one'. Isn't that it in simple terms? There is no room for another God, because God fills the heavens and the earth, for the heaven and the earth are within Him.

But secondly, we see His omnipresence in His attributes because He's creation's environment, but also He is equally present everywhere. Now this is very important for us to understand, God is equally present everywhere in the whole universe. This God of ours transcends all spatial and geographical limitations. Yet the paradox is He is present in every single part of the universe with His whole being. Now, I am here, and in half an hour or so I will be over there - but God is here and over there at the same time, in the same capacity, in all of His being! You don't understand it? Well, that's what makes Him God. Now, yes, the manifestations of His glory may vary at times, and He may present Himself in different ways, in different spots, in different eras of time - I'm not disputing that. But the fact is this: God is omnipresent, and as Jeremiah said [in] 23:24: 'Can any hide himself in secret places that I shall not see him? saith the Lord. Do not I fill heaven and earth? saith the Lord'.

He's not simply filling the heaven and the earth with His knowledge, or with His influence, He is filling all of creation with His very essence, equally, everywhere. That means this: there is not a place in the universe that we can imagine that is deprived of God's presence. Boy, that's a comfort, isn't it? We'll see in a few moments the great comfort that it is. It was a comfort to the Psalmist in 139 that we have been reading, if you look down at it, this is a great Psalm - as I have already said - on the nature of God. The 24 verses that you read here are divided into four stanzas, with six verses in each stanza. The first stanza tells us God is omniscient, He sees everything: 'Lord, thou hast searched me, and known me'. The second stanza we read from verse 7 to 12 tells us God is omnipresent, He is everywhere: 'Whither shall I go from thy spirit?'. Then the next stanza tells us God is omnipotent, God is powerful, all-powerful in fact. The last stanza tells us that God is omniscient, in other words all-righteous, there is no unrighteousness or blemish in Him.

Now, the Psalmist writing: 'Whither shall I go from thy spirit? Whither shall I flee from thy presence?' - it wasn't that he was running away from God, don't get that into your head! But what he was saying is: 'If I tried to run away from God, I couldn't! Because you can't run away from God'. What the Psalmist is saying - now get this, and really try to grapple with this - God is in heaven, God is on the earth, and God is in hell! We find that difficult to understand, but this is what the Psalmist is telling us: you can't even take refuge in darkness, because there is no difference between darkness and light to God - in fact the darkness is light to God. If you're going to hide in it, He'll show you up, don't you worry about that - the light of His glorious presence will expel all darkness! In heaven there is the presence of God's glory, in hell there is the presence of God's wrath.

The sad thing is that our world runs from God, and maybe you're here in our meeting now and you're running from God - well, here's the news for you: you can't run from God. Can't run from Him! You can't even escape God in hell, for it's God's hell! How different is the God of the Bible from the gods of this world, the idolatries that we see from day-to-day? You see the difference is that unbelievers in our world, and religious systems, don't know where their god is, do they? They can't tell you where [their] god is, they can take you to show you their god. You can see this illustrated in the Old Testament in 1 Kings 18, the prophets of Baal called upon their god and there was no reply. You remember they cut themselves, and they shouted for their god to come and reveal himself - Baal! 'And Elijah mocked them, saying, Cry aloud: for he is a god; either

he is talking, or he is pursuing, or he is in a journey, or peradventure he sleepeth, and must be awaked' - and they did cry aloud, they did shout, but there was no response.

Now, that's not like our God - praise Him, He's not like that! You don't need to behave the way the Baalites behaved, you don't need to cry for God's presence in the sense of Him being here - God is here! He is beside us! We should never believe that God is far removed in any shape or form, we should never behave in our lives as if He is not near us in a geographical sense. That is what the apostle was trying to get across to the Greek mind, when he said in Acts 17: 'In him we live, and move, and we have our being'. Like the goldfish in the bowl, our existence - our great world that we think it to be, all of creation - exists in God. To sum it all up, Augustine was right when he said this: 'God is not partly here, or partly there, but He is totally present at every point of the universe'. Thomas Brooks, the puritan: 'God is an infinite circle whose centre is everywhere, and whose circumference is nowhere'. Though heaven be God's palace, yet it is not His prison - it's amazing, isn't it? God is neither shut in anywhere, or shut out of everywhere - He is omnipresent. Ah, that's a blessing!

But thirdly, His omnipresence is seen in creation, it is seen in His own attributes, and thirdly it is seen in the Gospel - the gospel of God's grace. Now, you can see it a little bit in Jonah, the book of Jonah, because you remember that Jonah was foolish enough to think that he could flee from the presence of God. He asked the question: 'Whither shall I flee from Thy presence?' - and he thought: 'Well, I'll get on this boat, and go across the ocean, and I'll flee from His presence'. He attempted the impossible: to run away from God - which teaches us that you can't run away from God in a location. You can't hide anywhere in God's universe from Him! Now, I think that Jonah knew better than this - I really believe that he believed that God was an omnipresent God, but I'll tell you what I also believe: that his disobedient sin had warped him so much that he couldn't judge right from wrong. Isn't that what happens? Sin gets in and lets us forget what God is like. It dupes us into thinking that we can escape God, that we can hide from God, and that we can hide our dirty hands that we committed the sin with. But Jonah soon found out, in the belly of a whale, that he couldn't escape God - not even in that belly.

Thinking men throughout all the ages - philosophers, and theologians, and all sorts of academics - have concerned themselves with the great question of what kind of world this is. The materialist believes that it's simply material, all that exists, and all that you see, that's all of reality - there's nothing beyond that. They believe that the source of life is within itself, in other words if you can't see the source of life, it doesn't exist. Evolution, the big-bang, and then there is creation - and creation has within it the capacity to bring life, and to take life away, and it's all found within its own self, there is no spiritual realm, there is no greater power or One who determines anything. But, you see, the omnipresence of God answers all these questions, doesn't it? It declares and imparts the supreme value of men to God, that God is willing that His presence should dwell with men! God is present to man, God is near to man, God sees him and knows man through and through - and that's the beginning of faith. That's the beginning of realising the origin of the species, that's what it is - faith! Being able to see the evidence of things not seen! It's beginning to realise that God is, and God is here! When you lay that foundation, you throw out all the nonsense of Darwinism, and all the spiritual evolution that some theologians believe in, that God used these things. God is the supreme life, God is above all things, God is the Creator, God is everywhere, God is, and God is here!

Now, if you lay that foundation, you understand the book of Hebrews which says this - this is faith, he that cometh to God must believe that He is. Christ said, John 14 and 1: 'Believe in God', we could leave it there in the sense of what He's trying to say - you must start at this point: 'Believe in God, and then believe also in me'. Believing in God is the foundation of believing in Christ, and Romans tells us now in the gospel, in the preached word of the logos: 'The word is nigh thee' - isn't that it? The omnipresence of God in His gospel. James Cabbett (sp?) said this - and listen, unbeliever, if you're in this meeting, backslidden child of God: 'We

cannot get away from God, though we can ignore Him'. C. S. Lewis said: 'We may ignore, but we can nowhere evade, the presence of God - the world is crowded with Him'!

Canon W.G.H. Holmes of India tells of a story of seeing a Hindu worshipper - and we've seen many of them on our television screen. 'We see them tapping on trees', he said, 'on the mission field, tapping on stones, and lifting them and whispering: 'Are you there? Are you there?' to the god that they hope to find within it'. Isn't that what some believe? But the Christian can say: 'God is indeed here, God is everywhere, but He is not confined to stones or to trees, but He is free in His universe, He is near to everything, He is next to everyone - and the miracle of the Gospel is that, through Jesus Christ His Son, He is immediately accessible to every heart'. Isn't that wonderful? This is the foundational thing, as Martyn Lloyd-Jones said: 'The fundamental thing, the most serious thing of all, about God's omnipresence is that we are always in the presence of God'. What would our lives be like if we believed that there was not a moment in existence that we were outside His presence? William Seeker said it well: 'A man may hide God from himself, and yet he cannot hide himself from God'. One moment, you're in this meeting and you're hiding God from you - you don't want to know His word, you don't want to know His gospel. You've been hearing home truths, maybe from this pulpit, or from another mouth, and it's coming home and you want to hide God - you can't! He is the omnipresent God.

