

NATIONAL COMMUNITY CHURCH

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Your God Is Too Small – God in the Hands of Angry People

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Well, this past week I was in Colorado Springs for some meetings and I had a breakfast meeting with Bob DeMoss and Bob did something rather curious at the end of our breakfast. He put his finger on the end of the straw that was in his waterglass, creating a little bit of suction. He pulled it out and then he released one drop of water on his index finger and he asked me a question. He said, how many molecules do you think are in this drop of water? Now a drop of water is pretty small, about five one hundredths of a milliliter to be exact, but it felt like a trick question. So I'm thinking it's gotta be something crazy, like a million or a billion or a trillion. And Bob leans over the table and says, there are five quintillion molecules in that little drop of water. Now, I like Bob. I have no reason not to trust him, but I just met them, so I figured I better research this thing and sure enough, there was an Italian scientist Amedeo Avogadro who calculated the number of molecules in one mol of substance, it's called Avogadro Constant. And in case you care, it's six point two to one four, one five times 10 to the 23rd power. Do the math, and sure enough there are five quintillion molecules in a single drop of water. A drop of water isn't as simple as it seems. In fact, it's more complex than what we can imagine and what's true of water is true of you. There are 37 point 2,000,000,000,000 chemical reactions happening in your body right now. Your heart will beat 100,000 times today. You'll pump five quarts of blood through a hundred thousand miles of capillaries and veins and arteries. If your blood vessels were laid end to end, they would circle the earth four times, but that's simple science compared to the six feet of DNA that is in every cell in your body. Average adult about 30,000,000,000,000 cells. So if you unraveled all of that DNA in every cell, laid them end to end, it would measure about 34,000,000,000 miles.

Let me try and put that in perspective. September fifth, 1977, we launched a space probe. You know this Voyager 1 travels at about 38,000 miles per hour, which is almost a million miles per day. First space craft to travel beyond the heliopause and into interstellar space. It launched 40 years, eight months and seven days ago. Now Nasa actually keeps track of its distance from Earth continuously. Today it's 13,138,176,777 miles from Earth, is that not amazing? Not as amazing as you. The Voyager 1 will run out of gas, so to speak, in 2025. At that point it will be about 16,000,000,000 miles away from Earth. That's not even half of the distance of the DNA in your body. Would you turn to someone and say you have amazing DNA.

Now if a drop of water is more complex than we can imagine and if we are more complex than we can imagine, is it possible that the creator of the universe is more complex than we can imagine? If you have a Bible, you can turn to the Old Testament Book of Job. It's believed to be the oldest book in the Bible, but it's as relevant today as it was thousands of years ago. Listen, Job asks the same existential questions that we do. Experienced the same epistemological angst that we do. He's confused by God. He's frustrated with God, but you got to give Job from credit he still worships God.

What I want to do this weekend is just eavesdrop on an ancient conversation between Job and one of his friends, a man named Zophar. Now Job's friends get a bad rap, right? With friends like that who needs enemies? They are not the best empathizers in the Bible, but they ask really good questions. We need friends who ask really good questions, who ask us the tough questions, who ask us the personal questions, who ask the questions about life and love, and God. We need friends who ask us questions that make us think and questions that we can't answer, and that's what Zophar does and we all need a Zophar in our lives.

And so Job, chapter 11, verse four, here we go. Zophar says to Job,

"you claim my beliefs are flawless and I am pure in God's sight. Oh, how I wish God would speak, that he would open his lips against you and disclose to you the secrets of wisdom for true wisdom has two sides."

And we're going to come back to that because truth is found in the tension of opposites.

Verse seven, *"Can you solve the mysteries of God? Can you discover everything about the all mighty?"* Now, those are rhetorical questions, but the answer is 'n'.o

Verse eight, *"They're higher than the heavens above. What can you do? They are deeper than the depths below. What can you know?"*

