

GOD
Message 6
Exodus 3:1-15

INTRO: We have come now, in this series, to this greatest of all questions: What is God like? And by doing so, we have also come to the most complicated question of all questions, because we want to describe as best we can the indescribable Being we call God with a capital G. What we will be talking about is the attributes of God. Now the attributes of God are revealed in three ways in special revelation, the Bible. They are revealed by the names He is given; by His actions, past, present or future; and by actual propositions about Him. The attributes of God, as revealed in Scripture, are the qualities or characteristics we attribute to God from what the Bible says. For example, from the Bible we learn that God is holy, or He is good etc.. These are attributes.

Having said that, we arrive at yet another great problem: how shall we deal with this question? How shall we categorize the attributes of God? Shall we separate them as to what He is essentially and what He is in character? Shall we, like Henry C. Thiessen, divide His attributes as moral and non-moral? Shall we, like Strong, divide them as absolute and relative? Well, in my limited studies, I have concluded that all methods want to break down somewhere. That is how almost everything we try to communicate about God seems to be. Every effort in every area seems insufficient. It never seems quite right. Understanding seems to fail, and when we have more of that, then words want to fail.

So, I will divide the attributes of God into two major categories, personal and impersonal. Let me try to explain that. Let us say you would seek to give the major attributes of any human being. The impersonal attributes would be things like being made up of flesh and blood and bones etc.. But the personal attributes would be such as being impatient, or proud, or kind and loving etc..

So we will seek to answer the question as to what God is like by considering Him in His personal and impersonal attributes. We will look only at the major areas. But let me acknowledge this right from the outset of trying to explain what God is like, that when we try to explain the one and only God, that not only our words groan and travail

under the load of trying to tell the story, but our understanding also ultimately fails us. Our finite minds cannot fully grasp this one infinite God who is a Triune being. And sometimes, where our minds can grasp certain aspects, we seem to not find words to describe what we had found.

The Apostle Paul was caught up to heaven according to his own account in 2 Corinthians 12. And in verses 3-4 he says, "And I know such a man--whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows--how he was caught up into Paradise and heard **inexpressible** words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter." So Paul heard words that are inexpressible. Then he says that it is not lawful to speak them. This could be translated that it is either forbidden to repeat them or it is 'not possible' to speak them. They cannot be uttered, or they are not allowed to be repeated. And even in Scripture, when we analyze what it says about God, we seem to run out of words. However, we can rest assured that what God has considered necessary to communicate about Himself is sufficiently possible with words or God would have provided some other means.

I quoted to you in the first message from Tozer in book 2 of *The Attributes of God*. He said, "The famous preacher Sam Jones (who was the Billy Sunday before Billy Sunday's time) said that when the average preacher takes a text it reminds him of an insect trying to carry a bale of cotton." He then says, "And when I take my text and try to talk about God I feel like that insect; only God can help me." That is how it will be from here on.

III. WHAT IS GOD LIKE?

A. Impersonal Attributes

1. Self Existence

So, let us consider what God is like in His impersonal attributes, beginning with what I think is the greatest, single, impersonal attribute. Let me take you to a most significant passage of Scripture in Exodus 3. In our first message we read of Moses and the burning bush, and how God told him to take off his shoes because he was standing on holy ground. Now let us read verses 5-14. God has here assigned to

Moses the task to deliver the children of Israel out of Egypt. Moses says to God, "Indeed! So, when I come to the children of Israel and I say, "The God of your fathers has sent me to you", and they say, "What is His name? What shall I say to them?" And God said to Moses. "You want to know My name? You want to know who I am? I am who I am." And when you go to the children of Israel, you say to them, "I AM has sent you."

So, this passage reveals the most significant name of God ever revealed. It is simply, "I am." Now the clause, "I am" has two very important parts to it. The first is the personal pronoun 'I'. That means God is a Person. We will deal with that under the section that has to do with God's personal attributes. Here we will deal with the "AM" part of the clause "I AM". You see, this is what we call in grammar a 'to be' verb. It means that the God of the Bible is a personal being. He exists, and He knows He exists. To have existence means to have actual being. It is to have being in reality. *To exist means that something or someone is, present tense.*

Now I understand that theologians have speculated various reasons for this name other than the one I have given. But James Leo Garrett, in his first volume on systematic theology on this point quoting another theologian says, "the most natural interpretation remains that which equates the Tetragrammaton (Greek word for the four Hebrew letters of the name translated Jehovah) with 'He is,' 'He exists,' 'He is present'" (I:192).

Now you may well ask, "So, what is so significant about this name? Doesn't sound like much to me!" Well, let us see how meaningful this name is in light of our own being. When a person is conceived, he or she comes into existence. But that person did not exist before. God, on the other hand, never came into existence. He had no beginning. He has always existed. When a person comes into existence, his or her body, soul and spirit undergo constant change until the person dies. But God never changes. Man's body is

conceived, born, matures and then dies. But God does not have a body, nor does He ever change, or die. However, a human being that comes into existence by conception will never cease to be. A person cannot cease to exist. When a person commits suicide, they simply enter another form of existence. But God never began, nor can ever cease to be, nor ever changes; not in the past, not in the present, nor in the future. God is always the same; He has always existed, and He always will!

