Behold Your God: He is God

Job

I would invite you to take your Bible and turn back to the book of Job where we read most of the first two chapters earlier. Though our normal practice is to do book exposition, today we're launching into a topical exposition series I'm calling "Behold Your God." In this series, instead of going verse by verse through a book of the Bible, we're going through different passages over the next few months where God reveals Himself in powerful ways. Week after week, we're going to have an encounter with the Living God.

But before we start building out this series, I want to begin by laying a foundation and explain why this is such an important study. To that end Job will serve as an illustration more than a direct study. Now I know what some of you are thinking. *Did Pastor Gabe forget that today is Mother's Day?* No, I didn't. When I looked ahead through the corridors of time—otherwise known as the calendar—and I saw that today would be Mother's Day, it didn't take long to conclude that there is no greater gift a mother can receive than children who live in light of a true knowledge of God. And there is no greater gift a mother can give than to live before her family in light of a true knowledge of God. So if this message can help us all grow in our knowledge of God, this is will be more than appropriate for Mother's Day.

If you're there in Job, look again at 1:20-22. After receiving the sudden news of the loss, ruin, and death of almost everything in his life, Job responds like this. . .

"What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us." Those are the opening words of AW Tozer in his book *The Knowledge of the Holy*. "What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us." It's not the *first* thought that comes to your mind that's most important. The first thought that comes to your mind when you think about God usually rises out of your circumstances—what you read that morning in the Bible, or the Growing Disciples class you're taking, or a sermon you recently heard. The first thought that comes to your mind

when you think about God may well reflect what is pressing on your soul in that moment, but it's not necessarily the most important thing about you.

What is the most important thing about you is your conception of God. Again, Tozer says, "The most portentous 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." Your heart—which is the center of your thoughts, affections, and will—your heart revolves around your conception of God. What you think and believe about any issue is shaped by your conception of God. Your desires, priorities, and values are shaped by your conception of God. Your decisions and words and actions are shaped by your conception of God. All of that is to say that your heart revolves around your view of God.

So as you respond to the situations of life, to the degree that you're being sincere, you're broadcasting what you believe about God.

We see this principle clearly presented in Job's response, do we not? When Job responds to the devastation of his life by worshipping God, he's broadcasting to those around him and to all in the spiritual realm—especially God and Satan—what he believes about God. When his wife, in 2:9 says, "Do you still hold fast to your integrity? Curse God and die!", she broadcasts what she believes about God. And Job again broadcasts his view of God when he says, "You speak as one of the foolish women speaks. Shall we indeed accept good from God and not accept adversity?" Job's wife was happy to worship God when life was good. But she cursed God when adversity came. If Job responded like his wife, he would have proved Satan right. But Job proved God right and Satan wrong.

"What comes into your mind when you think about God is the most important thing about you." And you demonstrate what you really believe about God by how you respond to the issues of life.

This was true of David. Psalm 18 is the psalm that David wrote after the Lord delivered him from Saul and all his enemies. He begins that psalm saying, "I love You, O LORD, my strength. The LORD is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer, My God, my rock, in

whom I take refuge; My shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold. I call upon the LORD, who is worthy to be praised, And I am saved from my enemies."

Now you might be tempted to think that of course David praises God after he was delivered. It's easy to affirm those things about God when the outcome of trials is victory. But how did David respond in the middle of his trial when he was constantly running and hiding from Saul for years? Well, several psalms tell us.

David wrote Psalm 59 at the very beginning of his ordeal when King Saul dispatched men to watch over David's house and ambush him. In that psalm he cried out to the Lord, "Deliver me from my enemies, O God . . . Save me from men of bloodshed. For behold, they have set an ambush for me life." And he ends the psalm saying, "But as for me, I shall sing of Your strength; Yes, I shall joyfully sing of Your lovingkindness in the morning, For You have been my stronghold and a refuge in the day of my distress. O my strength, I will sing praises to You; For God is my stronghold, the God who shows me lovingkindness."

