

God is... Divine
Ex 3:1-5, 13=15, Ex 33:18-23

Brothers and sisters, how well do you know God? It's an important question for us with real life applications. A number of years ago, one of the little boys at Valleyview was having a conversation with his mother about the importance of following "the rules." Actually, it was less of a conversation and more of a battle of the wills; with the mom telling her little boy that he must do something and the little boy challenging his mom by continually asking her "why?"

Eventually his mom decided to play the God card, "*You must listen to your mother because that's God's rule, God says so!*" The little boy pondered this for a moment and then asked "*so God is the one who gets to make the rules??*" "Yes" said the exasperated mother. "*Well... then I think that I want to be God!*" came the reply.

It's a cute story but also a good illustration of how our thoughts about God, what we believe about God, and what we find out about God affects us and has consequences for us.

And it also illustrates the challenge we face in speaking about God. If you were to attempt to describe God to someone, if you wanted to tell your children about who God is, what would you say??

I suspect most of us would say something like God is invisible, you can't see Him, He is a spiritual being. We'd also probably say something about God being the creator of everything, and that God can be everywhere at the same time, that He knows everything – He even what we are thinking... that He is very powerful – all powerful in fact... and of course we would be sure to say that God is Love and that He loves us and sent His son Jesus to die for us.

And if we were extra theologically minded, we might even try to say something about the fact that Jesus is also God and that God is a Holy Trinity – Father, Son and Holy Spirit but still one God... and then hope that whoever we are explaining this to doesn't ask "*but why?*"

Because brothers and sisters, all these generalized statements about God are true but as that that response of the little boy reveals, the devil gets in the details. Generalized statements about God often cause us to run into other problems when people press us on them, because we don't really know further elaborate on or respond to the inevitable questions which these generalized statements raise.

You've probably heard some of these questions - how can a loving God send people to hell? How could an all-powerful God allow so much suffering to occur in this world? If God knows everything then why didn't he stop me from making that decision which ended in such a disaster?

But what these kinds of questions reveal brothers and sisters... is that we don't really know God as well as we think we do. And when we start to reflect on and consider what we do know about God its inevitable that we will start to wonder - How do we know what we know about God to begin with?

So, let's begin to learn more about God by establishing how it is that we are able to know God, and how we can know much

more specific details about who God is, so that we don't get tripped up by the devil in the details, but... we can deepen our relationship with the Divine instead.

Now there are many people who believe that to know God better we can simply start with what we know and work our way back – like the little boy who kept asking “why?” This is known as the “Way of Causality.” If we keep looking at what we know and keep asking why eventually we will end up at God because God is the ultimate cause of all things.

Another example of working from what we know is the “Way of the Negation” in which we subtract from our idea of God any and all imperfections, limitations, flaws or evils that we know exist in ourselves and in this world and what we are left with is the ultimately Perfect Being who is God.

Or in contrast to the Way of Negation there is the “Way of Eminence” where we identify and attribute to God all that we believe to be good and right and beautiful in this world, understanding that while it might be flawed in ourselves, in

God it reaches its most eminent form of expression and thus God is the exemplar of absolute good or beauty or... love – as we idealize it should be.

But brothers and sisters, do you see any problems with trying to know God in this manner? Starting with what we know to better understand the unknown? The scriptures certainly do, listen to what it says in 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.”*

In other words, the scripture tells us that it is not possible to work our way from what we know here on the earth and in the heavens and then make the jump to knowing more specific details about who God is. Its not possible.

Rather scripture tells us that God must reveal Himself to us if we are to know Him specifically. As Hebrews 1:1 tells us *“In*

the past God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways.”

And that is why I selected our scripture passages today from Exodus 3 and Exodus 33 where God is intentionally revealing Himself in greater specificity to Moses - in giving Moses His name, and in showing Moses the backside of His glory.

So, the way in which we come to know God is not by starting with what we know, but in responding to God’s previously unknown revelation of Himself to us - with belief and obedience – just as we see Moses doing by taking off his shoes and accepting the limited glimpse of the divine glory which God was willing to show him.

And because it is God who reveals Himself to us we can trust that God really wants us to know Him, and that we are capable of knowing Him, and we can be confident in what He reveals to us about Himself through the scriptures is correct.