So, we have pondered His omnipresence in creation, in His own attributes, and in His gospel. But let's look in the second half of our message, that we must practise the presence of God. Augustine it was who once was accosted by a heathen who showed him his idol, his god made of wood, and said to Augustine: 'Here is my god, where is thine?'. Augustine replied: 'I cannot show you my God, not because there is no God to show, but because you have no eyes to see Him'. Isn't that wonderful? Isn't that the truth? You need eyes to see Him, and although Henry Amelial (sp?) says: 'From every point of earth we are equally near to heaven and the infinite', yet many in our world do not see Him! Perhaps we could go a step further and say: 'They will not see Him!'. They look to creation, they look to God in His attributes, they look in the gospel, and they see nothing that they should desire Him. You see, you need eyes to see the presence of Almighty God.

Now, I want to address the believers in this in two ways. First of all: we must practise the presence of God in communion with God. Secondly: we must practise the presence of God in receiving comfort and strength from God. Let's look at our first: in communion with God. Now, I believe this was the vision of that old French monk, Brother Lawrence in the 1600's - and let me advise you, please, if you can get your hands on his book: 'Practising the Presence of God', do so! It is before the Reformation, so there may be one or two things that you will find hard to swallow, but that man knew God more than any of us, I would dare to say, in this place. He wished, and this is his desire, that at all times he would be conscious of the divine presence. That was his one goal in life, he was a cook in the monastery, that's all he did - cut up carrots, and peel potatoes, and clean floors - but his desire was a greater desire than many, to always, in everything, seek the glory of God and look for His glory in all that we do and say.

I believe the little man was right: that this is the holiest of all occupations. Let me quote him: 'Our life is to find joy in God's divine company, and to make it a habit of life. We should apply ourselves continually so that, without exception, all our actions become small occasions of fellowship with God'. I said to you before in the Bible Reading that he said: 'If I can pick a carrot off the kitchen floor for the love of God, I will do it'. That's practising the presence of God - in communion with God! One of the most infamous 'free thinkers' of England was a man called Anthony Collins, he died in 1726 and he was the author of the well-known book 'Discourse In Free Thinking'. One day he was walking down the street, and he met a poor working-class man on his way to church, and he stopped him and he said: 'Where are you going?'. He said: 'I'm going to church, sir'. Collins, thinking he was clever, said: 'Is your God a great God or a little God?'. He was attempting to confuse the simple fellow, and the church-goer turned and gave him the perfect answer, he said: 'He is so great, sir, that the heaven of heavens cannot contain Him, and so little that He can dwell in my heart'. Collins

later admitted that this simple, but sublime, answer of an uneducated man had more effect upon his mind than all the volumes of argument that he had ever read in any book of religious apologetics! Isn't that it?

Your God, Christian, dwells and inhabits and fills the heaven of heavens - yet He's in your heart. If you could grasp that, that God dwells around us, yes, that God is in everything and around everything, and everything has its existence within Him - but the miracle is that He is in us! That He can fill us by His Spirit, and we can know communion with God in the holy of holies of our spirit. If you could picture yourself standing on a ship in the mid-ocean, and the sun is setting, and you - on the deck of that great ship, in the great Atlantic, perhaps - can see the reflection of that sun on the great wide ocean, can't you? But then if you're transported to the mountain top, and you see a great mountain lake, and the sun is setting at the same time - it's a lot smaller than the great ocean, but still you can see that reflection in the mountain lake. If you were lifted to a little spring trickling down from the top of the mountain, still you would see that reflection of the sun - isn't that right? My friend, the wonder of God's omnipresence is this: that no matter who we are, no matter how great we believe ourselves to be, or how small we are in insignificance - the reflection of God's omnipresence can be seen in all! All of us - miracle of Ephesians - can be filled with all the fullness of God. The possibility of your life, my friend, being filled to capacity with the omnipresent.

So, we see it in communion with God, we must practise it there. But secondly, we must practise it also in receiving comfort and strength from God. Now, if this hasn't already been a comfort and strength to your soul there's something wrong! What a comfort and a strength in sorrow, in depression, in great need - the omnipresence of God is a source of strength to the Christian! His objective presence that is always there, that is not affected by anything. Now, the thing that I want to convey to you this morning is this: this presence not only can be known, but it can be experienced - and there is a great difference. For there is a multitude of believers in our world today, and in our land, who know a great deal of things, but experience is a mile off. My friend, this is wonderful, it was the very presence that was promised to those who love and serve the Lord Jesus Christ, 'ere He left this scene. It was His presence that he promised to His own, John 14: 'We will come unto you and make our abode with you, go into the world and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen'.

Wasn't it that presence that was given to His church, for His own believers to enjoy and love? Ephesians 4:6: 'One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all'. The Lord Himself said: 'Even though their numbers be few, I am in the midst of them'. The Psalmist said: 'Even in the presence of the dying, the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for thou art with me' - presence! Psalm 121, the great Psalm: 'I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help. My help cometh from the Lord, which made heaven and earth. He will not suffer thy foot to be moved: he that keepeth thee will not slumber. Behold, he that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep. The Lord is thy keeper: the Lord is thy shade upon thy right hand. The sun shall not smite thee by day, nor the moon by night. The Lord shall preserve thee from all evil: he shall preserve thy soul. The Lord shall preserve thy going out and thy coming in from this time forth, and even for evermore' - why? Because He's everywhere, He's in and He's out, and when we go out and go in He's there.

Oh, it's wonderful. In another place, the great saint said: 'When we are asleep, he is ever there. When we arise in the morning we can say, When I am awake I am still with thee'. Ernest Hemingway was a famous poet, there's very little that we know about him - I beg your pardon, not Ernest Hemingway, he was a rogue, this man was a saint: Tennyson. All that we know about Tennyson's spiritual life we get from his niece, she tells us that this man had a very rich communion with his God. We discover about his spiritual life, and she tells us in one instance that they were walking one day together down the beautiful downs of the Isle of Wight. The sea was sounding in their ears, and the beautiful pastures were round about them, and the bright skies of heaven were above, and Tennyson said to his niece - listen: 'God is with us now on this down, just as truly as Christ was with the two disciples on the road to Emmaus. We cannot see Him, but the Father, the

Saviour, the Spirit, are nearer perhaps now than then to those who are not about the actual real presence of God, and His Christ with all who yearn for Him. Surely the love of God takes away, and makes us forget all our fear', answered Tennyson - listen: 'I should be sorely afraid to live my life without God's presence, but to feel that He is by my side now, just as much as you are, that is the very joy of my heart'. She says: 'I looked on Tennyson as he spoke, and the glory of God rested on his face, and I felt that the presence of God overshadowed him'. Wonder that His presence can be known and felt!

Do you need comfort? Well, this is your comfort. This is your comfort, and He is not there only when you forget His presence, only when you are ignorant to the fact that He dwells with you - and no matter what you're going through, like David as he stood and the soldiers around him mutinied, he could stand upon the rock Christ Jesus and say: 'I encourage myself in the Lord'. As we close, do you know that the last name by which God is known in the Old Testament is found in Ezekiel? It is the Hebrew name Jehovah-Shammah, it simply means: 'The Lord, He is here'. Oh, my friends, what a calm to the troubled seas of life, what a balm for the broken heart, what a breath that breathes peace to the winds of our troubled soul - to know that God is here, to realise and begin to walk in the conscious experience of the presence of God. A sentence from Dr Alan Freese (sp?) sums up life's experience if we want it to be of the omnipresence of God, listen: 'It is the knowledge that God is present, oh, it is blessed - but to feel His presence is nothing more than sheer happiness'. Isaac Watts:

'Within Thy circling power I stand,
On every side I find Thy hand.
Awake, asleep, at home, abroad,
I am surrounded with my God'.

