

**Introduction...**

“What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us. The history of mankind will probably show that no people has ever risen above its religion, and man’s spiritual history will positively demonstrate that no religion has ever been greater than its idea of God. Worship is pure or base as the worshiper entertains high or low thoughts of God.

For this reason the gravest question before the Church is always God Himself, and the most crucial fact about any man is not what he at a given time may say or do, but what he in his deep heart conceives God to be like...Always the most revealing thing about us is our idea of God.”<sup>1</sup>

All humans have a deep inner sense that God exists. The reality of God is written on our hearts and it is written in the stars. The heavens declare the glory of God, what can be known about God is plain to us through the things that God has made, our conscience reveals the presence and justice of God; but one of the results of sin entering the world is that instead of embracing that inner sense of God we reject it. Rather than honoring God we reject Him and we worship and serve ourselves.

In some cases, man’s rejection of that inner sense of God becomes complete and the result is the denial of God altogether. “The fool has said in his heart there is no God (**Psalm 14:1**).” The Psalmist calls this person a fool in part because in order to arrive at his/her atheistic conclusion they must first deny one of the strongest universal impulses of humanity, which is that there is a God and in some way we are answerable to Him.

But there is a huge gap between that inner sense of God and actually knowing the one true God. The spirit of our own culture is NOT one that tends to promote great thoughts about God. Even in the church there is a tendency for us to have great thoughts about man but not great thoughts about God. And one of the results is that our concept of God is not shaped by the Bible but is shaped by our own human instincts. Like the Israelites at the foot of Mt. Sinai, we have a tendency to re-create God in our own image.

“I can believe in a God of love but not a God who judges people for their mistakes.”

“I can’t believe in a God who allows suffering to take place in the world.”

“If there is a God, surely He must allow more than one way for people to come to Him.”

But there is one true God and we can know Him, in fact He wants us to know Him. Jesus prayed to his Father, “This is eternal life, that they may know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent” (**John 17:3**). God has revealed Himself to us in His Word, the Bible. He wants us to know who He is and what He is like. He wants us to understand why He does things and what it means for us. He wants us to know Him as He is and to love Him not based on what we *feel* but on what we *know* is true of our God.

We can’t know everything there is to know about God but we can know what He has revealed to us and that is the purpose of this study. We want to gather around the Word so

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<sup>1</sup> –A.W. Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy* (New York: HarperCollins, 1961), 1.

that we can learn more about our God. We want to know what He is like and as we learn we want to let the knowledge of God shape our faith. We want to let the truth about Him sink into our minds, our hearts and lives as we ***Behold Our God.***

### ***Transition...***

To kick off this series we are going to be in **Exodus 34** where we see one of the most important passages in all the Bible. In this passage, we are going to see God reveal Himself to Moses in a way that He had never been revealed before.

No one knew God the way Moses knew God. In **Exo 33:11** we read that God would speak to Moses face to face as a man speaks to his friend. The first five books of the OT were written by Moses, which means that God revealed to him the history of creation and Moses wrote it down. God also appeared to Moses and spoke to him from the burning bush. Moses had a front row seat to the wonders that God performed in Egypt including the parting of the Red Sea. Moses spent more than a month with God on Mt. Sinai receiving God's Word.

But after all of this Moses wanted to know more of God. He wanted to see God in a way he had never seen Him before.

**33:18** Moses said, "Please show me your glory." <sup>19</sup> And he said, "I will make all my goodness pass before you and will proclaim before you my name 'The Lord.' And I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy. <sup>20</sup> But," he said, "you cannot see my face, for man shall not see me and live." <sup>21</sup> And the Lord said, "Behold, there is a place by me where you shall stand on the rock, <sup>22</sup> and while my glory passes by I will put you in a cleft of the rock, and I will cover you with my hand until I have passed by. <sup>23</sup> Then I will take away my hand, and you shall see my back, but my face shall not be seen."

**34** The Lord said to Moses, "Cut for yourself two tablets of stone like the first, and I will write on the tablets the words that were on the first tablets, which you broke. <sup>2</sup> Be ready by the morning, and come up in the morning to Mount Sinai, and present yourself there to me on the top of the mountain. <sup>3</sup> No one shall come up with you, and let no one be seen throughout all the mountain. Let no flocks or herds graze opposite that mountain." <sup>4</sup> So Moses cut two tablets of stone like the first. And he rose early in the morning and went up on Mount Sinai, as the Lord had commanded him, and took in his hand two tablets of stone. <sup>5</sup> The Lord descended in the cloud and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name of the Lord. <sup>6</sup> The Lord passed before him and proclaimed, "The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, <sup>7</sup> keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation." <sup>8</sup> And Moses quickly bowed his head toward the earth and worshiped. <sup>9</sup> And he said, "If now I have found favor in your sight, O Lord, please let the Lord go in the midst of us, for it is a stiff-necked people, and pardon our iniquity and our sin, and take us for your inheritance."

**Sermon Focus...**

Now, before we get to this passage I want us to back up just a little bit and try to understand what Moses is asking for here. Based on what Moses already knows about God and what He has seen God do, it seems odd that he is asking to see God's glory. So, let's back up and get a little background on the nature of God that Moses has already come to know.

