

THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD, or
MAN'S GREATEST PRIORITY

Intro: Anyone who reads the Scriptures with an open heart cannot help but see (if he has the blessing of God at all) that the Bible is not only a revelation from God, but it is a revelation of God. There is not a book in the Bible which does not have this as its primary objective -- to teach us about God -- either the Father, the Son, the Holy Spirit, or all Three of Them! When we read any portion of Scripture, we should ask: What is there in this passage that I should learn about God? When we finish, we should ask: What has the Lord shown me about Himself, and how should it affect me and my life?

Tragically, this is a subject which many Christians neglect until God, through their circumstances, compels them to do otherwise.

This past week I received in the mail a list of the 100 best sellers among Christian books. As I looked through the titles, I realized more strongly than ever why the Church of the 20th century like it is today. The people of God are satisfied with light things. Probably a good percentage of them are incapable of digesting solid truth. A few books on the list of best sellers were not even Christian books, but books of a secular nature which Christians are buying ahead of other books which are solidly Christian. The book list is an alarming commentary on the condition of the Church today.

One book which manages to hold a place among the best sellers is now about 66 on the list. It is James Packer's book, Knowing God. If you haven't read it, you should read it -- and you ought to encourage other Christians to read it. It is the kind of reading that will build you up in the faith.

In the very first chapter of his book Dr. Packer refers to a 20-year old preacher who, back in 1855, stood before his people in London, and spoke to them about knowing God. That speaker was Charles Haddon Spurgeon, and his language would have honored a man who had been in the ministry for 50 years. It is hard to imagine that a young man only 20 would have such great insight into the Word of God. In the more than 60 volumes of Spurgeon's sermons which have been printed, this message is the first sermon in the first volume. I won't read the whole quotation given by Dr. Packer. You can read it for yourself on pages 13 and 14 in his book, or, better yet, buy Volume 1 of Spurgeon's sermons, and read the whole message along with the part that Dr. Packer quoted. But the gist of the quotation is this: young Spurgeon said that the knowledge of God will improve our minds, it will humble us, it will expand our thinking, and it will console us. And then, after these remarks, Spurgeon added this comment:
Oh, there is, in contemplating Christ, a balm for every

wound; in musing on the Father, there is a quietus for every grief; and in the influence of the Holy Ghost, there is a balsam for every sore. Would you lose your sorrow? Would you drown your cares? Then go, plunge yourself in the Godhead's deepest sea; be lost in his immensity; and you shall come forth as from a couch of rest, refreshed and invigorated. I know of nothing (said Spurgeon) which can so comfort the soul; so calm the swelling billows of sorrow and grief; so speak peace to the winds of trial, as a devout musing upon the subject of the Godhead. (And then he concluded these remarks by saying,) It is to that subject that I invite you this morning . . . (Packer, Knowing God, pp. 13, 14).

In the following weeks I want to bring a series of messages dealing with this theme: The knowledge of God. We will be looking at the attributes of God as given to us in Scripture. BUT WHERE AND HOW DO WE BEGIN WITH A SUBJECT SO VAST THAT NO ONE HAS EVER BEEN ABLE TO COMPREHEND FULLY ALL THAT IS GIVEN TO US IN SCRIPTURE?

Let's begin with Psalm 100.

There are 7 commands which the Psalmist gives us -- things that we are to do without fail:

- 1) "Make a joyful noise unto the Lord, all ye lands."
- 2) "Serve the Lord with gladness."
- 3) "Come before his presence with singing."
- 4) "The one in particular that we are concerned with just now: "Know ye that the LORD he is God."
- 5) "Enter into his gates with thanksgiving, and into his courts with praise."
- 6) "Be thankful unto him."
- 7) "And bless his name."

Note the middle one again, "Know ye that the LORD he is God," and pay particular attention to the fact that it is a command -- not just a suggestion, or something to do if you have time, BUT A COMMAND. To ignore this is sin. It is to disobey God. And to fail to obey God at this point can only have the worst kind of consequences for you. Dwell on those words until they are written upon your heart: "Know ye that the LORD he is God." No one who knows the Lord would deliberately deny that statement, but is it really evident in your life that you believe this, and are living in the enjoyment of it?

At this point the question should be raised: But how can I know Him?

Psalm 100 gives us several ways, and I want to consider those with you. But, before I do, let me mention one thing which should be obvious to us all, and yet we dare not overlook it.

It is this: We can only, truly, know God through His Word!

Let me explain what I mean.

God is known in creation (I will speak of that in a minute), but if you do not look at creation through the Word, you might become a pantheist, or even one who worships creation. It is the Word of God that keeps us in the clear regarding creation.

Or take even the Lord Jesus Christ. God's final and most complete revelation of Himself is in Christ. But how can you and I possibly know about Christ if we do not learn of Him in Holy Scripture? We cannot know Him in any other way. It is the Word of God that keeps us straight about Christ.

Even Psalm 100 is helpful to us as a part of the Word of God.

Thus, let me reject anything that cannot be supported by the Bible, but let me accept any and everything that I find in the Scriptures even though I may not be able to understand all that I find there.

The knowledge of God which we seek is in the Word of God -- and in what it reveals to us of

- the names of God,
- the works of God,
- the words of God,
- the attributes of God,
- and, ultimately, through the Son of God!

But everything that God intends for us to know has been recorded for us permanently in the written Word of God. Therefore, a search for God must involve a searching of the Scriptures.

How can we learn to know God, according to Psalm 100? The Psalmist mentions at least 6 ways, and then I want to conclude with one which is not in Psalm 100, to complete what we have here.

I. WE LEARN TO KNOW GOD THROUGH PRAISING HIM.

This is the most dominant emphasis in the Psalm, isn't it? Look especially at verses 1 and 4.

Think of the place that praise has in both the OT and the NT. We are to praise God at all times for all things -- the things we consider bad as well as the things that we consider good!

Why?

- 1) Because it keeps us thinking about what our blessings are, and
- 2) Because in determining where our blessings have come

from, we are always brought to realize that they have come from God -- and so we praise Him. And we realize as we do all of this, that we come to know God by the kind of blessings which He gives us.

For this to have such a large place throughout Scripture is to show how important it is. If you are not increasing in the knowledge of God, it is very, very likely that you are neglecting the praise of God!

"Whoso offereth praise glorifieth me," said the Lord in Psa. 50:23.

II. WE LEARN TO KNOW GOD THROUGH SERVING HIM.

"Serve the Lord with gladness." How often we fail here -- not only by neglecting the Lord's service, but by doing it without gladness. See v. 2a.

Serving God is one of the greatest means that the Lord uses to teach us to know Him. Cf. Moses in Exodus 5 and 6 when all of the plans concerning the deliverance of Israel seemed to fall apart when Pharaoh said, "No!" It was one of the greatest lessons that Moses was ever to learn about the Lord and His wisdom and His power. "Now thou shalt see what I will do to Pharaoh . . ." (Ex. 6:1).

The Bible is full of such illustrations.

If you are not serving the Lord, you are missing out on a great deal that the Lord would teach you about Himself.

III. WE LEARN TO KNOW GOD THROUGH FELLOWSHIP WITH HIM.

"Come before his presence with singing." See v. 2b.

This can be done with others, but there must be times daily when we are alone with the Lord.

Think of Jacob, returning home after 20 years, about to meet Esau, surrounded by a large family -- and then it is stated in Gen. 32:24, "And Jacob was left alone . . ." In the following verses we have that life-changing experience which Jacob had at Peniel when he said, "I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved" (Gen. 32:30b).

Have you been with the Lord this morning? Is this your main reason even for being here?

IV. WE LEARN TO KNOW GOD THROUGH CREATION.

I could direct your thinking to Psalm 19 ("The heavens declare the glory of God . . ."), or to Romans 1 where we see

Paul's statement that the people of the world are "without excuse" as to evidence through creation that God exists, but, instead, let me confine myself to Psalm 100: "It is He that hath made us, and not we ourselves."

How much time have you spent thinking about that? Guided in your thinking by the Word of God, what have you learned about God from the fact that He made you? Since He did that, can you doubt any promise that He has given to us? Can you ever doubt the wisdom of God when you stop to contemplate just the miracle of your being -- body, soul, and spirit? You and I have not done this, but He did!

If you are neglecting what you can learn from creation as it is spoken of in Scripture, you are to that extent deficient in your knowledge of the Lord.

And then think of this next great theme:

V. WE LEARN TO KNOW GOD THROUGH SALVATION.

This is undoubtedly the greatest way in which God has made Himself known -- by His work for our salvation, past, present and future. "We are his people, and the sheep of his pasture."

The Lord Himself said,
 "And when he putteth forth his own sheep,
 he goeth before them,
 and the sheep follow him: for they know his voice"
 (John 10:4).

Your knowledge of the Lord is inseparably linked with what you believe about salvation -- how we are saved, why we are saved, and all that has to do with our salvation. This is where God has specifically made Himself known to men.

VI. WE LEARN TO KNOW GOD THROUGH HIS PROVIDENTIAL DEALINGS IN OUR LIVES.

I am thinking now of the last verse of the Psalm: v. 5:
 "For the Lord is good; his mercy is everlasting; and his truth (or, faithfulness) endureth to all generations."

These are attributes of God: His goodness,
 His mercy,
 His faithfulness.

You and I experience them continually. All we need to do is to look at the way the Lord is leading us, blessing us, teaching us, using us -- and we, as we look at the circumstances of our lives in the light of the Word, have much to see that will bring us into a greater knowledge of God.

One book that does not appear on the current best sellers list is a book by John Flavel, The Mystery of Providence. The fact that it does not appear is not a reflection upon Mr. Flavel, but upon Christians today who do not seem to be interested in this subject. It ought to be found in everyone's home. In it, Mr. Flavel teaches, among other things, that every detail of our lives, who we are, where we were born, our gifts and our limitations, everything is under the providence of God. This includes the time of our birth, the time of our death, and all things in between. The Psalmist would add this most wonderful detail (although Flavel does not ignore it at all): that everything is characterized by the goodness,
 the mercy, and
 the faithfulness of God!
 This alone should be the subject for unceasing praise to God -- and in all of God's providences He is continually making Himself known to us.

Such was the case with Job.

Concl: One final word.

When we deal with the knowledge of God we are dealing with a subject that is inexhaustible, a subject which will continue to unfold to our understanding in heaven. Paul wrote of this in 1 Cor. 13:12,

"For now we see through a glass darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known."

"Know ye that the LORD he is God."

To know the Lord is not only the greatest of all subjects, but it is the greatest of all pursuits. To know the Lord is to enter into life's greatest blessings -- a foretaste of that perfect knowledge which will be ours in heaven!

THE ETERNITY OF GOD

Scripture Reading: Psalm 90 (verse 2).

Intro: The Bible clearly teaches that the ultimate purpose of salvation is that we will become like God, and like His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

See such passages as Rom. 8:29; 1 John 3:2; Phil. 3:20, 21; 2 Cor. 3:18.

However, it is also clear in Scripture that though we shall be like God and like Christ, we will never be Deity. There will always be differences between the Godhead and those of us whom They have redeemed!

In order to bring this out, one way in which theologians and other Bible teachers have taught the attributes of God is by distinguishing between God's incommunicable attributes as compared with those which are communicable. Or, in other words, they distinguish, because the Bible distinguishes, between those attributes which God alone possesses (the incommunicable) and those attributes which He imarts to us (the communicable). In all cases God possesses the communicable in a perfection which we cannot attain in this life -- such as we see in His wisdom, or in His love.

The subject which we have before us just now is THE ETERNITY OF GOD -- one of God's incommunicable attributes.

All of us have had our beginning in time. God is without beginning, and without ending. He has always existed, and He always will exist. He never began to be, nor will He ever cease to be. He is the ever-living, "the Lord, the everlasting God" (Gen. 21:33).

THE ETERNITY OF GOD not only means that He lives, that He has always lived, and always will live, but it also must indicate that He lives without changing in any way. This unchangeableness of God is spoken of as God's immutability! God's eternal existence and His unchangeableness are brought together in Psalm 102:25-27.

Therefore, since God is eternal and unchangeable, everything about Him is eternal and unchangeable. His knowledge is unchangeable. He never learns because He knows all things. His wisdom never changes. He never has made any mistakes, and He never will. His power never changes. He has not gradually gotten so that He can do more and more things, but He has always been able to do everything that He can do now. His love never changes. This was the basis of Jeremiah's comfort for the people of Judah in Jer. 31:3. God's holiness never changes. He

does not improve. He is eternally perfect in an absolute sense. God's Word never changes. His will does not change. His promises are changeless. Everything about God is eternal!

Henry Lyte, in his hymn, Abide with Me, has mentioned this eternal and unchanging characteristic of God to show how comforting it is to us who are the people of God:

Swift to its close ebbs out life's little day;
Earth's joys grow dim, its glories pass away;
Change and decay in all around I see.
O Thou, who changest not, abide with me.

And, let me also point out -- that which can be stated of God the Father, is also true of God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.

Concerning the Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, Paul states the eternity of Christ in a charge to Timothy found in 1 Tim. 6: 13-16. (Read.)

With reference to the Holy Spirit we have that statement found in Heb. 9:14 about "Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God . . ."

Now let me read to you

I. SOME OF THE PASSAGES OF SCRIPTURE WHERE THE ETERNITY OF GOD IS TAUGHT.

- A. In our Scripture reading: Psalms 90:1, 2.
- B. In Psalm 93:1, 2.
- C. At the conclusion of Moses' blessing upon the tribes of Israel, just before his death -- the last recorded words of Moses in the Pentateuch: Deuteronomy 33:26-29.
- D. Isaiah makes a strong emphasis on the eternal, unchanging character of God: Isaiah 40:27-31; 41:1-4; 43:10; 44:6-8; 57:15.
- E. It is even implied in Genesis 1:1.
- F. The passage, quoted in the introduction, Genesis 21:33, where it is stated that "Abraham . . . called . . . on the name of the Lord, the everlasting God" -- "Lord" is Jehovah, meaning that every use of that name, the hundreds of times it appears in the OT, is a testimony to the eternity of God and to the fact that He does not change!

But we also have this emphasis in the NT, in addition to

the charge Paul gave to Timothy which we have already referred to.

G. See Rom. 16:25-27 -- at the close of that great Epistle.

H. With both God and Christ included we have Rev. 1:4, 8, 17, 18. See also Heb. 13:8 plus John 1:1-3; 1 John 1:1-3.

I. In Heb. 1:10-12 the writer quotes Psa. 102:24-27 (which we have already referred to), and applies it to Christ!

But now, having looked at all of these passages (and these are only a part, a small part, of what we could have read, let us ask ourselves:

II. WHAT ARE THE PURPOSES OF SUCH A REVELATION IN SCRIPTURE?

There are many answers to that question, but let me call your attention to a few of the more obvious purposes

A. First and foremost, we have such a revelation in the Word of God because God wants these things about Himself to be known.

They would not be in the Bible if that were not the case. But, if we need proof: Isa. 43:10.

But that is apparent also in our Scripture reading: Psa. 90. God reveals what we could never discover for ourselves, and so this is why we find it throughout the Word of God.

But let us just take Psalm 90 and note the effect that this truth about God had on Moses Himself. All of these purposes can be seen elsewhere, but it is interesting to see how many Moses has recorded in this one Psalm.

B. The purposes given by Moses in Psalm 90:

1. That we might worship God. Cf. vv. 1, 2.

This is what Moses is doing as the Psalm begins, and the attitude of worship continues all the way through the 17 verses! If anything will make us worship God, it is the knowledge of God.

Illustrated in Rev. 4:8-11. Note the attributes mentioned.

2. That we might be humbled.

See verses 3-10. So overwhelming is this truth that we cannot begin to understand it without seeing ourselves in contrast. Is this a truth which contri-

buted to the meekness of Moses. Cf. Num. 12:3.