Hallelujah! What a great God He is! Now, let's bow our heads, and wherever you are, whatever your circumstances may be - unsaved, backslidden, going through trials and problems - the message is this: that because God's universe is in Him, God is here. God is there with you at this moment, He's at your elbow, wanting you to trust Him - no matter your circumstance - just to trust the omnipresent God. Wherever in this life you may be led, He will be there with you. What a fact!

Our Father, we thank Thee - oh, for such a great God that Thou art. We bless Thee, and worship Thee, we're lost in wonder, love, and praise. We don't know what to say, Lord, but how great Thou art. thrill us with Thyself, and take us along that we may learn to practise the presence of God in communion, and in strength and mercy and grace to help in time need. May we know what it is to never lose sight of Jesus. Amen.

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Behold Your God - Chapter 12

"The Omniscience Of God"

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Now we're turning again, as we did last week, to Psalm 139 - 139th Psalm. You'll remember last week, we didn't so much as do an exposition of this passage, but we did look at the subject, the theme, of one of the stanzas within this Psalm - the theme was the omnipresence of God. We saw also that every stanza within this Psalm has a theme: there is the omni-righteousness of God, there is the omniscience of God also that we're looking at today. So, we're going to look at the verses that apply to our subject this morning - the omniscience of God.

Psalm 139 and verse 1: "O Lord, thou hast searched me, and known me. Thou knowest my downsitting and mine uprising, thou understandest my thought afar off. Thou compassest my path and my lying down, and art acquainted with all my ways. For there is not a word in my tongue, but, lo, O Lord, thou knowest it altogether".

Let's just take a moment's prayer as we come to the word of God. Father, we fear Thine all-seeing eye, for we know that Thou dost see even things that we cannot see ourselves. But yet, in that awesome terror of the eye of the living God, there is a great comfort to know that the God who knows us better than we know ourselves, is the God who loves us and cares for us. Our Father, we pray that the awesomeness of this truth may be impressed upon our hearts, but also that our faith may rest plainly upon our God. Fill me, I pray, in the Saviour's name, Amen.

The young people this evening, after the Gospel meeting, will be looking at the subject of the Trinity of God. This is a good illustration for that subject, as well as also the greatness of the attributes of God. It is a story concerning Augustine, one of the great church fathers and saints of God. You will know that Augustine wrote many discourses on the truths of Scripture and theology, but upon one of those writings he took a break one day and decided that he would go for a walk along the sea shore. It happened to be a discourse on the Trinity of God. As he went for walk along the shore, lost in meditation, he suddenly came upon a young boy who was digging a hole in the sand. It appeared to Augustine that the young boy was trying to bring water from the sea and fill up the hole with water. Augustine stopped for a moment and inquired of the boy, what was the object of his task. The boy replied that he intended to empty the sea into this cavity within the sand - all the great waters of the deep! To that Augustine shouted: 'Impossible! It cannot be done young man!'. The young boy looked up at Augustine and said: 'Not more impossible than for thee, oh Augustine, to explain the mystery on which thou art now meditating'.

He got more than he bargained for from that young man! Augustine says that he learnt his lesson from that moment on, he walked away and he says that that was what he was trying to do. He was trying to fill this little hole of his human mind, and great intellect though it was, with the vastness of the ocean of who God is and what God can do. He says: 'Standing on the shores of time, I am trying to get into this little finite mind things which are infinite'. As we have stood on the shore of God greatness, in these weeks that have gone by, that is one thing: as we learn more about God, we find the little that we can know about Him. We have begun to see that God is a great vast Person, He is vaster than our finite minds can take in - and we learn well when we learn like Augustine, to realise that there is so much that we cannot understand.

This subject that we come upon this morning: 'The Omniscience of God', it testifies too greatly to us how little we can understand - because it is in contrast to our little understanding of Him, how greatly He understands all things. John Wesley said this: 'Bring me a worm that can comprehend a man, and then I will show you a man that can comprehend God'. Omniscience is a word that is made up of two Latin words. The first again, as we have learnt, 'omni' means 'all' - 'science' means knowledge. To put it plainly, the omniscience of God is God's all-knowledge, the attribute whereby He knows all things - He knows everything! That means that He knows all actualities and all possibilities - not only things that are, but things that can be - all actualities, and all possibilities, past, present and future.

It means there has never been a time when anything was unknown to God. It means there will never ever be a time when He will not possess full, perfect and absolute knowledge. It means that God cannot learn. Isn't that an amazing thought? God knows all things, and He cannot learn anything about anyone or anything! Just imagine the opposite of it for a moment: imagine if God could receive some information into His mind, a knowledge that He hadn't possessed from all eternity, that He could learn something. Imagine God sitting at the feet of another, a teacher, learning something that the most high mind never ever knew! It's impossible, isn't it? He knows nothing better than anything else, He knows everything equally well, He never can discover anything because He knows everything. He can never be surprised, God is never amazed, God never sits in wonder, love and praise like we do when we think upon Him - there's nothing, there is nothing that He wonders at.

Whenever, in the word of God, we find God asking questions it's always to bring the person He is asking the question of into the realisation of the knowledge that He already has. He wants to bring us to a knowledge, He wants to reveal us to His truth. We find it right throughout Scripture, don't we? In fact, Paul, in Romans 11 capitulated, I believe, the knowledge that is in most men and women - even atheists, though they will not admit to it - and that is that God is greater, and there has to be an absolute deity, a great God, a great supreme source of life in the universe. Paul said: 'O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!', he goes on, 'Who hath known the mind of the Lord?'

One of the results of the fall in the garden of Eden is that men have tried to promote themselves to the status of the Almighty. One of the ways that is in vogue today is in the mind - in intellectualism. We need to be careful that we do not despise intellectualism, but we must never put it on the pinnacle that the world does - for they believe by learning they can get to a certain stage where they can equal God! But from our vantage point we say - those who know God, those who have known the salvation of God, those who are day by day in His pilgrimage of grace, having revealed to us the great nature of God - we cry: 'Such knowledge is too wonderful for me, it is high, I cannot attain unto it!' So, as we come to the all-knowing God, let us beware that this is a fearful, and wonderful Being.

There are three things I want you to see this morning. First of all that God knows His creation. Secondly, God knows you as a believer. And thirdly, God knows you as an unconverted sinner. The first is: God knows His creation. That is very simple, that God knows every creature. I'm sure that the high-fluting intellectuals would really wonder at this philosophical idea that God would even be remotely concerned with the little ant beneath a rock - but that is the God that we have. That is the God that is revealed to us through the word of God, we read: 'He telleth', or counteth, 'the number of the stars. He calleth them all by their names'. The word of God tells us He knows the ravens and their young ones. The word of God, through the Lord Jesus Christ, tells us that He knows the very sparrows that fall. He said: 'I know all the fowls of the mountains, and the wild beasts of the field are mine'. The Lord said He knows the very hairs that are on our head, and He numbers them! One man put it well when he said: 'Anyone can count the seeds in one apple, but only God can count the apples in one seed'.

This is the God that we have. Basil Manley put it: 'If there is ever any one thought, full, distinct, vivid, thoroughly comprehended by yourself - then just what that is to you, all knowledge is to God'. Let's think about that. Do you know a subject well? I'm not even talking about a theological subject. For instance, take a pea, a little pea out of a pod, and set it down on a plate. Take one week to study that little piece of vegetable, watch it, turn it around from every angle, every aspect that you can see it, watch the light shine on it, look at it in the shade, cut it open, look inside it - by the end of that week your huge mind of humanity will be able to grasp of little piece of God's creation. The truth is, you don't know all about it - but if you think that you know that well, that is the way that God knows everything! He is remarkable, and what a wonderful thing to know that there is nothing, absolutely nothing that is going on in this universe, that our God does not know about. He is not ignorant to anything, He is not ignorant to anything in your life, anything in your circumstances, anything in your heart or in your mind - God knows everything! He knows everything in His creation.

