

God is... Omniscient
Ps 139:1-6, 13-18, Isaiah 46:10-11

Brothers and Sisters, I'm certain that we've all had the experience of conversing with our friends about the strange behavior of someone we know, or trying to figure out what really happened in some puzzling incident. And after speculating on the motivations and considering plausible explanations based on the information that is available to us, nothing really seems to make much sense and somebody will inevitably say "*well... God only knows!*" Do you know what I'm talking about?

God only... knows. Such a small statement, a verbal reflex in such conversations really, but it packs a lot of theological truth doesn't it! We might not be able to figure something out, we might not be able to fully understand what's happened, but God does. God alone knows.

God, the only self-existing, unlimited and perfect, infinite and omnipresent divine being... knows.

Not only is this a statement that God is able to know things we can't because He has access to information that we don't, and He has a divine ability to comprehend things that we can't – but its also a statement that God is a conscious, self aware, personal and relational divine being. God is able to know us...

As is implied in what we read from Psalm 139 and Isaiah 46 this morning, the God who reveals Himself to us in the scripture is the living God - who fully knows Himself, knows what He wants, knows who He will do it with, and knows how to bring it about, and knows us better than ourselves.

And so, brothers and sisters if you didn't already know, and if you haven't yet figured it out, the message this morning is about God's knowledge... or as we commonly refer to it; God's omniscience.

This word comes to us from the Latin, where "omni" means all, and "science" means knowledge. So, when we say God is omniscient, we are saying that God is all knowing, He has all

knowledge, 1 John 3:20 specifically says that *“He knows everything!”*

Now, when we hear that someone knows everything, our first impulse is to challenge it - right? *“Oh, you know everything – then what’s 49 billion x 45775?? Or what am I thinking about right now?? Or what’s going to happen on March 18th in twenty years from now??”*

Those kinds of challenges usually put an end to whatever boasting was going on about being a “know-it-all” - but God actually does know all these things; the one who created numbers and whose thoughts are beyond counting, as David says in Ps 139:17, can certainly multiply 49 billion x 45775.

And this scripture passage reveals that God knows what we are thinking as well. David says in Ps 139:2 *“you perceive my thoughts from afar.”* God doesn’t even need to be close to us in order to know what we are thinking...

And in regards to what would happen on a specific day in the future, it is as Ps 139:16 states *“all the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be.”* So of course, God knows what is going to happen.

God’s knowledge is all encompassing and complete, there is nothing lacking in it, and He knows everything in its fullness and in its essence and in its relationship to everything else – it’s fully comprehensive, and instantaneous.

Thus, if we were to consider ALL that God can know about Himself, and ALL things that are possible due to who God is, it would be an uncreatedly-infinite amount of knowledge about ALL of who God is and can do... theologians call this God’s **necessary** knowledge because it’s necessitated by who God is within Himself just being God. God doesn’t have to do anything to have this knowledge - its just part of His being.

Then there is God’s knowledge that comes from His Divine will to bring us, and the entirety of the created reality that exists, into existence. Theologians call this God’s **free** knowledge

because it is free of any external influence or internal compulsion that would require or force God to act on His knowledge and create us and this universe. God is free in this way. Isn't God amazing brothers and sisters!!

And God knows what is happening, and that means He knows what has happened and what will happen and everything that could have happened – ALL outcomes in His creation are known to Him. Isn't God simply awe-inspiring??

Now how does God know all this? Is He just that smart, are His divine capacities for observation and deduction and having a hunch so... divine... that He is able to figure it all out and thus know ALL things?

Well, that's a good guess, but God's knowledge actually flows out of His self-existence and His infinity. And because everything exists due to God's self-existence, including time... and God has no limits, any knowledge God has is not limited knowledge whereby He is in need of acquiring or learning more knowledge.

In other words, the way God knows is part of His being as God, which means its beyond the way we are able to know things, not just in terms of capacity but especially in terms of acquisition.