Furthermore, those whom God reveals Himself to have a divine responsibility to tell others about it. We see that in God's instructions to Moses in Exodus 3 to go and speak on His behalf to the people of Israel, and it's implied in verse we read from Heb 1:1 in that God spoke to people through the prophets in the past, and if you read those prophetic books in the bible you'll see that God specifically commands them to tell others what He has revealed to them.

And all this is important as a foundation brothers and sisters because we need to be able to be confident and believe and trust that God specifically reveals Himself to us in and through the scriptures – this is why the Bible is a book unlike any other, it is a **Holy** book – the **Holy** Bible. This is how God specifically reveals Himself to us.

And because God is revealing Himself to us in this way – we also have a responsibility to tell others what we know about who God is, and this is definitely one of the ways God would have us Go Out and Bless people spiritually in the next phase of our blessing project, tell them who God is, what God is

like... because brothers and sisters there is a lot of incorrect teaching and confusion and misinformation going around about God.

And if you are thinking *“well, why doesn't an all-powerful God who is everywhere simply do some more obviously spectacular self-revelation to clear that up for us?”* then indeed you are in the right place because that is what is going to happen as we look at the Holy Scriptures this morning – God will reveal Himself to us, so be sure you are paying attention!

Now our two scripture readings this morning reveal that there are qualities about God which make Him God – they make Him Divine. These qualities have no analogous parallel within our world, our existence, or within our experience. These are what define God's distinctiveness and His transcendent greatness and awesomeness in being not only a divine being, as God.

The first is revealed to us in Exodus 3:14 in God's statement *“I AM who I AM, This is what you are to say to the Israelites: ‘I*

AM has sent me to you.” This reveals to us that God is Self-Existent. That’s amazing!

And the second is revealed to us in Exodus 3:15 when God says *“This is my name forever, the name you shall call me from generation to generation.”* and it is also implied as part of the reason why God says in Exodus 33:20 that *“no one can see His face and live”* because God’s self-existence is - Infinite. That’s incredible!

So, let’s contemplate on God’s self-existence for a moment – God is the I AM who I AM, and this name in Hebrew Yahweh is related to the verb “to be” and thus we draw from this revelation of God that His divine existence is self contained, independent of anything or anyone else and this means that God is uncreated.

Let that sink in for a moment – we exist in dependence upon so many things, not the least of which is that it shouldn’t be - 30 outside or we’ll freeze to death, and so our existence is dependent upon heat... and also on having shelter and food

and water and health and other people who can help provide all these necessities we are dependant upon. We need to be conceived by a mother and father and born into this world in order to exist... but God needs none of that. He is self-existent. It blows your mind.

The implications of this self-existence in who God is, are as follows; God has life within Himself; John 5:26 states this plainly *“the Father has life in himself,”*

God’s decisions, His plans, and His deliberations and thoughts are not contingent upon anything or anyone else but Himself. Romans 11:34 says *“Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor?”*

And God is in no one’s debt for anything; Romans 11:35 says *“who has ever given to God that God should repay them?”*

And God’s self existence, means that He is completely independent – or maybe its better to say undependent or autonomous and this applies also to His will and in His power.

Nothing can make God lose His will, break His will, or thwart His will; Romans 9:19 says *“who can resist His will?”* and Dan 4:35 reveals that God is self-accountable in His power *“He does as he pleases with the powers of heaven and the peoples of the earth. No one can hold back his hand or say to him: ‘What have you done?’”*

In fact God’s self-existence is so autonomous and foundational that all other existence that we know or are aware of or can speculate about flows from it and is continually sustained by it.

Rev 4:11 says *“for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being”* and 1 Colossians 1:16-17 states *“all things have been created through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.”* God is the foundation for reality.

Which is why we can’t reverse engineer the knowledge of God and somehow leap across the gap between the created and dependent to the uncreated and autonomous. God’s self-

existence places Him beyond our investigative abilities and makes him uniquely transcendent and awesome as God.