As a part of the above is the added purpose

3. That we might realize more of our sinfulness.
See vv. 7, 8.

We probably have lost that sense of our sinfulness because we have lost sight of the glory and ~~ma~~jesty of God!

This leads inevitably to two other things:

4. That we might fear the Lord (v. 11).

And this, in turn, leads us to the next purpose:

5. That we might be wise (v. 12).

And as Moses' prayer continues, we note:

6. That we might pray, trusting the Lord to meet our needs (vv. 13-16).

And, as both the Psalm and the prayer end, we see cry of Moses concerning his own work.

7. That we might serve the Lord in a manner acceptable to Him.

"Beauty" here means favor. It speaks of the blessing of God upon our work, the work which He has appointed for us to do.

Concl: If we were to go to other passages of Scripture, we would find these same purposes mentioned again -- and others that are not mentioned here.

But the important thing at this point is this: Are we going to go away and forget all that we have seen in the Word and heard from the Word during this service, OR are we going to seek the Lord, are we going to cry out for understanding concerning the eternity of God, concerning His unchanging character, so that the truth can affect us in the same way that it affected Moses? That is why this Psalm is here -- it is for us! Oh, meditate on these truths. Ask the Lord to give you understanding. Humble yourself before Him. Trust Him to make you what He wants you to be. Respond to His working in your own heart. Seek His blessing above everything else.

These truths can bring to us the best and greatest blessings that we have ever known!

Attributes are characteristics.
The attributes of God indicate
who and what God is!

no subject is more ~~important~~

It can certainly be said that the
Bible is not only a revelation from
God, but it is also a revelation of
God. Thus, a study of God brings
us to a study of the Scriptures

Passages on ~~knowing~~ the Lord:

- 1) Phil. 3:10.
- 2) Job 42:5, 6
- 3) Ex. 6:1 - Israel
7:5 - Egypt
7:17 - Pharaoh

GOD, SELF-SUFFICIENT AND ALL-SUFFICIENT

Acts 17:16-34

Text: Verse 25

Intro: We are currently in a series on The Knowledge of God.

This is the greatest, the most important, the most extensive subject in all of Scripture because, as I have said repeatedly,

The Bible is not only a revelation from God,
but it is especially a revelation of God.

We do not understand anything in life as we should until we see things in the light of what God is! Only as we know God can we know ourselves. Only as we know God can we understand what sin is, and how terrible it is. And only as we know God can we understand the need for and the nature of salvation.

We have been reminded that God's purpose in saving us is to make us like Himself and like His Son, our Lord Jesus Christ.

But we have also seen that we will never be Deity -- we will never be completely like God. God will always be greater in all respects than we are. And so as we seek to know God we must always be careful to distinguish between those characteristics that are uniquely His, as compared with those He imparts, or communicates, to us.

We have been considering His incommunicable attributes first -- those He does not impart to us.

The first one we considered together was The Eternity of God, seen, for example, in Psa. 90:1, 2. (Read.)

This morning I would like to consider with you The Self-Sufficiency of God, and His All-Sufficiency.

We have both of these in verse 25 of our Scripture reading in Acts 17. (Read.)

- 1) God's Self-Sufficiency is seen in the statement made by the Apostle Paul, "Neither is worshipped with men's hands, as though he needed anything."
- 2) God's All-Sufficiency is seen in the latter part of verse 25: " . . . seeing he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things."

So -- this means that He is Self-Sufficient with reference to Himself; He is All-Sufficient with reference to all of creation.

Let me see if I can explain this so as to make it even clearer.

God is self-sufficient because all fulness and all perfection is in Him. He can never be in need of anything. He is not lacking in anything. He can never lose anything that He has within Himself. As we have seen, He does not change. He is not

dependent upon anything outside of Himself (like we are) because He existed eternally by Himself. Thus, as Paul sought to teach the Athenians, we do not bring God anything which He has to have to survive. Cf. Psalms 50:12, 13,

"If I were hungry, I would not tell thee: for the world is mine, and the fulness thereof. Will I eat the flesh of bulls, or drink the blood of goats?"

On the other hand, we are utterly dependent upon God, as Acts 17:25 teaches us, for "life, and breath, and all things." No creature, man, beast, fish, or bird, can live without God. David wrote in Psalm 145:15, 16,

"The eyes of all wait upon thee; and thou givest them their meat in due season. Thou openest thine hand, and satisfiest the desire of every living thing."

And, it is important to know that God is the only God. There is no other. Isaiah taught his people this over and over again when he gave them the Lord's words, "I am God, and there is none else" (Isa. 45:22).

This does not need to bother us, however, because God is so completely sufficient for us that there is no need that can possibly arise but what He can meet it!

Let us remember that this is an incommunicable attribute. God does not make us self-sufficient. In fact, He does just exactly the opposite: He so works in the hearts of His people that they realize more and more their utter dependence upon Him. This is the very essence of our faith!

Now I would like to take you to several passages of Scripture so that you can see how the Self-Sufficiency of God and the All-Sufficiency of God relate to us.

I. THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THIS ATTRIBUTE OF GOD AND SALVATION.

In the light of God's All-Sufficiency we should expect two things regarding salvation: (and, in fact, regarding all of the other points I am going to make):

- 1) First -- that only God can save.
- 2) Second -- that He does everything necessary for our salvation.

The truth of divine Self-Sufficiency and divine All-Sufficiency apply equally to the Father, to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit!

A. That only God can save, note John 6:66-69; 14:6; Acts 4:12. Also Isa. 45:22.

B. That God does the work completely, note 2 Cor. 5:21;

Phil. 1:6; 2 Tim. 1:12; Heb. 7:25 -- and many others.

II. THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THIS DOCTRINE AND ALL OF THE NEEDS OF DAILY LIFE.

Have you ever read Psalm 23 with this in mind? Note how life, and death, and even eternity are all included.

III. THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THIS DOCTRINE AND THE TRIALS AND TROUBLES WHICH COME TO ALL OF US.

Turn to Psalm 46.

IV. THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THIS DOCTRINE AND THE APPARENT INCONSISTENCIES OF GOD'S DEALINGS WITH HIS PEOPLE AS COMPARED WITH WHAT HAPPENS TO PEOPLE OF THE WORLD.

Have you ever felt like Asaph did before he was able to write the 73rd Psalm? Note the change beginning with verse 17, and then see his statement in verse 25.

V. THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THIS DOCTRINE AND THE SPECIAL TRIALS WHICH COME TO US, BUT THEY DO NOT COME IN THE SAME WAY TO ALL.

Paul's experience in 2 Cor. 12 will give us a good illustration. Paul was given his "thorn in the flesh" to make him and keep him humble. He protested to God, and sought deliverance. After three times of prayer, God said, "No" -- and then the Lord did something that was even more wonderful. See 2 Cor. 12:9, 10.

Concl: "How firm a foundation, ye saints of the Lord,
Is laid for your faith in his excellent Word!
What more can he say than to you he hath said,
You who unto Jesus for refuge have fled?

"Fear not, I am with thee, O be not dismayed;
I, I am thy God, and will still give thee aid;
I'll strengthen thee, help thee, and cause thee to stand,
Upheld by my righteous, omnipotent hand.'

"When through the deep waters I call thee to go,
The rivers of woe shall not thee overflow;
For I will be with thee thy troubles to bless,
And sanctify to thee thy deepest distress.'

"When through fiery trials thy pathway shall lie,
My grace, all-sufficient, shall be thy supply;
The flame shall not hurt thee; I only design
Thy dross to consume, and thy gold to refine.'

"E'en down to old age all my people shall prove
My sovereign, eternal, unchangeable love;

And when hoary hairs shall their temples adorn,
Like lambs they shall still in my bosom be borne.'

"' The soul that on Jesus hath leaned for repose,
I will not, I will not desert to his foes;
That soul; though all hell should endeavor to shake,
I'll never, no never, no, never forsake.'"

What a marvelous God we have -- completely sufficient in
Himself, and more than you and I will ever need for all of the
needs we can possibly face in this world.

The Bible is a marvelous testimony of a Self-Sufficient God Who
is All-Sufficient for those who turn in faith to Him!

THE IMMENSITY OF GOD

Scripture Reading: Psalm 139. This attribute of God is taught especially in verses 7-10.

Texts: Various passages of Scripture.

Intro: During our Sunday morning services in recent weeks we have been considering The Attributes of God -- or, to state it another way, The Knowledge of God. We have been examining the Scriptures to learn Who God is by noting the various characteristics which He has.

We have noted that He has two kinds of characteristics, or attributes. Some belong uniquely to Him. These we call incommunicable attributes because He does not impart them to us. This includes God's Eternity. It includes His Self-Sufficiency. Other attributes which God does impart to His own are such attributes as His love, His wisdom, His power, etc. We will be considering these later.

We have also learned that it is impossible to deal with one of God's attributes without dealing with others. We are going to see that again this morning.

I would like for you to consider with me in this message, THE IMMENSITY OF GOD.

Related to this are references in Scripture to the fact that God is infinite; God is omnipresent.

With this great truth about God I would like to do two things:

- 1) Make sure that we all understand what it means -- especially by looking at several passages in the Bible where it is taught -- but also by giving some definitions.
- 2) Show the practical importance of this attribute of God -- both for the Christian and also for the one who is not a Christian.

I. THE DEFINITION OF THE IMMENSITY OF GOD.

Let me define it in three ways:

- 1) As the words immensity, infinity, and omnipresence are defined in any good dictionary.
- 2) As this doctrine has been defined by some theologians.
- 3) As the doctrine is defined in Scripture itself -- which, of course, is the main proof that we are concerned about.

A. The dictionary definitions:

1. Immensity. This word is defined as meaning vast, huge, very great, immeasurable, boundless.

2. Infinity. This means immeasurably great, that which is boundless, unlimited.
3. Omnipresent. This is the characteristic of being everywhere at the same time.

B. The theological definitions.

There are many of these that we could choose from because every true theologian has to explain the immensity of God, His infinity, the fact that He is omnipresent. Here are three:

1. Samuel Clarke's definition, quoted by Dr. Chafer, Vol. I, p. 221:

God "is at all times equally present . . . to every point of the boundless immensity, as if it were all but one single point."

What Dr. Clarke means is that God is not spread out so that every part of the universe has a little bit of Him, but He is completely present everywhere He is.

God is not like our President, for example. When President Carter travels overseas, he is not in Washington. He cannot be in two places at once. However, God can not only be two places at once; He can and is everywhere at once — so that you cannot ever go any place, but what God is there!

Let me give you a second definition:

2. Thomas Watson's definition (a Puritan), in his book, A Body of Divinity, p. 50:

God "is not confined to any place . . . and so is present in all places at once."

3. Augustine (quoted by Watson, p. 50):

"In no place is God's Being either confined or limited."

These all reflect the teaching of Scripture, but, so there will not be any doubt in anyone's mind, let me now give you the teaching of the Word of God.

C. The teaching of Scripture:

1. From our Scripture reading: Psalm 139:7-10.

It is extremely interesting to note how this truth about God is used in the Scriptures, and I would like for you to recognize that as we read some of these passages.

Solomon seems to be the first one in Scripture who gave a formal statement of the immensity of God. He did this when the Temple was built. Note it in the following passages:

2. 1 Kings 8:27; 2 Chron. 2:6; 6:18.

According to the first passage above, Solomon recognized that not even the earth could contain God when the heavens could not contain Him.

"But will God indeed dwell on the earth? behold, the heaven and heaven of heavens cannot contain thee; how much less this house that I have builded?"

Both Isaiah and Jeremiah preached in Judah as that nation was facing captivity because of sin. This was one of the attributes of God which these prophets both used to turn the nation back to the Lord.

3. Isaiah 40:12, 15, 17, 22.

Note also Isa. 66:1,

"Thus saith the Lord, The heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool: where is the house that ye build unto me? and where is the place of my rest?"

4. Jeremiah 23:23, 24,

"Am I a God at hand, saith the Lord, and not a God afar off? Can any hide himself in secret places that I shall not see him? saith the Lord. Do not I fill heaven and earth? saith the Lord."

Note how it was used in the preaching of Stephen and of Paul when they were speaking to unbelieving Jews (in Stephen's case), and to unbelieving Gentiles (in Paul's case).

5. Stephen: Acts 7:47-50.

6. Paul (in the passage we considered last week): Acts 17:24, 27.

Add to this Paul's great statements about God in Eph. 4:6, that there is "One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all."

Even our Lord Jesus Christ gave expression to this truth when He was speaking to an unregenerate Samaritan woman.

7. The Lord Jesus Christ: John 4:24,
"God is a Spirit: and they that worship him
must worship him in spirit and in truth."

So the conclusion of all of these passages is that you can never be any place where God is not. He is always accessible. He does not keep office hours. He never goes on a vacation. He is never so busy with some that He is unable to take care of others. When you call upon Him, you never get a busy signal. He is never for a moment out of touch with you. He is always "present in all places at the same time" (New World Dictionary, p. 521).

But now, to impress this truth even more upon your heart, let me take the rest of the time this morning to point out

II. SOME OF THE PRACTICAL CONSEQUENCES OF KNOWING THIS TRUTH.

The truth is never revealed just to satisfy our curiosity. It is meant to transform our lives. How should this truth affect us?

First, and most important of all,

- A. It should make us realize more about the glory and greatness of God -- and so cause us to worship Him.

The Psalmist exhorts us in Psalm 150:2b, "Praise him according to his excellent greatness."

We have the words of David in 1 Chron. 29:10, 11 with which he worshipped the Lord before the people of Israel:

"Blessed be thou, Lord God of Israel our father,
for ever and ever. Thine, O Lord, is the greatness,
and the power, and the glory, and the victory, and
the majesty: for all that is in the heaven and in
the earth is thine; thine is the kingdom, O Lord,
and thou art exalted as head above all."

To know truth like this will make us worship God!

Always closely related to this first point is a second point:

- B. It will make us realize more about the corresponding insignificance of man -- and so lead us to humble ourselves before God.

David realized this and expressed it in the passage I have just referred to. See 1 Chron. 29:14 -- "But who

am I, and what is my people, that we should be able to offer so willingly after this sort? for all things come of thee, and of thine own have we given thee."

Isaiah also taught this in the 40th chapter of his prophecy, verses 15, 17,

"Behold, the nations are as a drop of a bucket, and are counted as the small dust of the balance: behold, he taketh up the isles as a very little thing."

"All nations before him are as nothing; and they are counted to him less than nothing, and vanity."

If this is said about "all nations," then how insignificant must every individual be!

But there is a third thing I would like to mention:

C. A warning, as well as an encouragement: Prov. 15:3,

"The eyes of the Lord are in every place, beholding the evil and the good."

Finally, let me give you

D. Some other encouragements -- for the Lord's people.

This truth is full of comforting influences for the child of God.

1. In times of trial (Psa. 23:4).

2. In prayer (Phil. 4:5b-7). For the meaning of, "The Lord is at hand," cf. the same word in the LXX of Psa. 145:18, 19,

"The Lord is nigh unto all them that call upon him, to all that call upon him in truth. He will fulfil the desire of them that fear him: he also will hear their cry, and will save them."

3. When facing opposition (Heb. 13:5, 6).

4. In the fellowship of the saints (Matt. 18:20).

5. In our service (Matt. 28:18-20).

6. As to the providence of God (Eph. 1:19-23).

Concl: May the Lord enable us to know this truth, and then to walk in the enjoyment of it each day.

THE HOLINESS OF GOD

Scripture Reading: Revelation 15.

