

The God of the Big Picture - Introducing God

"So Moses chiselled out two stone tablets like the first ones and went up Mount Sinai early in the morning, as the LORD had commanded him; and he carried the two stone tablets in his hands. Then the LORD came down in the cloud and stood there with him and proclaimed his name, the LORD. And he passed in front of Moses, proclaiming, "The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children and their children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation."" (Exodus 34:4-7)

1. Your God versus the Biblical God

i) Ludwig Fuerbach (1804 - 1872)

- "You are what you eat" - denial of spiritual being
- "Atheism is not a message of despair but a testimony to the nobility of humanity"
- "God is nothing more than man's projection upon the backdrop of the universe"

ii) Would we have imagined the Biblical God?

- We may have projected a God we believe may be there, or even hope be there, but would we ever have dreamed up the God that is revealed in the Bible?

• Remember the previous week's studies - we only know God through God's revelation, which comes to us through the Bible:

"But what about you?" he asked. "Who do you say I am?" Simon Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." Jesus replied, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven." (Matthew 16:15-17)

2. The God of the Bible

Faith is the key to knowing God

i) The Bible at no point attempts to prove God. His eternal life and being are taken as read.

"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." (Genesis 1:1)

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." (John 1:1)

ii) The closest the Bible gets to testing God is Malachi 3:10 "Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this," says the LORD Almighty, "and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it."

iii) Evidence and reasoning are omitted from the Bible, therefore the only safe route to belief in God is by faith i.e. we believe in creation not because science may prove it one day but by faith: "By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God's command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible." (Hebrews 11:3)

iv) Belief on its own is not enough; the devil believes in God "You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that—and shudder." (James 2:19) He knows his final doom: "What do you want with us, Son of God?" they shouted. "Have you come here to torture us before the appointed time?" (Matthew 8:29) and he knows his time is short: "Therefore rejoice, you heavens and you who dwell in them! But woe to the earth and the sea, because the devil has gone down to you! He is filled with fury, because he knows that his time is short." (Revelation 12:12)

"There are no atheists in hell" (RT Kendall)

3. What the Bible tells us about knowing God

i) He is a Personal God. We are able to know Him personally because He is a person. All members of the Trinity are persons.

The Bible uses two words for God 'Elohim' and 'Yahweh'

• **Elohim** (God) refers to His power and transcendence. God beyond reach: "But will God really dwell on earth? The heavens, even the highest heaven, cannot contain you." (1 Kings 8:27)

• **Yahweh** (Lord) is God's name 'I am that I am' and refers to His personal being and His immanence. God within reach. "God said to Moses, "I am who I am. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: 'I AM has sent me to you.'" (Exodus 3:14)

ii) He is a Holy God.

"Do not come any closer," God said. "Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground." (Exodus 3:5)

"I am the LORD your God; consecrate yourselves and be holy, because I am holy. Do not make yourselves unclean by any creature that moves about on the ground." (Leviticus 11:44)

Holiness = 'Otherness'

a) God is wholly 'other' -

"or this time I will send the full force of my plagues against you and against your officials and your people, so you may know that there is no one like me in all the earth." (Exodus 9:14) Expressed in the song 'Who is there like You?'

b) There is nothing else like Him -

"Who among the gods is like you, O LORD? Who is like you - majestic in holiness, awesome in glory, working wonders? (Exodus 15:11)

c) He is incapable of error -

"As for God, his way is perfect; the word of the LORD is flawless. He is a shield for all who take refuge in him. (2 Samuel 22:31)

d) He is without sin, fault or defect, He hates sin -

The Ten Commandments - Exodus 20:1-17

"God is a righteous judge, a God who expresses his wrath every day." (Psalm 7:11)

This has implications for us:

• **To know God, humanity (which is not holy), needs a substitute.** In the Old Testament the sacrificial system of worship showed both God's mercy and the seriousness of sin. "But those sacrifices are an annual reminder of sins... "But when this priest had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God." (Hebrews 10:3-4, 12)

That's why the substitute must be without spot or blemish.

"The animals you choose must be year-old males without defect, and you may take them from the sheep or the goats." (Exodus 12:5)

"For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin." (Hebrews 4:15)

"He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth." (1 Peter 2:22)

•His people are called to be holy

"for it is written: "Be holy, because I am holy." (1 Peter 1:16)

We are both made holy by Jesus' death and called to be sanctified by the Holy Spirit.

"To the church of God in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be holy, together with all those everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ—their Lord and ours" (1 Corinthians 1:2)

"You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires" (Ephesians 4:22)

"It is God's will that you should be sanctified: that you should avoid sexual immorality; that each of you should learn to control his own body in a way that is holy and honorable, not in passionate lust like the heathen, who do not know God; and that in this matter no one should wrong his brother or take advantage of him. The Lord will punish men for all such sins, as we have already told you and warned you. For God did not call us to be impure, but to live a holy life. Therefore, he who rejects this instruction does not reject man but God, who gives you his Holy Spirit." (1 Thessalonians 4:3-8)

iii)He is a merciful God

"maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children and their children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation."(Exodus 34:7)

Mercy = the right and ability to punish but choosing not to

"and the LORD said, "I will cause all my goodness to pass in front of you, and I will proclaim my name, the LORD, in your presence. I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion." (Exodus 33:19)

"The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance." (2 Peter 3:9)

a)He gave us His Son as the Lamb slain before the foundation of the world -

"but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect. He was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake." (1 Peter 1:19-20)

We see God's redemption plan as early as Genesis 3:15:

"And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel."