**I. God was...**

The Bible does not begin by giving us a basic introduction to God as the main character of the book. There is no philosophical explanation for His existence nor is there a theological description of his nature. **Instead the Bible assumes the existence of God and operates from page one with the understanding that God existed before the beginning of all things.** God exists on His own, independent of everything, outside of space and time, with a wisdom, power and authority that is unmatched. God is eternal!

Eternity is a perfect possession of life without any variation; it comprehends itself in all years, all ages, all periods of ages; it never begins; it endures...and eternity belongs to God...it is the duration of His essence (Charnock).<sup>2</sup>

When the Bible introduces us to God it does so by showing us what God did to bring the universe into existence, "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth (**Gen 1:1**)."

When little children begin to ask big questions they will often ask where things came from and as good parents we will try to answer them in a way that they can understand. The Baptist Catechism begins with this question:

**Who made you? – Answer: God made me.**

**What else did God make? – Answer: God made all things.**

And many of our children threw in this question next, "Who made God?" and that is when many of you simply say, "Maybe you should go ask your mother or pastor Justin." But this is a great question and it is the natural one. Even at a young age we understand the principle of cause and effect. If something exists, it is because someone made it. But when we trace the chain of cause and effect all the way back to the beginning we come to God and there the chain ends.

**God creates but He wasn't created. God makes but He wasn't made. God simply is and He has always been.** There was a time when the universe did not exist but there has never been a time when God did not exist.

He is the uncaused cause of all things. He is the unmade maker of the universe. **He doesn't exist within time and space, time and space exist because of Him.** He is not dependent upon created things, instead all created things are dependent upon Him. He is God and there is no other, He is God and there is none like Him. His power is so great that He can merely say a word and an entire universe springs into being.

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<sup>2</sup> Beeke and Jones *A Puritan Theology* (pg. 62)

He exists forever and he is always the same. He does not grow older. He does not gain new powers or lose the ones He has. He does not mature or develop. He does not get stronger, or weaker, or wiser as time goes by. **(J.I. Packer, *Knowing God* pg. 77)**

***God is eternal in His essence*** and this poses a problem for us because we are finite. Our human reasoning is therefore bound to finite categories and limitations. What this means is that if we are to gain a true understanding of the eternal God, then He is going to have to reveal Himself to us. We aren't capable of arriving at an accurate understanding of an infinite and holy God without His help. **God must show us His glory!**

**That's where the Bible comes in and that's where Moses comes in. God had revealed His eternality to Moses but that is not all that God showed him. Moses learned that God was but he is also about to learn that God is.**

## **II. God is...**

Now let's think back and remember that Moses is not just in the story but He is the one writing the story. God chose to reveal Himself to Moses and in the process He revealed to Moses how He made the world. He revealed to Moses the history of creation and the promises that He made to Adam, to Noah, as well as to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

Moses wrote the book of Genesis and that means that at some level Moses had to try and comprehend the eternal being of God. But that wasn't the first time Moses had to wrestle with the being of God. **Moses' wrestling with the being of God began in Exodus 3 when Moses was tending his sheep and he saw a strange bush.**

The bush was engulfed in fire but the fire did not consume the bush. The fire did not need fuel to burn, it burned all by itself. It was pure and holy fire that was not dependent upon an energy source to give it life. **The fire was like God**, not dependent upon other energy sources but having its energy source in itself. **The fire was self-sustaining, self-sufficient...like God.**

There before that unearthly fire God told Moses that he would go to Egypt and lead the Hebrew people out of slavery. God would be with Him but Moses was to go to the people of Israel and tell them that the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob had sent him to lead them to freedom. Moses responded by saying, "What if I get there and the people of Israel say to me 'What is the name of this God?' What should I tell them is Your name?"

God responded by saying, "I AM that I AM." Then he said, "You must say this to the Israelites, 'I AM has sent me to you.' I AM is the personal name of God and in the Hebrew it is pronounced ('*ehyeh*') but we pronounce it ***Yahweh***. This is the most common name for God used in the Bible and it occurs over 6,000 times but when we see it in Scripture we see it as LORD. **But how do we understand this name? What does this name mean and what does it tell us about God?**

Well, we know already from the beginning of the book of Genesis that God is eternal in the sense that He has always been, but this name helps expand our understanding by showing us that not only has God always been but God will always be. For God there is no past or

future, there is only present. Time begins and ends, but God is outside of time and has no beginning or end, therefore He simply is.

“God is what He always was and He is what He will always be...”

God **was** and out of nothing He brought everything into being. God **is** and His being is not dependent upon anything. God **will always be**, from everlasting to everlasting He is God. That is His essence. But there is so much more for us to learn about God.

### III. God is Lord

All of the things we have talked about so far are already known to Moses. God had already shown these things to him, but he knows there is more to God than this and he pleads with God to show him more. Moses knows that God is glorious but He wants to see God's glory with his own eyes.

