

If you have your Bibles, go ahead and grab them. If you didn't bring a Bible with you, there should be a hardback black one somewhere around you. I'm glad you're here. Psalms, chapter 8, is where we'll be. We'll spend the bulk of the first part of our time together in Psalms 8, and then we're going to flip over to 1 John 5 for just a bit, and we'll go from there.

Before my conversion to Christianity, I was a pretty aggressive agnostic. I had seen enough of Christians and understood enough of Christianity to think, *Really all of this is ridiculous*. That was kind of my position, and really my personality now is just like it was back then. It just wasn't saved. Really my wit and my aggression, rather than being *for* Jesus Christ was actually *against* Jesus Christ. Not because I really thought Jesus Christ was a bad thing. I just didn't believe what was being taught about Jesus Christ. Really if you line it out and you just say what we believe, it's going to take a certain measure of the Holy Spirit in your heart and in your life to help you understand, believe, and love God, okay?

So I'll line it out. A creator God saw his creation fracture. Sin enters into the world, into that fracture, and God decides to renew and reconcile that fractured creation back to himself by a virgin giving birth to a Son who lives a perfect life, is then killed on the cross because of his perfection, but luckily for us, rises from the grave three days later, and then floats into heaven. One day he is coming back to get all of us on the back of a white horse with a sword coming out of his mouth and a tattoo on his thigh.

That doesn't seem difficult to pick apart, right? I was always kind of an avid reader. That was not something that happened post-Christianity. That was something pre-Christianity. I always wanted to know how things worked and how they fit together and how *this* made sense of *this*. So really what I was doing when it came to the Christian faith is... For me, it was wrought with inconsistency. There were so many inconsistencies, not only in the Bible but in the lives of Christians I knew that I was a bit of a skeptic. Then God actually saved me via my skepticism. All right? I never even saw it coming.

We moved to Texas. I'm playing football. I know I don't look like an athlete. It's because I'm not. That doesn't stop you from being on the team in high school. Jeff Faircloth (I've told this story a billion times) goes, "Hey, I need to tell you about Jesus. When do you want to do that?"

"Umm..."

He was giving the option of deciding *when* that took place but wasn't giving me the option of *if* that took place. Jeff and I kind of hit it off, and I, if for nothing else, just respected his courage. I started going to church with him.

Let me be straight. Church did nothing to alleviate my doubts. It almost fed into them. It seemed like the more I went to church, actually the more I doubted that and the more questions I had and the more concerned I was and the more I believed there were inconsistencies in what Christians believed. I would sit there. If somebody brought you today and you're not a believer, let me tell you what you can expect. After you leave here, they're going to go, "So what did you think? What did you think? Just wondering what you thought of what he had to say." Right? That's what's going to happen.

I knew that was coming. I'm not an idiot. I'd take some notes. I'd take notes not necessarily what this guy is saying, but I'm kind of just taking notes on the inconsistencies as I saw them, how some of the belief systems of Christians were I believed untenable for our day and age, how outdated and silly they seemed in regard to where culture actually was and where the world actually was. I'm taking notes, but I'm not taking notes because I'm going, *Oh, God is amazing!* I'm taking notes because I thought, *These people are idiots.*

Now I know how it works doctrinally now. I know how it works biblically now, but at the time, God just kept kind of drawing me in, and I didn't even know I was getting drawn in. I was just kind of mocking stuff. Then God just decided (here's what's crazy) to save me without answering any of my questions. It wasn't like he was like, "Well here."

"Oh, I see!"

That's not how it happened. So I'm like, *I don't quite understand how the Bible is the inerrant Word of God. I have a problem with how Christians have behaved historically in different periods of time. I have a strong frustration with how Christians view certain aspects of sexuality, marriage, all sorts of things like that.*

God never threw me a bone on any of that. He didn't go, "Well, here how's the Word happened. Here's why that is." He just saved me, just literally opened my eyes, and I loved him. I don't even know how it happened. Well, I know biblically now how it happened, but I didn't know I was getting sucked in. If I would have known that, I would have never come. If I would have known he was going to do that at the time, there was no way I would have gone, "Let me come and make fun of your stuff some more."