But let's look, secondly, at how God knows you, the believer in Himself. I want to look at this in three ways, and I want to spend a little time over it. First of all God knows you as a believer in your heart. Secondly, He knows your prayers, and thirdly, He knows your trials. First: He knows your heart. Proverbs 15 and verse 3 says this: 'The eyes of the Lord are in every place, beholding the evil and the good'. Do you remember Hagar, the bondwoman cast into the desert and into the wilderness? She was rejected, and there she was: she leaves her little child Ishmael down in the desert to die, and she walks away. But what was her prayer? 'Thou, God, seest me'. Isn't that it? The omniscience of God - that we can never hide from the sight of the Almighty, He always sees us. One biblical scholar put it like this: 'The whole of my life stood open to His view from the beginning. He saw my every fall, my every sin, my every backsliding - yet He fixed His heart upon me!'. Oh, does that not thrill you? Does that not excite you as a believer in Christ? That there is One in heaven, there is One who inhabits the whole of this earth that we live and move and have our being in - and He is the God who knows all actualities, and all possibilities, and He knows everything about you: mind, body, soul and spirit - yet He loves you! Is that not wonderful to you? We were thinking about it at the Breaking of Bread:

It is a thing most wonderful,
Almost too wonderful to be.
That God's own Son should come to earth,
To die to save a child like me'.

It is wonderful. It's wonderful because He knows our heart. It's wonderful because He cannot be deceived, we cannot hide anything from God, we cannot - if I can say it reverently - wipe His eye. His knowledge is not only absolute, but it is instantaneous. If you think of us studying that little pea from the pod, we have to study it for a week to really get to know it, but God does not study or learn anything - His knowledge is instant, at that very moment He needs it, it is there. God's knowledge is retentive - what an amazing thought? You can learn, but you forget. If you're like me, you have to continually keep in mind what you're trying to learn. No matter how much you put it into your mind, there are weeks go by and you forget something that you studied in so much detail, but God never forgets! God is retentive of all His instantaneous knowledge.

The word of God says: 'He that planteth the ear, shall he not hear? He that formed the eye, shall he not see?'. Let me say this, believer: this proves to me the folly of hypocrisy. There are a lot of hypocrites within the church of Jesus Christ, and the world will tell you that. People who name the name of Christ, who are supposedly walking the walk, but their life testifies different - they are hypocrites! When we think of the omniscience of God, that God Almighty has a window into your heart, He has an eye-scope right into your breast to see who you are. He has a key to open up the treasure of your heart, and to see all the vile things that dwell within. That should banish hypocrisy from us! Shouldn't it? Like a money lender notes down all the debts that are owed to him, God has a day book for every child of God, I believe, in which He records

their life! What they do, what they say, the way they behave, the way they live before a world that needs Christ - and the only way they will see Christ is through His church, His body. But what does the hypocrite do? The hypocrite covers over their sin, they hope to colour it, to shade it in so that no-one will notice, and portray themselves as something else. It is the spirit of Judas Iscariot - when that devoted sister and child of God came before the Lord Jesus Christ and anointed His feet with perfume, remember what Judas said? He had covetousness, isn't that what the word of God says? His hand was in the bag, he was greedy, he was a thief, but he covered over his covetousness with charity! Charity to the poor - the biggest hypocrite, to cover over an unholy thing with a holy thing, and pretend he is doing it for God? It is true that God sees through the fig leaves that hide man's sin.

Now, let's think about this: God's eye is always upon you. Always! At every single moment, at every turning point in your life, His omniscient eye is always upon your life, upon your thoughts, upon your heart, upon your motives, upon everything. Is it any wonder David said: 'I have set the Lord before me'. That's what you've got to get: believer, if you want to live a holy life before God and you're finding it very hard, if you could only get to a realisation of the omniscience of God here and now around the word of God, and set the Lord always before you, you'd never make a wrong move! Never! Seneca, the heathen philosopher, counselled Lucidius (sp?) - and this was his great worldly wisdom, he didn't know it was from the word of God, he said: 'Whatever you are doing, you should imagine some of the Roman worthies stand before you, and that would make you do nothing dishonourable'. That was his philosophy - it was just another way of God's philosophy, only you should be more fearful realising that you're not just imagining, you're not pretending, and it's not some Roman worthy that's in front of you, it's the God of all eternity! Imagine setting Him before our eyes - it would prevent a lot of sin, wouldn't it?

You know, it is said that before Latimer was burned at the stake, and martyred, that during his examination by the church of Rome it says that he took heed to every word he said - why? Because he heard the pen writing behind the hangings. He could hear the scratch on the parchment. Dying! About to be burned alive for God! My friends, as we walk our Christian life this great truth of the omniscience of God is being able to hear the scratch of the pen of the Holy Spirit writing the account of our lives in heaven! What care we would have over our words, what care over our behaviour, if we realised that God's pen never ever stops writing, that God never ever misses anything - nothing is hidden to His great all-seeing eye.

Julius Drusus (sp?), a Roman Tribune, had a house on a hill in the city. It is said that it was in view, it was exposed to the whole of the neighbourhood. The builder on one occasion came up to him and offered him: for five talents he would make it more private, so that no-one could see. This is what Drusus said: 'I will give you ten talents, if you can make every room so open that all the city may behold in what manner I lead my life'. That's an unbeliever! We are always open to God - I just want that to drop into our hearts, I don't want to go on any further if we don't get this into our minds: that we are never ever closed to God in anyway. He sees all of us! All that there is to see, He sees!

He sees your heart, believer - but secondly: He sees your prayers. This is wonderful to me, this should be wonderful to every child who is a child of prayer - because in Malachi 3:16 we read this: 'God has a book of remembrance written for them that thought upon his name'. Isn't that beautiful? There's a book in heaven - a book! Those who shut themselves off from the world, who go into their closet where no-one sees them - now, not standing on the street corner, or standing in the prayer meeting praying away to God with all high-fluting terms - but those who go into the closet and seek God on their own where nobody sees them, there's a book in heaven and your name is recorded there, and there's a day you'll be rewarded. What an incentive, that God sees your prayers! You go into the closet and you groan and you cry to God, but you can say like the Psalmist: 'My groaning is not hid from thee'. You water your prayers with your tears, God says: 'I put your tears into a bottle, I'm counting them, I'm taking note of them' - what an encouragement to pray!

There's no reason to fear that your petitions will be ignored by God, or that He'll not see you, or that He's concerning Himself with the great affairs of the universe, and prophecy and all the rest - and that He hasn't seen you, the humble soul upon his knees! He's looking after millions, think how many millions pray to Him every moment of the day, yet He takes note of you as an individual - and more than taking note, He writes it down in a book. Amazing. Every word that's in your heart, and even in times when you're lying on a sick bed and you can't put into words what you feel - 'It shall come to pass that before they call I will answer, and while they are yet speaking I will hear' - for He sees our hearts. He knows our prayers, He sees our hearts. Thomas Watson says: 'To think God was in this place' - to think God was in this place! Now! In the closet at home when we seek Him - 'would add wings to prayer, and oil to the flame of our devotion'.

Thirdly: we know the omniscience of God in our trials. God knows your trials, believer. Thomas Watson also said this, listen: 'If saints find a real purgatory, it is in this life - but this is the comfort: that God sees what wrong is done to them, and the apple of His eye is touched and He is sensitive to it'. Did you ever have somebody poke their finger in your eye? It's not too nice, sure it's not? That's the way God feels when anything, or anybody, touches you. That's what God's trying to convey to us: we are the apple of His eye. When they came to whip Paul, it was as if they were whipping the King's Son, because God in heaven was wrathful with them that were whipping him. One has said: 'For every drop of a saint's blood spilt, God puts a drop of wrath in His vial'. Isn't it wonderful? You see what you're going through - maybe they're someone here today and they're getting a hard, hard time from someone close to them. They're being put through the mill, a trial that's not your fault, and you never asked for it - but what a wonder to know that God knows! God knows all about it, God knows who is innocent, God knows who is guilty.