We acquire our knowledge through learning; interacting with the world around us in a variety of ways. Knowledge comes to us through formal means such as being taught, instructed, disciplined, trained, counselled etc... or through informal means like experience, play, random interactions, and so on.

Some of what we know is readily available and accessible to us in our conscious minds while other bits and pieces of information reside in our subconscious and help to form our intuitions. But I'm not wanting to go into great detail about how we know things, I just want to highlight how it is that we must learn and acquire knowledge so that we understand that God does not.

God's knowledge is innate to Himself, it comes from within Himself, and He is completely aware of all of it within Himself.

So not only is God all-knowing... but all knowledge actually flows from Him. This is what Isaiah 28:26 implies when it says that God instructs the farmer and teaches him the right way to plant and harvest, and vs 29 of this passage concludes that this agricultural knowledge “comes from Yahweh (I AM) whose plan is wonderful and wisdom magnificent”

That’s amazing isn’t it – that whatever knowledge we learn and acquire is already something that God knows within Himself and actually comes from God, there is no knowledge that we can learn or acquire outside of that which God already knows.

Now I don’t mean to imply that if we dedicate ourselves to the pursuit of learning and knowledge that we will somehow be able to make our way back to God and connect with Him, its rather that we need to understand that the ability to learn and acquire knowledge is fully dependent upon God, we only deceive ourselves if we think being educated is a way in which we can be independent of Him, as Proverbs 1:7 “*The fear of Yahweh is the beginning of knowledge...*”

Plus, as we understand this truth about God as the source of knowledge it gives us a deeper understanding of what God was testing in Adam and Eve when He forbid them to eat from the Tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

Because, if knowledge is sourced in God... then God himself is the sole source of the determination of what is right and what is wrong. For Adam and Eve to “**know**” good and evil is thus to determine from within their own being what is right and wrong, independent of God.

Its not that Adam and Eve didn’t understand that it was right to obey God’s command and wrong to disobey it prior to eating from the tree, that they were innocent of morality and what was good and evil – it was that they accepted the source of knowing this command was right and disobeying it was wrong as coming from God, and not themselves.

In taking the fruit from the tree they willingly set themselves up against God, as their own source of knowledge for what is

right and wrong. And you can see it play out when God confronts them about it. They each determine for themselves what went wrong in this situation - Eve blames the serpent for deceiving her, Adam blames Eve for giving him the fruit.

And we can see this continue to play out across human history right up until today where we believe that it is our choice to determine what is right or wrong to the point where we say there is no objective right or wrong. And thus things that were considered wrong in the past are now considered right... and what was right is now considered wrong.

Even those of us who would agree that God is the proper and only source for the knowledge of what is good and evil... we also struggle with the full implications that God determines good and evil in all things - and not ourselves – and I'm not just talking about our current struggle to accept God's determination on right and wrong concerning our human sexuality and gender.

When we begin to dig into all that the scripture reveals to us about God's knowledge it becomes increasingly clear to us that God's free knowledge not only determines what is right and wrong but God's free knowledge of what will come to pass - is what makes it come to pass.

We already heard Ps 139:16 that *"all the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be."* And what we read from Isaiah 46:10 is that the whole of our human history is determined by God, He says *"I make known the end from the beginning, from ancient times, what is still to come."*

Job 14:5 tells us *"A person's days are determined; you have decreed the number of his months and have set limits he cannot exceed."* Lamentations 3:37 states *"Who can speak and have it happen if the Lord has not decreed it?"* This carries through even in the New Testament, James 4:15 instructs us that we *"ought to say, 'If it is the Lord's will, we will live and do this or that.'"*

So, its clear from the scripture that God, in His knowledge of all things, has decreed all things, and has decreed them with their causes and conditions in the exact order in which they come to pass in His creation – and this is problematic for us in two ways brothers and sisters.