Intro: This attribute of God has been called "the attribute of attributes" (John Howe, date: 1670) because holiness is the very essence of God's nature! No term can possibly be more descriptive of what God is! In Psalm 111:9 we read, "holy and reverend is his name." Psalm 99 seems to be the Psalm of the Holiness of God. In verse 3 of that Psalm we read,
"Let them praise thy great and terrible name; for it is holy," or, for He is holy.

In verse 5 of that Psalm we have these words,

"Exalt ye the Lord our God, and worship at his footstool;
for he is holy."

In verse 9 (the last verse):

Exalt the Lord our God, and worship at his holy hill;
for the Lord our God is holy."

From our Scripture reading this morning we have the verse which teaches us:

"Who shall not fear thee, O Lord, and glorify thy name?
for thou only art holy: for all nations shall come and worship before thee; for thy judgments are made manifest" (Rev. 15:4).

Thus, as we begin to deal this morning with the greatest of all subjects in Scripture, my first point is this:

I. THE LORD IS HOLY!

What does this mean?

Referring to some of the incommunicable attributes which we have already considered, one writer says, speaking of God,

He only is independently, infinitely, immutably holy. . . He is so because the sum of all moral excellency is found in Him. He is absolute Purity, unsullied even by the shadow of sin" (Pink, The Attributes of God, p. 41).

The Apostle John expressed it this way:

. . . God is light, and in him is no darkness at all (1 John 1:5b).

The Old Testament prophet Habakkuk expressed the same truth, but in different words:

Art thou not from everlasting, O Lord my God, mine Holy One? . . . Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look on iniquity . . . (Hab. 1: 12a, 13a).

And so the doctrine of the holiness of God indicates that He is completely without sin, that He is incapable of sinning, and, furthermore, that He cannot and will not ultimately tolerate sin. Psalm 7:11 says that "God is angry with the wicked every day." But more about this later.

The second thing for us to notice from Rev. 15:4 is that

II. GOD ALONE IS HOLY.

No man is holy like God is. No angel is holy like He is. There are holy men and holy women, just as there are holy angels, but none are as holy as God is -- and this applies equally to God, the Father; God, the Son; and God, the Holy Spirit! What the singing saints of Revelation 15 said is absolutely true: "For thou ONLY art holy."

When Moses led the children of Israel in singing after they had crossed the Red Sea, a question they asked in the song was this:

Who is like unto thee, O Lord, among the gods? who is like thee, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders?

The Apostle Paul emphasizes this in 1 Timothy 6:16 where he wrote the following about Christ:

Who only hath immortality, dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto; whom no man hath seen, nor can see: to whom be honour and power everlasting. Amen.

But there is a third point to be recognized. It is this: Since He is holy, and holier than anyone else, it is to be recognized that

III. ALL THAT HE DOES IS HOLY.

You have this in Rev. 15:3,
Great and marvellous are thy works, Lord God Almighty;
just and true are thy ways, thou King of saints.

In Psalm 98:1 we read,
O sing unto the Lord a new song; for he hath done
marvellous things: his right hand, and his holy arm,
hath gotten him the victory.

God is incapable of doing anything at any time that is not perfectly consistent with His holiness!

This leads to several consequences which are clearly indicated in the Scriptures. Let me mention four of them.

IV. FOUR CONSEQUENCES OF KNOWING THAT GOD IS HOLY.

A. We should fear Him.

Let me emphasize this for those of you who do not know the Lord Jesus Christ as your Saviour. You may have asked yourself, or you may even now be asking, Why should I receive Christ as my Saviour?

The best answer I know to that question is the subject that we have been discussing: Because God is a holy God. If you do not turn to Christ as your Saviour now, you are going to face the Godhead some day in judgment -- and it will be too late to think about salvation then.

Solomon once wrote,

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the holy (or, of the Holy One) is understanding.

We have read in Rev. 15, verse 4,

Who shall not fear thee, O Lord, and glorify thy name? for thou only art holy . . . for thy judgments are made manifest.

The reason that people do not pay attention to Christ is that they do not know that God is holy, or, if they do know it, they have never come to understand what it actually means!

Jesus Christ is not just one way of escaping from the wrath of a Holy God; He is the only Way. Not until you believe in Christ can you know that your sins are forgiven. Paul wrote in 1 Timothy 1:15a,

This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners . . .

Christ "appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself" (Heb. 9:26b), and, as we read a few Sundays ago in Acts 17, God

" . . . now commandeth all men everywhere to repent: BECAUSE HE HATH APPOINTED A DAY, IN THE WHICH HE WILL JUDGE THE WORLD IN RIGHTEOUSNESS BY THAT MAN WHOM HE HATH ORDAINED: WHEREOF HE HATH GIVEN ASSURANCE UNTO ALL MEN, IN THAT HE HATH RASIED HIM FROM THE DEAD (vv. 30b, 31).

The most foolish thing a person can do is to delay coming to Christ, or to refuse the offer of salvation in the Lord Jesus Christ.

A holy GOD is to be feared!

A second consequence is this:

B. We should worship Him -- our holy God!

That is what the saints are doing in Rev. 15! And note what they are singing: "All nations shall come and worship before thee."

That is what Paul wrote about in Phil. 2:9-11.

Listen to the familiar words of Psa. 103:1,
Bless the Lord, O my soul: and all that is within
me, bless his holy name.

Or, note the last verse (21) of Psalm 145:
My mouth shall speak the praise of the Lord: and
let all flesh bless his holy name for ever and ever.

When Isaiah saw the Lord in Isaiah 6, what were the
angelic seraphim doing? He wrote that "one cried unto
another, and said, Holy, holy, holy, is the LORD of
hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory."

Do you want to know what it means to worship God? Then
take your Bible and ask Him to show you His holiness.
If you do, you are certain to become a worshipper!

But there is a third consequence:

C. We should trust Him -- even in times when it seems that
He has deserted us.

A classic illustration is to be found in Psalm 22 -- the
first 3 verses. It was a problem faced by:

- 1) David.
- 2) Our Lord Jesus Christ.
- 3) To some extent -- every child of God who has ever
lived.

What is our answer to the agony expressed in verses 1, 2?
You have it in verse 3:

But thou art holy, O thou that inhabitest the
praises of Israel.

Even when I do not understand what God is doing, or why
He has left me alone, I can have peace if I know that
He is "holy"! And, therefore, I can trust Him.

But there is one other consequence, a consequence of such
great magnitude that it should occupy our time from the
moment we are saved until we die, or until the Lord comes!
And then it will concern us also throughout all eternity.
It is this -- and I only have time to mention it:

D. We, too, must be holy.

Let me give you two passages of Scripture to prove this.

1. 1 Peter 1:14-16.

Peter is quoting from Lev. 11:44, showing that this is truth which applies to Old Testament saints and to New Testament saints alike!

The other passage is:

2. 2 Cor. 6:17-7:1.

The first of these passages emphasizes obedience to the Word;
the second emphasizes faith in the promises of God.
The teaching is clear: As we obey the Word in the power of the Holy Spirit, and as we believe the promises of God which are found in the Word, the result will be seen in our holy lives.

Concl: Do you long to be holy, like the Lord, or are you still playing with sin? What a marvelous truth to have before us as we come to the Lord's Table! If God were not a holy God, there would not have been the need for the Cross. And if Christ had not been just as holy as the Father, He could never have offered a sacrifice which would have been pleasing to His "Holy Father," which was the way He addressed God in John 17:11.

May God give us a greater understanding of His holiness, and may He make us more and more like His Son.

Let us sing.

THE GOODNESS OF GOD
Psalm 119:65-72

Intro: God's attribute of goodness is one that shows how inter-related God is in His attributes:

- 1) In one sense, God is good, and always good, because He is never bad. He never sins. He never does that which is wrong. According to this meaning, God's goodness is closely related to His holiness, His righteousness.
- 2) In another sense, God is good because He is kind, merciful, gracious, compassionate, loving, faithful, patient, long-suffering, and Wonderful in His works.

Thus, the great doctrines of the love of God and the grace of God are a part of the doctrine of the goodness of God.

This is the attribute which gives us hope when we consider, on the one hand, the holiness of God, and, on the other hand, the wrath of God.

Even our English word, God, has been taken from the attribute of God's goodness.

One writer has said,

Our Jehovah, the true God, is superlatively good; good in the highest degree, good beyond all conception and expression (Gill, John, Body of Divinity, I, 132).

There are many statements in Scripture similar to the one in our text this morning, but this one seems to sum up the teaching of Scripture on this point:

Thou art good, and doest good; teach me thy statutes.

If we could add one other idea, it is that expressed in Psa.

54:6 -- that God has a good name:

I will freely sacrifice unto thee: I will praise thy name,
O Lord; for it is good.

To indicate for us how vital a part goodness is in the character of God, we need only to read that great 33rd chapter of the book of Exodus where we have the record of Moses in the mount, receiving the Law for the second time, when he prayed, "I beseech thee, shew me thy glory." And the Lord responded with these words:

I will make all my goodness pass before thee, and I will proclaim the name of the Lord before thee; and will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will shew mercy on whom I will shew mercy.

(See Ex. 33:18, 19.) In the next chapter we see at least a part of the answer in verses 6, 7:

And the Lord passed by before him, and proclaimed, The Lord, The Lord God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, Keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty; visiting the iniquity of the

fathers upon the children, and upon the children's children, unto the third and to the fourth generation.

Again I must say what I have said about the attributes of God which we have considered previously -- that this is a subject so vast in Scripture that it is utterly impossible to deal with it thoroughly in one message -- or even in a lifetime. But let us this morning consider some of the outstanding features about the goodness of God which we have in the Scriptures.

First of all, let us notice that the Scriptures teach us that

I. GOD'S GOODNESS IS EVIDENT IN ALL THAT HE DOES.

Cf. Psa. 145:8, 9,

"The Lord is gracious, and full of compassion;
slow to anger, and of great mercy. The Lord is
good to all: and his tender mercies are over all
his works."

As our text says, The Lord Himself is not only good, but He "doest good."

We have a tremendous testimony to this fact in the Biblical account of creation. After the work was finished, we have this summary in the last verse of Genesis 1 (v. 31):

And God saw every thing that he had made, and, behold, it was very good. . .

II. ALTHOUGH GOD IS GOOD, HE IS ABSOLUTELY FREE AND SOVEREIGN IN THE EXERCISE OF HIS GOODNESS.

In other words, He does not have to be good to anyone! We do not deserve His goodness. We forfeit that by the very fact that we are members of the human race, under divine judgment -- plus the fact that we have ignored and scorned the ways of God times without number! If man can deserve grace, or mercy, or goodness, then it is no longer any of these things.

All of this is made perfectly clear in the Lord's words to Moses in Ex. 33:18, 19 (printed out next to the bottom on the preceding page).

Therefore, this truth is never presented in Scripture as a truth to make us careless and sinful, but one to make us humble and grateful, and, I might add, hopeful.

III. IT IS TO THIS ATTRIBUTE OF GOD THAT WE OWE OUR SALVATION.

Note what the Apostle Paul has to say in Rom. 1:4 where he is uncovering man's great need for salvation. He writes:

Or despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering (all synonyms for "goodness"); not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?

Look also at Titus 3:4-7. And then see Romans 5:6-11.

If it were not for the goodness of God, not a single person would be saved! Man did not initially ask to be saved. It was not ~~man~~'s idea. It all began with God, and consequently, to Him belongs all of the glory.

And this brings me to my fourth point.

IV. OVER AND OVER AGAIN IN SCRIPTURE THE SUBJECT OF THE GOODNESS OF GOD IS THE BASIS FOR EXHORTATIONS FOR US TO PRAISE THE LORD.

Perhaps the outstanding example of this is in Psalm 107 -- verses 8, 15, 21, 31.

How many times do you have the expression in Scripture with which Psalm 118 opens and closes?

O give thanks unto the Lord; for he is good: because his mercy endureth forever.

O give thanks unto the Lord; for he is good: for his mercy endureth for ever.

And what about Psalm 68:19?

Blessed be the Lord, who daily loadeth us with benefits, even the God of our salvation. Selah.

In salvation, and through every day of your life and mine before and since, God has poured out blessings of all kinds upon us, and yet we spend practically no time in praising Him for what we have.

But let me mention two more very important aspects of this truth of the goodness of God:

V. THE ATTRIBUTE OF GOD GIVES US GREAT HOPE IN TIMES OF TRIAL.

Take your Bible and read about the goodness of God, and you will find that many, many of them deal with God's goodness in connection with the troubles that we have.

Let me cite two passages:

A. Psalm 27. Note the general message of the Psalm, culminating in verses 13, 14.

B. Lamentations 3:22-33.

These passages show:

- 1) How dependent we are upon the goodness of God. Often it is our only hope.
- 2) That it is not foolish to wait upon God because of the fact that He is good!
- 3) That even though we might be in the midst of trials now, the Lord will eventually come to our help and deliver us.

He even takes care of us while we are going through the trials. Cf. Nahum 1:7,

The Lord is good, a strong hold in the day of trouble;
and he knoweth them that trust in him.

Finally . . .

VI. THE GOODNESS OF GOD IS INEXHAUSTIBLE.

Cf. Psa. 23:6, "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever."

We just read Lamentations 3:22, 23, "It is of the Lord's mercies . . ."

David expressed it in another way in Psalm 31:19,

Oh how great is thy goodness, which thou has laid up
for them that fear thee; which thou hast wrought for
them that trust in thee before the sons of men!

Concl: The life of Joseph ought to be a great encouragement to us to trust the Lord.

After Jacob, his father, died, Joseph's brothers thought that he would then get even with them. They hadn't yet really believed in the goodness of God to them, and so they went to Joseph begging for forgiveness again.

What was his response? Do you remember? See Gen. 50:19, 20.

And Joseph said unto them, Fear not: for am I in the place of God? But as for you, ye thought evil against me: but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive."

May the Lord enable all of us to sing to His glory:

Come, thou Fount of every blessing,
Tune my heart to sing thy grace;
Streams of mercy, never ceasing,
Call for songs of loudest praise.

Joseph Hart (1712-1768) penned these words which I have given

you before, but they bear repeating because they deal with our subject of the goodness of God.

How good is the God we adore,
Our faithful unchangeable Friend;
His love is as great as His power,
And knows neither measure nor end.

'Tis Jesus the first and the last,
Whose Spirit shall guide us safe home;
We'll praise Him for all that is past,
We'll trust Him for all that's to come.

THE POWER OF GOD

Scripture Reading: Ephesians 1:15-23.

Text: Ephesians 1:19-23.

- Intro: In Psalm 62 when David is considering the hope that he has concerning his enemies, he makes a statement which
- the Word of God supports from beginning to end:
God hath spoken once; twice have I heard this; that power belongeth unto God. (See v. 11.)

God has chosen to manifest His power in different ways:

- 1) He displayed His power in creation. We read in Psalm 33,
By the word of the Lord were the heavens made;
Also— and all the host of them by the breath of his mouth. . .
Rom. 1:20 For he spake, and it was done;
he commanded, and it stood fast" (vv. 6, 9).
- 2) He has shown it in His dealings with His people. When all hope, humanly speaking, was gone, that Abraham and Sarah could have a son, the Lord appeared to Abraham and told him something which revived Abraham's hope. It was this:
" . . . I am the Almighty God; walk before me,
and be thou perfect" (Gen. 17:1b).
Along this same line, the promises of God, prophecies (which are a form of promises), the purposes of God -- all of these things which are so vital a part of God's dealings with us -- would be impossible apart from the power of God!
- 3) God manifests His power through miracles. The Apostle John has taken miracles to show that these were evidence of the Deity of the Lord Jesus Christ. Cf. John 20:30, 31.
- 4) All of us who are saved are evidence of the power of God.
Cf. Rom. 1:16,
For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ:
for it is the power of God unto salvation
to every one that believeth;
to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.
- 5) Answers to prayer would be impossible if God were not a God of power. Cf. Jer. 33:3,
Call unto me, and I will answer thee,
and shew thee great and mighty things,
which thou knowest not.