David wrote Psalm 54 when the Ziphites betrayed David as he was living among them. He wrote, "Save me, O God, by Your name, And vindicate me by Your power. . . . Behold, God is my helper; The Lord is the sustainer of my soul." David wrote Psalm 57 when he fled from Saul in the cave. He said, "Be gracious to me, O God, be gracious to me, for my soul takes refuge in You; and in the shadow of Your wings I will take refuge until destruction passes by."

When David was running for his life from King Saul, instead of railing against Saul or God Himself, David looked to God as His refuge. So his declaration at the end of his trial was only the culmination of all that he believed to be true about God as he went through the trial. David believed that God would protect him, so he took refuge and comfort in the Lord, and refused to retaliate against Saul.

Sadly, in later years, he let victory and prosperity move him away from dependency on the Lord, making room for sin to creep into his heart. After he violated Bathsheba and murdered Uriah, the prophet Nathan said to David, "Thus says the LORD God of Israel, 'It is I who anointed you king over Israel and it is I who delivered you from the hand of Saul. I also gave you your master's house and your master's wives into your care, and I gave you the house of Israel and Judah; and if that had been too little, I would have added to you many more things like these!' Why have you despised the word of the LORD by doing evil in His sight?"

It would be true to say that David violated Bathsheba out of the lust of his heart, and he murdered Uriah out of fear of being caught. But God Himself says that the root of David's sin was that he had wrong thoughts about God. He acted as though God was holding out on him, and he despised the word of God which would have protected him from sin. David's right thoughts about God are the explanation of his exemplary response to his unjust suffering, and his wrong thoughts about God are the explanation for his deplorable sins.

"What comes into your mind when you think about God is the most important thing about you." Consider the oldest example of this principle presented to us in Scripture. Keep your finger here and turn with me to Genesis 3.

Just before Genesis 3 we're told that on the sixth day of creation the Lord made Adam from the dust of the ground and placed him in the Garden of Eden. And he commanded Adam, "From any tree of the garden you may eat freely; but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it you will surely die." Within hours of giving this command, the Lord made Eve from Adam's side and you can be sure that Adam accurately conveyed this command to her.

LOOK at 3:1-6... We don't know how much time transpired between day six of creation and this day. Was it days or weeks? I don't think it was very long, but it was long enough that Adam and Eve were accustomed to spending time with God in the garden. Vs. 8 says they knew the sound of God making His way to them through the Garden. We don't know anything about what they would talk about with God and how much of Himself He revealed to them. But they had complete trust in God.

Notice that in vs. 5 the way Satan tempts Eve is to fundamentally change her thoughts about God. He says, "For God knows that in the day you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." God is holding out on you. God wants to keep you in the dark. God doesn't want you to know what He knows. God is doesn't want you to be like Him. God can't be trusted.

And with that assassination of God's character, Eve looks at the fruit, considers the command of God, and concludes that God is not looking out for her best interest. So she determined for herself what was best and ate the fruit. Steve Lawson wrote about this moment, "No longer seeing God as loving, she wrongly assumed He was withholding His goodness. No longer seeing Him as righteous, she actually believed He would not punish sin. Once these aberrations occurred in her thinking about God, the result was inevitable—she disobeyed Him." Mark it, my friends, the way the devil deceived Eve was by changing her thoughts about God. And so it is with all sin and temptation. Sin can only live in an environment laced with wrong thoughts about God. And this poison drunk by Adam and Eve has permeated humanity ever since.

When Paul condemns all humanity under sin in Romans 3, he identifies the common source of sin as this: "there is no fear of God before their eyes." And because there is no fear of God, they love wickedness. In that section of Romans 3 Paul also quotes part of Psalm 14 which says, "The fool has said in his heart, 'There is no God.' They are corrupt, they have committed abominable deeds; There is no one who does good."

Atheism leads to all kinds of ungodliness. But you know what else leads to ungodliness? Practical atheism. Practical atheism is belief in a God that doesn't exist. Practical atheism is having a distorted view of God that effectively denies the existence of the one true and living God. Another word for practical atheism is idolatry.