In the book of the Revelation, chapter 12, we read of Satan, and he's depicted as a dragon with seven heads. Do you know what that typifies? It typifies the devil's knowledge, and ability, and intuition, to think as he persecutes the church of Jesus Christ - it's as if he's got seven heads, all his plans and his schemes, and his wiles and his methods, he's been doctoring them up for years! What a blessing it is to go to Zechariah 3 and verse 9, and see that God is described there as having seven eyes. He sees every single scheme of the evil one, and He knows it! He's seen it before he's even thought it! Our God is there for us, a righteous refuge that the righteous can run into and be saved.

Where are you today? Are you getting a hard time? Are you perplexed? Do you know what Job said as he was perplexed? 'He knoweth the way that I take'. Are you weary? Do you feel you can't go on any more, you've had it up to here? You can take no more of this trial, of this life, of this temptation, of what this other person seems to be doing to you - listen: 'He knoweth our frame, He remembereth that we are dust'. Maybe you're doubting your salvation, maybe you're doubting that you're making a good job of this Christian life, maybe you've suspicion even about the truths of the word of God: 'Search me O God and know my heart, try me and know my thoughts, and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting'. Maybe you're in sorrow and affliction, and you're thinking: 'No-one knows what I'm going through'. Listen, God said: 'I have surely seen the affliction of my people which are in Egypt, and have heard their cry by reason of their task masters, for I know their sorrows' - I know! For this is the only wise God, this is the God who knows everything!

A little boy was listening to his father reading the family devotions from the word of God, and he was so impressed by his father and mother's discussion as they talked about the limitless power and mercy of their God. The little boy put his hand on Daddy's knee, and said: 'Daddy how big is God anyway?'. They always ask the hardest questions, don't they? The man thought for a minute and then said: 'Well son, He's always just a little bit bigger than your need'. That's the truth - He sees everything, He knows everything, and He can take care of everything too.

Fourthly, believer, He knows your future. He knows your future - you go through the word of God, you go through all the prophecies. He predicted that the Israelites would be in a strange land and afflicted for 400 years. He prophesied that the same people would be in captivity in Babylon for 70 years. He then told them that they would be delivered at the end of that time. You go into the book of Daniel and chapter 2, and you find the prophecy about the times of the Gentiles. You find prophecies right throughout the word of God about the place, and the manner, and the capacity, of Messiah's birth where He would be born, and how He would be born. The reason is: God knows the plan of the ages! He knows the plan of the ages because He has planned the ages!

That's our God, and that is the God that sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might believe through Him that came incarnate, in flesh, to save us. And when we see the incarnate God in the Lord Jesus Christ, we see that He was all-knowing! He knew men's thoughts. He said that He was the only one who knew the Father. He said He knew what was in men, and he said: 'I know them that are mine' - He knows those that are His! There's a great comfort in the fact that God is never taken by surprise - can you rest in that? It might shock you what you're going to hear in the week that lies ahead, but it doesn't shock Him. As Charles Stern says: 'There is nothing round the corner which is beyond God's view' - nothing. So, there are you are, lying in a hospital bed; there you are, with your head weeping on a pillow for a loved one that has gone; there you are, agonising in prayer for a son or a daughter who is outside of Christ and shows no sign of coming into Him - but what a wonder that there is a High Priest in heaven touched with the feeling of our infirmities, who knows because He came in likeness of sinful flesh! We can say with William Blake, the poet

He doth give His joy to all,
He became an infant, small.
He becomes a Man of woe,
He doth feel the sorrow to.

Think not thou can sigh a sigh,
And thy Maker is not by!
Think not thou canst weep a tear,
And thy Maker is not near.

Oh, He gives to us his joy,
That our griefs He may destroy.
Till are grief is fled and gone,
He doth sit by us and moan'.

Isn't it wonderful that He sympathises? A sympathising Saviour who knows everything.

But thirdly, and finally: God knows you, sinner. You're not saved and you're in our meeting now, He knows your heart. All things are naked and open in His eyes, He is the one with whom we have to do. We can discern our exterior, but He discerns the heart. He says: 'I, the Lord, search the heart, I try the reins even to the very man according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings'. There is nothing secret to God: 'For I know the things that come into your mind', He says - every one of them! He saw Cain slaying Abel. He heard Sarah laughing in her tent. He saw Achen burying the bar of gold in the sand. He saw it all, and David painfully realised that he couldn't hide his sin from God when Nathan the prophet came in and said: 'Thou art the man!'. He says to you today, backslider and unrepentant sinner: 'Be sure your sin will find you out' - for every time you sin there are two witnesses, there is your conscience and there is God Almighty who sees everything you're doing.

On one occasion Mark Twain, it was his birthday and he was away overseas. His friends met in his local club and they thought of a prank to play on him for his birthday. So they wrote him a letter full of nonsense, about 15 pages, and they put it in an envelope - but they didn't know where Mark Twain was, so they wrote on the front of the envelope: 'Mark Twain, only God knows'. They sent it away for a laugh, it was only for themselves, they didn't think it was going to get there. A few weeks later there was a letter came back, and it said: 'From Mark Twain, God did'. Now listen: God knows exactly where you are at this moment, He knows exactly what is in your heart, He knows what is in your mind, He knows that you're running from Him, He knows that you're living in sin, He knows that you are knee-deep into rebelliousness toward God and His word - He knows everything! You can't hide from Him! The ancient Greeks, and the statues that they worshipped as their god - do you know what they believed? That when a spider came across the eyes of that statue and spun a web, that their god couldn't see what they were up to! You can laugh at that, but that's the way some of you are living, isn't it? You think God can't see what you're dabbling in, you think God can't see what you're doing - but the miracle is this: God sees your heart, God sees your sin, and God looks most where man looks least. He sees your judgement, He sees everything.

Lafayette tells us that when he was in prison, he was once shut up in a little room for a long long time. In the door of his cell there was a little hole that was sawn out. He says that through that hole there was placed the eye of a soldier to watch him every moment of the day. He says that all he could see was the soldier's eye, and that eye was always there - day and night, every moment he lifted his eye from his bed, he finished washing, he finished eating - every time he looked at that hole there was an eye looking always upon him. This is what he said: 'Oh, it was dreadful! There was no escape, there was no hiding. When I lay down, when I rose up, that eye was watching me!'. How terrible it is to be a sinner, and the eye of the holy God is always upon you.

Let me say, as we close: if you have something to hide from the all-seeing eye of God, He knows everything - He knows the reason for it. He knows, and He says: 'Thou hast set our iniquities before Thee, our secret sins in the light of Thy countenance' - what you think is hidden is open air to God! He sees it all - and you're just like Adam, your father, running in the garden - imagine him trying to hide from God! Where can you hide? 'Thou knowest my downsitting and mine uprising, thou understandest my thought afar off. Thou compasses my path and my lying down, and art acquainted with all my ways'. How can you hide from Him? You cannot, and there is not a moment of privacy from the Almighty. But you know something, if you're hiding in the truth of God's omniscience - not from it, but if you are hiding in it - it's very sweet. Isn't that sweet?

Does it not warm your heart to know that your Heavenly Father knows you completely? There's no tale-bearer that can come up to the ear of God and whisper something that He doesn't know about you. There's no informers. There's no accuser that can make an accusation stick upon your name. There's no forgotten skeleton that can come tumbling out of the closet to expose your past. There's no unsuspected weakness in your character that can come to light and make God turn away from you! For He says this: 'For the mountains shall depart and the hills be removed, but my kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of my peace be removed, saith the Lord that hath mercy on thee'. Isn't it wonderful that we have a God in heaven who knoweth that we are dust? Whatever befalls us, God knows us, God loves us, and God cares for us.