I could go on, but we all should recognize that God would not be God apart from His power.

— BUT WITH ALL THAT I HAVE SAID, I HAVE NOT YET MENTIONED THE MAIN PLACE WHERE GOD HAS SEEN FIT TO DEMONSTRATE HIS POWER. IT IS BROUGHT OUT IN OUR TEXT THIS MORNING. THE GREATEST DISPLAY OF THE POWER OF GOD IS TO BE SEEN IN THE RESURRECTION, GLORIFICATION, AND EXALTATION OF THE LORD JESUS CHRIST! (Read again vv. 19-23.)

According to Paul, it is vital that every child of God know the power of God. But he makes it very clear that this is not seen in its greatest form in creation,

or in the Gospel,

or in the making of saints,

BUT IN THE RESURRECTION, GLORIFICATION, AND EXALTATION OF HIS SON, THE LORD JESUS CHRIST.

Note the following significant things from our text:

- I. THIS WAS ONE THING THAT PAUL PRAYED ABOUT FOR THE SAINTS -- UNCEASINGLY! See vv. 15-17, 19 ff.

Paul was concerned that the people of God should know:

- 1) "The hope of his calling."
- 2) "The riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints."
- 3) "The exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe."

And Paul uses an array of words for power in this passage which, as far as I know, is not surpassed in any other passage of Scripture!

But notice, secondly, why he prayed about this (apart from the fact that he wanted them to know about God's power).

- II. HE PRAYED ABOUT THIS (and the other two requests) BECAUSE IT CAN ONLY BE KNOWN AS A RESULT OF A REVELATION OF GOD TO OUR OWN HEARTS.

See vv. 17, 18a.

Thus, we do not instinctively realize what we should know about the power of God; God Himself has to make it known to us if we are ever to understand it.

And, as Scripture indicates in so many places, we do not learn this all at once. Abraham did not learn it at once. Neither did Moses. Nor did David. Nor did Job. Nor did Isaiah, nor Jeremiah. Nor did the nation Israel. Nor did John the Baptist. Nor did the Apostles James and John. Nor did Paul. Nor did any saint who lived before all of these, or after! BUT EVERYTHING THAT ANY SAINT HAS LEARNED ABOUT THE POWER OF GOD HE (OR SHE) HAS LEARNED THROUGHOUT LIFE FROM GOD ALONE! We may say that we know that God is a God of power, and we may really think that we do, but it is when the testings and trials of life come along that we really see how much we actually know about the power of God!

Let us now look to see where we can expect God to teach us about His mighty power. As I have already mentioned, emphasizing what

we have in our text,

III. THE POWER OF GOD IS MADE KNOWN PRE-EMINENTLY THROUGH THE RESURRECTION, GLORIFICATION, AND EXALTATION OF THE LORD JESUS CHRIST.

In other words, in all of history, there is no greater display of God's power.

Let us look at these verses carefully, praying that as we do, God Himself will enable us to understand more about His power.

- A. Note, in the first place, that Paul is talking about God's power as it is now -- not as it will be at some future time.

He is not describing things as they will be some day, but as they are at this present hour -- and God's power as it always has been, but expressed for the people of God to be assured of when Christ was raised from the dead and exalted to the right hand of the Father!

All that can be said about the power of God applies to your circumstances, and mine, at this very hour.

- B. It was omnipotent power.

Think of what it would mean to raise anyone from the dead, and to place him at the Father's right hand?

Think of what it meant to raise Christ as He was raised -- so that He would never die again.

Think of the forces that opposed Christ's resurrection, seen and unseen -- the forces of Rome, the forces of Israel, the forces of Satan and demons. And yet God raised Him from the dead as though there were no problems at all!

- C. It was sovereign power -- over angels, over demons, over the nations of the earth, and over us in the Church.

No one, human or angelic, is excluded from the terms which Paul uses in vv. 21-23.

But let us not overlook an expression in v. 21 which gives us another characteristic of God's power. I refer to the words, "not only in this world," or age, "but also in that which is to come." This should make us see that the power of God has another very vital characteristic:

- D. It was (and is) eternal power.

One thing which any sovereign fears is the possibility that he can be overthrown. We saw an example of that this past week in the assassination of Somoza, the former dictator of Nicaragua. And it was said that he feared that his enemies would eventually get him!

JESUS CHRIST HAS NO SUCH FEARS BECAUSE THE POSSIBILITY THAT HE COULD BE OVERTHROWN DOES NOT EVEN EXIST. THERE IS NO POSSIBILITY OF SUCH A THING -- THERE NEVER HAS BEEN, NOR WILL THERE EVER BE!

He is eternally sovereign over kings, nations, all and every individual, angels, demons, even Satan himself! John Flavel, one of the Puritans said that God not only put the crown on Nebuchadnezzar's head, but that God put Nebuchadnezzar's head on his body so that he could wear that crown! See Vol. 3, pp. 345, 346.

c.f. Isa. 40: 28 - He "fainteth not, neither is weary"...

Where could we find greater encouragement than in the truth of God's power -- especially when we include with it God's other attributes of love, mercy, wisdom, etc.?

But, let me ask, in conclusion,

IV. HOW DOES THIS ALL APPLY TO US?

One writer (John Flavel, Vol. 3, pp. 353, 354) recognizes the excuses we all make against trusting the Lord in times of trouble. We say:

- 1) That our troubles have lasted so long now that there is no hope that they will be changed, or taken away.
- 2) That previous hopes we have held did not materialize.
- 3) That we can see no signs, or evidence, that things are going to change.
- 4) That everything seems to be against us and are working contrary to us.

How does the resurrection of Christ help us -- followed by His glorification and exaltation?

- A. We see the complete undoing of all that our Lord's enemies had done.
- B. We see how quickly the whole situation was changed.
- C. We see how God's promises and God's purposes were carried out.

When we think of how we trust the promises of God, let us remember that there never has been a greater validation of every promise that God ever made than in the resurrection, glorification, and exaltation of Christ!

- D. We see that God never for one moment lost control of the situation.
- E. We see that God Himself was pleased with the outcome. He was the One Who set Christ down "at his own right hand in the heavenly places" -- a privilege given to Christ alone (never to any angel).

Concl: The raising of Lazarus holds many lessons for troubled saints:

- 1) Unanswered prayer.
- 2) The absence of the Lord.
- 3) The Lord's delay in coming.
- 4) The hopelessness of the situation -- not only death, but decay.
- 5) The way in which it all seemed to be a contradiction of His love.

But none of these were permanent obstacles in the way. With one word it was all suddenly changed, and Lazarus stood before them alive.

This is not to be taken as a pattern of the way God works, but it is for our encouragement and for the strengthening of our faith. Because the power of God is what it is, no situation is too great for Him. Cf. Rom. 8:28, 29.

THE WISDOM OF GOD
Romans 11:25-36

Intro: The last four verses of our Scripture reading give us our subject for our message. (Read.)

These verses tell us that:

- 1) The wisdom of God is beyond human comprehension.
- 2) God's wisdom comes solely from Him. No one has advised Him; no one has taught Him.
- 3) God's wisdom is displayed in His ways.
- 4) The last verse (36) gives us the four great truths which form the foundation of our faith. (Read again.) It may be that the last one ("to whom be glory for ever") describes the outstanding feature of the first three -- that God has designed all things, and He has designed them for His glory -- that God accomplishes all things, and He does it in such a way that He is glorified -- that all things are worked out in His infinite wisdom so that He is glorified.

We learn from this text also that if we would know something about the wisdom of God, we must recognize the character of His knowledge.

Knowledge and wisdom do not always go together, but in God they do! Practically every language on the face of the earth has words like our knowledge and wisdom. Knowledge has to do with a person's acquaintance with the truth; wisdom is a practical word, showing how that person uses the knowledge which he possesses.

Our text also shows us that the wisdom of God is displayed in His ways -- thus bringing out the practical aspect of our subject.

When Daniel asked to know what God had made known to Nebuchadnezzar so that he could interpret the king's dream, God answered his prayer. Daniel's prayer of thanksgiving and worship which followed is very helpful as we consider the wisdom of God. The prayer is in Daniel 2:19-23.

Then was the secret revealed unto Daniel in a night vision. Then Daniel blessed the God of heaven.

Daniel answered and said, Blessed be the name of God for ever and ever: for wisdom and might are his:

And he changeth the times and the seasons: he removeth kings, and setteth up kings: he giveth wisdom unto the wise, and knowledge to them that know understanding:

He reveleth the deep and secret things: he knoweth what is in the darkness, and the light dwelleth with him.

I thank thee, and praise thee, O thou God of my fathers, who has given me wisdom and might, and hast made known unto me now what we desired of thee: for thou hast now made known unto us the king's matter.

The Scriptures teach us that:

- 1) God is not only wise, but He is all-wise. He is infinite and omniscient in what He knows.
- 2) Wisdom is the very essence of what God is. He has never said or done a foolish thing. He has not acquired any of His knowledge or wisdom from anyone outside of Himself, nor does He learn from experience (like we do). He is perfect in His wisdom and knowledge.
- 3) He is the source of all truth, all knowledge, all wisdom. He possesses all of these in an infinite degree.
- 4) God has revealed in His Word the truth which He wants us to know, the truth that has to do with His redemptive purposes for man. BUT -- He has not revealed everything. He knows much that He has not revealed. NOR is it possible for us ever to comprehend completely what God has revealed. This is why we have the words that Paul has written in Rom. 11:33.

In James 1:5 we have a wonderful promise regarding the wisdom of God, a promise which most of you know, and a promise which I would like to read as the basis for my message to you. I want to raise the question, and answer it (if God will enable me to do so), HOW DO WE COME TO AN UNDERSTANDING OF THE WISDOM OF GOD?

Listen to James' words:

If any of you lack wisdom (and that includes all of us), let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him.

And then James adds in v. 6,

But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed.

Later in his epistle James says this about the wisdom of God:

But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy.

These last words are found in James 3:17.

So the first thing that we need to know about the wisdom of God is that it can be learned only from God Himself, and that we are taught to pray for that wisdom.

But I am not going to leave you there because God does not leave us there. We do not pray, and then look for some handwriting on the wall, or some audible voice to speak to us. God has done both of these things in the past, but they are not the usual way that He has for making His wisdom known. No! God has not left us to grope or just to hope that we would learn what He wants us to know. His knowledge and wisdom are learned in certain specific ways. BASIC TO ALL IS THE FIRST POINT THAT I

WANT TO MAKE WITH YOU NOW:

I. THE WISDOM OF GOD IS MADE KNOWN PRIMARILY IN HIS WORD.

I am going to be speaking to you this morning about:

- 1) Creation.
- 2) Christ.
- 3) Salvation.
- 4) Providence.

BUT I WANT YOU TO REALIZE AND TO REMEMBER THIS: THAT EVERY WAY IN WHICH GOD HAS MADE KNOWN HIS WISDOM MUST BE EXAMINED IN THE LIGHT OF WHAT WE HAVE IN THE WORD OF GOD.

Please turn to 1 Cor. 2:1-10.

Note two things:

- 1) God has given us a revelation -- which is His Word.
- 2) God has given to His people the Holy Spirit as our Teacher.

This latter point is what the Lord emphasized with His disciples over and over in His Upper Room Discourse found in John 14, 15, and 16.

Note also Paul's words in 2 Timothy 3:14-17.

And, before we go to our next point, see the amazing statement made by Peter in 2 Peter 1:16-21. God has confirmed all of the truth that He has revealed by having it written. That's what "the scripture" is -- a written record.

So -- let me now state a very important principle regarding our knowledge of the wisdom of God: I MUST NEVER ACCEPT ANYTHING WITH FINALITY ABOUT THE VARIOUS WAYS IN WHICH GOD HAS MADE HIS WISDOM KNOWN, i.e., through Christ, or through creation, or through salvation, or through divine providence, -- I must not accept anything which cannot be confirmed by the Word of God. This is the ultimate test that must be given to all of the wisdom of God, because it is found here, and only here!

But now let me go on to speak of four other ways in which God has made His wisdom known, ways which are taught and confirmed in the Word of God.

II. THE WISDOM OF GOD IS MADE KNOWN ALSO IN CREATION.

Listen to what Solomon taught about this -- in Prov. 3:19, 20, The Lord by wisdom hath founded the earth; by understanding hath he established the heavens. By his knowledge the depths are broken up, and the clouds drop down the dew.

Hear these words from Jer. 10:12,
 He hath made the earth by his power, he hath
 established the world by his wisdom, and hath
 stretched out the heavens by his discretion.

Cf. Psa. 19:1-3.

God's wisdom can be seen in the order of creation -- which
 we would not know if it had not been preserved for us in
 Genesis 1 and 2.

His wisdom is seen in the way in which creation is sustained
 from day to day, and year to year, and generation to genera-
 tion.

There are hundreds of passages which speak of creation --
 all of which will teach us about the marvelous knowledge and
 wisdom of God. After all of these years you still hear
 scientists saying that we are only beginning to learn some
 of the vast secrets of the universe in which we live. GOD
 IS THE SOURCE OF ALL OF THIS KNOWLEDGE, AND HE HAS ALWAYS
 KNOWN WHAT WE ARE JUST NOW LEARNING!

O come, let us worship and bow down: let us kneel
 before the Lord our maker. For he is our God, and
 we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of
 his hand. . . (Psa. 95:6, 7a).

III. THE WISDOM OF GOD IS MADE KNOWN IN CHRIST.

In 1 Cor. 1:24 Paul speaks of Christ as "the wisdom of God"
 -- "Christ . . . the wisdom of God."

A. It was evident in His teaching.

Even the unbelieving Jews marvelled at this. Some of
 them said, when they heard Him teaching in the Temple,
 How knoweth this man letters, having never
 learned?
 (Cf. John 7:15b,)

Later in the same chapter of John it is recorded that
 the Jews sent officers to apprehend our Lord. But the
 officers came back without Him, saying, "Never man
 spake like this man" (John 7:46b).

See what He said about His own teaching: cf. John 8:
 26-28; 14:10.

B. It was evident in His coming into the world.

We have no greater proof of the fact that the Bible is
 the Word of God than we do in what it has to say about
 Christ! Cf. Luke 24:27, 44.

I am on a subject now which is inexhaustible, but let me say just one more of many things which could be said about Christ in relation to the wisdom of God:

C. It was evident in the manner in which the Lord Jesus Christ came into the world.

If He had only been a man, He could never have offered a sacrifice that would have satisfied the righteousness of God; if He had remained as God, He could not have been a substitute for sinful man.

See how both the humanity and Deity of Christ as referred to in John 20:31.

But let me go on to another way in which the wisdom of God has been made known to us -- which we learn about in the Word.

IV. THE WISDOM OF GOD IS MADE KNOWN IN SALVATION.

When you take into account the sinfulness of man, his utter and complete depravity, not only his alienation from God, but his rebellion against God -- an overwhelming need with no desire for that need to be met and no capacity for understanding that need until convicted by the Spirit of God -- when you take into consideration these things, THEN YOU ARE NOT SURPRISED TO SEE IN THE WORD THAT SALVATION ORIGINATED WITH GOD, THAT SALVATION IS A DIVINE WORK FROM START TO FINISH, AND THAT IT HAS TO INCLUDE SUCH THINGS AS ELECTION,

GRACE,
CONVICTION BY THE SPIRIT,
FAITH AS A GIFT FROM GOD,
REDEMPTION,
JUSTIFICATION,
SANCTIFICATION,

and ultimately, GLORIFICATION --
and all of this according to the eternal, infinite, and perfect wisdom and foreknowledge of God Himself!