So when God wanted to deliver His people Israel out of Egypt He prepared Moses for the task. When He called Moses, Moses struggled with the call. He said to God, "Indeed, when I come to the children of Israel and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they say to me, 'What is His name?' what shall I say to them?" (Ex. 3:13). God answered Moses and told him who He was. He said, "I am who I am." Now God has identified Himself to Israel, and now He will tell Moses what to tell the people when they would ask who sent Him, "And He said, 'Thus you shall say to the children of Israel, 'I AM has sent me to you.'" That seems so simple a name at first that one wonders at God's choice of names. Why didn't He say, "You tell them Elyon has sent you." Elyon is the highest high One. That is what Lucifer wanted to be like before he fell with pride. But God did not say, "You tell them the highest high One has sent you." That should impress anyone, even Israel, right? But God says, "You tell them, I AM has sent you."

What is so great about that name? Well, God has actual existence. No other beings worshipped as god have actual existence unless it is the devil himself. But not only so. You and I could not say, "I am who I am." No. That would be blasphemy. All we can say is, "I am who God made me." To say, "I am who I am" means I have existence in myself by myself and of myself. Not only that, but I cannot truly say "I am who I am" because I am constantly changing. I am not today who I was yesterday. Though I am the same person, my personality has undergone change. But God

never changes. There is only one who has existence in Himself and by Himself, and there is only One who never changes, and that is the God who made Himself known to Israel as I AM.

How man longs to control his own existence. As far as man's existence in the body, he seeks to maintain it as long as possible. How we long to make ourselves immortal. But then we would be in the dilemma God spared man from when He drove man out of the Garden of Eden because if man had eaten of the tree of life after he sinned, there would have been no possible redemption for him. He would have had to continue to exist in his sinful state for all eternity. That is unthinkable. Even today man is trying to make himself so that he can extend his existence in the body, not knowing that death is the only possible escape from existing for all eternity in the state of sin.

In John 8 Jesus is talking with the Jews. And they said to Him, "Do we not say rightly that You are a Samaritan and have a demon?" (48). They are indicating that they understand He is not only a mere man, but that He has existence just like other people; only it is very lowly, that is demonic. And Jesus in essence says, "I am anything but a mere man. I am God". Listen to His words in verse 51, "Most assuredly, I say to you, 'If anyone keeps My word he shall never see death.'" Wow, what a claim.

Then they said to Him, "Are you greater than our father Abraham, who is dead. And the prophets are dead. Who do you make yourself to be?" Now look at verses 54-58 (read). Now notice the words in verse 58 again, "Most assuredly I say to you, before Abraham was, I AM." Now there is a case of bad grammar. To be grammatically correct, He should have said, "Before Abraham was, I was." But good grammar fails to lay hold of this huge theological truth, so Jesus bends the rules of grammar and says, "Before Abraham was, I AM." In other words, "I have always been and I will always be. I AM."

Jesus' statement speaks of absolute eternal existence. Not unending existence, but an existence without beginning and without end. He was the I AM. The fact that He is without beginning is a truth that blows the fuses on our little computers, but a truth nevertheless. God eternally exists by His own energy. He needs no one or anything in order to exist. He has self existence in Himself. He never needs to eat or refuel.

It is viewed by many Bible scholars that Isaiah 14:12-14 speaks of the fall of Lucifer, who then became Satan (read 12-14). It is interesting to note the attribute of God that he chooses that he wants to be like. He says, "I will be like the Most High." It was the 'high' position of God he wanted. The word here is the Hebrew word 'elyon'. As a noun, it is a superlative. He did not want to be a 'high' one. He did not want to be a 'higher' one. He wanted to be the highest high one! But how can you ever be the highest high one if you are not first the "I AM"?

Now the Jews viewed the name, I AM, or some say Jehovah, or Jaweh; all refer to the same thing, as the highest name there is for God, and rightly so. I understand that when the scribes, who copied the Scriptures by hand, came to this name, before they wrote the name they had a bath. This name was revered above all other names.

In the Hebrew language, when the Jews come to this name for God when they read the Old Testament, they do not pronounce it. Instead of saying 'Jehovah' they say, 'Adonia', Lord. I have been told that only once a year, and that by only the High Priest of Israel, was the name Jehovah ever verbalized. It is on the day of atonement. And on this great occasion each year, when the High Priest enters the Holy of Holies, a place only the High Priest could enter He reverently utters this holiest of all names.

Many years after the time of Christ, the Jewish people failed to pass on the skill of reading the Hebrew language. The Hebrew language had no

vowels and the reader must know by memory the vowel sounds of the words. For example, the word 'red' would be rd. And rd could mean read, or road or red or rod and so on. When the Masorites copied the Scriptures, about 600 years after Christ, they put vowel signs under the Hebrew letters so that the unskilled Hebrew might correctly read each word. When they came to that great name we are considering, the name 'I am', they put vowel signs underneath it so that it is not pronounceable. So when the Jews come to this most holy name when they read the Bible, instead of reading it the way it is written, 'Jehovah', or Yahweh, they pronounce it as 'Adoniah'. That is entirely different from the way it is written.