I want to talk about two things this weekend? Don't box God in and don't box people out. Pretty simple. We going to spend most of our time on one because it's the key to two. Don't box God in. Now Zophar he kinda called Job on the carpet. He confronts Job's pride and he confronts Job's ignorance. He says, you claim my beliefs are flawless. Well, in order for your beliefs to be flawless, you would have to be omniscient, wouldn't you? You know I say this all the time, but I'm going to say it one more time for good measure. As soon as I am omniscient, I will let you know, but I would not hold your breath. Do not put your faith in me. I will disappoint you. I promise you. Why? Because I'm not God and I think faith starts here. Faith starts where you end and you've got to get to the end of yourself, to the end of your self righteousness, to the end of your self sufficiency. You've got to come to terms with the fact I am not God. Now that seems so obvious, but you tell me, are there some people in your life who it seems they did not get that memo? Yeah, they have to be right all the time and they had to be holier than thou and they kind of want you to worship the ground that they walk on and they are functioning, they would never say it, but they're acting like it's all about them, but let's not talk about them. Let's talk about us. Let's be honest. A lot of self proclaiming Christians who would rather be right than righteous. They don't just follow the Messiah, they think they're the Messiah. Nothing will turn people off to the Messiah faster than someone who has a Messiah complex. I think we need a John the Baptist moment. Do you remember the compliment that Jesus paid John? He said, among women, those born of women, there is no one greater than John. Are you kidding me? I can die and go to heaven at that moment, right? Like this is Jesus saying you're the greatest. Wow, but what does John say about himself? He says, I am not the Messiah. I think we have got to realize that God has God, I'm not not even close and when we try to play God or try to do God's job for him, does it not backfire? I think Billy Graham said it best. God's job is to judge, Holy Spirit's job is to convict, my job is to love and if we do our job, God is going to do his job.

Now let me go back to square one. Isaiah 55:8 & 9 says this, ⁸ *“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,” declares the LORD.* ⁹ *“As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.”*

Now, I already talked about Voyager 1, so I'm not going to belabor the expansive space, but let me say this, astrophysicists estimate the co-moving distance from one side of the universe to the other to be 93,000,000,000 light years. One light year, 5.88 trillion miles. You try multiplying that by 93,000,000,000. Good luck. That distance unimaginable, immeasurable, inconceivable and God says, that's about the distance between your thoughts and my thoughts. So here's my thought, your best thoughts on your best day is at least 93,000,000,000 light years short of how great and how good God really is. When I say don't box God in what I mean, come on. If we can't even understand the complexity of a drop of water, how are we going to understand the God who said, let there be light in all things were created.

Stick with me, once you hear what I'm about to say, you can know God. God's revealed himself through creation, it's called general revelation. You don't have to be afraid of science. Science is your friend. Einstein said that science without religion is blind and religion without science is lame. The distinction between science and spirituality, it's a false dichotomy. If you believe that all things are created by him and for him, then there is no sacred or secular. There is only God and what he has created. In him we live and move and have our being. He is the fifth force that the physicist cannot quite figure out.

When I was a freshman in college, I took a class in immunology at the University of Chicago Hospital Centers, still ranks as my favorite all-time class. And I don't know that my professor believed in a God, but I felt like every class was an exegesis of Psalm :39, that we are fearfully and wonderfully made. And there was a moment it marked me. I remember the day that she was talking about hemoglobin is the protein in our red blood cells that transports oxygen to the body. And I remember sitting there just thinking to myself, this is amazing, and I remember walking out of that class praising God for hemoglobin. When was the last time you thank God for hemoglobin? I wish I had more time to talk about this, but I believe that every ology is a branch of theology.

Romans 1 says it this way. *“All of creation reveals his invisible qualities, his eternal power and divine nature”*. You can know God through creation, it's general revelation and you can know God through scripture, it's called special revelation. Now we believe the Bible to be the inspired word of God. I love books. I've read thousands of books, but listen the Bible is in a category by itself, and I'll tell you why. You don't just read the Bible the Bible reads you. Hebrews 4:12 says. *“It is living and active, it's sharper than any two edged sword dividing soul and spirit, joint and marrow.”* And then it says this, *“it exposes the inner most thoughts and desires.”* The Bible is magnetic resonance imaging, it reveals us to us as we study it. It reveals God to us. It gives us a picture of who we are and who God is. So hear me, you can know God, you can know that you know that you are in right relationship with God, but I want to juxtapose that with this. First Corinthians 8:2 says, *“He who thinks he knows does not yet know as he ought to know.”* Translation, the more you know, the more you know how much you don't know. There is the concept and the philosophy of science called critical realism. It's a simple idea that, listen, we don't know everything there is to know, so we ought to expect our scientific theories to be

amended by new discoveries. I just think we need a degree of critical realism, but when it comes to our theology, don't box God in. Now, don't create God in your image, we've been talking about that and listen it's going to fit the picture of scripture. If it doesn't, it's a wrong picture, but the God of the Bible does not fit within the logical constraints of the left brain. The God of the Bible does not fit within the imaginative constraints of the right brain. That's why it says he's able to do immeasurably more than all we can ask or imagine according to his power that's at work within us. What I'm getting to is this; you can know God, but the more you know, the more you know how much you don't know.

