

Sermon outline and notes © Dr. Stephen Felker, Pastor
Swift Creek Baptist Church (swiftcreek.church)
18510 Branders Bridge Rd., Colonial Heights, VA 23834
Sunday, July 9, 2017

John 1:1, 3-4; 5:26; 10:28-29 “The Greatness of God – Part 1”

Intro. In Isa 40:18 the prophet asks, “To whom then will you liken God?” The fact is, there is no one like God. No one compares to Him for He is incomparable in greatness. Ps. 48:1 says, “Great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised....” I read to you what Jesus said in John 10:29, “My Father... is greater than all.” God is not just great. He is the greatest of all!

Let me tell you how great God is. He is so great that no one in human flesh can behold Him unfiltered. He said to Moses in Ex. 33:20, “You cannot see My face; for no man shall see Me, and live.” Who can look directly into the sun with a naked eye and not go blind? Prior to that statement, when God manifested His presence on Mount Sinai, we read in Exodus 19:16 & 18, “there were thunderings and lightnings, and a thick cloud on the mountain; and the sound of the trumpet was very loud.... Now Mount Sinai was completely in smoke, because the LORD descended upon it in fire. Its smoke ascended like the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mountain quaked greatly.” No wonder we read in the last of v.16 that “all the people who were in the camp trembled.” In the presence of such a mighty God, what are we?

Furthermore, in Psa. 104:1 the Psalmist says, “O LORD my God, You are very great: You are clothed with honor and majesty.” Our word “majesty” comes from Latin; it means greatness. When we ascribe majesty to someone, we are acknowledging greatness in that person, and voicing our respect, and so it is with God. In 2 Peter 1:16 the apostle said of Jesus, we “were eyewitnesses of His majesty,” speaking of His transfiguration on the mountain. The Greek word translated “majesty” (*megaleiotes*) is primarily based on the Greek word *mega*, which refers to greatness. We should not be surprised that Jesus manifested greatness as only the Son of God could do. The angel prophesied concerning Jesus near the time of His birth in Luke 1:32, “He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest....”

A book was written some time back called, “Your God Is Too Small.” Indeed, too many Christians today lack of the full knowledge of the greatness of God. Popular Christianity is much more likely to speak of God in terms of a friend or buddy. He is a friend to us, and He desires to have a personal relationship with us, but don’t forget that God is far greater than any human friend you know. A lack of understanding of the absolute greatness of God is one reason why our faith is so feeble and our worship is weak and irreverent.

What a task I have before me today, to preach about the greatness of God. Human eloquence cannot adequately express His greatness, for God is greater than the mind God created. His greatness cannot be fully conceived. In fact, if we could conceive of His greatness, He would be less than the human mind which could form the conception!

Today in over the next several messages I will share with you some of the attributes of God that explain why God is so great. What I will share today are not easy concepts to grasp, but if you do gain a better understanding of the greatness of God, it will have an important impact upon your life, including your faith.

So let’s start with the fact that:

I. GOD IS SELF-EXISTANT

The little boy asked his mother, "Who made God?" Well, the fact is, no one made God. He has always existed. He is the One who created everything else. Aside from God, nothing is self-caused. Whatever exists must have had a cause that predates it and was at least equal to it, since the lesser cannot produce the greater. When a child asks, "Where did God come from?" he knows that everything around him came from something other than itself, and he simply extends that concept upward to God. So he must be told that God has no origin, and he will find this hard to grasp since it introduces a category with which he is wholly unfamiliar.

The human mind, being created, has an understandable uneasiness about the Uncreated. We tend to be disquieted by the thought of One who is accountable to no one, who is self-existent and self-sufficient. Philosophy and science have not always been friendly toward the idea of God, the reason being that they are dedicated to the task of accounting for things and are impatient with anything they do not know or understand by human reason or experimentation. To admit that there is One who lies beyond us, who exists outside of all our categories, who will not appear before the bar of our reason: this requires a great deal of humility, more than most of us possess.

So where does Scripture teach this amazing truth about God? When God revealed His name to Moses, He said in Ex. 3:14 that it was Yahweh, meaning, "I AM THAT I AM." One of the meanings of the Hebrew word upon which the name of God is based (*hayah*) is "to exist." The verb of being is stated twice and in the imperfect, continuous tense. He is the One who was, who is, who always will be, the great ever-present, self-existent "I AM." Then John 1:1, 3 says, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.... All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made." God is the cause of everything, but He Himself was caused or created by no one. Likewise, the apostle Paul said in Col. 1:16, "For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him." Again, God calls all things to be, that He Himself is the great Self Existent One who was created by no one.

Logically, if there was ever a time that nothing existed, then nothing would still exist. Common sense tells us that it is impossible to get something out of nothing. In order for something to exist now, someone must have always existed. That someone is God!