Let us bow our heads. What a comfort to the sorrowing, troubled soul - but you've got to rest on it, you've got to believe that He is the God who sees you where you are, knows everything, and will uphold you with His love. Sinner, He's not missing anything, not a bit, yet He loves you and He longs for you to come by faith and believe in His Son. Let us all today as this church of Jesus Christ commit ourselves, knowing that He never takes His eye off us, and may we live holy and unblameable lives in this evil world - because what the world misses, God sees.

Father, we thank Thee for a terrible truth, but yet a truth that we can trust in, if we believe in humility upon it. We pray that it will be a salve for the sin-sick soul, for the sorrowing soul - and Lord, for our lukewarm hearts, that it may spur us on to follow godliness and holiness, without which no man will see Thee. Hear us, we pray - You see our hearts at this moment, and we pray that You will take the offering that we bring, Amen.

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Behold Your God - Chapter 13

"Knowing Your God"

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We're turning to Daniel, the prophecy of Daniel in the Old Testament, Daniel chapter 11. This is our thirteenth and our concluding, our final, study in the series 'Behold Your God!' - and we have, I hope, had a blessed time as we've been contemplating the great God, and indeed our Saviour the Lord Jesus Christ through whom God has revealed Himself to this dying world. Now, I want to bring a challenging message to you in the close of the series, as to what are you going to do with the knowledge that you have gleaned over these weeks. Now, perhaps in the weeks that have gone by, you haven't learned anything you didn't already know - and that's probably the case. But with what you do know about our God, what are you going to do?

I have referred, in weeks gone by, to this verse. Indeed, in our first study we looked at it, in Daniel chapter 11 and verse 32. Now, I want you to keep your finger in the book of Daniel, because we will be looking at further passages from it in this study. I've entitled this morning's message: 'Knowing Your God' - knowing your God. Daniel 11 and verse 32: "And such as do wickedly against the covenant shall he corrupt by flatteries: but the people that do know their God shall be strong, and do exploits".

Knowing your God - in 1 Samuel chapter 4 and verse 21 there is the birth of a child. The birth of that child is heralded by his name, and the name of the child was: 'Ichabod'. The verse tells us that Ichabod means: 'the glory has departed', and it defines why the glory had departed - the reason being that the Ark of God had departed out of Israel, it had been taken away. You will remember that the Ark of God was the resting and residing place of the presence of God, literally speaking His presence abode over the Ark of the Covenant. With the removal of that Ark went the removal of God's presence, and the removal of the glory of God.

The question I ask at the outset of our study today is: has the glory of our great God departed? The God that we have been learning about in weeks gone by, all His attributes, all of His great divine nature - has His glory departed from His church? Now, think of it: if you take all of the great truths that we have learned and compare it with the situation that prevails through Christendom today, has the glory departed? Is this great glory, and majesty, and power of God evident among us, and evident among the church of Jesus Christ at large? I think it would be true to say that today we have more knowledge of God than we have ever had. I believe that we know more, theologically speaking, about God than any generation has ever known. There are more books about God, there are more books on the secrets of the Christian life, there are more resources, tapes, records, libraries, churches, missionary organisations, in this world than there has ever been - but, arguably, we could say that God is little-known! There is much known of God, but what about knowledge in God?

We have books on the Holy Spirit, books on God the Father, books on the Lord Jesus Christ - books without number, and the writing of them goes on, as the great prophet said. We have books on the baptism of the Spirit, we have books against the baptism of the Spirit, we have books on tongues, books on how not to speak in tongues is how to find fulfilment - we have books on everything, we have knowledge about everything. Indeed, evangelistic Christianity today, it could be said, has all the answers, and indeed the answers that all want! You can get them, no matter what your view is, you can get knowledge upon it. We know the Gospel inside out - indeed, even the unregenerate, especially in our land of Ulster, knows the

Gospel inside out. We know that the Lord Jesus Christ came in flesh, He was incarnate, He was the Word of God, He was the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world, the Lamb of God coming to take away the sin of the world. We know He rose from the dead, we know He showed Himself among the apostles, we know He ascended to heaven, when He ascended on high He gave gifts to men. We know about His second coming, we know about the millennium kingdom that will be formed upon the earth after He comes and takes His church. We know it all! But do we know our God?

Whatever you do, do not mistake knowing God by, first of all, a knowledge of God. I am not speaking of a knowledge of God - we have a great knowledge of God, but do we know our God? Secondly, I am not talking about knowing godliness - for we all know godliness, we know what it is to live a godly life, even if we are not living it, we know how to live it. We read from the word of God the precepts and promises of what it is to live a godly life, but that - do not mistake that for knowing your God. John the apostle tells us: 'This is life eternal, that they might know Thee', the only true God, 'and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent'. In all of our knowledge of God and godliness and His word, the question is: do we know our God, and where is that joy unspeakable and full of glory that is promised to the child of God who knows his Father?

This cannot be known through study or through learning, and Paul tells us: 'But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness unto him, neither can he know them because they are spiritually discerned'. We cannot study to know God - we can study to know about Him, we can study to know about godliness, and about Christianity, and about the assembly, and about prophecy. We can study these things, but there must come a time that we must follow on to know our God. With that in mind, I asked the question at the outset of our meeting: will you get to know this God whom you have learned about?

'How?', you say, 'How can I know Him? I know about Him, but how can I move - make that transition from knowing about, to knowing Him?'. I give you an answer from the book of Job: 'Acquaint now thyself with Him, and be at peace'. I believe what the church of Jesus Christ needs today, and what we need after eleven weeks studying the person and attributes of God, is that like Ezekiel sitting by that great river, that the clouds of heaven would open, that there would be a cleft in the sky, and that we would have visions of God. We need to have a fresh vision that will transform us, that will change us, so that we will get to know our God better.

Now, what are the pre-requisites to get to know God in an intimate way? I want you to note these, please - this is the conclusion of these messages, and what is burning upon my heart today, five things that we need to do and need to be, to get to know this God of ours. They can all be summarised in one simple statement, listen: 'If we are to get to know our God, we must live a holy life'. If we are to get to know our God, we must live a holy life. The first thing I'll leave with you is part of that holy life, and it is this: a holy zeal for God. In Daniel 11 and verse 32, that we read, we saw this: 'But the people that do know their God shall be strong, and do exploits'. One translation says: 'They shall stand firm and take action'. Now we find that verse in this prophetic chapter of chapter 11, and the opposite to that verse is found in verse 21: 'And in his estate shall stand up a vile person, to whom they shall not give the honour of the kingdom: but he shall come in peaceably, and obtain the kingdom by flatteries' - antichrist, all that is opposed to Christ, the antithesis of Christ. We find a picture of antichrist within the book of Daniel, and he will raise up that abomination of desolations - that is what the first half of verse 32 is speaking about, those who do wickedly against the covenant, corrupt by flatteries.

So, these who stand firm and are strong in the strength of the Lord, those who do know their God and do exploits, are the exact opposite of all that is antichrist. Now, we have not seen Antichrist yet, but there is the antichrist system. There is that spirit of antichrist, that spirit of iniquity that doth already work among us, and we as believers are to have a holy zeal against it. That is part of the holy life whereby you get to know intimately this great God. What is it? It is a holy indignation of all that is not of God. Ichabod, the glory has

departed - well, what is our reaction to it? What is our reaction to that? What is our reaction when we see God's name trodden in the dirt, when we see society totally ignoring the precepts and laws of our God, when we see the church diluting the Gospel, when we see apostasy all around - what is our reaction to be? Are we just to shut up and say nothing? Are we to be gracious in the sense that we don't protest about anything when the name of God is trodden underfoot of men - what are we to do?

