

September 15, 2013 - God 101

We started a new series last week called “101” and we are going to look at some of the fundamental, foundational, core elements of the Christian faith, things on which everything else seems to rest. Your opinion about these sorts of things is going to colour and shape all of the rest of your beliefs so this is the kind of things we are going to be looking at in this series.

Last week we started out and we looked at the Bible and we asked “Is it authentic; is it accurate; is it trustworthy; is it true?” We went through all of those kind of questions about the Bible. If you weren’t here last week, I encourage you to go on line and listen to that lesson because we are going to move forward through the rest of the series assuming that you have worked through that material and kind of processed all of that. We are going to proceed from here assuming that we’re all in agreement that the answer to the above questions, is ‘yes’.

Today we get to move on and continue our series as we take a look at God, Himself. Now, I knew going into this series that probably on most weeks there was going to be more material than I would have time to squeeze into our regular time slot. I accepted the fact that we’re just going to have to boil this down to the very basics, the very core elements of stuff, but I didn’t realize that when I came to this subject for this week that, that was going to be extremely difficult to do. How do you boil God down to about 30 minutes of talking? Even as I tried to say “Okay, I’ve just got to narrow this down to the very essentials the very core, the most important aspects of God’s nature, there were still a lot of them. There was still a lot to say about all of them and so, even though this is a 101 class, there’s still too much material for us to cover. So, I’m just going to say, we’ll do our best but we are only scratching the very, very, surface of this topic and we could probably do a whole series of series, talking about God. This morning we are going to do our best to hit the highlights.

We can probably start out and talk about the question “Does God exist?” We could probably do a whole series just on that one question “Does God exist and is there evidence to support the existence of God?” We’re not going to do that this morning. We could do that and maybe we’ll do that another time. We won’t do it this morning for a couple of reasons. First of all, if we’re going to go ahead with the assumption from last week that the Bible is authentic and accurate and true and trustworthy, then the Bible is pretty clear that there is a God. So if that’s our standard then that answers this question on one level. Secondly, if you ask people if they believe in God, according to the World Fact Book, in 2010, they asked people around the World if they believed in God and 88% of the people said “Yes, I believe that there is some kind of higher power, deity of some kind.” The technical term for those people, we would call them ‘Theists’, people who believe in a God. People like Christians and Jews who believe that there is just one God, we would call them ‘Mono-theists’ and people who come from religions like Hinduism and things like that where there is more than one God, we would call them ‘Poly-theists’. Just in general, people who believe that there is

a God of some kind, we call them Theists and according to this study there's about 88% of the population that falls into that group. In addition to them, there's another 10% of people who aren't sure. "There might be or there might not be, I haven't really made up my mind yet." So, there's 10% who fit into that category and we would call them 'Agnostics', which really means, don't know. People who don't know. So, there's 10% in that category who say there could be a god or their might not be, I haven't made up my mind yet. The remaining 2% say "I am certain that there is no god in the World there is no god in the Universe and we would call them 'Atheists'. Which is just putting the letter 'A' in front of Theist, which means usually when you do that, it just kind of negates the thing.

Going on these kind of statistics and some similar to them, we can say that 98% of the population believes that there is or there might be a God, we are just going to work with that assumption that most of you here today are part of that 98% and believe that there is or may be a God. We are going to ask a different question this morning not "Does God exist?" but "If there is a God, what is he like?" I think that question is almost as vital as the first question "Does God exist at all?" If there is a God, we need to know what he is like.

This August we were down in Iowa and we were talking with one of Michelle's cousins and I was giving her a hard time because Michelle had told me that a long time ago when we were first together and Michelle told her cousin that we were going to get married, her cousin was quite opposed to the idea. She didn't like it and more to the point, she didn't like me. I was giving her a hard time about that when we were down in August and she told me "Well, the reason was, I had never actually met you but I had seen this picture that was from high school and you kind of had a mullet and a little bit of peach fuzz and you just looked a little slimy or something. So I said "That's not the kind of guy you want to marry." And she said "I'm okay with it now though." So, that was a bit of a relief. That's the way it works. Sometimes we get an impression of a person and we have that in our mind and we base the way we relate to that person and the way we think about that person based on that one impression. That impression may or may not be true.