And the first is that God’s predetermination is inconsistent and at odds with what we believe to be our free will and how the outcomes of events are contingent upon our ability to choose. Now I know this sounds really academic and philosophical - but its important for us.

And the second problem is a bit more personal, because God’s predetermination of our lives suggests that He has determined and is responsible for the hardship and suffering and tragedies that have occurred in our lives, not to mention the vast amount of suffering that occurs in this world, and that is really difficult for us to comes to terms with, for obvious personal reasons...

So, let’s take a look at the first problem and then we’ll be in a better position to consider what the Lord would reveal to us this morning about our second problem.

Now I hope its obvious to us that trying to solve the first problem by saying there are limits on God’s knowledge so that the human will is given some space where in it can affect and determine the outcome of reality is clearly unbiblical and would be speaking falsely of God.

But I also need to make it clear to us that we are not then to respond – as I’ve heard so many people respond over the years – by getting all fatalistic and saying there is no point to doing anything because everything will happen as it will happen regardless of what we do.

Nor is it right to be pragmatic about it and confess that on the big things and with regards to His plan God has predetermined things, but there’s space in this for us to make our own choices on things that don’t matter as much and God somehow works it all out – that really doesn’t square with

scripture either. We only need to think of Matt 12:7 where Jesus teaches us about God's attention to the seemingly insignificant details in that even the very hairs on our head are numbered.

The truth is brothers and sisters that God's omniscience and the predetermination that flows from it does not in any way deny human agency or undermine our responsibility, it does however contradict this notion we have of "free will" and expose it as unbiblical.

You might not realize it brothers and sisters but the philosophical concept of a free will and what it really means is actually only applicable to God in what we learned was His free knowledge. Only God is so free as to have no external influences or internal compulsions upon Him and His will. Only God is in position to make His decisions of His own free knowledge.

And to know this is a great source of comfort and confidence for us because once God has decided from His own free knowledge, that He will bring it to pass, He will not arbitrarily

change the plan due to some unexpected influence or factor that He did not foresee.

Thus, when scripture reveals God created Human beings in His image, He is revealing to us that His predetermined plan is for us to have the ability, the influence and the agency to rule and develop His creation and to multiply and fill the earth, and do so for His glory - thus He has endowed us with all the faculties needed for this purpose. Furthermore, in the act of creating us – God has made us able to respond to Him, we are responsible. When God acts it calls forth our response.

God's free act to create us and this world provides the reality wherein our design and purpose allow us to have real agency and genuine responsibility, and it is the means by which God will fulfill and work through to bring about His predetermined purpose.

Our agency and response to God is real and genuine **because** He has predetermined it – not in spite of it... This is a truth about God as our Creator that we need to embrace...

And we must let go of and turn away from... the pernicious sinful inclination of believing that our human will is free when that is something that is reserved only for God's will. We know how things turn out when Human beings usurp God's knowledge of good and evil... brothers and sisters usurping God's free will for our own is equally disastrous for us.

Instead... "choose" to understand our will, our agency, our responsibility and our choices in light of our created purpose as the biblical way for us to know ourselves as God knows us, and then we can echo David's confession in Psalm 139:14 "*I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I **know** that full well.*"

Now what about the works of God, the predeterminations of God that are not wonderful for us.

Well, brothers and sisters, let us receive what knowledge and understanding of these trials and tribulations we can by keeping our eyes on God, because as scripture reveals to us – was not God the very first to experience his own

predetermined trial and tribulation, as His wonderful creations Adam and Eve rebelled against Him, usurped His knowledge and declared themselves as gods by knowing good and evil...

Do you think this was an unknown development to God?? That he didn't see this coming?? No - Paul says in Eph 1:4 that God's plan for our salvation in Christ was resolved to occur before the creation of world.

So that tells us that God was fully aware of all that He would bring about when He chose to create this world and us – and what He Himself would be committing to experience in allowing Adam and Eve to rebel and place the creation under the curse of sin, and the consequences and the suffering that would bring into each and every one of our lives – He knew this in full in eternity past before He spoke it all into existence.