This is how God saved me, right out skepticism, right out of doubt, right out of being mouthy toward the things of God. So that created in me a real soft spot in my heart for skeptics and agnostics and atheists. It's

why, if that's where you are, I'm glad you're here. We are not nervous about you being here, and you don't need to be nervous about being here. You'll not find us easily offended by your doubts, questions, and concerns about God. I think if you're a thinker, you're going to wrestle with some things. If you're an achiever, you're going to wrestle with some things.

Here's what I'll tell you. I don't believe in any way that our faith is a blind faith, and I find nowhere in Scripture that God has asked us to detach our minds from how he reveals himself to be. But here's also where I press on you. Don't pretend like you're not living in a grid of faith right now. *Well, no. My reality is defined by science.* Science has a great deal of faith involved in it. Now if you want to talk about boiling water, no. But if you want to talk about why we're here, where we came from, it's... The word in science for faith is *theory*. That's *faith* in science: theory. "We can't prove it, but we think this is how it works."

That's faith, so let's just... We can be friends. Let's just not pretend that I'm a man of faith and you're not. Because my heart is soft toward the skeptic and because I have an earnest desire to try to communicate in such a way that you'll at least understand some of what we believe rather than the caricature of what we believe... In 2004 I'd been pastor here just for a couple of years, I wanted to do a series on doubt. What I found out about doubt just in offhand conversations is that doubt is not one-size-fits-all.

I mean, it's just not. We'll struggle with doubt, but it's almost always for a different reason. It's almost always a different doubt. I found some people really wrestle with doubt because of their upbringing. Some people wrestle with doubt because this thing happened. Some people wrestle with doubt because they hang out with a lot of Christians. Some people struggle with doubt because of a loss, because of an illness.

Some people struggle with doubt because they put their dreams in this thing, and it didn't come true, so how can God be good? Therefore, how can God be real? So doubts are kind of all over the map, and the motivations for those doubts are all over the map. I thought I needed to get some help. So what I did is I stood up on a random Sunday. How many of you were in '04? Not many of you. Okay. I have no idea what's happening in Dallas. The camera is just one way.

What I did was on a given Sunday morning, I said, "Hey, in about a month, I'm going to start this new series. I need your help. Tear off the back of your bulletin, and I want you to write on the back of your bulletin if you struggle with a doubt, if you have kind of a consistent haunting, *I don't know how to make this work. This robs me of joy. This robs me of confidence in God*, whether that be the Word of God, or whether that be why bad things happen to good people. Write your doubt out, and put it in the joy boxes (our offertory plates, if you will) as you walk out."

Now that weekend, it looked like we took in \$30 million. We did! We took in like \$4,000 and a mountain of doubt. We spread them out on my office floor, and it became clear that unless I was about to do a three- or four-year series on doubt (Can you imagine that, how much of a beat-down that would be? "Doubt number 207..."), we were going to have to do something else with it. So what we tried to do was to categorize the doubts into biblical categories.

Not let's take each doubt as individual doubts, but kind of let's pile them up into categories of doubts and try to identify the roots of doubt, and then from those roots, try to handle those doubts. So in '04, I preached a series called *The Roots of Doubt* based on what we found that day. Now of the eight piles on my office floor, the largest pile by far (and it ended up being the last sermon in that series) was a doubt that could fit into this: "If I am a Christian, if Jesus lives inside of me, if I am blood-bought by God, why do I struggle? Why does it seem like I'm perpetually two steps forward, one step back? Why do I feel like I'm constantly climbing a mountain, almost to the top, only to slide back down to the bottom?"

It was some variation of that kind of thinking, and here's why that happens to us. The Bible is going to put weight on every area of our lives...*every* area. The Bible has something to say about everything. It has something to say about sex. It has something to say about marriage. It has something to say about friendship. It has something to say about leisure. It has tons to say about work. It has stuff to say about the life of your mind, the day of rest. There's not an area of your life the Bible is not going to speak directly to, or in the wisdom literature, bear weight on whether or not that thing is wise or not.