Listen to what Tozer says about idolatry: "Among the sins to which the human heart is prone, hardly any other is more hateful to God than idolatry, for idolatry is at bottom a libel on His character. The idolatrous heart assumes that God is other than He is—in itself a monstrous sin—and substitutes for the true God one made after its own likeness." He

goes on to say, "The essence of idolatry is the entertainment of thoughts about God that are unworthy of Him. It begins in the mind and may be present where no overt act of worship has taken place."

The person who goes to church and believes that a loving God would never send people to hell is an idolater. They worship a god that doesn't exist and deny the existence of the true God who does indeed send people to hell. If you think that you've done something so heinous that God will never forgive you, you're thinking of a god who doesn't exist and denying the existence of the true God who cleanses us from all sin no matter how severe in degree or great in number. The person who strives to earn forgiveness or earn God's smile strives after a god that doesn't exist, and denies the true God who saves by grace alone and is pleased with His people solely on the basis of Christ's righteousness.

We commit idolatry when we conceive of God as something other than He is. And the direction of our distorted views of God always make Him out to be more like His creation.

The Apostle Paul speaks to this idolatry in Romans 1:21, "For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures."

When Moses was on Mount Sinai and the glory cloud hovered on the mountain, the people grew impatient and complained to Aaron saying, "Make us a god who will go before us." So Aaron made the golden calf and said, "This is your god, O Israel, who brought you up from the land of Egypt." Aaron exchanged the glory of God for an image in the form of a four-footed animal. Aaron had a lot of right thoughts about God who delivered them from Egypt, but he also had a lot of wrong thoughts that led to idolatry.

You and I may not imagine God as a four-footed animal, but sometimes we imagine God as corruptible man—as one of us. Voltaire was no friend of biblical Christianity, but he was right when he said, "In the beginning God created man in His own image, and man

has been trying to repay the favor ever since." Our tendency is to bring God down to our level as if He ought to share our values and priorities and perspective and propensities.

We want God's justice on our enemies to be swift and to the fullest extent, and we want His justice on us and our loved ones to be slow and merciful. When exercises His justice differently than we expect, we question God's justice.

When we see God's providence bring chronic pain and suffering into someone's life, we know that if we had the power, we would remove their suffering. So we wonder why God's isn't as compassionate as we are.

Or when a tragic death occurs, we may ask, "Why would God let that happen?" Which is a short way of saying, "If I was God, I wouldn't let that happen, so what's wrong with God that He let it happen? That doesn't seem just or fair or right." In such moments if someone asked us what we believed about God we would give the right orthodox answer. But in our heart, we would deny Him by thinking wrongly about Him. Idolatry is the besetting sin of all people—even among us who worship God.

"What comes into your mind when you think about God is the most important thing about you." And so there is nothing more important than to grow in our knowledge of God. Jesus prays in John 17, "This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent." Paul prays in Ephesians 1:17, "that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him." In Ephesians 4 we're told that the work of ministry continues, "until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God." In Colossians 1 Paul prays, "that you will walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God."

We are saved by the knowledge of God; 2 Corinthians 4:6, "For God, who said, "Light shall shine out of darkness," is the One who has shone in our hearts to give the Light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ." We are sanctified by a growing

knowledge of God; 2 Peter 3:18 says, "but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ." Our glorification will be defined by a full knowledge of God, 1 Corinthians 13:12, "For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face; now I know in part, but then I will know fully just as I also have been fully known."

Boasting is generally discouraged in Scripture, but there is one thing we are encouraged to boast in, Jeremiah 9:23-24, "Thus says the LORD, "Let not a wise man boast of his wisdom, and let not the mighty man boast of his might, let not a rich man boast of his riches; but let him who boasts boast of this, that he understands and knows Me, that I am the LORD who exercises lovingkindness, justice and righteousness on earth; for I delight in these things," declares the LORD."

There is no greater problem in your life than wrong thoughts about God. There can be greater joy in your life than knowing God rightly. So there is no greater need we all have than to grow in our knowledge of God. That is our aim in this series.