Our salvation is entirely consistent with the way in which a holy God would provide, had to provide, for the salvation of sinful men!

This is what Paul is glorying in in the verses we read as our Scripture reading this morning.

Finally

V. THE WISDOM OF GOD IS MADE KNOWN IN HIS PROVIDENTIAL DEALINGS WITH US, HIS PEOPLE.

Will you believe that Rom. 11:36 applies to you at this very

moment -- facing the circumstances that you face just now? Can you see how it has been evident in all of your life in the past? Will you rest in this grand statement of truth as it relates to the future?

God always works in accordance with his counsels in the past and in the light of what He has planned for the future.

Isaiah wrote in Isa. 25:1,

O Lord, thou art my God; I will exalt thee, I will praise thy name; for thou hast done wonderful things; thy counsels of old are faithfulness and truth.

Paul was praising and worshipping God in Eph. 1 for His salvation and for His providence when he wrote in vv. 8-12, Wherein he hath abounded toward us in all wisdom and prudence; Having made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he hath purposed in himself: That in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him: In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will: That we should be to the praise of his glory, who first trusted in Christ.

Concl: Back in the 1600's Paul Gerhardt wrote the following words which are found in #368 in our hymnal, words translated into English by John Wesley about 100 years later. Listen to them and think of how they apply to God's wisdom made known in His providential dealings with us:

Give to the wind thy fears, Hope, and be undismayed;
 God hears thy sighs, and counts thy tears,
 God shall lift up thy head,
 Though waves and clouds and storms He gently clears the way;
 Wait thou His time, so shall the night Soon end in joyous
 day.
 Still heavy is thy heart?
 Still sink thy spirits down?
 Cast off the weight, let fear depart, And every care be gone.
 He everywhere hath sway, And all things serve His mind;
 His every act pure blessing is, His path unsullied light.
 Far, far above thy thought His counsel shall appear,
 When fully He the work hath wrought That caused thy needless
 Leave to His sovereign will fear.
 To choose and to command:
 With wonder filled, thou then shalt own
How wise, how strong His hand.

THE FAITHFULNESS OF GOD

Scripture Reading: 1 Cor. 1:1-9.

Intro: The whole Bible is a testimony of the faithfulness of God. In fact, all of human history witnesses to His faithfulness. The faithfulness of God has its application to those who do not know the Lord as well as to those who do know Him.

By definition a faithful person is one who is loyal, reliable, true, trustworthy -- one who is true to his word, his promises, his vows. (See The Random House Dictionary, p. 511.)

Thus, in defining the faithfulness of God, it is not surprising to read such statements as this in books which deal with the attributes of God:

. . . the faithfulness of God chiefly lies in the performance of his word, which is certain, with respect to all that is spoken by him (Gill's Body of Divinity, I, 163).

Another writer has said this:

. . . the faithfulness of God is his sincerity, firmness, and constancy in performing his word to his people in all times and cases (Flavel, III, 363).

But, what is even more important, this is the way it is defined in the Word of God. Let me read from Deut. 7:6-10:

For thou art an holy people unto the Lord thy God: the Lord hath chosen thee to be a special people unto himself, above all people that are upon the face of the earth. The Lord did not set his love upon you, nor choose you, because ye were more in number than any people; for ye were the fewest of all people: But because the Lord loved you, and because he would keep the oath which he had sworn unto your fathers, hath the Lord brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you out of the house of bondmen, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt.

Let me interrupt the reading of this passage just a moment to point out what Moses has written here so you will not miss it -- that the account of the exodus from Egypt is a story of the faithfulness of God! But let me finish:

Know therefore that the Lord thy God, he is God, the faithful God, which keepeth covenant and mercy with them that love him and keep his commandments to a thousand generations;

which means forever. But there is another side to the faithfulness of God which is brought out in v. 10:

And repayeth them that hate him to their face, to destroy them: he will not be slack to him that hateth him, he will repay him to his face.

You see, there are promises of judgment as well as promises of

blessing. So that whenever God brings judgment, that, too, is evidence that He is faithful to His Word -- a faithful God!

Actually, when you stop to think about it, we as the Lord's people would have no assurance at all if we could not count on the faithfulness of God. God would keep His promises if He wanted to, but we could not have any real faith that He ~~was~~ (and is) bound to keep His Word.

The reason that Sarah could believe that she would have a child "when she was past age," was "because she judged him faithful who had promised" (Heb. 11:11b).

As Paul begins his Epistle to Titus, speaking of salvation, he writes,

In hope of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began; But hath in due times manifested his word through preaching, which is committed unto me according to the commandment of God our Saviour (Titus 1:2, 3).

And then, in his last Epistle, Paul wrote to Timothy that "if we believe not, yet he abideth faithful: he cannot deny himself" (2 Tim. 2:13).

So it is not simply a case that God will not lie, or will not be unfaithful, but He "cannot lie," He "cannot deny himself."

WHAT TREMENDOUS ASSURANCE THERE IS FOR US WHEN WE UNDERSTAND WHAT IT MEANS THAT GOD IS FAITHFUL, THAT IT IS HIS VERY NATURE TO BE FAITHFUL. HE CANNOT BE OTHERWISE.

Is it any wonder that Jeremiah, with all of the overwhelming discouragements he faced, would find great comfort in the faithfulness of God? Do you remember his words?

It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not. They are new every morning: great is thy faithfulness (Lam. 3:22, 23).

There are four ways (at least) in which I could deal with the faithfulness of God this morning:

- 1) I could deal with it just as it is in God without any reference to you and to me. But that probably would not be very profitable to us. And this is not the main emphasis in the Word. It is an attribute of God which is explained with reference to His Word and to people.
- 2) Or I could deal with it as it relates to all people -- those who do not know the Lord as well as those who do.

I could point out how God gives to all men the seasons of the year, and even day and night every 24 hours. He told Noah,

While the earth remaineth, seedtime and harvest,

and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease (Gen. 8:22).

The Lord said that perhaps 5,000 years ago, and He has kept His Word down to this very moment.

Or take the meaning of the rainbow, which also was given as a promise to Noah -- "neither shall there any more be a flood to destroy the earth" (Gen. 9:11b).

When our Lord was here on earth He mentioned an evidence of God's faithfulness to all men, in these words:

. . . he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust (Matt. 5:45b).

So it is clear that life on the earth would be impossible for anyone if it were not for the faithfulness of God.

But I am not going to say any more about that just now.

- 3) We could also think about God's promises of judgment for the unsaved -- such a verse as Acts 17:31, when Paul was preaching in Athens:

Because he (God) hath appointed a day in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead.

But, before I finish this series on the attributes of God, I expect, the Lord willing, to bring a message on THE WRATH OF GOD, so I will deal with this aspect of God's faithfulness at that time -- a most solemn and terrible subject.

- 4) But the way that I want to deal with God's faithfulness in the time that remains is the way in which this great truth applies to the people of God -- and even then I cannot be exhaustive in speaking of God's faithfulness.

Let us think for the next few minutes about:

- 1) God's faithfulness in our salvation.
- 2) God's faithfulness when we sin.
- 3) God's faithfulness in our sufferings.
- 4) God's faithfulness in our service.

And, as we deal with these themes, be sure to note that God is faithful because He is sovereign and because He is infinitely wise in what He has promised and in knowing how to do what He has promised to do. God has not out-promised Himself!

I. GOD'S FAITHFULNESS IN OUR SALVATION.

See this in our Scripture reading for the morning: 1 Cor. 1:7-9. Calling the Corinthian believers "unto the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord" marks the beginning of our salvation; "the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ" marks its culmination. Paul often had to cling to this truth when dealing with the Lord's people. We speak of it as our eternal security in Christ. In past days it was

called the perseverance of the saints.

How do we know that if we are once truly saved we will always be saved -- is it because we know that we will always be faithful to God? NO! But it is because we know that He will always be faithful to us!

See it again in 1 Thess. 5:23, 24:

And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and
I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be
preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord
Jesus Christ.

What an order! Think of what it would take to accomplish this. And note that this verse points to "the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ" too.

The faithfulness of God gives Paul his one hope that such a prayer will be answered. See v. 24:

Faithful is he that calleth you, who also will do it. This does not mean that there are not things for us to do, but it does mean that when you and I stand complete before God when the Saviour comes, all of the glory will belong to Him, and not to us -- not any of it!

Cf. Phil. 1:6.

II. THE FAITHFULNESS OF GOD WHEN WE SIN.

Cf. 1 John 1:9.

This is not meant as an excuse for sin, but it is a verse which gives us hope when we do sin -- hope that rests primarily on the faithfulness of God -- His faithfulness to His own beloved Son, and His faithfulness to us in His Son.

David could never have prayed Psalm 51 apart from the faithfulness of God.

The same is true of our Lord's prayer on the Cross: "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34).

How thankful we can be that, when our Lord died, He died for all of our sins!

III. THE FAITHFULNESS OF GOD WHEN WE SUFFER.

You will never find a promise in the Word to the effect that the children of God will never suffer. There is no such promise. Instead we are told that "whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth" (Heb. 12:6). But we can always say what the Psalmist wrote in Psa. 119:75,

I know, O Lord, that thy judgments are right, and

that thou in faithfulness hast afflicted me.

This is always true! We can count on it!

And it is also always true that the Lord controls our testings and sufferings. Cf. 1 Cor. 10:13. He never allows them to get out-of-hand.

And, furthermore, it is always true that they have a purpose. They fit into what God is doing in our hearts, preparing us for eternity when we will be like our dear Saviour. Cf. Rom. 8:28.

Even for the present, we can say with Joseph what he said to his brothers about how they had hated him and sold him and really wanted to kill him: " . . . ye thought evil against me, but God meant it unto good . . . " (Gen. 50:20).

Finally . . .

IV. THE FAITHFULNESS OF GOD IN OUR SERVICE.

When we are serving God, truly serving Him, we are entering into the battle ~~against~~ Satan, against the whole world system, and against ungodly men. Actually, when you consider the opposition, there is no hope that we can ever see any blessing if we only have our own resources to depend upon. But we have more than that! We have the faithfulness of an Almighty God! Cf. 2 Thess. 3:1-5. (Read.)

There would be no prayer, no obedience, no effective service apart from the faithfulness of God.

Concl: It seems from Scripture that there is no greater example of human love than the love of a mother for her child. Isaiah uses that to emphasize the faithfulness of God. Listen to Isaiah 49:15, 16:

Can a woman forget her suckling child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb?

What is the answer? "Yea," or, YES -- "they may forget" -- and they often do forget. It is not at all unusual to hear reports today of mothers forsaking their children, or being cruel to their children, and sometimes even killing them. But what does Isaiah refer to this for? Note:

. . . yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee. Behold (a word to attract attention to something very important), I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands (both of them); thy walls are continually before me.

How could we possibly have any truth that would be better preparation for coming to the Lord's Table than this truth of THE FAITHFULNESS OF GOD?

THE WILL OF GOD

Eph. 1:3-14

Intro: We have a good example of the way in which the attributes of God are inter-related when we read the statement in verse 11 of Ephesians 1: " . . . being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will."

Concerning what God is doing, Stephen Charnock, in his book, The Existence and Attributes of God, makes the following statements:

The knowledge of God regards a thing as possible, and as it may be done; the wisdom of God regards a thing as fit and convenient to be done; the will of God resolves that it shall be done; the power of God is the application of his will to effect what it hath resolved (p. 365).

Later on in the same paragraph he shows how three of these attributes (God's wisdom, which also includes His knowledge; His power; His will) are all spoken of in Ephesians 1:11:

His will orders, his wisdom guides, and his power effects (Ibid.)

The wisdom of God is seen in the word, "counsel." The power of God is expressed by the word, "worketh." There are three words which speak of the will of God:

- 1) "Being predestinated."
- 2) "The purpose of him."
- 3) "His own will."

Also v. 5.

The will of God is also spoken of specifically in verse 9 of our Scripture reading. (Read.) In this verse also we have the purpose of God referred to: "which he hath purposed in himself."

As with everything that has to do with God, this subject is so vast and so profound that it is impossible for us to know it as God knows it. In fact, it is obvious in Scripture that God has not revealed everything concerning His will. He has revealed what He has been pleased to make known to us. But even with what is revealed, we find ourselves exclaiming with worship and adoration to God,

O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out! For who hath known the mind of the Lord? or who hath been his counsellor? Or who hath first given to him, and it shall be recompensed unto him again? For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen.

What we mean by the will of God is this: That God, in infinite wisdom, has determined what He will do throughout the course

of time and on into eternity, and that He is doing it! And this determination is not being made as time goes on, but it was made "before the foundation of the world" (1 Pet. 1:20). You have this even though, when we look at the human scene, we see that people in all ages have done what they have chosen to do, in most cases without any knowledge that is continually working to see that His will is being accomplished!

The best way for us to be convinced of this is to read some of the passages which deal with this tremendously important subject. I am going to read them too rapidly for you to be able to turn to them, but let me ask you to listen carefully as I read, jot down the references, and read them again for yourself when you have the time:

- 1) It was the great Babylonian king, Nebuchadnezzar, who said after God had humiliated him by making him eat grass like and ox, letting his hair grow until it ~~was~~ like eagles' feathers, and his nails were like birds' claws,

I blessed the most High, and I praised and honoured him that liveth for ever, whose dominion is an everlasting dominion, and his kingdom is from generation to generation: And all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing: and he doeth his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou?

This is Dan. 4:34b, 35.

- 2) Job recognized this when he ~~was~~ talking about all of his troubles. You will find these words in Job 23:13, 14, But he is in one mind, and who can turn him? and what his soul desireth, even that he doeth. For he performeth the thing that is appointed for me: and many such things are with him.
- 4) Or take Isaiah's words as he was writing prophecy concerning the Assyrian nation:

The Lord of hosts hath sword, saying, Surely as I have thought, so shall it come to pass; and as I have purposed, so shall it stand: . . . This is the purpose that is purposed upon the whole earth: and this is the hand that is stretched out upon all the nations. For the Lord of hosts hath purposed, and who shall disannul it? and his hand is stretched out, and who shall turn it back?

Cf. Isa. 14:24, 26, 27.

- 3) God asked Job some very important questions: Wilt thou disannul my judgment? wilt thou condemn me, that thou mayest be righteous? Hast thou an arm like God? or canst thou thunder with a voice like him?

See Job 40:8, 9.

- 5) Or take Psalms 37:23, 24, The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord: and he delighteth in his way. Though he fall, he shall not

be utterly cast down: for the Lord upholdeth him with his hand.

- 6) See Psa. 115:3,
But our God is in the heavens: he hath done
whatsoever he hath pleased.
- 7) In Psa. 118:22, 23, with reference to Christ,
The stone which the builders refused is become
the head stone of the corner. This is the Lord's
doing; it is marvellous in our eyes.
And even the next verse, v. 24,
This is the day which the Lord hath made; we will
rejoice and be glad in it.
- 8) Peter was declaring this truth when he was preaching in
Jerusalem in Acts 2, and he pointed out that the ful-
fillment of the sovereign, eternal will of God in no
way excused man from the responsibility of his sin.
Listen to what he said, speaking of Christ:
Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel
and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and
by wicked hands have crucified and slain" (v. 23).
- 9) The will of God stands behind those great verses in
Romans 8 -- verses 28-31. The first part of this
reading is from the NASB:
And we know that God causes all things to work
together for good to them that love God, to them
who are the called according to his purpose.
For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate
to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he
might be the firstborn among many brethren.
Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also
called: and whom he called, them he also justified:
and whom he justified, them he also glorified.
What shall we then say to these things? If God
be for us, who can be against us?
- 10) In Romans 9 Paul indicated that people responded to his
teaching by asking, "For who hath resisted his will?"
And his answer is simply another question: "Nay but,
O man, who art thou that repliest against God?" See
vv. 19b, 20a.