Now here's what happens. As that is proclaimed and as we read that or hear someone preach that, we become, if we're self-aware... Now I'm not pretending we're all self-aware. Some of you think you are far more awesome than you are. I am well aware of that. Those of you who are self-aware will hear the Word of God spoken. You will read the Word of God, and you'll see God's standard for you and me is up *here*, and you're kind of dwelling down *here*.

When that happens, we try to fill in the gap. We try to fill in the gap. We begin to try to get up to God's standard. By the way, his standard is hopelessly impossible. "Be holy, because I am. Be like me." The rest of the Bible is going to say, "You're not like me, but be like me." Then we get stuck in this climb and slide, climb and slide type of existence with the Lord. What I thought we would do for the month of July is let's just talk about holiness. We're coming off of our study of the book of Galatians. I think it's a perfect time to just stop, and let's talk about what it means to be a holy people.

To do that, where you start is incredibly important. Let me try to frame it for you. If you don't know where you are, trying to get to where you need to be is going to be impossible. If I were to drop you somewhere and you didn't know where I was dropping you, and I were to say, "Go to New York City. Head to

Manhattan," you have no real shot of getting there. I know some of you are outdoorsy. You're like, "Well, I know where the sun rises, and I know where it sets." So you know east and west, but you don't know where you are, so you don't know which direction to go and at what degree that direction to go.

"Well, I can see by the stars the directions." But if you don't know where you are, who cares about knowing northwest from northeast from southwest to southeast. It won't matter! You don't know where you are. So if you don't start from the right place, then what happens is as the journey progresses, you lose heart because you don't know if all your effort is in vain. You don't know if you're heading in the right direction at all. You don't know if you're going to wake up and realize, *No, I went the wrong way. I have to turn around and go all the way back from where I came and then head another way.* You simply don't know.

So every day that skyline doesn't appear on the horizon is a day where you will wrestle with the journey itself. Because who knows? It might all be in vain. Where you start on the topic of holiness is unbelievably important. Here's where it's going to stretch some of us. If you're a covenant member of The Village and you're here a lot, this had better not stretch you, or I'm going to be frustrated. Where you start with holiness, external moral holiness, is not you at all. In fact, if we start with you, we don't have a shot. If we start with you, it doesn't matter what direction you head; we're not getting there. It's the wrong starting point.

If we're going to talk about holiness, we have to start with God. That's where we have to start. If we don't start with God, we have no shot at actually getting to holiness. I'll explain why that is at the end. I mean, partly at the end of the sermon today and partly at the end of the series in three weeks. Now what we know from the Bible and what all Protestant theologians would predominantly agree upon is that there are three words that start with *O* that describe who God is. There's *omniscience*. He is all-knowing. He knows everything.

You can look in the Old Testament and watch them teach that. You can watch David go, "Where can I go from your spirit? No matter where I go, there you are. If I go to the depths, there you are. If I go to the heights, there you are. If I go to the other side of the sea, there you are. No matter where I go, there you are." God is all-knowing (*omniscient*). He is *omnipresent*. He is everywhere at once, and when all is said and done, he is *omnipotent* (all-powerful). In each one of those categories, we can go Old Testament or New Testament to see it.

Old Testament, you can watch it play out in the prophets and how he interacts with the world. In the New Testament, you can see that in the life of Jesus. So Colossians tells us Jesus is "**...the image of the invisible God.**" If you want to know what God is like, look at Jesus. On the omnipotence of God, the all-powerful nature of God, you simply look at Jesus. Jesus walks in a type of power that nobody else walks

in. He curses a fig tree, and it dies. Do you see why it's good that we're not God? Can you imagine the carnage if you could curse something and kill it? Do you know how many cars would be on fire on the freeway? Do you know how many neighbors would have perished? It's just good we don't have that power.

God, as seen in the Old Testament and then as seen in the life of Christ... Christ curses a fig tree, and it dies. He rebukes a storm, and it listens to him. We might curse a storm, but it doesn't go, "Oh, calm down. We'll stop." Jesus curses a storm, and it listens. Jesus told a dead guy he wasn't allowed to be dead anymore. That's power. That's omnipotence. When you tell a dead guy to quit being dead, you're all-powerful. When you rebuke a storm, and it listens... If you want to look at God's omniscience, his knowing of all things, again you can look Old Testament or you can look at Jesus.