Now let me say something that I believe is true, but before I say it, I want you to promise not to throw me out. Here it is: God is entirely selfish! Now you say, that is terrible. Selfishness is sin! That is true, for all created beings, but it is not true for God Almighty! Did we not say God made man for His own glory? He wants all of us and every part of us to be focused on Him. Is that not selfishness to the supreme? If I did everything for my own glory, would you not say I was extremely selfish? God wants us to praise Him. Is that not selfishness? He wants us to honor Him. Is that not selfishness? So why is it so wrong for us to be selfish, but it is not wrong for God? Why? Because we are wanting for ourselves what belongs to God alone! That is essentially what sin is!

Listen to A. W. Tozer for a moment: "In God's self there is no sin. We creatures properly and rightly and scripturally have everything to say against self and selfishness - it's the great sin. But God's self is not sinful, because God was the originator of us all, and it is only our fallen selves that are sinful. Because God is the original, unfallen, holy God, God's self is not sinful. the poet says,

In Thy praise of Self untiring
Thy perfections shine;
Self-sufficient, self admiring,-

Such life must be Thine;
Glorifying Self, yet blameless
With a sanctity all shameless
It is so divine!

God loves Himself - the Father loves the Son, the Son loves the Father and the Son and the Father love the Holy Spirit. They understood this in olden times, when men were thinkers instead of imitators and they thought within the confines of Scripture" (2:25).

Let me put that another way. If I did everything for my glory and I wanted everybody to praise me and glorify me and say nice things about me, what would you think of me? You would say, "He is very proud and selfish" right? But God created everything and everyone to glorify Him. He wanted everyone to learn to know who He is and to say good things to Him about Him and to say good things to others about Him. Why is it good if God does that and bad when I do that? Because it is all about Him! He made us for Himself! If we get to know Him and worship Him and glorify Him and praise Him and magnify Him and bless Him, it is good because He is good; He is good; He is good! You see, the name "I AM" is all about God's own self. He is!

Now let us take a moment and consider what sin is. The Bible is all about God. He said, "I AM". Sin is all about man. Man wants to be the "I AM". Sin is basically selfishness. The sinner wants the place God has. The place of self magnification or glorification etc... I want to do what I want to do. I want my way. God wants His way. For God it is all about who He is. For man, it is all about who he, man, is. He says the definition of sin is fallen selfhood. He then says that God is like the sun around which the other planets revolve. The sun stands still and the planets all revolve around the sun. And Tozer writes, "Then one day the little planet said, 'I'll be my own sun. Away with this God.' And man fell. That's what we call the fall of man. That's where sin came in-sin reached up and took God's self and said, 'I'll be self myself' (Vol. 2, pg.

27). So man became the sun in his own eyes. That is the essence of sin.

When LEM would introduce his wife he would say something like this: "This is my wonderful wife. I submit and she obeys and she always lets me have her way." Well, if we were to introduce God, we might say: "This is my God! I submit, and I obey, and He always lets Me have His way." There is a very interesting thing to observe. We, as people want happiness and fulfillment. But as long as we seek our own happiness and fulfillment, it is an illusive dream. But when we seek what God wants from us, then comes contentment and fulfillment. And it seems to take us a Christian life-time to learn this.

To mention Tozer again, he says that the way a sinner acts is not sin. The act is but a manifestation of sin. Each individual sin is a manifestation of sin. The act is not sin itself, it is a manifestation of sin. Then he gives an example of cancer. Cancer victims begin to have certain symptoms. The symptoms are not cancer, they are the result of cancer. Acts of sin are symptoms of a deeper problem, the real problem of sin. It is when the self seeks to be the I AM, that is the root of sin. When I seek the throne where God belongs, that is the essence of sin. That is what happened to Lucifer, and he became Satan.

I have defined sin as any thought, word or action that is not in line with the perfect will and character of God. And yet, those are but symptoms of sin. It is when self determines what is best and what is right and what is wrong that we have the heart of sin. You see, everything is measured by who God is and what He likes and does not like or what He would have us do or not do. It is not man that is the measure of all things as secularism would have it. It is God; Almighty God!

CONCL: Well, I did not want to give more than one message to this name but I must give some of it the next message because of its importance. So let us bring this message to

a close. This morning we have considered the first of the impersonal attributes of God and that is that He exists in and of and by Himself. He needs nothing from anyone. Because He does not need anything from anyone, that does not mean He does not want something from His creatures. He is all in all. He is the center of all there is, and He wants to be worshipped, praised, glorified, magnified and blessed.

Lord God, You are the great I AM. You have existed multiplied hundreds of millions of trillions upon trillions years ago. You exist right now and you will exist for all eternity by Your very own Self. You need nothing. You need no one. Yet You have made us and have made us able and capable to know You and to expand our understanding of You. You are the very center of all things whether we realize or understand it or not. You have made us to worship and praise and magnify and glorify and bless You. You have said that all those who know Your name will trust You. Teach us to know You.