A W. Tozer said it this way. Eternity won't be long enough to learn all that God is or praise him for all that he's done. Wow. So what do we do with that? That's a little overwhelming? Well, for starters, we ought to probably stay humble and stay hungry and maybe just, maybe we outta do what Jesus said; ask, seek and knock. Those are present imperative verbs. In other words, you've got to keep asking, keep seeking, keep knocking. Roth Smith did an interesting study, found that children ask on average about a hundred 25 questions per day, adults six questions per day. Somewhere between childhood and adulthood we lose about a 119 questions a day and then we wonder where the wonder went, we wonder where the mystery of God went. Never lose a holy curiosity.

Verse 6; Zophar says to Job, true wisdom has two sides. Now I like something that Wayne Cordeiro said years ago and it stuck with me. He said this, we are one dimensional people. We have learned pat definitions of the eternal and think that we understand it exhaustively. Grace, easy; the unmerited favor of God, we rattle off like pros. We've defined it therefore we understand it we're ready to move onto the next unfathomable truth. One Dimensional Christians. We know so much but understand so little. Listen, truth found in the tension of opposites.

Let me come at this from a couple of different angles. 1932 German physicist, Werner Heisenberg wins the Nobel prize for his work with quantum mechanics. His discovery ranks as one of the greatest scientific revolutions of the 20th century. It's called Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle, and here it is in a nutshell. We cannot know the precise position and momentum of a quantum particle at the same time. Here's why. Sometimes matter behaves like a particle, it appears to be in one place at one time. But sometimes matter behaves like a wave, it appears to be in several places at the same time, almost like the ripple effect of a rock dropped in a pond. It's the duality of nature. Remember Romans 1 his invisible qualities revealed in creation. See, it also reveals the duality of nature's God. Let me give you an example. The Trinity, do you have that figured out? One God, Father, Son, and Spirit, One. I don't know. Last time I checked, one does not equal three and three does not equal one, at least in four dimensions of space-time, it does not. But if we could comprehend God, he wouldn't be God at all. I like what Robert Johnson said about paradox. He said that scripture is full of two sided trues and I've found this to be true. Heresy is usually paying attention to one side and ignoring the other. Johnson says this, when the unstoppable bullet hits the impenetrable wall, that's where we find religious experience. It is precisely here that we will grow. I think we play it safe. I think we stopped asking questions. I think we stopped seeking. We stopped knocking and we kind of live in this little comfortable world and what I'm saying is let's not box God in.

20 years ago I read a book by Jim Collins and Jerry Porras, *Built to Last*. I mean it's still a classic. It's a business book about keys to corporate success. Over six years they studied 18 companies and they talk about the tyranny of the or and the genius of the end. And I think what happens is we get in trouble when we start thinking in either/or categories and I think what happens is it's right or wrong, it's black or white, it's A or B, but some things don't quite fit in that box. I'll give you an example. John chapter nine, man born blind, and the disciples revealed the tyranny of the or because here's the question they asked. Why was this man born blind? Was it because of his own sins or his parents sins? Cause it's got to be one of those two. Well no, Jesus comes along and presents a third option, if you will. He says, it's not because of his sins or his parents sins this happened, so that the power of God could be seen in him.

For the past five weeks we've been talking about God in the Hands of Angry People. In the beginning, God created us in his image. We've been creating God in our image ever since. What happens is when you create God in your image, you end up with a God who looks an awful lot like you, thinks like you, talks like you, and it's a counterfeit God. That's the God that we've been trying to dismantle during this series. And what we've been doing is pointing to the person of Jesus. Why? Because the Bible says he is the image of the invisible God. If you want to know who God is, what God looks like, look at the person of Jesus, but I need to warn you. It's a paradoxical picture. You've got Jesus meek and mild, but the little children come unto me. John 11 says, Jesus wept. He steps in this woman caught in the act of adultery, you can stone her over my dead body. There's this meek and mild nature to Jesus. But then there's Jesus, I don't know how to frame it fast and furious. He single handedly turns a temple upside down and throws the money changers out, like who is this? Because it almost seems like two different people sometimes. So which is it? Is He Jesus, lamb of God or is he Jesus, Lion of the Tribe of Judah? The answer is yes. Is he the son of man or is he the son of God? The answer is yes. Is he full of grace or full of truth? The answer is yes. Jesus is paradox with a capital P and this is where I want to push us a little bit because I think we fall into the same trap as the Pharisees. We want God to fit in our box. It doesn't work that way. If you want a God, you can comprehend, a God you can control the only option is a God that you create in your image and you end up with that counterfeit God. And so what happens is this, we end up boxing God in with easy answers. We ended up boxing God in with these nice platitudes. We end up boxing God in with pride and prejudice and a hundred other things. And curious, isn't it that God starts to look a lot like our personality and our history and our gift mix and our gender and our race, and our wounds and what I'm saying is let's not box God in because when we do, we end a boxing people out.