Frequently Jesus is in rooms where men are thinking things, and he calls out what they're thinking. Can you imagine how freaked out you'd be about that? Any time Jesus was in the room, you were like, *Okay. Concentrate. Find a verse. Meditate on it. Find a verse. Find a verse. Don't go there. Find a verse.* I mean, can you imagine? Because what's happening is the Pharisees are thinking things, his disciples are thinking things, and Jesus is asking them why they're thinking it. I mean, you want to talk about an awkward moment, just having a one-off thought in your head, and Jesus goes, "Why are you doing that? Why are you thinking that? You, why are you thinking that?"

"What?"

"No, you were thinking that. Why would you think that way? How long do I have to be with you? Let me ask *you* a question since you're thinking that."

"I wasn't thinking that."

"You were thinking that. Let me ask you a question."

Right? You can see that God is all-knowing. Then another picture you're going to see in Jesus. The grounds between omniscience and omnipresent kind of get muddied because you can *know* and *be* simultaneously. It's a little bit much for our brains, but I love this story in the book of John where Jesus is calling his disciples. He calls Philip, and Philip gets really excited, and he runs to his brother, Nathanael. Nathanael is sleeping under a fig tree. Philip wakes him up and says, "You're not going to believe it. We found the Messiah. He is from Nazareth." Nathanael is like, "Can anything good from Nazareth? That's impossible."

Nathanael gets up, and he follows his brother, Philip, back to Jesus. When they get to Jesus, Jesus stands up and says, "**Behold a true Israelite in which there is no fault.**" Nathanael said, "Do you know me?" Jesus said, "Before you were asleep under that fig tree, I knew you." Nathanael bows. "I'm in. I'm following you. I'm going with you. You are the Messiah. You are the Holy One of God." So it wasn't just that Jesus knew he was asleep under the fig tree. His answer was, "Before you were asleep under the fig tree, I knew you." This is God's immense power, knowledge, and presence.

Look at me. This isn't necessarily what makes him the God we love. The most consistent prefix to God's name in the Bible is *holy*. It's not just that God is all-powerful. It's not just that God is ever-present, and it's not just that God is all-knowing and wise. It's that in his power, in his presence, and in his knowledge, he is holy. It is his holy power and his holy presence and his holy wisdom that makes all the difference in the world, because if God is powerful but not holy, then our motivation to serve him will not be gratitude and love. It will be fear because of his power.

If he is all-knowing but he is not holy, then ultimately we will be terrified at what he knows, with no hope to hide from him at all. If his presence is everywhere, that means what we think is secret is not secret. The things we do in private and the things we think in our minds and the true desires of our hearts are seen clearly by a God who knows all, is everywhere, and is all-powerful. So if he is not holy, that's terrifying. *Holy* is a weird word, and what I mean by that is I think we use it a lot, but nobody really knows what it means. In fact, in our culture, it's predominantly a word put in front of other words, but no time.

Here's what I want to do. I want to define holiness for you. This isn't my definition, but it's one I believe is biblically sound. For you achievers, I know I'm miserable to take notes off of. Let me give you this definition. The holiness of God describes both the majesty of God and the purity and moral perfection of his nature. So the holiness of God describes the majesty of God and the purity of God, and the moral perfection of his nature.

When we say, "holy," what we mean is God is majestic and he is pure and he is morally perfect. So what I want to do with this definition is I want to break it into two parts, not three. That would be too "sermony." We're going to break it into two parts, not three and a poem. Two and no poem. Then I want to tell you why it matters, okay? Let's start with the majesty of God. If you looked up on your dictionary app the word *majesty*, you would find these two (it's the first two) definitions: lofty dignity or (this is my favorite) an imposing grandeur.