Well, if we know our God, we will stand up for God. If we know our God there will be a holy indignation that will rise in our bosom, because of the lost glory of God that was once here, that was once in us, and we will become angry about it! We'll not be able to rest at the world's defiance against God - it will goad us into action, and if we need anything today, we need a baptism of holy anger from God. Remember Paul when he went into the city of Athens to preach the Gospel? It says that the city was so completely given over to idolatry that he was stirred within himself. J. B. Phillips translates it: 'He was exasperated' - exasperated at the idolatry, of how these people were so easily bewitched by false gods, by demons, by a false religious system - and it made Paul angry!

We see it in our Lord Jesus Christ, don't we? Gentle Jesus meek and mild, going into the temple with a whip. Picture it: holy indignation - 'My Father's house shall be a house of prayer, but ye have made it into a den of thieves and robbers' - and He goes in with a holy righteous anger, why? Because the glory of His Father is at stake - Ichabod! We find that in the person of Daniel. You don't need to think too hard about him, but you remember within the book there are the four Hebrew children. There they are, four young men of God standing in front of the whole Babylonian system of the devil - and four men stand firm for God, and openly challenge the status quo. Rather than suffer contamination by the King's meat, or drink the wine and eat the flesh of debauchery in Babylon, they eat vegetables - why? Because it is better to obey God, rather than men.

Think of this: Darius, the Emperor, bans prayer. We all know that Daniel prayed three times a day. Now, what did Daniel do when Darius bans prayer? Daniel goes up to his front window, opens the windows, and decides: 'Well, I'll pray where everybody can see me pray. I will stand firm, I will take action'. He is willing to stand against the worldly system, to challenge everything that is not of God. That's what we need, oh, we need men and women like this - we are sound you know, but as the man said: we are sound asleep many of us! We need to stand up and be counted, we need to stand up against the world, because it is them who know their God that shall do exploits for God. There's a lot of fanaticism about, I know that, but there was one writer said this - and I believe he was right: 'I would rather calm down a fanatic than try to resuscitate corpse'. Isn't that better? We need to stand, we need to have the life of God in us and to be seen to be for God and be counted for Him.

Now, in Daniel that holy zeal was not only challenged to stand up publicly - because if you know many a person that stands up publicly, you'll find that their private life has a lot to be desired, it's very different than the way they protest in public. But for Daniel, that stand for God in public channelled also into his private life. If you look at Daniel 9, turn to it, Daniel 9 we find that in verse 2 - look at it - it says he understood from the Scriptures, he was studying the books of the word of God, that Israel's captivity was drawing to a close - but he also knew that Israel's sin was so great that it would provoke God to wrath upon them rather than mercy. So because he knew the prophecies, that God should be fulfilling them, but Israel's sin was so bad that He would pour wrath on them rather than mercy - look at verse 3: 'By prayer and supplications, with fasting, and sackcloth, and ashes'. Daniel's holy zeal is conveyed in the energy of private fervent prayer - for the fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.

Now, let us analyse ourselves. We want to have an intimate knowledge of our God, but we cannot have that knowledge if we do not have a holy zeal. We need a holy zeal in our stand for God and in our private prayer for God. Well might the hymnwriter have said:

'May Thy rich grace impart
 Strength to this fainting heart.
 My zeal inspire!
 As Thou hast died for me,
 So may thy love to Thee,
 Pure, warm and changeless be:
 A living fire'.

That's the first thing: a holy zeal for God. Secondly: a holy obedience to God. A holy obedience to God - Titus 1 and verse 16 we read this: 'They profess that they know God; but in works they deny him, being abominable, and disobedient, and unto every good work reprobate'. So there is a people who profess that they know God intimately, but by their works they deny it - they haven't got that holy obedience to God. But John says, 1 John 2 and verse 3: 'Hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments'. Now I want you to direct your thoughts to our Lord Jesus, I want you to look at the great biography of His life - for it was the life of God in flesh upon the earth. We can see there that He had a holy zeal for God, and He had a holy obedience to God. He said: 'My meat is to do the will of my Father. My life, my energy, my resources, everything I am and have, I am living in obedience to my Father and according to His will. I am here to finish His work'.

Now, listen, if you're wanting to know the God that we have been talking about for eleven weeks, you're going to have to be obedient. This is very simple, this is elementary stuff, this is the basics of Christian success - if I can put like that. If you're wanting to get to know God, if you're wanting to go on with God, you're going to have to be obedient to God! The Lord Himself said: 'Neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and he to whosoever the Son will reveal Him' - and He had God revealed to Him, the Father revealed Himself to the Son, and it was no coincidence that His life was an obedient one. 'And him to whosoever the Son reveals the Father to', if He's going to reveal Him to you, if He's going to reveal Him to me, it'll be through an obedient and a holy life. Now we must grasp this! We cannot know a holy God if we are not willing to be holy. We can't know a faithful God if you can't take our word as our bond. This is serious stuff, this is where the rubber meets the road, this is where we take off - when we forsake our sins, when we forsake the things that we do and so easily beset us and we leave them by, and we decide: 'I'm going on for God, and nothing's going to stop me. I'm going to know my God, and sin certainly isn't going to be a barrier or a stumbling block to that'.

Billy Sunday told a story one time when he was preaching, about a church down the road that was on fire. The local atheist, that everybody knew, ran down and he started to help them trying to put out the fire. One wise guy out of the church said: 'Oh, this is the first time I've seen you at church'. The atheist turned round to the Christian and said: 'Well, it's the first time I've seen the church on fire!' - and isn't that right? We can't blame the world for not wanting certain things to do with us at times, can we? I know that these things, to the natural mind they don't understand spiritual things, but there are times that there is nothing to attract people to us. Nothing! There is not a holy life, and let us be assured today that if there is a holy life there will be folk attracted to you! And many of them will be Christians.

Our Lord's words are still true today: 'Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God' - they shall see God, the pure. The apostle was right in Hebrews: 'Follow peace with all men, and holiness without which none shall see God'. We need a holy zeal, and we need a holy obedience - and thirdly: we need a holy death to self. Do you want to see God? Do you want to know God? Not just know about Him, but follow after to know this God intimately that we have been studying and looking at - well, if you do, you're going to have to do what Paul says and reckon yourself dead to sin, and throw open your life to the inflow of the Holy Spirit. There's no other way! Come to your meetings, have your time of prayer, wear your denominational badge or

whatever theological persuasion you have - but if you want to know God you're going to have to submit to God!

This is a detachment from everything that the world holds dear - to love not the world, neither the things that are in the world, for the love of the world is not the love of the Father. And anyone who has the love of the world in them, the love of the Father dwells not in them - the two cannot dwell together. Let me say that this is also applicable to the church of Jesus Christ, that their self must die. If I can use the word 'organisation' - I don't like using it - but as an organisation of people our self must die! Our reputation must fall into the ground and die as a corn of wheat, or it will abide alone. We must move away from the lifeless textualism, that: 'It's in the Bible, and I take it, but there is no reality of these truths in my life to show it'. We must move away from the fact that these things happened 2000 or more years ago, and we will sit in a huddle studying these things and learning about history - to step forward, to let this great, almighty, supernatural, sovereign God start doing things in our lives.

Can we do that? Can we change the facade of what is Christianity today in Northern Ireland into a reality of a life filled with the very breath and life of God? Yes, we'll lose friends, we'll maybe lose our reputation, people will look at down us and say that: 'You're holier than thou' - but this is what Daniel was. He had a great boldness for God, to follow after God, to obey God rather than to obey men - and he counted the cost for God. Shadrach, Meshach, Abednego, Daniel, put their neck on the block for God - they counted the cost, they knew their stand was right and nothing would shift them. For them that know their God, they stand firm and they take action.