What is most amazing about God's created world is life. Man absolutely cannot create life from that which is nonlife. God is the source of all life. In John 5:26 Jesus said, "For as the Father has life in Himself, so He has granted the Son to have life in Himself." We are not the source of our own life, but God is the author of life, for life dwells within His very being. John 1:4 says, "In Him was life...." He is life, and therefore He is self-existent.

What possible meaning can the self-existence of God have for me and others like me in a world such as this and in times such as these? Because we are the handiwork of God, it follows that all our problems and their solutions are ultimately theological. We need to remember that man is a created being, who of himself possesses nothing but is dependent each moment for his existence upon the One who created him after His own likeness. Without God man has no ground of existence.

As a sunbeam perishes when cut off from the sun, so man apart from God perishes into the outer darkness of death (Mt. 8:12).

The problem comes when man forgets his dependence on God and asserts his independence from God. One of the marks of God's image in man is his ability to exercise moral choice. Yet man chose to be independent of God and confirmed his choice by deliberately disobeying a divine command. He rejects the sovereignty of God in his own life while asserting his own. He

unconsciously imitates Lucifer, saying, “I will be like the most High.” Because man is born a rebel, he is unaware that he is one. His constant assertion of self appears to him a perfectly normal thing. He is willing to share himself, sometimes even to sacrifice himself for a desired end, but never to dethrone himself. No matter how far down the scale of social acceptance he may slide, he is still in his own eyes a king on a throne. The essence of sin is to set our will against the will of God. I believe that no more accurate description of sin has even been given than that of the prophet in Isaiah 53:6, “All we like sheep have gone astray; We have turned, every one, to his own way....”

So considering that God is the one who created us and we are absolutely dependent upon Him for our very existence, we should give heed to the words of Jesus in Mt. 16:24, “If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. The creature should submit to his Creator and Savior.

Furthermore, not only is God self-existent:

II. GOD IS SELF-SUFFICIENT

He is the “living God” (Jer. 10:10; Acts 14:15).¹ Therefore, His life is not dependent upon another, but He is the source of all life. Were there another from whom God could receive the gift of life, that other would be God. In Acts 17:25 Paul said, “Nor is He worshiped with men’s hands, as though He needed anything, since He gives to all life, breath, and all things.” He did not bring His worlds into being to meet some unfulfilled need in Himself, as a man might build a house to shelter him against the winter cold or plant a field of corn to provide him with necessary food. God has a voluntary relationship to everything He has made, but He has no necessary relationship to anything outside of Himself. His interest in His creatures arises from His sovereign good pleasure, not from any need those creatures can supply.

In contrast, man is not self-sufficient. Paul asked in 1 Cor. 4:7, “...what do you have that you did not receive?” Nothing is complete in itself but requires something outside itself in order to exist. All breathing things need air; every organism needs food and water. To God alone nothing is necessary. That we do exist is altogether of God’s free determination, and not by divine necessity.

Were all human beings suddenly to become blind, still the sun would shine by day and the stars by night, for these owe nothing to the billions who benefit from their light. So, were every man on earth to become atheist, it could not affect God in any way. He would still be God and not harmed in the least, for He is absolutely self-sufficient. He is what He is in Himself without regard to any other. To believe in Him adds nothing to His perfections; to doubt Him takes nothing away.

Of course this means that we are indeed absolutely dependent upon God and we need to recognize that reality. In the model prayer Jesus taught us to pray, “Give us this day our daily bread” (Mt. 6:11). In such a prayer we acknowledge our daily dependence upon God. We need God for every other aspect of daily living. The apostle Paul said it well in 2 Cor. 3:5, “Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think of anything as being from ourselves, but our sufficiency is from God.” We who are creatures of need, and who are not self-sufficient, can pray and trust in the One who is absolutely self-sufficient!

Furthermore, probably the hardest thought of all for our natural egotism to entertain is that God does not need our help. Yet let us not imagine that the truth of the divine self-sufficiency will paralyze Christian activity for the *true* believer. We should understand that we serve him, not for His benefit, but for our own. Likewise, God needs no defenders. A God who must be defended is one who can help us only while someone is helping Him.

¹ There are 28 other references in the Bible to the “living God.”

III. GOD IS INFINITE

Of all that can be thought or said about God, His infinitude is perhaps the most difficult to grasp. Even to try to conceive of it would appear to be self-contradictory, for such conceptualization requires us to undertake something which we know at the outset we can never accomplish. We are trying to envision a mode of being altogether foreign to us, and wholly unlike anything we have known in our familiar world of matter, space, and time. Infinitude, of course, means limitlessness, and it is obviously impossible for a limited mind to grasp the Unlimited! Yet we must try, for the Holy Scriptures teach that God is infinite. Properly, the word “infinite” can be used of no created thing, and of no one but God.

I will deal with some of the specifics of God’s infinitude in our next message, when I will talk about the fact that God is all-powerful, all-knowing, and everywhere present. Today, I will just deal with the general concept along with some specific illustrations of it.