**Exo 33:18** Moses said, “Please show me your glory.”

**Now this request is fascinating to me especially coming from Moses and especially coming at this point.** This is the *second* time God met with Moses on Mt. Sinai. The first time ended when Moses came down the mountain to find that the people had exchanged the glory of God for the work of their own hands.

But this request also came at the end of Moses spending 40 days with God in the fire...let me explain...

It had taken the people of Israel 3 months to reach the wilderness of Sinai after God delivered them from their slavery in Egypt and at the end of those 3 months they had reached the foot of a mountain. After they arrived and had set up their camp, God spoke out of the mountain and called for Moses to come up to Him so that He could meet with God and receive the words of the covenant that God was making with the people. **God was going to come down from Heaven and rest upon the mountain in a thick cloud and he would speak to Moses so that the people could hear Him and believe.**

They needed to see and hear this because along they were already grumbling and complaining. They did not trust God to protect them at the Red Sea, they grumbled for food in the wilderness, but God was going to get their attention in a way that He never had.

On the morning of the 3<sup>rd</sup> day they woke up to thunder and lightning and a thick cloud on the mountain and a very loud trumpet blast so that all the people in the camp saw, heard and trembled. When the people looked they saw the mountain wrapped in fire and covered in smoke, and then God spoke out of the fire and called for Moses to come up and he went. God gave Moses the 10 commandments, He gave him the laws that would govern the people, He gave him instructions for the tabernacle and the sacrifices; all the words of the covenant were given in the 40 days that Moses spent in the fire with God.

But 40 days is a long time to be without a leader, so the people decided it was time to worship their redeemer in their own way. They fashioned a calf out of gold and they said, “behold, this is the god who brought us out of Egypt.” They bowed before the idol, they laid offerings before it, and they worshipped around it. **God and Moses were both furious.** Moses smashed the tablets when he came down and God spoke about destroying them all and starting over with Moses alone; but in the end the people were spared and God showed them *mercy*.

**Now, this is well-known Biblical history which means that many of us just accept it without asking some of the critical questions that we should, such as, “What kind of God would forgive His people after all the grumbling, rebellion and idolatry? How could He forgive them after all that He had done for them?”**

Surely in His anger He should simply consume them or at the very least cause He should refuse to bless them. My instinct is that God should simply wash His hands of these people because that is what I would do in such a situation. Think of all that God had done for them with the plagues, delivering them from slavery, making them rich as they left Egypt, and now they are bowing down to a golden cow!

They had seen God’s hand of power in Egypt, they had seen Him command the water, the wind, the weather, the insects and other creatures. They had seen God bring death to every household in Egypt in one single moment. They had seen God protect them against Pharaoh’s army, they had seen Him part the sea for them and now they are ***content to worship a golden cow.***

How could He still love them? How could He still care about them and want to bless them? How could He still want to be their God and want them to be His people? What kind of God is this? **And I think *that is the question on Moses’ mind. Nobody knows God the way Moses knows God but even here we see Moses say wait a minute, “I want to see the real you. I want to know what you are truly like. So he says to God...***

**Exo 33:18** Moses said, “Please show me your glory. **V. 19** And **God** said, “I will...

**God knows what Moses is asking for. Moses wants to actually see God. He doesn’t just want to hear God’s voice, He doesn’t just want to see the burning bush, He doesn’t just want to be engulfed in God’s consuming fire; He wants to see God’s true essence. He wants to behold God and when the time came this is what happened.**

**Ex 34:6** The Lord passed before him and proclaimed, “The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, <sup>7</sup> keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children’s children, to the third and the fourth generation.”

**8** And Moses quickly bowed his head toward the earth and worshiped. <sup>9</sup> And he said, “If now I have found favor in your sight, O Lord, please let the Lord go in the midst of us, for

it is a stiff-necked people, and pardon our iniquity and our sin, and take us for your inheritance.”

### ***Conclusion...***

Moses knew more of God than any other man on earth and yet He wanted more. At one-point God told Moses to leave Sinai and take the people into the Promised Land. God even said that He would bless them as they went. God said that He would even send an angel to go before them and drive out their enemies. God would make all this happen, but He wouldn't go up with the people Himself.

**And Moses said no! He didn't just want God's blessings, he wanted God. He didn't want the fame and power of leading a nation of people, he wanted God. Moses knew great things about God and he had seen God do amazing things with his own eyes; but the deep longing of his heart was to see God himself and to be in His presence.**

The Israelites were content with God's blessings. They would be happy if God would simply give them something to eat. They had no problems erecting an idol and calling that their god. They weren't interested in knowing God they just wanted His stuff.

**Are we like Moses wanting to see more of God's glory or are we like Israel content to create God in our own image? When confronted with the truth about the God of the Bible will we reject Him for the god of our own making or will we like Moses bow down to the ground and worship Him.**

God wants us to know Him and has even made it possible for us to know Him forever. In an unfathomable act of mercy, God gave His Son to die for us so that our sin could be forgiven and we could be brought into an eternal relationship with God as sons, daughters and friends.

I want to know more about this God. I want to know Him and I pray that you do as well.