There was no Plan B.

b)His people are chosen, in Christ, from the foundation of the world -

"For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight." (Ephesians 1:4)

c)His people were chosen by sheer grace, not works -

"Understand, then, that it is not because of your righteousness that the LORD your God is giving you this good land to possess, for you are a stiff-necked people." (Deuteronomy 9:6)

"who has saved us and called us to a holy life—not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace."(2 Timothy 1:9)

d)This mercy is revealed in the Good News (Gospel)

"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." (John 3:16)

iv)He is Just

Just = Fair, acting with Justice

"Righteousness and justice are the foundation of your throne; love and faithfulness go before you." (Psalm 89:14)

I.This may not be our idea of justice i.e. Myra Hindley

"For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways," declares the LORD. "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts." (Isaiah 55:8-9)

II.To be just there must be a day when things are made right.

Therefore, He must punish sin: *"maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children and their children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation."* (Exodus 34:7)

He will not clear the guilty: *"The LORD is slow to anger, abounding in love and forgiving sin and rebellion. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation."* (Numbers 14:18)

All the world is guilty: *We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all."* (Isaiah 53:6)

"Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God." (Romans:3:19)

A)God must be vindicated (How could you, God?)

B)Jesus Christ must be vindicated (Crucified as a terrorist)

C)God's people must be vindicated (The blood of the martyrs)

III.He punishes sin by:

a)Letting people continue in it:

"Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts." (Romans 1:26)

b)By sending calamity:

"It is mine to avenge; I will repay. In due time their foot will slip; their day of disaster is near and their doom rushes upon them." (Deuteronomy 32:35)

c)Punishing with death:

"but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die." (Genesis 2:17)

"For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Romans 6:23)

d)Ultimately God deals with it in two ways:

•**a sacrifice of blood:** *"The blood will be a sign for you on the houses where you are; and when I see the blood, I will pass over you. No destructive plague will touch you when I strike Egypt."* (Exodus 12:13)

"He did not enter by means of the blood of goats and calves; but he entered the Most Holy Place once for all by his own blood, having obtained eternal redemption." (Hebrews 9:12)

•**everlasting hell:** *"Then he will say to those on his left, "Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels."* (Matthew 25:41)

e)Discipline for believers: *"And you have forgotten that word of encouragement that addresses you as sons: "My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you, because the Lord disciplines those he loves" (Hebrews 12:5)*

IV.He is Jealous

a)He accepts no rival

"You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me" (Exodus 20:5)

"I am the LORD; that is my name! I will not give my glory to another or my praise to idols." (Isaiah 42:8)

b)He hates idolatry

"Be careful not to forget the covenant of the LORD your God that he made with you; do not make for yourselves an idol in the form of anything the LORD your God has forbidden. For the LORD your God is a consuming fire, a jealous God." (Deuteronomy 4:23-24)

"Do not follow other gods, the gods of the peoples around you;" (Deuteronomy 6:14)

c)He is jealous for His people

"Then the angel who was speaking to me said, "Proclaim this word: This is what the LORD Almighty says: 'I am very jealous for Jerusalem and Zion,'" (Zechariah 1:14)

"Or do you think Scripture says without reason that the spirit he caused to live in us envies intensely? (James 4:5)

V.He is Faithful

"great is your faithfulness." (Lamentations 3:23)

"God, who has called you into fellowship with his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, is faithful." (1 Corinthians 1:9)

a)He will never leave or forsake us

"And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." (Matthew 28:20)

"Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you." (Hebrews 13:5)

b)He will supply all our needs

"And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus." (Philippians 4:19)

c)He will provide an escape in trial and temptation

"No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it." (1 Corinthians 10:13)

"if this is so, then the Lord knows how to rescue godly men from trials and to hold the unrighteous for the day of judgment, while continuing their punishment." (2 Peter 2:9)

VI.He is Truthful

"faith and knowledge resting on the hope of eternal life, which God, who does not lie, promised before the beginning of time," (Titus 1:2)

"God did this so that, by two unchangeable things in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled to take hold of the hope offered to us may be greatly encouraged." (Hebrews 6:18)

a)His Son is Truth

"Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." (John 14:6)

b)His Spirit is Truth

"And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever— the Spirit of truth." (John 14:16-17)

c)His Word is Truth

"Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth." (John 17:17)

d)He requires Truth from His people

"Surely you desire truth in the inner parts" (Psalm 51:6)

4.Knowing about God vs Knowing God

a)God is knowable at an intimate level (see Song of Songs)

i.Abraham was called God's friend

"But you, O Israel, my servant, Jacob, whom I have chosen, you descendants of Abraham my friend," (Isaiah 41:8)

ii.Jesus calls us friends

"I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you." (John 15:15)

iii.The Spirit cries 'Abba, Father'

"Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, "Abba, Father." (Galatians 4:6)

iv.God confides in those who fear Him

"The LORD confides in those who fear him; he makes his covenant known to them." (Psalm 25:14)

b)We know God first through conversion

c)As we grow in grace

- 1)Private prayer
- 2)Bible reading
- 3)Teaching & Preaching
- 4)Worship
- 5)Church Involvement
- 6)Communion

d)He wants us to know His ways

e)He wants to be worshipped

f)He wants to be talked to

g)He wants to reveal Himself to those who long to find Him

"So I say to you: Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you." (Luke 11:9)