Majesty is an imposing grandeur. It's the presence of something that makes you feel small and helpless. It is imposing in its scope, in its scale, in its size. About six, seven weeks ago now, I had the opportunity to hike the Inca Trail in Peru. It was the most awful, awesome thing I've ever done in my life. We were

coached before we got there. Here's how we were coached. "It's winter in Peru, so what that means is you're going to need a sub-thermal sleeping bag at night, but you're going to be upwards to 11,000, 12,000, 13,000, 14,000 feet, and the sun will be out. When you're at that height and you're that close to the sun, 80 degrees feels like 100 degrees.

You're going to want to wear those kind of hiking pants that you can zip off the bottom parts and have shorts on and tee shirts and sunscreen. Bring a poncho. You're not going to need it. It's the dry season." Repeatedly, "That's what you're going to need. So fly into Lima. Take a little jumper over to Cusco. That's 11,000 feet." If you're from Dallas, 11,000 feet might as well be the moon. You might as well dress up like an astronaut with oxygen tanks, because I got...

I'm right about to hike for four days, camp three nights on the side of a mountain, and I got winded going to baggage claim. I was like, *This is not going to be good. This is not going to work out well for me.* Finally I found my bag. I just kind of dragged it behind me until we got out to the van and tried to acclimate. Now I got acclimated, hit the trailhead. The first day's hike was spectacular. It was hot. The first night after we made camp, I just can't explain to you what the sky looked like.

If I would have thought more about this, it would have been great to put a couple of the pictures up. I mean, the sky was unbelievable. It looked like make-believe. It looked like something out of a dream. I mean, you could see the Milky Way. I mean, not just stars. It was unreal. You're not allowed to light fires inside the camp. I mean, it was just dark except the sky was just lit up.

Then we woke the next morning. Day two is what even our guide called "hell day." It's straight up the side of the mountain. I don't know if you know about the Inca Trail. It was built by the Incas. Apparently their feet are like *that*. I'm six foot five. My feet are not like that. If my feet were like that, I would constantly fall over. My feet are like *this*. I'm having to put *this* on a step like *this* for eight hours straight up a mountain. We awoke at five in the morning to rain on our tent. Okay, no problem. I have a poncho. So I put on my little Nike windbreaker. It's supposed to get hot. I put on my poncho.

Now rain is not a problem. You're just going to get a little damp. It's going to be fine. What happens to rain once you get to about 12,000 feet? No, not snow. Ice bullets. As we're making this climb, I'm having to walk sideways just to get my foot on the steps. I'm being pelted by ice, bullets from God. Thank goodness a man who is a covenant member of the church was on the trip. He is a bit bigger of a boy than I am, so I just drafted behind him. I let him take it for the team, and I'm just kind of...

Then we finally get to the summit (14,000 feet). We cross over the summit. As we get there, the other side is sunny and green and lush. You can hear the river down. I never felt so tiny in all of my life. On the way up

on day two, there were people crying. There were people who wanted off the trail. There was nowhere to go. I mean, you're eight hours from the trailhead. You're four hours from camp. You're stuck, bro. Suck it up and go. There was some guy who kept running past us. Then like 10 minutes later, we would just walk past him. Then he'd run past us.

This is a true story. I actually had lunch with the Dallas Peru guys this past week. We were laughing about some of this. This guy finally just threw himself into the side of the mountain and started crying. We made fun of him the rest of the trip. You can't help him. You'll die. Keep going! "You should have trained harder." So we get up there, and this idea of an imposing grandeur to me is like looking at the Andes. See, the Andes aren't like the Rockies. The Rockies apparently have stopped growing. The Andes are still shooting straight up, so it's jagged and rough, and the ecosystem is constantly changing.