I remember when we first moved to Saskatoon we rented a house here but we never actually met our landlord or lady in person. We did everything over the phone and on E-mail. We had done that for over a year and then eventually our landlady happened to be in Saskatoon so she said "I'm in town visiting people can I stop by the house and meet you?" I said "Sure!" So, over the year or 15 months or whatever it had been we had talked a lot, we had E-mailed and whatnot and I had developed this very clear picture of who my landlady was, what she looked like, what her personality was like, how she dressed. I just kind of had this image in my mind of who she was. So that day, when she came over to our house and rang the doorbell and she said "Hi! I'm Lena." And I said "No you're not!" I didn't actually say that but that was in my head because she didn't look like she was supposed to look. It wasn't the picture that I had formed in my mind of who this person was going to be. And so, of courser, in that case, I was the one in the wrong, yes she was definitely who she was but my perception of who she was, was wrong. I think if you look at those kind of situations, I

think many people in our World have developed a very strong opinion about God which is based on a flawed perception of who he is. People think about God and respond to God and talk about God and feel about God, based on who they think He is but they may not actually realize who God really is and if they actually met God in person, they may be like me when I met my landlady and go “No! That’s not who I thought you were at all.” That would really change everything because your understanding of who God is, dictates how you are going to relate to Him.

Here’s a couple examples of perceptions people might have about God and who He is. First perception of God is the ‘Absent Minded Professor’. This perception of God is the one that says: You know, God formed the World, made the World, got it all set up, set the thing spinning around, put the people on it and then just kind of wandered off and forgot about us. He’s kind of off somewhere in the universe doing something else and really doesn’t pay much attention to us or give much mind to us, He just lets things go on and on as they are going. The Absent Minded Professor!

Another perception of God is the ‘Cosmic Killjoy’. That’s the perception of God that says: God is sitting up there in the clouds watching down on earth and He just really gets his kicks out of punishing us for things that He says are wrong. He get’s his kicks out of preventing us from doing things in our life that are really fun. So, God is just up there making rules, arbitrarily, and then punishing us for when we don’t follow His rules. The Cosmic Killjoy!

Third perception is ‘The Mad Scientist’ perception. This is the perception that says: God used the World kind of as his play thing. It’s his toy! It’s his experiment! So He toys with the forces of nature and the lives of people kind of on a whim. He just does stuff to see what happens. You know, what happens if I send a tornado here? What happens if I send a tsunami there? What happens if I do this in this person’s life? What happens if I do that in that person’s life? It’s just kind of a big science experiment for God to kind of see what happens as he messes with the World on a whim.

The last one I want to share is ‘The Puppet Master’. The puppet master is kind of like the mad scientist but a little bit different. The puppet master view of God says: Humanity is kind of God’s source of entertainment. So God’s up there pulling strings, making things happen because He’s bored. He wants some entertainment. So watching what happens down here on Earth is God’s way of amusing himself and watching what goes on down here. There’s probably hundreds of other perceptions of God that are a little off the mark. Some people might feel that God is angry and vengeful and that’s what God is all about. Other people might feel like God is antiquated and out of touch, that he’s old fashioned and a little prejudicial. Other people might think that God is love and God is all about love and because God is love, what God wants more than anything else is for me to be happy. So whatever makes me happy makes God happy. Maybe that’s some people’s perception of who God is but none of these things really match the character of God as we read about it in the Bible. of who God is changes how we interpret His actions and how we can respond and relate to

Him. Now, there are many important aspects of God's nature but for today, we're going to try and focus on just two. Two of which I think in many ways are foundational to who God really is. Let's begin.

THE GOD OF THE BIBLE IS SUPERNATURAL

He is not of this world. He is beyond our reality. He is unlike anything else we have ever seen; heard; experienced; or conceived of. God is supernatural!

Now, I was trying this week to think of something that would accurately capsule that idea and the thing that did it best for me, I don't know if it will work for you, but what did it best for me was a song by a guy by the name of Chris Rice. Chris Rice's song, talking about trying to find God and understand God and this is how he explains his journey, he says: (Mike sings!)

"I can sniff, I can see, I can count up pretty high, but these facts aren't getting me any closer to the sky. But my heart of faith keeps poundin' so I know I'm doing fine, but sometimes finding You is just like trying to...smell the colour 9. Smell the colour 9. But 9's not a colour, and even if it was you couldn't smell a colour, and that's my point exactly."

And that's kind of how it is when I try and understand God. Understanding God is kind of like trying to smell the number 9. I understand all those words but I just can't make them fit together quite right to give me the answer that I'm looking for. The God of the Bible, when we try and understand who He really is, is kind of like that. You look in the Book of Job, one of Job's friends is giving him some advice and he says: Job 11:7-9:

"Can you fathom the mysteries of God? Can you probe the limits of the Almighty? They are higher than the heavens above--what can you do? They are deeper than the depths below--what can you know? Their measure is longer than the earth and wider than the sea."

And at the end of the Book of Job, Job has gone through this incredible experience and at the very end of Job, here's what Job says: Job. 42:3b:

"Surely I spoke of things I did not understand, things too wonderful for me to know."