And God is also Infinite in His Divine self-existence. There are no limits to His self-existence, we can’t measure or quantify His existence in or anything about Him. It often goes past us when we read verses like Exodus 3:15 but when God says forever... He means forever, there’s no end or limit to what He is speaking of. So when God says to Moses in Ex 3:15 that His name *“I AM”* is His name forever, He is revealing to us that His self-existence will never end, it is Infinite, He is Infinite.

But God’s Divine infinity also means that He is without beginning. Psalm 90:2 says *“Before the mountains were born or you brought forth the whole world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God.”* God’s infinity stretches back everlasting into eternity before the start of Creation and it reaches forward everlasting into eternity beyond the Creation.

But it goes even beyond that brothers and sisters, God’s Infinite self-existence transcends time itself, time is just a

creation of God and thus the scriptures reveal to us in Ps. 90:4, and 2 Peter 3:8 that *“With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day.”* This isn’t to say that God experiences Time differently that we do, though that is true, rather it is to say that God stands above Time and Time itself is dependent upon God’s self-existence for its existence, and it is beyond the capacity of Time to quantify and measure God. For God, there is no past or future, those are terms of created Time, for God there is only an eternal, infinite present self-existence... I AM

And while this reality of God’s infinity can be revealed to us, or described to us so that we start to understand the magnitude by which God is so far superior to us as time-bound, limited, finite creatures... its not just about realizing that it’s impossible for the finite to fully comprehend the infinite, but it is so that we understand if God were to confront us with His infinite Divine essence - it would literally undo us.

This is in part why God tells Moses in our second scripture passage this morning that no one can see God’s face, can see

His glory, His full and complete essence of His Divinity and survive it, and it also underlines the biblical command that we are to Fear God, as Psalm 89:7 says *“In the council of the holy ones God is greatly feared; he is more awesome than all who surround him.”*

To Fear God is first and foremost the proper response that we should have when God reveals who He is as self-existing infinite God who is the basis for our entire existence and is so far beyond our limited existence that if we encountered His Essence, it would blow us apart.

That’s very different from being afraid of what we might know or encounter in this world. Many people today don’t like to talk about the Fear of God – even though the Bible mentions Fearing God 10x more than it does Loving God (*I’ve done a separate sermon on that if you want to learn more about it*) – but this aversion to the Fear of God is a good example of how starting from what we know in order to better know God does not work and gives us incorrect and incomplete knowledge of God.

Our experience of fear from what we know in this world, has to do with the unknown, the uncertainty of the future, the fragility of life, suffering, death and that much of this comes from the imperfections and limitations and the effects of sin on our human qualities of love, or truth, or faithfulness and so on.

So if we attempt to move from what we know in this respect about fear and try to understand what it means to fear God – without knowing God from His revelation - we inevitably project those same kinds of imperfections and limitations on to who God is. And not only does this distort what it means to Fear God, and give us a false picture of Him, its also insulting to God's very infinite essence as it implying defects and imperfections in God

Instead God's infinite self-existence that we come to know through His revelation to us in scriptures means that every quality of God, every characteristic or attribute of God is limitless. Which not only means that His grace, His mercy, His justice, His goodness, His Fatherhood, His knowledge and

power and presence are unlimited... and this is the basis for that famous verse in Ephesians 3:18 where Paul talks about needing to be empowered to grasp the width, length, height and dept of God's love and to know this love that surpasses knowledge.

It also implies that there are no defects, there is nothing lacking in any God's qualities either, Numbers 23:19 states *"God is not human, that he should lie, not a human being, that he should change his mind"* and Psalm 19:7 says *"The Law of Yahweh is perfect..."*

And brothers and sisters, because God has revealed Himself to be both self-existing and infinite it also means that He is One – there is a Unity to who God is.

First there is the Unity of Singularity meaning that there is only ONE God who is like God in His divine essence. God proclaims this in Deuteronomy 32:39 *"See now, that I myself am He! There is no god beside me!"*

Secondly, He is unified in Simplicity – meaning that God is not a composite made up of various parts or pieces or ideas or ideals, He is One and when we experience God in His actions, His truth, His revelation to us we can trust that we have a genuine experience of God and its not just a piece or a part of God, which would leave us wondering if the rest of God is the same as the part of God we have experienced.