This is only a small fraction of the passages which could be
cited -- that God has pre-determined what His will is, that He
has a plan, a purpose, involving all things and all men, and
He is accomplishing just exactly what He willed should be done.

These passages show that the will of God is a doctrine which
involves the nations of the earth. It involves the salvation
of God's people. It involves our joys and our sorrows, the
very steps that we take.

Now the minute you begin to talk about such a theme as this there
are always people who will begin to say, "Well, we are just

robots, if all of that is true!" A robot is a mechanical man which acts and works mechanically -- not a true man, but a machine which is directed by computers.

My first response to that would be that we all know that life is not like that. We live and act. We make decisions, and we are responsible for the decisions we make, and for those we do not make that we should make. The Bible is the most true-to-life book that has ever been written. In fact, we cannot understand ourselves apart from the Bible. And the Bible does not ignore that fact that we are responsible human beings, living every day, making decisions, facing and dealing with the problems that are ours in this world!

The truth of Scripture does not contradict any of that.

But my second response to such an objection is this: Let us go to Scripture, let us go to the passage which we have read together this morning, and let us see what Paul taught about this. Paul faced the difficulties of life as none of us have had to face them, and yet he is the one who has been pleased to teach us that behind this human scene is the sovereign hand of an Almighty, an all-wise God, working "all things after the counsel of his own will." What does he teach us about it? Was it distasteful to him? Did it depress him? Did it make him become a fatalist? Did it make him say, "Well, God is going to do what He wants to do, so I can just sit back and watch him do it"? How do you account for the fact that the Apostle Paul, who teaches these things so clearly, was willing to suffer so terribly and work so constantly in order that the Gospel might be preached throughout the Roman world IF, as many have always said, this truth means the death of evangelism, and the death of missions, and renders Christian service unnecessary?

Look at Ephesians 1, verses 3-14, for just a few minutes as we conclude this morning and note some of the things that Paul teaches us in this passage.

I. WE MUST ADMIT THAT THE PRIMARY EMPHASIS IN THIS CHAPTER, IN ALL THAT PAUL HAS TO SAY, HAS TO DO WITH SALVATION!

There is enough in the Bible to make us understand that "all things" in verse 11 does actually apply to all things without any limitation, but the emphasis is clearly on salvation. So we must believe that in every generation the people who are coming to Christ are the very people that God has ordained for salvation -- and this in spite of the fact that there has never been a single generation but what the church has failed God grievously and repeatedly. This is our encouragement, and this is one of the greatest incentives we have to serve the Lord. He is accomplishing His work and His will through us, but He can do, and does do it, without

us, when He needs to!

Cf. John 1:12, 13 -- which includes things within a man, as well as human influences from the outside. Every time a person is born again he is "born . . . of God"!

- II. I HAVE BEEN ABLE TO SAY THE THINGS THAT I HAVE JUST SAID BECAUSE GOD HAS MADE HIS WILL DEPENDENT UPON HIMSELF ALONE. See v. 9.

This is why the will of God cannot fail, and this is why, in this passage, Paul is praising God, not exalting himself or any of his co-workers in the Gospel. Even when the Lord uses us, we must recognize that He is doing exactly that: using us, working through us. But the work is being done by Him!

- III. PAUL ALSO TEACHES IN THIS PASSAGE THAT GOD HAS BEEN INFINITELY WISE IN WHAT HE HAS DONE; THERE COULD BE NO GREATER PLAN; GOD HAS NOT DONE A SINGLE FOOLISH THING, NOR CAN HE BE CHARGED WITH FOLLY IN ANY WAY.

See v. 8.

Before you try to argue away the plain meaning of a passage like this, just remember that you are questioning the wisdom of an all-wise God.

Think about this -- and go back to meditate on Isa. 55:8, 9.

But there is more.

- IV. GOD, IN ESTABLISHING HIS WILL, HAS DONE THAT WHICH HAS BROUGHT HIM THE GREATEST PLEASURE.

See. v. 5.

He may not have done things the way you would have done them, but we can be thankful for that because you are sinful, but God is perfect. How could God take pleasure in anything that was not right?

- V. WE NEED TO NOTE THAT GOD'S WILL HAS BEEN DESIGNED FOR HIS OWN GLORY.

See vv. 6, 12, and 14. Can we argue with that? Dare we argue with that? Is there any higher purpose for anything in heaven or on earth?

Now all of these things that I have been pointing out from the Scriptures about the will of God have had to do primarily with God's side of things. Let me point out one big item about this

passage that does have to do with us. It is found in verse 3 -- and the theme sounded there continues right on down through verse 14. It is this:

VI. IT IS THROUGH THE WILL OF GOD THAT WE HAVE BEEN BLESSED!
Cf. v. 3.

The will of God has brought every single blessing to us that is mentioned in these verses, and it is only because of the will of God that we have them.

The will of God includes more than we have here (as Rom. 12:1, 2, e.g., would indicate), but nothing included in the will of God for us falls outside of the category of that which brings blessing to us.

We certainly cannot understand many things about God's will, but let's not worry about that side of it. Act on what you can see and realize that you are saved (with all that that includes) because God "worketh all things after the counsel of his own will."

What should all of this lead to? This is my final point. It is summed up in one word which needs to be pointed in the right direction:

VII. THE KNOWLEDGE OF THE WILL OF GOD MUST LEAD US TO DO WHAT PAUL IS DOING IN THIS PASSAGE (WHICH EXPLAINS WHY IT WAS WRITTEN): "BLESSED BE THE GOD AND FATHER OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST . . ."

Does it bother you to give God all of the glory for your salvation? Do you want to argue about the teaching of Scripture that He chose you in eternity past, and that that is the only reason you would ever choose Him -- do you argue about that? Does it irritate you that it was God's will that determined your salvation, not your will? Would you rather think that God is frantically trying to make the best out of terrible situations in the world today instead of recognizing that He is absolutely sovereign, and that all things are being worked out by Him according to His eternal plan?

If these questions describe where you are then you do not stand where Paul stood, and you do not believe the truth that he believed. Oh, may the Lord Himself open our eyes so that we may see and believe the things which our Lord said, belong unto our peace (cf. Luke 19:42).

Concl: It is no wonder that we have the prayer of the Apostle Paul which follows our text, and concludes the chapter. Note that we need to know HIM first, and then "the hope of his calling," etc.

THE PATIENCE OF GOD

Scripture Reading: Psalm 86 (esp. v. 15).

Intro: The patience of God is sometimes expressed in Scripture as His longsuffering, sometimes as His forbearance.

It is amazing to see how the patience of God is linked with His mercy. It stands between the mercy of God and the wrath of God. See in Psalm 86 vv. 3, 5, 13, esp. 15.

It is an attribute of God which is related to His power. It takes the power of God to exercise the patience, or longsuffering, of God. He does not wait because circumstances or people keep Him from doing what He wants to do (because He is omnipotent). Neither does He wait because He does not know what to do (for He is omniscient). He does not wait because He has too many other things which He has to do first (because He is omnipresent, with all that that means). Nor does He wait because He has forgotten us, or forgotten His promise. Both of these are impossible with God. He does not wait because He has changed His promise, or because He has changed in His mercy and goodness; His Word is "for ever . . . settled in heaven" (Psa. 119:89) and He is a God "with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning" (Jas. 1:17b). **WHETHER WE ARE TALKING ABOUT GOD'S PATIENCE TOWARD THE WORLD OR HIS PATIENCE TOWARD HIS OWN PEOPLE, THE TEACHING OF SCRIPTURE IS THAT GOD WAITS, IS LONG-SUFFERING, IS FORBEARING, BECAUSE IN THE EXERCISE OF HIS SOVEREIGN POWER HE CHOOSES TO WAIT!**

It will greatly relieve our minds and set our hearts at rest if we can realize this. This does not mean that we should not pray, and even pray fervently and unceasingly. Some of the greatest prayers of Scripture deal with the apparent reluctance of God to meet the needs of His people. We will see more about this in a moment. But before we deal with the practical problems connected with the patience of God, it is important that we have a true understanding of what the Bible reveals about this as an attribute of God!

The patience of God, the longsuffering of God, the forbearance of God, are mentioned in Scripture (as mentioned above) have to do with all men -- saved and unsaved alike. God has His own purposes for waiting. He never delays beyond His appointed times, but we do not always know what those times are! He waits in the manifestation of His blessings, and He waits in the display of His wrath, because He has chosen of His own will to do so. This morning I want to look at both of these aspects of the patience of God, toward His people, and toward the world, as they are revealed in Scripture, and to do it within the time limitations that we have this morning.

Let us look, first of all, at . . .

I. THE PATIENCE OF GOD WITH HIS PEOPLE.

This the primary emphasis in Psalm 86, although it is against his enemies that David is praying. In v. 14 he describes them as "violent men" who "have sought after my soul."

Why does God delay (according to our point-of-view) in His dealings with us, and delay intentionally, when He could deliver us out of our troubles immediately if He chose to do so?

This Psalm provides several answers.

- A. First, and most obvious, that we will do what David is doing in this Psalm: PRAY!

And we need to add -- pray fervently, unceasingly!

Look at vv. 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7.

It is very obvious throughout Scripture that one of the ways in which God teaches us to pray is through the presence of trouble, trouble that seems to be endless!

- B. Secondly, God waits so that we will think about Him and His attributes.

Note vv. 5, 8, 10, 13, 15.

This is what gives us confidence in prayer. Without the knowledge of God our prayers will be weak and our hope will fluctuate. How important it is to know the divine attributes! They will bring comfort and courage to us when nothing else will.

But closely related to this, it is important for us to see how David refers to the attributes of God.

- C. God exercises His patience toward us so that we will learn to worship Him.

That is the attitude expressed in the verses which I have just read to you -- and add to that, v. 12.

See also what David seems to revel in, according to v. 9.

These first three points, so evident in Psalm 86, are three areas where we as the people of God are weak. And yet these things are extremely important to the Lord, and they form the very foundation upon which a strong relationship to the Lord is based.

But notice two more things from Psalm 86:

- D. It is through the patience, the longsuffering, of God that we learn some very important things about ourselves.

1. First, on the negative side:
 - a. We learn that we are "poor and needy" -- that we are weak and helpless. See vv. 1, 16.
 - b. We learn that the human heart is proud and stubborn. See vv. 14.
 - c. We learn that there are many things which we do not know, and that God is the only One Who can teach us. Secondary means are set aside in our thinking. See v. 11.

The whole Psalm indicates that these are purposes for God's longsuffering as it affected the life of David -- and so, as it affects our lives.

2. Second, on the positive side -- the things which are pleasing to God about us and our lives, things for which God alone gets the praise.
 - a. In v. 86 David says, "I am holy," or godly.
We learn in times of God's waiting that we have many needs, but the Lord encourages us by letting us see the good things, too.
 - b. Three times David refers to himself as God's "servant" -- in vv. 2, 4, 16.
As God's servant, David had not only been seeking to do God's will, but he had been trusting the Lord.

If these are not true of us, of course we need to change -- by the grace of God! But times of waiting are often used by God to confirm in our own hearts things which we do believe and things which we have sought to be and to do, that our faith might be strengthened.

- E. Finally, for the people of God, God delays so that we will remember deliverances which He has given us in the past.

Cf. vv. 13, 17.

Now, for a few minutes, let us turn to consider the other aspect of THE PATIENCE, or, THE LONGSUFFERING, OF GOD.

II. THE PATIENCE OF GOD TOWARD THE WORLD.

And for this let us turn to 2 Peter 3.

Peter brings up the subject of the longsuffering of God in connection with the coming of the Lord. See vv. 1-7, esp. vv. 3, 4.

There is no greater problem on earth than the question as to how a holy God, an omnipotent God, can continue to tolerate the insolence, the rebellion, the gross ungodliness, of the people of this world. They even add to all of their sins the fact that they will scorn the precious, infallible, Word of God!

What is the answer?

With the rise of sin reaching proportions that make our inflation rate look infinitesimal (immeasurably small), why hasn't the Lord come to put an end all of the ungodliness of the world? -- especially when it seems that there are more ungodly people in the world than there are godly, and so more people (it would seem) are going to hell than to heaven? WHY?

Peter gives three answers. I will just mention the first two, and then spend a few minutes on the third one.

- A. God's time schedule is different from ours; He works from the standpoint of eternity (2 Pet. 3:8).
- B. Since this is true, the Lord cannot be considered "slack," slow, or tardy, unless you can prove that He is not up to the schedule which He Himself has set.

Peter is saying God has neither forgotten nor is He even behind schedule. Everything is right on time according to the plan and purpose of God.

See v. 9a.

The question then becomes one like this: WHY HAS GOD SET SUCH A SCHEDULE? WHY HAVE TWO THOUSAND YEARS ALREADY GONE BY SINCE CHRIST WAS HERE ON EARTH, AND HE HAS NOT COME YET -- AND HE MAY NOT COME EVEN TODAY, OR TOMORROW? WHY? WHY WOULD HE CONTINUE TO LET PEOPLE BE BORN WHO WILL SPEND ETERNITY IN HELL? WHAT DOES THIS DO TO THE GOODNESS AND THE MERCY AND THE LOVE OF GOD?

Let me issue a word of caution at this point. We must be careful not to seek to penetrate into the wisdom of God beyond what the Lord has revealed. Let us be satisfied with what God has revealed and realize that we have our hands full to comprehend that.

See Peter's declaration about "the longsuffering of our Lord" in 2 Pet. 3:15, followed with the warning in v. 16.

- C. The purpose behind "the longsuffering of the Lord IS SALVATION, i.e., for the salvation of those who are yet to be saved!

Now before I point out what Peter means let me ask you to notice two other points:

- 1) This is not a truth that Peter alone believes; Paul was in perfect agreement with him. Peter was the Apostle to the Jews; Paul was the Apostle to the Gentiles. So this truth is a truth that is world-wide in its significance -- and from generation to generation!
- 2) This is a truth which "unlearned and unstable" men can "wrest," distort, misrepresent, pervert, change, "unto their own destruction"! See v. 16.
And, by the way, notice the setting of 2 Pet. 3: 17, 18 in this regard.

Why all of this warning?

The answer is to be seen when we look back to the latter part of v. 9.

Have you really read this verse carefully? Is it true that God wills the salvation of all men -- and that He has mistakenly set the time of the return of Christ only to see more and more people going to hell when He actually planned to save everybody? In view of all of the things we have been learning about the sovereign power of God, the ultimate accomplishment of all of His purposes, that no one can withstand Him, are we now to believe that God wants to do, God wills to do, something which men will not let Him do?

No, we cannot possibly believe that! We must believe that God is capable of doing all that He wills to do, and that He is actually accomplishing His own eternal, perfect will.

What is it? Read the latter part of v. 9 carefully. Who are the "us"?

Both 1 and 2 Peter are addressed to the elect! See 1 Peter 1:2 and 2 Peter 1:10. Peter and Paul are in perfect agreement that God has an elect people, and that these are the people who are being saved -- and that Jesus Christ will not come until all whom He has chosen, have been gathered in! He does not entertain any false hopes about men, nor is He wringing His hands because He wants to do what He cannot do. He is powerfully withholding judgment until His purposes are fulfilled.

Concl: Let me ask those of you who are saved to think about how long suffering God has been with you. Doesn't shame us that Christ would come into this world to die for our sins, and

and that when the Gospel was first presented to us, we wanted to have nothing to do with Him? And how can you bear to think of the many times you rejected the Gospel, and even how many times your heart has grown cold and sinful since you have been saved? Think of the grossness of your sins, and even the fact that there are people in hell, self-righteous people, who did not sin as you have -- and yet God has been merciful to you.