And that's kind of how I feel this morning. I'm up here trying to talk about things that I don't understand, things that are simply too wonderful to know. As we enter this discussion this morning, we do so, knowing that it is beyond us. We are attempting to understand something that our minds literally cannot wrap themselves around. I'll try and give you an example of that. Think of nothing. Picture nothing in your mind. How many of you picked 'black'. Lots of us would pick black when we think of nothing and black is the absence of colour and of light but not necessarily anything. Most of us have had this experience, you could walk into a room full of stuff, but if there's not windows or no light, it

would look black. It may be black but it isn't nothing and if you try and walk across the room, you will quickly find out that it is not nothing.

Maybe some of you with more scientific minds said "Well, nothing would be a vacuum!" (Not the kind you clean your house with, but the kind you use in a lab.) A vacuum is the absence of matter. But even if we could create a perfect vacuum in a lab, which so far, we have been unable to do, but even if we could, we could still have light and temperature and dark matter and neutrinos, and radiation within that vacuum. You see, we can define 'nothing' and for the most part, we can kind of understand the theoretical concept of nothing, but we can never really fully grasp absolute nothingness. Because it is beyond our present reality and experience so we can never quite get hold of it. Sometimes that's how God is. Sometimes, I think we forget exactly how God-like, God really is. And to properly understand God we have to use a God-size scale because all of His stats are immeasurable. Sometimes I forget exactly how unfathomable God really is.

Now there are several supernatural characteristics of who God is as a being, things I think are unique to God and even just one of these things probably elevates God far and away above anyone else. I often remember the words for each of these things, but I usually forget their magnitude. So, this morning, we're going to look at five of these things. One of them would just really, knock it out of the park, but when we put all of them together it's going to be just really overwhelming to us, who God is.

1. God is Eternal. The Biblical record of the beginning of history starts with: "In the beginning, God. (Gen. 1:1) Before there was heavens and earth; before there was land and water; before there was space; before there was anything, there was God.

In Exodus, Chapter 3:13-14, Moses is talking to God in the burning bush and God wants Moses to go into Egypt to free the Israelites and Moses says: "Well, who should I say has sent me to them, in case they ask" and God says to Moses "I Am who I Am, this is what you are to say to the Israelites, I AM has sent you." God names Himself, I AM. Every name has a meaning, mine means 'the One who is like the Lord'. God's name, the one He picked for Himself, means "The one who is in a perpetual state of being". I AM.

Paul describes God this way in 1 Tim. 1:17, he says: "Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honour and glory for ever and ever. Amen."

In the Book of Revelation, God describes himself in a couple of different places, here is how he describes Himself, in Rev. 1:8: "I am the Alpha and the Omega, says the Lord God, who is, and who was and who is to come, the Almighty." I am the Alpha and Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end. From cover to cover; Genesis to Revelation; A to Z; first to last; soup to nuts; beginning to end, God is. And at first, we don't balk at that too much, we accept, even expect, that God would be eternal, but pause for just a moment if you would, and try and wrap your mind around that. Imagine a being with no birth, no beginning, no

before! Imagine no end and no after! Imagine forever and ever and ever and ever and ever! Imagine that! The concept of eternity itself is tough enough for us to wrap our temporal lobes around because everything we know is temporary. Nothing on this earth lasts forever. Now just consider not just the existence of eternity but the existence of a being who spans eternity. Now, our circuits just weren't really made to get that!

Now, if that's not enough to fry your chips, get this! God is 'OMNIPRESENT'. Which is just a big fancy word that says: "He is everywhere". The writer of Psalms in Psalm 139:7-12. describes it this way, he said:

"Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there. If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast. If I say, "Surely the darkness will hide me and the light become night around me." even the darkness will not be dark to you; the night will shine like the day for darkness is as light as you."

According to the Bible, God is everywhere. In every corner of this building; in every room of your house; in every cubicle in your office; on every street corner; in every city of every country of every continent; in a submarine at the bottom of the ocean; at the International Space Station orbiting the Earth; in Antarctica with the penguins; on the far side of the moon; sitting in the chair next to you this morning; and at the farthest reaches of the universe, God is there! How does that work? I do not have a clue! I have no idea how that works. How is it possible? He's God. If that's not enough to blow your mind, consider this:

God is OMNISCIENT. Which is just a big fancy word to say, He knows everything. Again, in Psalm 139:2-4, we read:

"You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar. You discern my going out and my lying down; you are familiar with all my ways. Before a word is on my tongue you, Lord, know it completely."

The writer of Hebrews says, in Hebrews 4:

"Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of Him to whom we must give an account."

And John writes in 1John, 3:20: "God is greater than our hearts and He knows everything."

According to the Bible, God knows everything. Everything that has happened and everything that will happen. How everything works and why everything that doesn't work, isn't working. He knows every feeling; every thought; every word of every man woman and child before it is felt; thought or spoken. He knows what you did before you came to Church

this morning. He knows what you're planning to do after you leave Church this morning and He knows what you will actually do, after you leave Church this morning. That's right! God knows more than Socrates; Einstein; Stephen Hocking and the internet, put together. Whatever there is to know, God knows it.