Like every two hours, you're in a different spot. You're in the jungle, and then all of a sudden you're in what they call the *cloud forest*. I have children. That sounded very *Dora the Explorer* to me, all right? Then the Gooney Gumdrop Hill is next, right? So we go through the cloud forest. There are orchids. It was unbelievable. The entire time, I just felt tiny. I felt helpless like, *If this mountain wants to kill me, it can kill me and there's nothing I'm going to be able to do about that. There's no help coming. There's no helicopter coming. I mean, it's just me and this mountain and a step at a time until we get to camp.*

When we talk about majesty and imposing grandeur, we're talking about something that's so big that there is a tinge of fear in us. It doesn't mean we don't love it. It doesn't stir up things inside of us. It just means that it's so big and we're so small that there's a tinge of fear. So if you think about the Grand Canyon, you think about Mount Everest, you think about the Andes, you think about an actual ocean, you get in front of the Pacific, you get out in the Pacific, you get into those scenarios, there should be a type of majesty that creates in you a tinge of fear. You just know that if something goes wrong, you could get killed.

More than likely, it's not going to happen, but it's a possibility, and you can kind of feel that possibility. That's majesty. In Psalms 8, David is going to talk to us about that majesty. If you have a church background, I'm probably going to put a song in your head here, so sorry. Psalms 8, starting in verse 1. **"O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth! You have set your glory above the heavens."** So he is going to start, **"O Lord, our Lord, [our God] how majestic [how overwhelming, how unbelievable] is your name in all the earth!"**

Because David is saying, "If the Andes are intimidating to you, if Everest is intimidating, if the ocean is intimidating, if the Grand Canyon is intimidating, what about the One who just tells those things what to do?" **O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth! You have set your glory above the heavens."** This idea of God's glory being above the heavens is again the idea of the smallness, not just of

you and me as human beings but the smallest of actually the planet. God is not intimidated by or fearful of the Andes or the Rockies or the Grand Canyon. That is not so big of a hole in the ground that God is like, "I feel unsafe."

His glory is above the heavens. It transcends the heavens. It is fearful of nothing. He is magnificent. Look at where he goes next. **"Out of the mouth of babies and infants, you have established strength because of your foes, to still the enemy and the avenger."** Now that seems like a strange text. Let me try to explain it to you. God's response to the belittlement of his magnificence in the world is to sew into the heart of children an easy spotting of what creates all. So as you grow too cool for God and too smart for God and too smart for how he has revealed himself in nature and too smart for how he has shown himself to be, children get a better insight into reality than you do.

So you watch this play out in the New Testament when Jesus says, "You come to me like little children. You put your faith in me like a little child. Unless you come to me like a child, I'm telling you, you're not going to inherit eternal life." How does he avenge his name toward his enemies? By putting in the hearts of children and babies the awe that he designed all of us to walk in. Then you can really see in verses 3 and 4 what happens when majesty takes root in the heart. I want to point out two things about this text.

Look at verse 3. **"When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for him?"** Now there are several things happening in this text that I want to point out. I want to point them out because I think it's important, and I think we're losing a bit. There's a great book out now called *The Shallows*. It's basically talking about the dumbing down of our minds. This is true. I just don't think you can argue that we're dumber now than we were 50 years ago.

How many phone numbers do you know off the top of your head? Yours? Maybe your spouse's? Now especially if you're younger in here, this might sound crazy. We used to have to memorize everyone's number. You would have to memorize *everyone's* number. You would have to go, "Tell me that again." You'd have to write it down. You have stuff on your walls. You had a little flip-thing of paper next to your phone so you could pop it open and look for numbers. That's not how we do it now, but that's how it was. We don't memorize numbers anymore at all.

Do you remember maps? Okay. How about this one? Do you remember when you had to spell? Do you know who doesn't have to spell anymore? Anyone, specifically your children. "I don't have to spell. My computer just does it for me." Every once in a while, I'll trick it. Like my computer will go, "Hey, I have all the words that exist, and I don't know what you're doing here. I don't even know what you are trying here."

So I'll have to guess again. Hopefully I'll get close enough for the computer to go, "This is what you're trying to say. Oh, okay."

You have this dumbing down of culture. Because that's what's happening to us, we can't do something as simple as what David just did. So David is thinking, *When I look at the moon, when I look at the stars...* He doesn't know what we know about the moon and the stars! He doesn't know of the vastness of the universe. He doesn't know that it's ever expanding in every direction. He doesn't know what temperature things are burning and what they look like via telescope and via the pictures we have from the Hubble telescope and those things. He knows none of that.