Stick with me because this is dangerous territory, so I want you to hear what I'm saying. How do we box people out? Well, I think we do it experientially because we think that people need to have the same experience we've had. But I'll tell you something I've lived by a little mantra, something Oswell Chambers said. He wrote that little devotional *My Utmost for His Highest*. I remember reading this about 15 years ago and I probably quoted about 200 times since, here's what he said. Let God be as original with others as he was with you. Yeah, that's good right there. Because if we don't do that, what happens is we box people out who haven't had our experience and then I think we box people out theologically. I mean, come on, I remember I studied eschatology. I mean, I went to seminary for too many years. OK. And I studied it and I remember, man, I was all about what is it? Is it pre, mid or post? Tribulation, rapture because we've got to figure this thing out. And listen, I'm not saying it's not important. I think it is, but

you know what? I think the message is pretty simple; we better be ready whenever it is. And so I think what happens is, like, sometimes we use theology as an occasion to debate one another instead of really a true pursuit of who God is. And I think we have to be careful, it's why at the beginning of our core belief statement, you'll see a Lutheran Pastor, Rupertus Meldenius that we quote, and he said this, it was kind of very divisive time in church history, a lot of backbiting, infighting. And he said this; "In essentials unity, in non-essentials liberty, in all things charity." That rings true about 500 years later. What is he saying? Well, in the essentials, what is the essential? Can I give you my opinion? It's the first creed of the church; three words, Jesus is Lord that is essential. Listen, if you don't believe that Jesus is who he said he was the Son of man, Son of God, lived a sinless life, died on the cross for my sin, rose from the dead on the third day, is seated at the right hand of the Father. Jesus is Lord. That's essential. Essential is Romans 10:9 & 10 " *if you confess with your mouth Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you shall be saved.*" That's essential. I think about everything else is non-essential. I didn't say not important, OK? Very important, very important. But in those things, we have to have a degree of liberty with one another. And then in all things, guess what, charity we gotta love each other despite our theological differences. Man, we could talk about politically, culturally.

Can I just quickly throw this one in because it's Mother's Day. Can I kind of blow up our box a little bit? Listen, I know that we refer to God in the masculine because God identifies himself as father, but God doesn't have a gender in the way that we have a gender. OK? In fact, there are motherly metaphors for God. He is likened to a hen who gathers her chicks under her wings. And I know this sounds great, but our heavenly father has a maternal instincts, paradox, paradox. What's beautiful about that is this, remember God said he created them, male and female. You what? I think if you've only got one of those genders, I think you've got about half a picture of who God is. See what God does is present this poetic picture and that's why I'm getting so off track, but it's why in Ephesians 5 it says, husbands, love your wives as Christ loved the church, and at the end of it, what is he saying? He says, this is a profound mystery. See, there's this picture in our maleness and femaleness that reveals who God is. Let's not box people out. Now let me go back and say, let's not box God in and let's see where this takes us. In verse number seven, Zophar asked Job a question, can you solve the mysteries of God? There was a Greek Orthodox theologian whose name escapes me who said, it's not the task of Christianity to provide easy answers to every question, but to make us progressively aware of mystery. And he said this, God is not so much the object of our knowledge as the cause of our wonder. We want easy answers to every question. We want quick solutions to every problem, but you and I both know that's not the reality that we live in, and what happens is when we reduce mystery to certainty, we dumb down the Gospel. See, we sacrifice mystery on the altar of theology and then we wonder why people don't worship. We sacrificed mystery on the altar of knowledge and call it spiritual maturity. No, it's spiritual immaturity. Listen, A W Tozer said, to have found God and still pursue him is the soul's paradox, but here's the challenge. I think Kathleen Norris said it best, modern believers tend to trust more in therapy than mystery.