God is OMNIPOTENT. Which is just a big fancy word for 'All Powerful'. And not in the, could God make a rock so big that He couldn't lift it, kind of way; but God has the power and ability to do ABSOLUTELY ANYTHING. The Apostle Paul writes in Eph. 3:20-21:

"Now to Him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we could ask for or imagine, according to His power that is at work within us, to Him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen."

Paul says, God has the power to do immeasurably more than we could ask or imagine. Jesus goes one step further than that in Matthew 19:26, he says:

"With God, all things are possible."

And at the beginning of Luke's Gospel, an angel declares that "nothing is impossible for God", in Luke 1:37.

I think, at the same time, this is the easiest and the most difficult characteristic of God for us to comprehend. It is easy because we 'get' all powerful. We understand all powerful. We expect, all powerful and in fact, we want God to be 'all powerful'. It's hard, because, IF God is all powerful, then why do bad things happen? If God has the power to do anything; prevent anything; change anything; fix anything; then why doesn't He always do it? Either He isn't able to do it, in which case He isn't actually all powerful; or He could do it, but He chooses not to, in which case, He seems cruel and uncompassionate. And the problem is that the question mistakes 'all powerful' for 'all controlling'. God does have the power to do anything, but God chooses not to be in control of everything in this world. Now why would He do that? Because unless He gives up a portion of control, we can never have any measure of free will in our lives. If God retained full control of everything, we would not be free to make our own decisions; our own choices, but as soon as someone other than God has control over anything, there is the possibility and probably the very strong likelihood, that something bad could happen. If you have ever baked or made crafts or done just about anything with a young child, you understand this principle. If you do everything and remain in control, things usually turn out, more or less, like they're supposed to. But as soon as you give the child control, things tend to go awry. There is flour on the floor, there is egg shells in the batter. There is a tablespoon of salt instead of a teaspoon; smoke starts rising from the oven and perhaps, even a few minor cuts and burns, depending on how far you let things go. Now, when things don't go our way, or don't go the way we like, we shouldn't necessarily assume that, they went the way God wanted them to either. This may not have been His choice or desire and the fact, that He did not, in this instance, intervene, does not in any way

indicate a lack of ability or interest on His part.

Now, all of these traits are amazing but let's just go ahead and magnify them by infinity, shall we. God is eternal, He is everywhere, He is all powerful and He always will be, because God is UNCHANGING. God does not grow, or mature, or evolve, or digress, He will never cease to be eternal; there will never be a place where He is not; He will never forget something or have to learn something new; there will never come a time when His power will not be absolute. The writer of Hebrews says, in Hebrews 13:8: "Jesus is the same yesterday, today and forever." In the Book of James we read, in James 1:17: "Every good gift comes down from above, coming down from the Father of Heavenly lights, who does not change like the shifting shadows." And again, this is beyond the scope of our experience because everything changes...It has been said that, change is the one constant in this world. Seasons come and seasons go. Buildings wear out and get torn down. Trees grow taller and fall over and get hit by lightning and chopped down by loggers or burned by forest fires. Rivers cut deeper paths into the earth; they forge new paths through the rocks; they get dammed up or they dry out. Glaciers melt. Volcanoes erupt. Oceans rise. Earthquakes rip the ground open. Companies expand and collapse, they merge; they get bought out; they go bankrupt. Even the sun will one day, run out of fuel and people are probably the most changeable thing on earth. We get older; we gain weight; we lose weight; we learn more; we forget more; we get stronger; we get weaker; we develop new skills and some of our skills get rusty; we change jobs or companies or careers. Everything changes. But God remains the same--always and forever; without fail, yesterday, today and forever.

Now, put that all together and what do you have? You have a God who is truly SUPERNATURAL! And unlike any other gods, you look at ancient gods or even some of the gods in modern times, many other gods are merely bigger, stronger, faster, versions of humans with the odd superpower thrown in here and there. But they are still limited and restricted in what they do. They are often flawed and fallible and foolish. They are sometimes selfish and jealous and vengeful. They are often immoral and unethical and sometimes occasionally, mortal, but the God of the Bible is never described this way. He is more than just superhuman, He is beyond comprehension; He is beyond comparison; He is not of this world; He is like nothing else; nothing we have ever seen; nothing we have ever imagined. He is more than we can ever begin to wrap our minds around. He is, in every sense of the word, GOD. And once we get a sense of what that really means, it will totally reshape how we interpret His actions and how we respond and relate to Him.

Which brings us to our second important aspect of God's nature: Which is...our topic for next week.