When I say that God is infinite I mean that He knows no bounds, that He is measureless. Measurement describes limitations, and cannot apply to God. We measure created things, and even abstract things such as faith and love, but God cannot be measured. All that He is He is without growth or addition or development.

The may give one verse to support the fact that God is infinite. Psalms 147:5 says, “Great is our Lord, and mighty in power; His understanding is infinite.”

Outer space does at least help us get a better picture of the infinity and greatness of God. Our galaxy is only one of more than a hundred billion galaxies in the observable universe. Did you realize that the distance from our galaxy to the next nearest one is nearly 1,500,000 light years? It takes 100,000 light years just for a light to travel across our Milky Way galaxy. The psalmist is right, “the heavens declare the glory of God” (Ps. 19:1a).²

What does the infinitude of God mean to us beyond the mere wonder of thinking about it? We poor human creatures are constantly being frustrated by limitations imposed upon us from without and within. For example, the days of the years of our lives are few. How completely satisfying to turn from our limitations to a God who has none. The eternal God can give us life that has no end. Furthermore, the mercy and grace of God is infinite, and the man who has felt the grinding pain of inward guilt knows that this is more than academic. Romans 5:20 says, “Where sin abounded, grace abounded much more.” Abounding sin is the terror of the world, but abounding grace is the hope of mankind. However sin may abound it still has its limits, for, it is the product of finite minds and hearts; but God’s infinite grace and mercy has not limits! Likewise, His love is measureless. It is boundless. Because He is infinite His love can enfold the whole created world with over 7 billion people. His love is never exhausted. As we shall discuss in our next message, His power is also infinite. That is why Paul could say in Eph. 3:20, “Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us.”

One of the aspects of the infinitude of God that we will look into more in-depth is this:

IV. GOD IS ETERNAL

God has always existed; there has never been a time when He did not exist. Since humans think in terms of time, they cannot fully grasp this concept. We must remember that God created time just as He created everything else. Psalms 90:2 says, “Before the mountains were brought forth, Or ever You had formed the earth and the world, Even from everlasting to everlasting, You are God.” Psalms 102:25-26 says, “Of old You laid the foundation of the earth, And the heavens are the

² Mostly from Austini Tucker, "To Illustrate" in *Preaching*, Sept/Oct. 2008, p. 76-77.

work of Your hands. They will perish, but You will endure....” In Revelation 4:8 we see that the four living creatures who are before the throne keep saying, “Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, Who was and is and is to come!”³ God has no beginning or end. That is why He is called, “the Ancient of Days” (Daniel 7:9, 13, 22). God stretches backward beyond the creation of the universe in a never-ending line. God stretches beyond time as far as He stretches before it, in a never-ending line of existence. God will never cease to be.

This truth about God relates to the subject of time. Time marks the beginning of created existence, and because God never began to exist it can have no application to Him. He is related to events in time, yet He is not confined to time. Past, present, and future are one to Him. God lives in an everlasting now. Somehow He is above and beyond time. This is why God can say, “I am God, . . . and there is none like me, declaring the end from the beginning” (Isa. 46:9-10). He sees the end and the beginning in one view.

Of course, the fact that God is eternal means that we can share in his eternal life. Being created in the image of God, we are made for eternity as certainly as we are made for time. One mark of the image of God in man may be man’s insatiable craving for immortality. 2 Tim. 1:10 says, “Jesus Christ ... has abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.” So wrote the greatest Christian of them all just before he went out to meet his executioner. God’s eternity and man’s mortality join to persuade us that faith in Jesus Christ is not optional.

Conclusion: So the God of the Bible is a God who is great. He is self-existent, self-sufficient, infinite and eternal. How should we respond to such a great God? We should praise Him and adore Him. Ps. 95:3 says, “For the LORD is the great God, And the great King above all gods.” Then in v.6 it says, “Oh come, let us worship and bow down; Let us kneel before the LORD our Maker.” Likewise, Ps. 48:1 says, “Great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised....” So let us give Him the praise and worship He deserves! We should also understand our absolute dependence upon Him and put our trust in Him.

Sources: Roy T. Edgemon, *The Doctrines Baptists Believe* (Nashville: LifeWay Press, 1999); J. I. Packer, *Knowing God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1973); Larry Pierce, *Online Bible* [Ver. 4:23] (Ontario: onlinebible.net, 2012); Primary source: A. W. Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy* (Lincoln, NE: Back to the Bible Broadcast, 1971). Other sources listed in the footnotes. Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from *The New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982).

ABOUT THESE SERMON NOTES

© Dr. Stephen Felker. These notes may be used and even shared for personal study or ministry, but not for commercial purposes. The author credits the sources listed above and footnotes for much of the content. The “live” recording of this sermon will be more completely in the author’s own words. To obtain an audio recording of this message, you may listen free at www.sermonaudio.com/pastorFelker. A video of this sermon is available at <http://swiftcreek.church/>. Dr. Felker’s email address is S+Felker&2@aol.com (remove signs).

³ Likewise, in Revelation 1:8 Jesus said, “I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End, who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.”