He is simply the shepherd king who knows what it's like to be in the middle of a pasture in the dark of night and look up and see the stars and the moon and say, "Your fingers did this. You created this. Who am I that you would care for me, that you would know me, that you'd be cognizant of me in light of all of this?" That's where majesty strikes the soul of a man and creates in that man a type of gratitude that's impossible without majesty. "Who am I that you are mindful of me? Who am I that you would care about me?"

The Bible relentlessly teaches on God's awareness of who you are. All the days of your life were mapped before you would live one of them. He knows the day of your birth. He knows the day of your death. He knows how many hairs you have on your head. I know some of you are like, *Well, that's easy*. Before then. He is aware of every hair on your head. Get out of this ambiguous *us*. You. He is aware of *you*. In light of the expanse of the universe and his governing of the expanse of the universe, God is aware of, knowledgeable of, and for you. He is majestic. He is an imposing grandeur.

There is no higher court. There is no one for you to complain to about God's sovereign decrees and how he governs the universe. I'm not saying you're not free to shake your fist at him. I'm just saying it doesn't matter. You can't put God in the dock. You can't drag him into court. There's no Supreme Court that's going to hear your complaints against God and bang the gavel and go, "God is guilty!" He is majestic, which then, because he is so big, the second part of this definition is really a pretty beautiful thing.

Not only is God, in his holiness, majestic, but he is also pure and morally perfect. Now I just created a bit of a philosophical, theological train wreck. I don't know if you spotted it, but let's chat some about it. If God is pure and morally perfect, what do we do about the reality that such horrific things occur? If he is all-knowing and everywhere at once and all-knowledgeable, why doesn't he stop it? How is him not stopping it just and morally pure? I mean, that's hard, isn't it? Do we agree that's hard?

To put some framework around it, what we know in the Bible is there are times God intervenes and says, "This isn't happening. It's not happening. You're not doing this." He saves the day at the last moment,

comes through. "This isn't happening." He intervenes. Then there are times he doesn't. There are times he simply doesn't. Lauren and I were watching the news just two nights ago. The kids were down (our favorite part of the day).

We were watching the news, and some 6-year-old little girl was riding her bike, and she shot out of the alley. Some woman didn't see her coming off of the off-ramp, strikes the little 6-year-old girl, kills her. We're heartbroken for *both* of them, the family of the 6-year-old daughter and the poor woman who didn't see her. What I know biblically is God could have stopped that. God could have stopped it. He could have intervened. He could have said, "This isn't happening," and he could have stepped in and stopped it. Some of you, you've bled and you've hurt, and horrible things have happened. You've experienced loss, and God could have stopped it, couldn't he? He could have, or he is not God.

He could have stepped in and said, "I'm not letting it happen! Not today, not now. I'm intervening. I love this one. I'm not going to let it happen." We're going to talk a great deal about suffering in week three. Don't mark that as the week you skip. I'll tell you why. It's a heavy subject, but I'll tell you what. You're going to suffer, so it's best to understand how it's working in a universe where God is pure, upright, and moral, and suffering still exists. So definitely don't miss week three, or at least podcast it. Don't go, *Oh, I hate that topic. I'll skip that week.* It's a week that will pay dividends in your life for decades to come.

So how do we make sense of the tragedies that are in the world, the tragedies that are in our lives? How do you make sense of genocide, natural disasters? If we're going to say God is not only pure but he is morally perfect and he has the ability to stop all these things but for whatever reason does not stop these things...? Well, I think you have to do two things, okay? I think first you have to acknowledge we're a bit limited in scope.

So if I could make a bit of a point. There are things you do right now that you have no idea why you do them. There are parts of your life you don't want to do these things, but you continue to do these things, or you'd like to be more disciplined in this area, but you're not more. You don't even understand your own heart. What I'm saying is you can't figure *you* out, so in this moment with the suffering of the world, what you've taken is in your intellectual capacity of being unable to understand yourself, you've put on you the role and responsibility of figuring out how *God* is behaving.