Think of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego - they embraced the fires, they embraced them! Total self-death! I'm sure that there was a lot of Jews - I mean, it's interesting that there's only three of them that we hear about going into the fiery furnace, isn't it? With all the Jews in Babylon, I'm sure, I'm quite sure that they weren't the only ones that didn't bow down to the idol - but I'll tell you this much: maybe some of the ones that bowed down to the idol were saying to Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego: 'You're getting about fanatical now. OK, don't bow down to the idol, but going into the fiery furnace and just walking into it?'. My friend, this is what we are talking about - and if you want to call it a fanaticism for God, you call it that, but that's what Paul had. Listen: 'Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung that I might win Christ'. Listen to him in the book of Acts chapter 20: 'And now, behold, I go bound in the spirit unto Jerusalem, not knowing the things that shall befall me there: Save that the Holy Ghost witnesseth in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions abide me. But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God'.

I'm sure there was many a man said: 'Now Paul, no! You don't need to go to these extremes, you're accepted in the beloved. The grace of God is for you, God doesn't expect you to do these hair-brained to show off for God. What do you think you are?'. Do you know what he was? He was a follower of our Lord Jesus Christ, and if we call ourselves 'Christ's ones', we will be followers too. Do you remember in Matthew 16 we read: 'From that time forth began Jesus to show unto his disciples, how that he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day. Then Peter took him, and began to rebuke him' - imagine somebody rebuking the Lord! 'You're not going there, what are You talking about? Going to die? Are You a fanatic? Have You lost Your mind?'. 'Get thee behind me, Satan: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but the things that are of men' - that is what is killing the church of Jesus Christ today: the things that are of men and not of God. We must go for that holy road of self-sacrifice, that Christlikeness - and if we claim to be partakers of the divine nature that we have been studying in weeks gone by, you can't say you follow Christ if you don't die like Christ!

Fourthly: there is a holy satisfaction in God. First of all, a holy zeal after God; secondly, a holy obedience to God; and thirdly, a holy death to self; and fourthly, a holy satisfaction. What did the Babylonians say to Daniel and his friends? 'You bow down to that idol, or we'll throw you in the fiery furnace. We will! You do what we say, or we'll throw you in'. Now, look at Daniel 3, turn with me to Daniel 3. Daniel 3 and verse 16, now this is mighty: 'O Nebuchadnezzar, we are not careful to answer thee in this matter' - in other words they're saying: 'It's not necessary for us to give you an answer on this point'. 'If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of thine hand, O king. But if not, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up'. Do you know what he was saying? This often confused me, do you know what they were saying? 'It makes no difference whether you kill us, or whether you let us live, we are satisfied with our God. We're satisfied in our God whether we're alive, we're satisfied in our God whether we're dead - we're content with Him, and there's nothing you can offer us in any god, any riches, any reputation, that will change it'.

Satisfied in God! You know there's a lot in the church today that aren't satisfied in God. Now, I know that we have to move into the 21st century - but they want gimmicks, they want to bring things in because they're not just satisfied with hearing the word of God and praying to their God - God is not enough! Now we have to - if we're going to know God - we have to be satisfied in God! We have to decide [that] it makes no difference what life throws at me, or what illness throws at me, or what death brings to me, how soon it comes - I'm satisfied in God - and if you're like that you'll get to know God. For Paul said to Timothy: 'For the which cause I also suffer these things', I'm suffering you know, 'nevertheless I'm not ashamed' - I'm prepared to suffer! 'For I know', literally, 'I have knowledge and am acquainted with him whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I've committed unto him against that day'. Was it not a holy satisfaction in God that said: 'For me to live is Christ, to die is gain'? The poet put it in these words:

'Lord, it belongs not to my care,
Whether I die or live.
To love and serve Thee is my share,
And this Thy grace must give.

If life be long I will be glad,
That I may long obey.
If short, then why should I be sad
To soar to endless day?'

A holy satisfaction with God. Fifthly, and finally: a holy meditation upon God. You see, those who know their God have great thoughts of Him. You have to have great thoughts of God if you know God, you've been brought into communion with Him and fellowship with the great Almighty. You find that in the book of Daniel, if you look at chapter 5 and verse 22. He revealed Himself to the emperors, first of all to Belshazzar, chapter 5 and verse 22, and what was it? It was the greatness and the glory of God: 'And thou his son, O Belshazzar, hast not humbled thine heart, though thou knewest all this; But hast lifted up thyself against the Lord of heaven; and they have brought the vessels of his house before thee, and thou, and thy lords, thy wives, and thy concubines, have drunk wine in them; and thou hast praised the gods of silver, and gold, of brass, iron, wood, and stone, which see not, nor hear, nor know: and the God in whose hand thy breath is, and whose are all thy ways, hast thou not glorified'.

Nebuchadnezzar, in chapter 4 and verse 34, he's told again that God's dominion '...is an everlasting dominion, and his kingdom is from generation to generation'. The world is in God's hands. He reveals Himself to Darius in chapter 6 in the same way - and in chapter 4:25 we read this: 'The most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will'. Now look, if you're not satisfied with God you'll never be satisfied as a Christian! And let me say this: if you're not satisfied on earth studying the Lord Jesus Christ and the great Almighty Father, Son, and Holy Spirit - I don't think you'll enjoy heaven! For in heaven,

we will be eternally satisfied with Him - and if a believer can't be satisfied on earth with Him...I wonder are they going to heaven? This is where we practice for heaven, this is where we learn the art of beholding God, of meditating upon God, of contemplating God that we've been doing in our weeks gone by - and it's a lost art within Christian lives today, and that is why the glory of this great God has departed! The focal point has been put on man now, but all the holy men, prophets, patriarchs, apostles, and great preachers of the past, prostrated themselves regularly before God and meditated upon Him.

We have many problems, all of us, but A. W. Tozer said: 'The instant cure of most of our religious ills would be to enter the presence, in the spiritual experience to become suddenly aware that we are in God and God is in us. This would lift us out of our pitiful narrowness, and cause our hearts to be enlarged'. What is it? Turn your eyes upon Jesus, look full in His wonderful face, and the things of earth will grow strangely dim in the light of His glory and grace. It is to study the transcendence of God and to be lifted from the mundane grind of our lives - lives that are full of moods and fickleness. If we look to the changeless God, we will be anchored from the blowing of the winds of life. When people let us down, and when we let ourselves down, and let God down, there is a faithfulness in God that will always meet our needs. For all our shortcomings and all our sins, there is grace and there is mercy with God. It's amazing! In the deep pain of life and of death, there is the love of God for us all. In our loneliness, there is God's omnipresence. When we're in perplexity and confused, there is His all-knowing ability. When we are weak, He is strong. Our life is to obey Him, and to enjoy Him forever:

'Only to sit and think of God,
Oh, what a joy it is,
To think the thought,
To breathe the name.
Earth has no higher bliss,

Father of Jesus,
Love's reward,
What rapture it will be:
Prostrate before Thy throne to lie,
And gaze and gaze on Thee'.

Let me just finish by saying this: will you taste and see that the Lord is good? The old Chinese sage said this: 'The journey of a thousand miles begins with one step' - do you know what the one step towards knowing our God is? A desire to know Him. Do you want to know Him? The Psalmist wanted to know Him: 'My soul followeth hard after Thee. As the deer panteth after the water brook, so doth my soul pant after thee, O God'. 'For I am determined to know nothing among you, save Jesus Christ and him crucified...O, that I might know him, and the power of his resurrection, and fellowship of his sufferings'. 'Then', Hosea says, 'Then shall we follow on to know the Lord: his going forth is prepared as the morning; and he shall come unto us as the rain, as the latter and former rain unto the earth'. May we learn to know our God.

Our Father, in the weeks that have gone by we have learnt all about Thee. Our appetites have been whet, but Lord, we long to taste more, we long to have a holy life filled with zeal and obedience, with a death of self and a satisfaction in our God - and to be found meditating often, and thinking God's thoughts after Him. Lord, we thank Thee that they that hunger and thirst after righteousness shall be filled. We pray that all who have that desire to follow after, to know God, that Lord You would give them the grace and the strength to follow hard after Thee. Bless us now, we pray, in the Saviour's name, Amen.

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