Peter is warning all men not to discount the promise of the Lord's return. And Paul, who agreed with Peter said when he preached in Athens that

God . . . now commandeth all men every where to repent:
Because he hath appointed a day, in the which he will
judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he
hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto
all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead.

Cf. Acts 17:30b, 31.

Thus, not to believe is rebellion against God, and God will hold men accountable for their refusal to obey His voice.

If you are here this morning without Christ and you have either been setting aside what you know about God and the Gospel, or you have been counting on the fact that God, Who has been patient with you a thousand times will continue to do so, even when you stand before Him, THEN LET ME WARN YOU TO FLEE NOW TO CHRIST. Do not be concerned about what you cannot understand. Act on what you do know -- that there is salvation on in Christ, and that, if you do not receive Him, you will be lost eternally and you will be help totally responsible for your failure to believe in Him.

Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.

Perhaps those words of Charles Wesley can be expressive of the way you will approach the living God this very day:

Depth of mercy! can there be Mercy still reserved for me?
Can my God His wrath forbear Me, the chief of sinners, spare?
I have long withstood His grace, Long provoked Him to His
face,
Would not hearken to His calls, Grieved Him by a thousand
falls.

Now incline me to repent; Let me now my sins lament;
Now my foul revolt, deplore, Weep, believe, and sin no more.

THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD

Scripture Reading: Rom. 3:21-31.

Intro: One of the problems that has always faced men is the problem of right and wrong. Men have always asked, Are there things which are absolutely right, or absolutely wrong? If so, who determines what is right and what is wrong? Is this determined by each person? Is it determined by a person's background, or his culture, or by the government under which he lives? If the answer to any of these latter questions is, "Yes," then it must follow that there is no basis for saying that things are either absolutely right, or absolutely wrong. When there is no supreme standard which can serve as a guide for men, then truth becomes relative, and there is no basis upon which moral judgments can be made.

In our day, truth has been set aside as anything that is absolute. People are "doing their own thing" -- which is just another way of describing what was going on in Old Testament times when, in the days of the judges, there was no king in Israel and so "every man did that which was right in his own eyes" (Judges 17:6; 21:25).

Was this the right thing for them to do? Is this the right example for us to follow? In the whole area of morality, are there not things which are absolutely right, and absolutely wrong? Who is the judge? How are we to know?

This is where the subject of the righteousness of God becomes extremely important!

Let me ask you to turn for a moment to Psalm 36.

Note, first of all, the emphasis on the righteousness of God in vv. 6, 10. It is mentioned along with several other attributes of God.

Next, notice v. 9, especially the latter part of the verse: "in thy light shall we see light." In other words, what David is saying is that with the light, or the understanding, of what God is, we shall have light, or understanding, for ourselves and for the way that we should live.

Why is David saying all of these things?

Look at vv. 1 ff. for your answer -- and note how v. 1 lays the foundation for the first 4 verses when David says concerning "the wicked" that "there is no fear of God before his eyes." In other words, what David is saying is simply this: THE REASON THAT THE WICKED MAN IS THE WAY HE IS, THE REASON THAT WE CAN CALL HIM "WICKED" IS BECAUSE THERE IS SOMETHING VERY WRONG BETWEEN HIM AND GOD.

In Psalm 10 it is stated another way:

The wicked, through the pride of his countenance, will not seek after God: God is not in all his thoughts (v. 4).

Psalm 14 and Psalm 53 both tell us,

The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God,
or perhaps even more literally, "No God for me." And this is
at the root of his wickedness.

So, let us ask the question:

I. WHAT IS RIGHTEOUSNESS?

The Hebrew word in the Old Testament and the Greek word in the New Testament both mean essentially the same thing. They both indicate that there is a standard, and that things are righteous, or unrighteous, to the extent to which they conform to that standard. The word means that things can only be what they should be when they conform to the standard.

This can be illustrated in various ways:

- 1) By a police officer observing us with his radar equipment.
- 2) By the DEQ.
- 3) By a physical examination, e.g., a blood test -- normal or abnormal.

Now we are ready for a second question:

II. WHAT IS THE MORAL STANDARD BY WHICH ALL THINGS ARE TO BE JUDGED AS EITHER RIGHT OR WRONG?

How can we answer such a question?

Actually that is very simple: We come to the Word of God. There can be no higher authority than God. This is His Word, and it is here, and only here, that we will find our answer. All things have to be examined in the light of Scripture. Remember what we read in Psalm 36:9 -- "in thy light shall we see light."

What answer does the Bible give?

According to Scripture the standard, the perfect standard, to which we are to conform, is GOD! Over and over again righteousness is ascribed to Him.

Listen to some of these verses:

- 1) Psa. 119:137, "Righteous art thou, O Lord, and upright are thy judgments."
- 2) Psa. 119:142, "Thy righteousness is an everlasting righteousness, and thy law is the truth."

- 3) In one of Daniel's prayers during the captivity of Israel, we have these words found in Dan. 9:14,
Therefore hath the Lord watched upon the evil, and brought it upon us: for the Lord our God is righteous in all his works which he doeth: for we obeyed not his voice.
- 4) Rev. 15:3,
And they sing the song of Moses the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying, Great and marvelous are thy works, Lord God Almighty, just (or, righteous) and true are thy ways, thou King of saints.
- 5) Rev. 16:5,
And I heard the angel of the waters say, Thou art righteous, O Lord, which art, and wast, and shalt be, because thou hast judged thus.
- 6) John 17:25, the Lord Jesus addressing the Father says, "O righteous Father."
- 7) 1 John 2:1b,
And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.

Many other Scriptures could be cited, but these are sufficient to show that the standard by which all men and all actions are to be judged is God -- the Triune God: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

THEREFORE, WHATEVER CONFORMS TO THE CHARACTER OF GOD, IS RIGHT; WHATEVER IS OPPOSED TO THE CHARACTER OF GOD IS WRONG. WHATEVER PLEASES GOD IS RIGHT: WHATEVER DISPLEASES HIM IS WRONG.

Or, to state it in the words of the Apostle John, "All unrighteousness is sin" (1 John 5:17a).

And so

- If you do anything that you want to do, you are on the wrong track.
- If you feel free to do things just because lots of other people are doing it, you are on the wrong track.
- Even if you feel that you can do anything just because it is legal, you are on the wrong track. We have a way of legalizing things which we cannot control.

GOD is the One Who determines what is right and wrong, and He is the ultimate Judge of all people and of all actions. He is perfect moral excellence, and everything that He does is right! Everything has to be judged in the light of what He is and in the light of what He requires. Again, "in thy light shall we see light" (Psa. 36:9).

But, if you are following me, you know that this raises another question. It is this: IF RIGHT AND WRONG ARE DETERMINED BY GOD

AND HIS WILL, WHERE WILL WE GO TO LEARN ABOUT GOD AND TO FIND OUT WHAT HIS WILL IS?

Again, the answer is clear: God has made Himself and His will known in His Word, the Bible. And so, if you want to know God and His will, this is where you must turn. The Psalmist said long ago (and it is still true), "Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path" (Psa. 119:105). And a little farther down in the same chapter, v. 130, "The entrance of thy word giveth light; it giveth understanding to the simple."

You will not find anything in Scripture by way of teaching about God or His will which will lead you astray because the Bible clearly says that

III. GOD IS RIGHTEOUS IN HIS WORDS.

Moses was pointing the people of Israel to the Word of God when he said shortly before his death,

For what nation is there so great, who hath God so nigh unto them, as the Lord our God is in all things that we call upon him for? And what nation is there so great, that hath statutes and judgments so righteous as all this law, which I set before you this day? (Deut. 4:7, 8).

When David is extolling the Word of God in Psalm 19 he writes in v. 9, "The judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether."

When the Levites were praising God in the days of Nehemiah for His faithfulness to them as the seed of Abraham, they said, among other things, "Thou art the Lord the God, who . . . hast performed thy words; for thou art righteous" (Neh. 9:7a, 8b).

So the Word of God bears the stamp of the righteousness of God. It is true in

- 1) What it reveals of God.
- 2) Its statement of the will of God.
- 3) The promises that it gives to us.

And this leads me to a final point, and three things that I want to say about it.

Since God is righteous, we are not surprised to find in Scripture that

IV. HIS WORKS ARE RIGHTEOUS.

Let me show from Scripture in three areas that this is true.

A. God is absolutely righteous in His condemnation of sinners.

Let us turn to Romans 2:1-6. Listen as I read it, noting especially how Paul describes God's judgment in v. 5 -- a judgment which men will face because of their sins!

Note also how Paul preached in Athens -- in words which we have recently considered together: Acts 17:30b, 31 where he says that

God . . . now commandeth all men every where to repent: Because he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead.

Next week I want to deal with the wrath of God, and so the only added thing that I would say now is that God is absolutely righteous even when we consider the doctrine of an eternal hell!

But notice quickly a second great point with respect to the works of God:

- B. God is absolutely righteous in His justification of those who believe.

Turn to our Scripture reading of the morning and notice again vv. 21, 22, 25b, 26.

God does not set aside His righteousness in the forgiveness of sinners. He demanded that His righteousness be satisfied -- and Jesus Christ has done that by His death on the Cross.

Cf. Isa. 53:6; 2 Cor. 5:21; 1 Pet. 3:18 ("For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God . . .").

Finally,

- C. God is absolutely righteous in His providential dealings with us day after day.

Thomas Manton tells the story of a godly king who was being executed by his enemies. Before they killed him, however, they brought the king's children in and killed them one by one before the eyes of the king. And Thomas Manton tells us that "the historian" recorded "that he did in the presence of all meekly submit to this great and heavy calamity, crying out, "Righteous art thou, O Lord, and upright are thy judgments" (Vol. 8, p. 437). The verse is Psa. 119:137.

When John the Baptist was in prison he sent two of his own

disciples to the Lord to ask a question that expressed the bewilderment that was in his own heart because of the trials he was going through, and from which he was never delivered: Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another?" The Lord told the two disciples to go back and tell John what they had heard and seen -- that "the blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached unto them." AND THEN HE ADDED THESE WORDS: "AND BLESSED IS HE, WHOSOEVER SHALL NOT BE OFFENDED IN ME."

Why should we accept the dealings of God with us with such confidence?

Because He is righteous, and is ever faithful to Himself, and to us!

Concl: Do you see now why certain things are wrong, and other things are right? It is because of God.

Don't be deceived into believing that things are OK if everybody is doing them. Your own heart tells you that that is not the case. History will teach us that nations have been destroyed by God because they have given themselves to the very things that characterize American life today. And we will suffer the same fate.

Our only escape is to turn to God, to forsake our sins, and to seek the forgiveness which only He can give. BUT YOU CANNOT TURN TO GOD WITHOUT TURN TO CHRIST. IT IS IN CHRIST THAT WE SEE HOW GOD CAN "BE JUST, AND THE JUSTIFIER OF HIM WHICH BELIEVETH IN JESUS."

Stricken, smitten, and afflicted, See him dying on the tree!
'Tis the Christ by man rejected; Yes, my soul, 'tis he, 'tis he!
'Tis the long-expected Prophet, David's Son, yet David's Lord;
By his Son God now has spoken: 'Tis the true and faithful Word.

Tell me, ye who hear him groaning,
Was there ever grief like His?
Friends thro' fear his cause disowning,
Foes insulting his distress;
Many hands were raised to wound him,
None would interpose to save;
But the deepest stroke that pierced him
Was the stroke that Justice gave.

Ye who think of sin but lightly
Nor suppose the evil great
Here may view the nature rightly, Here its guilt my estimate.
Mark the Sacrifice appointed, See who bears the awful load;
'Tis the Word, the Lord's Anointed,
Son of man and Son of God.

(See back of preceding page for 4th and last verse.)

THE WRATH OF GOD

Scripture Reading: Romans 1:18-32.

Intro: One of the most touching scenes in Scripture is found in Acts 20 where Paul met for the last time in his life with the elders of the Ephesian church. The elders met Paul in Miletus, and there he not only exhorted them concerning their work in the future, but he reviewed with them his own ministry to them in the past.

No pastor could set for himself a greater goal than to be able to say to his own people what Paul said to those elders. I am referring especially to his statement found in Acts 20:27, "For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God." We could paraphrase that today in these words: "I have faithfully taught you every part of the Word of God."

Earlier in his comments to the elders he also said this:

I kept back nothing that was profitable unto you, but have shewed you, and have taught you publickly, and from house to house, Testifying both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks, repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ. (Acts 20:20, 21.)

All of these words mean that Paul had an obligation to God in his ministry, and he had an obligation to the church at Ephesus -- and that these two obligations were actually one! He was not only to preach and teach the Word of God, but he was to teach and preach ALL of the Word of God! Every servant of the Lord is under the same commission today.

When Paul wrote to Timothy, "Preach the Word" (2 Tim. 4:2a), he obviously meant, "Preach ALL of the Word."

All of this brings me to my subject for this morning.

One of the subjects of Scripture that is taught most extensively throughout the Bible, in both Testaments, is the subject of THE WRATH OF GOD. It is also called, THE ANGER OF GOD, THE FURY OF GOD, and THE JUDGMENT OF GOD. One writer has said that "a study of the concordance will show that there are more references in Scripture to the anger, fury, and wrath of God, than there are to His love and tenderness" (Packer quoting Pink in Knowing God, p. 135).

And yet in spite of this another writer makes the following observation:

How often during the past year did you hear, or, if you are a minister, did you preach, a sermon on the wrath of God? How long is it, I wonder, since a Christian spoke straight on this subject on radio or television, or in

one of those half-column sermonettes that appear in some national dailies and magazines? (And if a man did so, how long would it be before he would be asked to speak or write again?) The fact is that the subject of divine wrath has become taboo in modern society, and Christians by and large have accepted the taboo and conditioned themselves never to raise the matter (Packer, Knowing God, p. 134).

This same writer says,

To an age which has unashamedly sold itself to the gods of greed, pride, sex, and self-will, the Church mumbles on about God's kindness, and says virtually nothing about His judgment. (Ibid.).

There is no question that we need to talk about the kindness of God -- His love, His grace, His mercy, His lovingkindness, BUT, if we are to be faithful to our calling, WE MUST ALSO SPEAK OF THE WRATH OF GOD! In a very real sense, man cannot understand the kindness of God as he should if he does not understand something of the wrath of God.

I want to speak on this subject this morning. And the first thing that I want to say, based even upon our Scripture reading, is this:

I. THERE IS SUCH AN ATTRIBUTE IN GOD.

Read Rom. 1:18.

God is no less God because He is a God of wrath! In fact, we can hardly look for anything different when we think of the holiness of God and the righteousness of God, and place them along side of the "ungodliness and unrighteousness of men." God's wrath (to put it simply) is His response to the sin of man. Psalm 7:11b teaches us that "God is angry with the wicked every day."

"The wrath of God is revealed" in Scripture in many different ways:

- A. It "is revealed" against the world generally and against whole nations at particular times.

Think of:

- 1) What happened to the world in Noah's day.
- 2) Sodom and Gomorrah.
- 3) Egypt -- when the Lord delivered Israel in Moses' day.
- 4) The Canaanite nations -- under Joshua.
- 5) Israel -- under the Assyrians and the Babylonians.
- 6) What happened afterwards to the Assyrians and the Babylonians.

ISRAEL AT
KADESH
BARNEA.

- 7) The judgments that are yet to fall upon the whole world, according to the book of The Revelation.

And this is only a part of the Word of God -- and then we have more illustrations than we can possibly count from the history of nations which is not recorded in Scripture.

But note also that

- B. "The wrath of God is revealed from heaven" against individuals -- against those who do not know the Lord as well as against many who do know Him.

