

Learning From Jesus

Week 2

His Goodness and His Greatness, II

Key Verse

And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose...

Romans 8.28

Reflections on God's Majesty

"What's God like?" A lot of people speculate about God, but find that in the hard places of life, their speculations don't prove true. The god's of our own creation always fail us. But not so the God of the Bible. As we get to know the real God, we grow in our readiness to trust him. Our trust is linked to his character.

Last week we looked at God's goodness. This week we will look at God's greatness, at what the Bible often calls his "majesty".

"Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised"

Psalm 48

It is easy to lose sight of God's majesty, maybe because our attention is so diverted with the pressure of day to day problems and tasks that we don't take time to look to God and stand in awe of him. Maybe it's because we champion a personal relationship with God and forget to teach people that although God is personal he's not just like us; he's immensely greater. Maybe our biggest obstacle to perceiving the greatness of God is that our minds are filled with thoughts of our own greatness. J.I. Packer rightly says that as a rule modern men and women "*cherish great thoughts of man [and] have small thoughts of God.*" (Knowing God p.74)

To grasp God's greatness and majesty, it is helpful to compare ourselves to God. For example we might ask, "What limits us?" A great deal, to be honest. We have limited ability, limited knowledge, limited power... the list could get quite long. But when you make your list, and you look at the same time at God, you quickly realize that what limits us does not limit him. Simply said, He has no limits. That is part of why we call Him "great".

The Bible tells us, for one, that **His presence is without limit**. Theologians call this the **omnipresence** of God. Psalm 139 picks up this theme...

*I look behind me and you're there, then up ahead and you're there, too—
your reassuring presence, coming and going.* Ps 139:5 (Msg)

The scriptures say that he fills every place, that he surrounds every person. You can't do that. I have 6 children scattered around the country and the world. I can't be with them every moment in every place. But God can. We have moved our family to seven different cities over the years of our marriage. Each time it meant saying goodbye to wonderful friends and saying hello to strangers who would fast become friends. Each time was hard. But each time was anchored by the confidence that the same God we had served here would go with us to the place he had called us. He promises to be with us everywhere. You can not escape him or shake him, dodge him or duck him. God's presence is without exception; He is great.

The bible also says **His knowledge is without limit**. Theologians call this the **omniscience** of God. His knowledge extends over the earth and throughout the cosmos. He knows the stars in the heavens and the flowers in the fields. He knows the angels and the demons, and the destiny of the nations. He knows the past and the present and the future... And he knows me and you. He knows everything. Again Psalm 139 sounds the theme...

*You know everything I do; from far away you understand all my thoughts.
You see me, whether I am working or resting; you know all my actions.*
Ps 139:2-3 (GNB)

I have learned over the years that I don't understand myself anywhere near as well as I thought I once did. Human hearts have a depth of deception that is often beyond our sight. I follow my heart and make a decision and... disaster. So we learn to be cautious about ourselves, our feelings and fantasies and dreams. And I've learned that God knows me far better, far more deeply. He knows me inside out. He knows my thoughts, my excuses, my accomplishments and failures, He knows my integrity and my deceptions; he even knows the decreasing number of hairs on my head! His eye is always upon me; I always live in his sight. That makes living an awesome journey, filled with significance.

*Can anyone hide in secret places so that I cannot see him?" declares the
LORD. "Do not I fill heaven and earth?" Jer 23:24*

God's knowledge is without limit; He is great.

The Bible tells us as well that **His power is without limit**. Theologians call this the **omnipotence** of God. We say that God is almighty. By that the scriptures mean He can do whatever he wills. He has unlimited power. He never gets tired. He is never frustrated. He never fails.

*The LORD reigns, he is robed in majesty; the LORD is robed in majesty and is
armed with strength.. Your throne was established long ago; you are from all
eternity.* Ps 93:1,2

Nothing is too hard or difficult for Him. He can create a universe from the great constellations to the smallest micro-organisms. He can answer any prayer He likes. He can convert the hardest most self-centered unbeliever. He can heal any heart, mend any relationship, forgive any sin. Jesus said, *"All things are possible with God."* After his resurrection he said that *"all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me."* He is "almighty."

This is not true of you or me. Our abilities are limited. Our weaknesses are obvious (to everyone but us! But I figure that's why God gives us marriages ☺). Many things are too hard. We can't do whatever we want. In Isaiah 40, God makes just this point...

Who has measured the waters in the hollow of his hand, or with the breadth of his hand marked off the heavens? Who has held the dust of the earth in a basket, or weighed the mountains on the scales and the hills in a balance?

Isa 40:12

Have you? No... but God has and God does. Here's the point. God is mighty, He is great, He is majestic. He knows everything, can be anywhere, and can do everything He decides to do. He has no limits.

Do you think enough about this? This is our confidence in our journey in life, **that God is good and he is almighty**. He holds the whole world in his hands, even – and especially – the lives of those who have yielded to him. His character is the foundation of our confidence that His world is a *"perfectly safe place to be"* (D Willard) for those who trust him, a place where even our faults and failures are woven into his redemptive purposes. St Paul famously phrases it like this,

we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose... What, then, shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can be against us? ...Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? ...No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Rom 8:28,31,35,37-39 (NIV)

Reflection Question: Summarize the key ideas in the Reflection in your own words.

Bible Study:

1. Look up the following verses, and summarize them in the spaces below.

Reference: Isaiah 40:15-17, 22

Reference: Isaiah 40.23, 6-8

Reference: Isaiah 40.25-26

Reference: Isaiah 40.27-31

2. How would you summarize God's Greatness?

3. What do vv 27-31 tell us about God's care and compassion?

4. What do you think about Paul's claim in Romans 8.28?

Spiritual Tool for the Week

The following exercise is to be done this week. Record your experiences in the spaces below.

Spiritual Tool: Praying the Lord's Prayer and the 23rd Psalm

Take what you have learned so far about God's goodness, his greatness, his presence and his Kingdom, using it to shape and pray the words of the Lord's Prayer and the 23rd Psalm, using one or the other on a daily basis.

For example, perhaps you could start the Lord's prayer like this...

My majestic and good Father, you fill the heavens above, and are closer than the air I breathe – and you care for me!

Holy and awesome you are!

Your Kingdom presses in all around, your gracious reign breaking out far and near! May it be so everywhere, even in me!

Reflections on your experience

Readings for Nov 26th

Read "Embracing...", Chapters 1-6 and answer the following questions on chapters 4-6.

1. What do you think of E. Underhill's quote on p. 59? Have you found it to be true for you? Look at Jim's phrase on p. 74, "God wants to deal with sin itself, not simply get it erased."

2. Do you think God is really 'more eager to forgive than we are to be forgiven'? (p.65) What does Jim say causes us to reject this forgiveness (p.69)?

3. "There lurks within us a voice that condemns us." (p.79) What are the possible sources of this voice? Have you been aware of it in your life?

4. What is the basis upon "which we dare forgive ourselves"? (p.81) Name the 'six stages we encounter in the process of forgiving ourselves.' (p.84)

5. What are the 4 misconceptions about forgiveness that Jim mentions (pp. 96-97)?

6. Describe the steps in the healing journey of forgiveness that Jim describes (p.98ff) How can you forgive someone who does not ask for your forgiveness? (p. 104-105)

Read Ted Haggard's Letter of Apology.

Why do you think this happened? What could have prevented it? What is God saying to us through it?