With that as an introduction, let's come back to Job 1. I want to spend our remaining time today making what is perhaps the most obvious point about God but which we often forget. And that is this: God is God. This is the lesson of the book of Job, and it is a lesson often repeated in Scripture to people like us who keep forgetting that God is God.

Verses 1-7 set the context of Job's life. He was an immensely blessed man. He was wealthy beyond his contemporaries, he was the most respected man in the region, and he loved and cared for the souls of his children. Most importantly, he feared God, which is to say that his heart was shaped by his experience with God. Job did not have a trouble-free life, but his overall experience of life was defined by abundance and blessing and success.

Unlike God but just like us, Satan doesn't know what's in the heart of a person, so he looks at Job's success and he observes his worship of God and he cynically concludes that the only reason Job fears and worships God is because of the tangible benefits. So the Lord, who does know Job's heart, gives him permission to test his theory.

Satan then devises and executes a plan to destroy Job's life by taking away everything he owns and killing his 10 children—and the report of all that's happened comes to Job in a matter of seconds as one survivor after another reports the devastation.

Most of us have been in that position where you receive a shocking phone call or email or text. We've received news that shatters our perceptions and alters our plans and calls into question what we thought we knew. For some of us, that experience is rather fresh. How we respond rises out of our view of God.

Job responded to his life being shattered in two ways: sorrow and worship. Because he feared God, he confessed in that devastating moment that God has every right to take away as He does to give, so we should bless or speak well of God no matter what. In making this confession, Scripture says, Job did not sin, nor did He blame God. His confession was an act of worship in that he declared out loud that the Lord is God and worthy to be worshipped no matter what He adds or takes away from our lives.

Job feared God, not because doing so led to rewards, but because the Lord is God and that alone makes Him worthy of our worship. The most important thing about Job was not his family, nor his success, nor his possessions. The most important thing about Job was that he had right thoughts about God. And because he had right thoughts about God, he feared God and he turned away from evil.

How is it, then, that after hearing directly from God toward the end of the book, Job says, "I retract, and I repent in dush and ashes." What did he retract and repent of? Surely it wasn't his initial response in chapters 1-2. No, he retracted and repented of things he said between chapters 3-31.

You see, at the end of chapter two, we learn that Job had three friends who came to grieve with Job. They exuded profound wisdom for seven days as they sat with him in silence. But then they opened their mouths. And one by one they spoke to Job out of their own conception of God.

They held to an ancient version of Prosperity Theology which said that when you do well, God will bless you, and when you sin, God will punish you. So they concluded that for Job to experience suffering the way he did, he must have done something wrong. By the way, this idea was common in Jesus' day and held by the disciples because in John 9 they came across a blind man and they asked Jesus, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he would be born blind?" Many people still hold to it today and I often hear it expressed in my office by those who suffer and think God is punishing them.

Neither Job nor his friends knew anything about the conversation between God and Satan in heaven. They didn't know that it was precisely Job's righteousness that was the explanation for his suffering. So in their ignorance of what went on in heaven and with their wrong conception of God, they interrogated Job trying to find some wrong in him that explained his ordeal. After all, if they could get him to confess his sin, perhaps his suffering would end.

Job responded to their accusations by defending himself declaring his innocence. This discussion goes on for three cycles as Job and his friends spar over the source of his suffering. In the course of that discussion, while Job maintains His confession that God has a right to do whatever He wants, he develops an attitude of complaint to the point where instead of cursing God, he curses himself and his life. He declared that if this is what God intended for him, it would be better if he had not been born.

In chapter 10 he said, "I loathe my own life; I will give full vent to my complaint; I will speak in the bitterness of my soul. I will say to God, 'Do not condemn me; Let me know why You contend with me. Is it right for You indeed to oppress, to reject the labor of Your hands, and to look favorably on the schemes of the wicked? Have You eyes of flesh? Or do You see as a man sees? Are Your days as the days of a mortal, or Your years as man's years, that You should seek for my guilt and search after my sin? According to Your knowledge I am indeed not guilty, yet there is no deliverance from Your hand.'" Later in that chapter he says, "Hardship after hardship is with me. Why then have You brought me out of the womb? Would that I had died and no eye had seen me! I should have been

as though I had not been, carried from womb to tomb. Would He not let my few days alone? Withdraw from me that I may have a little cheer."