So even though Moses only saw God's back, and was not exposed to the full divine essence of God's face, what Moses would see in God's back was consistent with who God is throughout Himself. God is One, He is unified in simplicity, and thus scripture can say that when we are experiencing God's love we are experiencing God Himself – because of His Unity God is fully present in His Love, 1 John 4:7, 16 "God is love" – and note that the emphasis should be placed on God, not love.

The same is true of any other attribute or characteristic or quality of God which means that while these qualities of God are distinguishable from each other - God's knowledge is

distinguishable from His mercy and from His justice and so on – they are unified in who God is and they work together in divine harmony so that God is not inconsistent in any way in and of Himself.

And probably most importantly for us to understand and realize is that the very definition of how we label these qualities – grace, mercy, love, esp. love – finds its source from who God is and not from us. There is no definition of Love by which we determine if God is indeed Love apart from God Himself.

And finally God is Unified in Trinity. In Matthew 28:19 Jesus instructs us to baptize people into the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit and from this it is revealed to us that there are three distinct persons who are One God, of the same substance, essence and divinity.

Everything that has been revealed to us in scripture about who God is as Divine is equally and wholly true of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

In fact, many of the verses about God which we referenced this morning are inclusive of Jesus. With regards to Self-existence John 5:26 says *“the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself.* And as for God’s Infinity Jesus himself says in John 8:58 *“before Abraham was... I AM”* and He also insists on the Unity of God in John 10:30 when He states *“I and the Father are one!”*

And thus as we respond in awe and wonder and amazement and worship to God because of His Divine Self-existence and Infinity and Unity, we are then further amazed and left in awe and wonder to contemplate and respond to the fact that Jesus is also Divine – that He is God.

So why is this knowledge of God important for us brothers and sisters?

First because God wants us to know and understand who He truly is, and to respond to Him in awe and wonder and obedience - it is His will for us and it blesses us to know and think about such a transcendent divine being.

Secondly its proper and respectful to God to speak correctly and accurately about Him – it blesses Him to hear us do so and it is a blessing to others as well.

Thirdly knowing God... puts everything else into proper perspective; it lifts our eyes up and raises our hearts and minds above the petty, the mundane, our self-centered introspective navel gazing obsession with ourselves and what we think is problematic and important. It refreshes and reinvigorates us when we become cynical and jaded and lose our sense of wonder and inspiration and find it difficult to see the beauty and the good in this world.

Brothers and sisters – why does knowing God matter to us?

Well to paraphrase Dr. Spykman *“Nothing else matters except for God – but because of God everything else matters!”*

And finally, if you know who God is... then you truly know who you are; the knowledge of God not only lets us know who God is but it is the basis for receiving our own correct and true identity and our new identity – let me explain...

When God reveals Himself and draws near to us in doing so, as He has done this morning, His proximity irritates our sinfulness and it pushes back against God, the same way in which we experience the resistance when we try to put the same poles of two magnets together.

As you heard about God's self-existence, his Infinity and His Unity this morning, no doubt it blows your mind but there is confronts our human pride and humbles us and we don't like that. For example, it was difficult for me to write that God is autonomous in His power and accountable to no one but Himself – because my sinful nature does not want to submit to God or feel its right that someone should not be held accountable with their power, and like that little boy who was arguing with his mother – maybe I would like that autonomy to make the rules for myself instead of someone else doing that for me.

You will have encountered this in some way this morning as well, perhaps similar to me or perhaps in a different way – and as we learn more about the different attributes of God over

the next two months you will discover that learning more about God is eliciting unexpected reactions in your heart and mind where you didn't realize that Sin is still affecting you... But this isn't a bad thing brothers and sisters...

This is how the Holy Spirit works in us to sanctify us and show us what sinful thoughts and beliefs He is working on changing in our hearts and minds in order to make us more like Jesus Christ. So confess them as sin, seek forgiveness for them and ask the Holy Spirit to change them – it's a simple as that.

And from what we learned this morning I think we can see there is still much work to be done to bring each of us into the divine perfection of Jesus Christ so that we are prepared to live in the awesome and incomprehensible glorious presence of a divine self-existing infinite being who is the only true God - for all eternity. That is our purpose, that is our destiny – to know and to enjoy YAHWEH forever. Amen – let's pray...