Again -- think of:

- 1) Adam and Eve.
- 2) Cain.
- 3) Pharaoh.
- 4) Miriam.
- 5) Korah and Dathan and Abiram.
- 6) Moses at the rock.
- 7) Samson.
- 8) Saul.
- 9) David.
- 10) Uzziah.
- 11) Nebuchadnezzar.
- 12) Herod.
- 13) The man in John 5 who had been sick for 38 years, whom the Lord healed and to whom He said, "Sin no more, lest a worse thing come unto thee" (John 5:14).
- 14) Ananias and Sapphira.

This list could be enlarged with many more names -- and this does not touch what lies beyond divine revelation.

However, there is one example of divine judgment which goes far beyond any other.

- C. God "revealed" His wrath against His own Son at the Cross.

Cf. Isaiah 53:6; 2 Cor. 5:21; 1 Pet. 3:18.

It was because of "the wrath of God" that our Lord cried out on the Cross, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (Mark 15:34).

Let us remember this as we observe the Lord's Supper in a few minutes.

So there is no question as we turn to the Word of God that "the wrath of God" has been "revealed."

Sometimes God's wrath is delayed for many years (as in the case of the Canaanites, or of the wicked generally, as we learn in Psalm 73). Sometimes it is swift and devastating. Sometimes it is temporary in nature. Sometimes, permanent. And, with respect to the future, the judgment of God upon many will be eternal. There is a "day of wrath" coming in which there will be a further "revelation of the righteous judgment of God" (Rom. 2:5) in which the Lord Himself will say, "Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels" (Matt. 25:41). Paul wrote to the Thessalonian church of the day to come when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power (2 Thess. 1:7b-9).

Let me spend the rest of the time this morning answering two questions:

- 1) Why does God judge sin?
- 2) Is there any way of escape from the eternal judgment of God?

There are many things about the wrath of God which cannot be included in one message. To say all that could be said would mean that we would have to survey the Bible from one end to the other. But let us concentrate on these two things. First:

II. WHY DOES GOD JUDGE SIN? Why do we have all of these examples of "the wrath of God . . . revealed"?

A. The first and most important answer is this: FOR HIS OWN GLORY.

This not only means that He shows through His wrath that He is righteous and that He is sovereign, but it even shows that He is, that He exists, that there is such a One as He is!

As far as Egypt is concerned in the book of Exodus, there is hardly any evidence at all that they paid any serious attention to the God of Israel until they were judged with the 10 plagues! And we read over and over again that the reason God was bringing those judgments was not primarily to get Israel out of Egypt, but that Pharaoh and the Egyptians as well as the Israelites would know that He was Jehovah -- the living, unchanging God!

What ultimately is going to happen as a result of divine judgment, and throughout the universe? Cf. Phil. 2:9-11.

But there is a second, important reason:

- B. God judges sin, God manifests His wrath in judgment, to show sin for what it really is -- and the consequences of it.

God has many ways of judging sin. I am not dealing in detail with that today. But I do want to call your attention to our Scripture reading for this morning and how God's wrath is displayed according to this chapter. The passage has one extremely solemn message:
GOD OFTEN JUDGES SINNERS BY GIVING THEM OVER TO THEIR SIN.

Three times in our passage we read that God gives men (and women) up to their sins, or over to their sins -- to go deeper and deeper into sin, to reap the tragic effects which sin always brings.

Perhaps one reason that we are hesitant to speak of the wrath of God is because it forces us to speak out against the way of life which has become so generally accepted in any generation. Could any passage be more descriptive of life in American than Romans 1? And does it not tell us that right now we are a nation under divine judgment -- and that things are only going to get worse if we do not change?

How can anyone in his right mind want to pursue the course that we have taken when we can all see the results that it has produced? We are freer than we have ever been to do what we want to do, and yet never has there been so much unhappiness, grief, tragedy, crime, and all that goes with it than we have today!

God is speaking to us today by His judgment upon our sin!

- C. God judges sin so that we will recognize the need for salvation.

Did you ever stop to think that we would not really know the meaning of salvation as a term if we did not face the wrath of God? What are we being saved from? Perhaps this is the reason that the world has so little interest in salvation -- because they have heard so little about judgment, about the wrath of God, and about an eternal hell.

Look at our reading for this morning: Rom. 1:16-18 -- and notice how these verses are all tied together. Before Paul actually gets to the Gospel in Romans he spends two and a half chapters showing us what sin is

and how it has affected man's relationship with God!
 If you do not know what it means to be saved, read those
 2½ chapters over and over, praying that the Lord will
 help you to understand what they mean.

But now the second question -- and I have already partially
 answered it:

III. IS THERE ANY WAY OF ESCAPE FROM THE ETERNAL JUDGMENT OF GOD?

Yes, thank God, there is -- but there is only one!

It is in the Gospel.

There are many verses that we could talk about, but let me
 give you just one -- a verse which contains words which the
 Lord Jesus gave to answer the question I have just asked.

The verse is John 5:24. Listen to it:

Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my
 word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath ever-
 lasting life, and shall not come into condemnation
 (or, judgment); but is passed from death unto life.

Paul wrote to Timothy that "Christ Jesus came into the
 world to save sinners" (1 Tim. 1:15) -- and that is exactly
 what you and I are: "sinners." If you are trusting in
 Christ, you are saved; if not, you are under the judgment
 of God, you are under the wrath of God -- eternal wrath
 which means eternal judgment in hell.

And what will this mean?

Our Lord said, "If ye believe not that I am he,
 ye shall die in your sins" (John 8:24).
 He also told the Pharisees in John 9:41, "your sin remaineth!"
 And I want to add to these statements the words of Paul in
 Eph. 5:6 (and practically the same statement is found in
 Col. 3:6) where, after mentioning a list of sins, he declar-
 ed: . . . for because of these things ^{cometh} the wrath of
 God upon the children of disobedience.

You have one of two alternatives:

- 1) Either you receive Christ and are delivered from the
 wrath of God because of His sacrifice on the Cross,
- 2) Or you face God with the full responsibility of your
 sins + the fact that you have "not believed in the
 name of the only begotten Son of God" (John 3:18b).

Concl: This is solemn truth, but it is truth. And I pray that,
 if you have not been saved from divine wrath, that God
 will open your heart to His Word, and that you will trust Christ
 today!

THE LORD'S JOY
or
THE BLESSEDNESS OF GOD

Again, as with past attributes, the subject is too great for one message. We could speak of His joy in His Son, or in His works, or His people, but I am limiting myself to His joy in Himself - and what that means to us.

Scripture Reading: Zechariah 3:14-20.

Intro: One writer concludes his remarks on THE BLESSEDNESS OF GOD with these remarks: "And here ends the account of the attributes of God; which all centre and terminate in his blessedness" (Gill, John, Complete Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity, Vol. I, p. 180).

CHRIST -
"a man of
sorrows,
and acquainted
with
grief."

It might seem strange to speak of the happiness of God because so little has been said of it, and very little has been written about it in comparison with what has been written on God's other attributes, but, nevertheless, this is an attribute of God!

Let me show you from the Word that this is true.

I will begin by citing some passages which speak of man's happiness -- e.g., Psalm 1:1; 32:1 in the OT; the Beatitudes of our Lord's Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5:1-12 in the NT. The words that are translated, "blessed," in these passages speak of happiness. Therefore, if we were considering the happiness of man, we would want to consider these passages along with others in both the Old and New Testaments because this is the subject they are dealing with: HOW MAN CAN BE HAPPY.

Now the point that I want to make with reference to the Lord is this: The very word that is used of man's happiness in Matthew 5, The Beatitudes, is used of our Lord by Paul in his first Epistle to Timothy.

Please turn to 1 Timothy 1:11, and listen as I read this verse:

According to the glorious gospel of the blessed God,
which was committed to my trust.

Note the expression: "the glorious gospel of the blessed God."

And, then, turn over to the last chapter of this same Epistle, chapter 6 and verse 15, and listen again as I read: Here Paul is speaking of our Lord Jesus Christ when he writes,

Which in his times he shall shew, who is the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords.

And then Paul goes on to say in verse 16,

Who only hath immortality, dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto; whom no man hath seen, nor can see: to whom be honour and power everlasting. Amen.

The teaching is this: Our God is a happy God, perfectly happy. He is happy because of what He is. His happiness is not dependent upon anything outside of Himself. And this would mean that God did not create man because He was lonesome (as we sometimes

are told) and needed someone with whom He could have fellowship! Let me say this very emphatically: God does not need anyone. The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are perfectly, infinitely, eternally happy in themselves -- and they would have remained happy if there had never been a creation, and even if there had never been any people like you and I are: His saints! God's joy is not dependent upon us; His joy is complete in Himself!

And so I establish my first point this morning:

I. OUR GOD IS A HAPPY GOD.

He is "the blessed God."

This means that He is perfectly satisfied, contented -- that His pleasure, His happiness is complete. He is independently happy.

But let us go on to a second point to make this matter even clearer. We need to know

II. THE REASON FOR HIS HAPPINESS.

The answer to this is that He delights in Himself, He delights in all that He is.

For you and for me this would be sin. This is the very essence of pride -- because we are not perfect. God can delight in Himself because all perfections are in Him, and there is not the least degree of imperfection.

Let me prove this with Scripture, i.e., that God delights in Himself. Please turn to Jer. 9:23, 24. Listen again as I read:

Thus saith the Lord, Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches: But let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am the Lord which exercise lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness, in the earth: for in these things I delight, saith the Lord.

What does God delight in? He delights in His attributes, and in the exercise of His attributes. He delights in Himself!

For several weeks, now, on Sunday mornings, we have been considering the attributes of God -- His eternity, His sufficiency, His immensity, His holiness, His goodness (which includes His love, His grace, His mercy, etc.), His power, His wisdom, His faithfulness, His will, His patience, His righteousness, even His wrath. I have not

said everything that could be said about any of these attributes, nor have I necessarily included all of the attributes (although I have tried to get the major characteristics of God).

BUT THE LESSON FOR US TO LEARN FROM ALL OF THESE ATTRIBUTES ONCE WE HAVE COME TO EVEN A PARTIAL UNDERSTANDING OF THEM IS THAT GOD IS HAPPY BECAUSE HE IS ALL OF THESE, AND EVERY ONE OF THESE ATTRIBUTES IS FOUND IN HIM IN ABSOLUTE PERFECTION!

God is infinitely happy because He is infinitely perfect. If I could state it this way, God's happiness is the crowning glory, the result, of all of His attributes.

Notice Jer. 9:23, 24 again. To "glory" in a thing is to rejoice in it, to be happy about it.

This leads me to my last point. It is this:

III. THE PRACTICAL IMPORTANCE OF KNOWING THAT GOD IS A HAPPY GOD, AND WHY HE IS HAPPY.

Jer. 9:23, 24 helps us to see what the importance it. It is twofold:

A. It shows me the true meaning of happiness.

B. It shows me the source of my happiness.

Happiness is the one thing that everybody is interested in. We all want to be happy. Nobody wants to be sad.

Illus: Yesterday I listened to a discussion on TV about the evils of materialism. I suppose it was planned for this time of the year because of all of the gifts people will buy for their children at Christmas. And it was generally agreed that materialism, or a life centered on material possessions will not bring happiness. I got called away and did not get to hear all of the discussion, but the remedy seemed to be that we just need to give our children less, and perhaps spend a little more time with them ourselves. Such things might help, but this is not the whole answer!

Illus: When I was in college I had a friend who from the standpoint of popularity and personal achievement had everything. He was the idol of the campus. He was all-conference in football. He broke all kinds of athletic records. Physically he was handsome, muscular, the picture of health. The girls flocked around him. He was popular with the administration as well as with

the student body. He was all that everybody else would like to have been. BUT -- I was talking to him one day and he expressed to me his complete disillusionment with all that he had because it had failed to bring him the one thing that he wanted more than anything else. Do you know what it was? HAPPINESS. Why didn't he have happiness. Because he was seeking it in the wrong place.

Our Lord once said, " . . . a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth" (Luke 12: 15b). He was talking to a man who was afraid that his brother was going to take his inheritance from him.

We keep looking for happiness in what we have, or in who we are, or in who we know, or where we are - but happiness in Scripture is to be found in God, and in the impartation of that happiness to us.

Let's go back to Jeremiah again -- and remember the words that he used: " . . . wisdom . . . might . . . riches . . ." Contrast them with "lovingkindness, judgment (or, justice), and righteousness." Where do your interests lie? The first group has to do with us; the second has to do with God. The first has to do with what we have; the second has to do with what God is.

Jer. 9:23, 24 makes it very clear that you will only find happiness when you seek it in the things in which God finds His delight. Things that do not please Him will never please you!

But let me take this a step further . . .

Our happiness consists not only in knowing the reason for God's happiness, but, as I mentioned earlier, in knowing that HE IS THE SOURCE OF MY HAPPINESS. And it is His will that His people experience "fulness of joy" now, as He shall provide, and throughout eternity where we will not be limited as we are now.

As I finish dealing with the happiness of God as the source of our happiness, let me ask you to turn to Titus 2:11-15.

We have been talking about the Lord's joy, one of His attributes -- His happiness, His blessedness -- "the blessed God . . . the blessed and only Potentate" (1 Tim. 1:11; 6:15). In studying this subject and these verses I also discovered something about this familiar passage in Titus 2 -- especially with reference to the term, "the blessed hope." I learned that Paul used the same word here for "blessed" that he used to describe God and the Lord Jesus Christ in the the two former passages. This is a happy hope a hope which brings happiness. When the Lord comes, our happiness will be complete. Why? Because we are removed from this world. No -- that is only a part, but not the main part. The main part has to do with what becomes of us when the Lord returns. Paul used the expression in 1 Tim.

1:11, "the glorious gospel of the blessed God." Look at the progression of truth in Titus 2 with reference to the Gospel:

- 1) Salvation -- in v. 11.
- 2) The evidence of salvation, negatively and positively -- in v. 12. ^{The extent to which we are not like God, we will be unhappy; the extent to which we are like Him (godly), we will be happy.}
- 3) The ultimate purpose of our salvation -- in vv. 13, 14.
- 4) Our command to stick with our message even though men ^{happy} will despise us -- in v. 15.

Paul gives us the secret of happiness when, after describing salvation in Rom. 5:1-10, in v. 11 he indicates the basic change that salvation makes in the hearts of men:

And not only so, but we also joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have received the reconciliation.

Jude's great benediction is:

Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy, To the only wise God our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen. Cf. June 24, 25.

Even David in the OT knew something about this, and so he wrote:

Thou wilt shew me the path of life: in thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore (Psa. 16:11).

Concl: Do you know the Lord as your Saviour? If not, God commands you to repent and to believe in Him as the One Who died to save guilty sinners from their sins.

Do you claim to be a Christian? Can you see the evidences of salvation in your life? Do you long to be like the Lord? Is godliness the delight of your heart? If not, there is something very wrong, and you need to seek help from the Lord in knowing what your need is!

God is a happy God because of Who and what He is -- and there is no true happiness for any man except in God, in His saving grace, and in becoming like He is.

Bernard of Clairvaux in the middle 1100's expressed what I have been trying to say, in the following words:

Jesus, thou Joy of loving hearts,
Thou Fount of life, thou Light of men,
From the best bliss that earth imparts
We turn unfilled to Thee again.

Thy truth unchanged hath ever stood;
Thou savest those that on Thee call;

To them that seek Thee Thou art good,
To them that find Thee All in all.

We taste Thee, O thou living Bread,
And long to feast upon Thee still;
We drink of Thee, the Fountain-head,
And thirst our souls from Thee to fill.

Our restless spirits yearn for Thee,
Where'er our changeful lot is cast;
Glad when thy gracious smile we see,
Blest when our faith can hold Thee fast.

Our need is for the Lord. And we learn about Him in the Word.
The Lord could have been describing all of Scripture when He
said to His disciples,

These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy
might remain in you, and that your joy might be full
(John 15:11).