As is true for all of us, in the midst of intense emotions his thoughts went one way and then another, so there were also times where he expressed trust in the Lord. He said in ch. 13, "Though He slay me, I will hope in Him. Nevertheless I will argue my ways before Him." In ch. 19 he spoke those famous words of trust in a future resurrection, "As for me, I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last He will take His stand on the earth. Even after my skin is destroyed, yet from my flesh I shall see God."

But then in ch. 23 he went back to his complaining saying, "Even today my complaint is rebellion; His hand is heavy despite my groaning. Oh that I knew where I might find Him, that I might come to His seat! I would present my case before Him and fill my mouth with arguments. I would learn the words which He would answer, and perceive what He would say to me. Would He contend with me by the greatness of His power? No, surely He would pay attention to me. There the upright would reason with Him; And I would be delivered forever from my Judge." Again, he says in 30, "I cry out to You for help, but You do not answer me; I stand up, and You turn Your attention against me. You have become cruel to me; With the might of Your hand You persecute me."

Job confessed God had the right to do what He wanted, but he began to question whether what God wanted was right. Chapter 31 is Job's closing argument justifying himself before God and his friends declaring his innocence and the injustice of his suffering. Then Chapters 32-37 is the monologue of Elihu, a young man who admonishes Job and his three friends in defense of God. But I want you to jump with me to chapter 38 which is where God steps into the scene.

In response to Job's suffering, Job and his three friends have filled the air with their thoughts about God and why He causes suffering. Elihu has defended God. But now God is about to speak. What is God going to say to Job in His self-defense? What does God want Job and us to know about Himself? In light of all that Job has suffered as a righteous man, how will God justify His actions? Here it is. follow along starting in Job 38:1-40:9 . . .

We'll stop there, but the Lord isn't done. He goes on in ch. 40-41 to describe two powerful creatures—Behemoth and Leviathan—as examples of His wisdom and power.

What does the Lord want Job to know? Three words: I am God. The Lord is God and as His creatures we have no right to question Him. The Lord gave Job no explanation for His actions. He didn't give him any insight into what went on in heaven. The Lord didn't tell Job that he proved Satan wrong by worshipping God. The Lord said nothing except to assert His sovereignty over the universe and all things in it.

LOOK at Job's final response in 42:1-6 . . .

We don't know how much revelation Job had about God prior to this encounter. As we sit here with a Bible in our hands we can affirm God's sovereign right over His creation to do whatever He wants with His creatures. But we can also add to that a host of truths that God has revealed about Himself throughout history as recorded in Scripture.

But Job had no written Scripture. He had oral tradition which almost certainly meant he knew the history of creation through the flood. In fact, it's likely that Noah's sons were still alive during Job's day. So even though Job was several generations removed, he may have had direct access to the knowledge of God from Noah's sons.

But whatever Job knew about God, the Lord didn't appeal to it. Would have it been helpful if Job knew about the contest between Satan and God? Maybe. Would it have been helpful if Job knew that it was God Himself who suggested him to Satan on the basis of his righteousness? Perhaps. Would it have helped Job if he knew, in this moment of his suffering, that God intended to bless him even more than at the beginning? Who knows. But it doesn't matter. All that Job *needed* to know is that the Lord is God.

Think about those situations in your life that are particularly vexing to you. Is it enough for you to know that the Lord is God? Can you be content having none of your questions answered? Can you submit to God's providence in your life simply on basis that it is His will? Can you be still and know that He is God?

Now we don't have to limit ourselves to that. We can bring all our knowledge of God as revealed in Scripture to bear on our circumstances. But at the center of all that we know about God is this truth—He is God, and as God He has the sovereign right to do whatever He pleases.