He knew before He brought it about... the full depth of the sorrow He Himself would feel, the righteous anger of watching His good creation be spoiled and twisted and misused, and the sufferings, the pain and anguish and misery that every single

one of His creatures, you and I included, would endure in a world under the curse of sin... He knew it all, and knew what it would like to experience it all in its awful terrible fullness.

And since God is not bound by time – He would not experience the evil that would ravage His creation and His creatures in manageable doses over a period of time... no, as we learned a couple weeks back, God stands outside of time where there is no past or future but only an eternal present so I dare to say that God fully experiences all of it simultaneously.

Know this brothers and sisters, when trial and tribulation or tragedy come into our lives God already fully knows it, and also experiences it with us – whatever we experience... God does as well because He is Omniscient – He knows!

And if we contemplate what God knew He would predetermine to create and allow in His creation in this way, its really a wonder that God went ahead and created it at all!

But, as God Himself says in Isaiah 46:10 *“I make known the end from the beginning...”* In other words God has predetermined the end purpose which this will all lead to, and He had that planned as well, before the beginning of Creation.

And what an ending it will be! In the vision of Revelation 5 the apostle John sees this grand plan of God represented as a scroll sealed with seven seals – and no one on in all the creation is able to break the seals and bring about this plan of God, and so John weeps uncontrollably...

You see brothers and sisters, without the end being made known from the beginning and God’s plan coming to completion - all the tragedies and trials and tribulation and suffering that God determined were necessary, would occur and have been endured in vain - for no purpose at all! Terrible indeed!

Yet it is revealed to John that the Lamb of God can break the seals, open the scroll and bring about the completion of God plans for His creation. Just as 1 Peter 3:19-20 speaks about *“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.”

All of this is to encourage us brothers and sisters that God’s predetermination to bring about His plan in such a way that requires allowing sin and evil and suffering to occur, but ultimately leads to something amazing of which we start to get a glimpse of in Jesus Christ as He is resurrected, ascended and glorified and promises to return to make ALL things new.

God makes known the end from the beginning and thus in whatever God allows to come into your life brothers and sisters, however God has directed the course of human history we can trust what scripture reveals to us in Romans 8:28 *“that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.”*

God’s Omniscience and His predetermination that flow from it are not something that we need to fear brothers and sisters, instead God reveals this truth about Himself and His

knowledge to us in order to correct us, and give us comfort, assurance, confidence and hope!

Brothers and sisters, there is much more that could be said as we contemplate and gain knowledge about God and His omniscience, but let me close off this message by pointing us to God’s wisdom.

Because it is one thing to have knowledge – it is quite another to use that knowledge in a responsible way for a higher, noble purpose in a skillful and adept way – that is wisdom.

And the best place to see God using His knowledge in this manner brothers and sisters is in the pages of the scripture as they tell us the story of how God establishes His Covenant with the creation and then commits to renewing it, with Adam, with Noah, with Abraham, with Moses, with David and then – fulfils it through Christ! The skillful and clever ways in which God makes promises, enacts consequences, deals with human failure and unfaithfulness and yet is able to show mercy and forgiveness and grace and ultimately fulfill the

responsibilities of humanity on their behalf... is unbelievably and marvellously wise.

And the more familiar you become with how God displays His wisdom in the scriptures in this way, the more adept you become at recognizing how God deals wisely with you and your life...

And the more skilled you become at using the knowledge you have of God in a responsible way for the higher and more noble purpose - of blessing others – the more you will bring glory to God in Christ!

So, I pray for you all this morning as Paul prays in Colossians 1:9-12 asking “*God to fill you with the **knowledge of his will through all the wisdom and understanding** that the Spirit gives, so that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, **growing in the knowledge of God**, being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience, and giving joyful thanks to the*

Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of his holy people in the kingdom of light.”

God alone knows! Amen