Listen, there is not a person at any one of our campuses that doesn't need some therapy, including me, but you've got to leave room for the mystery of God. Now, here's where I want to just share something. I maybe shared this once or twice in 20 years, but I just feel like this weekend, at the end of this series, I need to share this. During my senior year of college I was

having the best basketball season statistically of my career, if you can call it that. First team All American, averaging 21.3 points per game, but who's counting? We were a favorite to win the national championship. Now, before you get impressed at all it was the NCCAA. The extra c stands for Christian. But I was having a great season I knew it was my last season. NBA doesn't recruit at Bible colleges and so I can honestly say like I was playing for God's glory, I was playing my heart out. And two weeks before the national tournament I torn my anterior cruciate ligament. My season was over, my career was over. It was a terrible ending. You know my dream was to win that national championship and that dream died, done, gone, out of eligibility, over. I remember going to the prayer room and I had this gamut of emotions. I was sad because I knew it was. I played basketball two hours a day every day for 10 years. It was my life and I was mad. God, how could you let this happen? I remember in that prayer room begging God to heal my knee. God heal my knee. God. I will give you the glory. Would you heal my knee? It did not happen. And it was that day I discovered Deuteronomy 29:29. And I created what I call my Deuteronomy 29:29 file. It says this, the things revealed belong to us, the secret things, they belong to the Lord, our God. It's a file where I put things that don't make sense. Now, I want to be honest there are children starving to death, there are kids who are being trafficked, there are refugees who are fleeing for their lives, torn ACL. I mean, come on. Pretty minor compared to that, but over the years that file has been filled. I don't understand. I do not understand why my father in-law 55 prime of life, prime ministry, massive heart attack, and he's gone. I don't understand why my intestines rupture, spent two days on a respirator, about a year of my life just felt like going through surgery and another surgery. What's happened over the years is that file's gotten thicker and thicker, but I want to tell you something. I have made a decision to trust him and to seek him and to worship him. Why? Because I can't solve all these mysteries. You've got to figure out what you're going to do with the mystery of life, with the mystery of love, with the mystery of God. There are no easy answers to these things but there is a God. Listened to me, who is bigger? There is a God who is bigger than your mistakes, a God who is bigger than your problems, a God who is bigger than your bad decisions, a God who is bigger than your knowledge, a God who is bigger than your happiness, a God who is bigger than your anxiety.

A W tozer said this, a low view of God is the cause of a hundred lesser evils. A high view of God is the solution to 10,000 temporal problems. At the end of Prince Caspian, one of the books in the Chronicles of Narnia series, there's this great dialogue between Lucy and Aslan.

She says, "Aslan you're bigger".

Aslan says "That's because you are older, little one"

She says "Not because you are?"

And Aslan says "I am not. But every year you grow, you will find me bigger".

Can I tell you what my prayer for you is this weekend, no matter where you are in that spiritual journey. It's something G. K. Chesterton said; 'How much happier you would be, how much more of you there would be if the hammer of a higher God could smash your small cosmos.' The Psalmist said it best. His love is meteoric, his loyalty astronomic, his purpose titanic, his verdicts oceanic, yet in his largeness, nothing gets lost.

I'll close with this; 1962, Dr Karl Barth did a lecture tour in the United States. He is regarded by many within the Protestant tradition as the greatest theologian of the 20th century. He hit the cover of Time magazine, April 20, 1962. Not bad for a theologian. So he came to University of Chicago and gave a lecture at Rockefeller Chapel. I lived right across it when I was a freshman in college. And at the end of that lecture, someone asked him a question, asked if he could summarize his whole life's work in a single sentence. Are you kidding me? OK. He has more than 600 works to his credit, his church dogmatics was written over a 35 year span. Check this out, it's 8,000 pages it's a 13 volume set, and someone's going to ask him, hey, can you just kinda summarize that? Can you give me the one sentence version? You know what's amazing Barth didn't skip a beat. Here's what he said. Jesus loves me, this I know for the Bible tells me so. Don't box God in. Don't box people out. But I hope you know this week Jesus loves you. He loves you. He loves you.

We celebrate communion at all of our campuses. In fact, I'm going to invite our ushers to come and prepare for that at all of our campuses. Let me say this, it's a pilgrimage back to the foot of the cross. By the way, the cross, the cross is God in the Hands of Angry People, right? The Cross is God in the Hands of Angry People, but I want you to notice what he does. What does he do? He says, father, forgive them for they know not what they do. See, he's the God of second chances. The question this weekend is, will you give God the second chance? That's the question.

Let me close with this, Ephesians 3:18 *may you have the power to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.* In Jesus name. Amen.