Job is not the only person given this kind of explanation. Isaiah 45:9 says, "Woe to the one who quarrels with his Maker—An earthenware vessel among the vessels of earth! Will the clay say to the potter, 'What are you doing?'" A hundred years later the Lord spoke a similar word through Jeremiah. It says in Jeremiah 18, "I went down to the potter's house, and there he was, making something on the wheel. But the vessel that he was making of clay was spoiled in the hand of the potter; so he remade it into another vessel, as it pleased the potter to make. Then the word of the LORD came to me saying, "Can I not, O house of Israel, deal with you as this potter does?" declares the LORD. "Behold, like the clay in the potter's hand, so are you in My hand, O house of Israel."

In Romans 9 Paul uses this illustration to respond to those who cry foul at the doctrine of election. He says, "You will say to me then, "Why does He still find fault? For who resists His will?" On the contrary, who are you, O man, who answers back to God? The thing molded will not say to the molder, "Why did you make me like this," will it? Or does not the potter have a right over the clay, to make from the same lump one vessel for honorable use and another for common use?"

The point in these passages could not be clearer. Just as a potter has absolute and unquestionable right to make whatever he wants out of a lump of clay, so God has the absolute and unquestionable right to do what He wants with His creation—including you and me. He is God. At the end of the day, whatever else we can say about His motives and purposes and character that add insight to why He does what He does, this is the bedrock truth: He is God, and He can do whatever He pleases.

Psalm 115:3 says that in contrast to idols, "our God is in the heavens; He does whatever He pleases." Psalm 135:6 says "Whatever the Lord pleases, He does, in heaven and in earth, in the seas and in all deeps."

Not only does God do whatever He pleases, but He does what He pleases so that you might know that He is God. Dr. Bookman repeatedly said something during our time in Israel that's been ringing in my ears as I've thought about this series. He said, "God is far more interested in revealing Himself to us than we are interested in knowing Him." If you want to do an interesting study, do a search in the Bible for the phrase "know that I am the Lord."

The Lord rescued Israel out of Egypt so that they know that He is the Lord. The Lord performed powerful signs which brought Egypt to its knees so that the Egyptians would know that He is the Lord. The Lord fed Israel manna day by day so that they would know that He is the Lord. The Lord sustained Israel in the wilderness for 40 years such that even their clothes and sandals didn't wear out so that they would know that He is the Lord.

Rahab told the spies that when the Canaanites heard what the Lord had done on the other side of the Jordan, "our hearts melted and no courage remained in any man any longer because of you; for the LORD your God, He is God in heaven above and on earth beneath."

When Elijah contested with the prophets of Baal on Mt. Carmel, the Lord rained fire from heaven and consumed the sacrifice and the people rightly responded, "The Lord, He is God; the Lord, He is God."

In 1 Kings 20, despite Ahab's wickedness, the Lord delivered Israel from the hands of hundreds of thousands of Arameans to demonstrate that He is the Lord. Through the prophet Ezekiel in particular the Lord proclaims judgement, restoration, and salvation throughout the book and over 60 times says that it is all for the purpose that people will know that He is the Lord.

One of the promises of the New Covenant yet to be fulfilled is that the day will come when no one will say to his neighbor, "Know the Lord," because everyone will know the Lord. Until then, God reveals Himself to us so that we might know that He is God.

The greatest act of self-revelation by God is in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. His perfect life, substitutionary death, and glorious resurrection declares to all the world that the Lord is God and there is no one like Him. I'll close with this. In Isaiah 55, the Lord says this, "Let the wicked forsake his way and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return to the LORD, and He will have compassion on him, and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon. "For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways," declares the LORD. "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways And My thoughts than your thoughts." What makes God's thoughts and ways different and higher than ours is that He is a compassionate and pardoning God. Where our tendency is to permanently reject those who hate us, God forgives those who turn from their false thoughts and wicked ways.

So if you have been worshipping some of other god, or a distorted version of the true God, turn from your wrong thoughts, and submit yourself to the one true and living God.

When you think about God, be sure that at least part of what comes into your mind is that He is God and, on that basis alone, He is worthy to be worshipped.

Prayer

Song

Benediction

Announcement: Women: there is a small gift for you in the lobby from the Hospitality Ministry that you can pick up on their way out of service