You couldn't find your car keys for 30 minutes this morning. You couldn't find your car keys before you got here. You're constantly losing stuff, but you put on your shoulders, *I'm going to make sense out of evil and suffering and God's purity and moral perfection.* I'm not giving God a pass on this. I'm just saying we need to start with the reality that we're a bit handicapped. Number two, difficulty, suffering, and loss should not ever surprise us because the Bible is full of it.

God hasn't painted in the words of Scripture some alternate reality we're not experiencing. Isn't the Bible filled with famines, loss, murder, rape, incest, death, disease? It shouldn't surprise us! *Where is this coming from?* God didn't try to hide this. What we see happening in the Scriptures and one of the reasons I'm trying to constantly drive you to the Scriptures is that God is at work in the mess in ways we can't fathom.

One of the big reasons I'd love for you to read your Bible more than you do is because you'll see how messy it is. You'll look at guys who God says, "I love this guy," and you go, *This guy? I mean, this guy is a bum. He loves that guy? He extends grace to that guy, gives mercy to that guy? Maybe there is a shot for me.* Or when the day of trouble arrives, you won't be caught off guard as if that just arrived. I mean, it's also been. The world is a broken place. What we know about God is that everything he does is good and holy and perfect.

*Well, that's easy for you to say, Matt. That wasn't your 6-year-old who got run over.* No, you're right. It wasn't my 6-year-old who got run over, but I put my 3-year-old son in the back of an ambulance. Then I sat up all night long with my 3-month-old who is now 3 years old, and with a nurse, put iced-down washcloths on her body to try to lower her temperature before it affected her brain. I've ridden in the back of the ambulance myself. I've done 18 months of chemotherapy. I've had a piece of my brain cut out. So I haven't had the ultimate loss of life, but I've been in the thick of the fear of it.

So what I know in that moment is not always what God is accomplishing but that God is accomplishing something, and that it is good, just, and right. This is one of those places where if you start with you, you're going to get goofy quickly. Here's what I mean. We could probably come to an agreement that most of us in this room are not the embodiment of justice. What we tend to do is we make up our own definition of justice, more than likely borrowing from what God has revealed is just. Then we take our definition of justice, despite the fact that we're *not* just, and we take our definition, and we put it on God to gauge whether or not he is just.

What is unjust is judging the Just One on his justice. It gets really goofy. It's like a criminal judging a judge. That's not how it works. When you start with man instead of starting with God, you get a man who makes accusations against God despite his knowledge of his own ignorance and his own inability to even see how he is put together. Again, you might be an unbelievably smart cat, all right? I might just love to play chess with you and sip on bourbon, but no matter how brilliant you are, you couldn't tell me, you couldn't give me an overview of the last 100 years and explain to me how we arrived at *this*, where we are today, how our culture works, how we view education, how we view marriage. You couldn't give me the high points.

Now maybe you could give me in some domain. Maybe you could say, "When it comes to technology, here are your high-level discoveries that led to this." I read an article I think three years ago now about how many points of communication it would take to take the iPhone back 50 years and explain it to someone. Hundreds of points of communication. "There's this thing called the Internet. All of the information in the world is put somewhere. Google has it, I think. Then what you do is you have this thing you carry in your hand. It's also a phone. Through the airwaves. Yeah, it's not a hard line. It's in the air. Okay?"

"Is that dangerous?"

"Probably, but we haven't discovered that yet."

It would be impossible to explain the iPhone to somebody 50 years ago. You would need hundreds of points of communication just to explain to them what that thing is in your hand, not to mention how we got to this current view of what marriage is, how we got to this current view of sexuality, how we got to this current view of economics, how we got to this current view of government. You might be able to pick your spot how art is now perceived, but you wouldn't be able to holistically tell me, "This is how we got here," but God can.

Not only that, but he has sovereignly governed the steps of men and the progress of common grace to get us to this moment. In every sovereign decision, he has been good. He is good, and he does good. That's what the Bible says. Now let me tell you why this is such an important deal. Let me read you a couple of texts. I don't think I've done this in other services, but I'm doing it now. First Timothy 6:15 through 16 says this: **"...he who is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone has immortality, who dwells in unapproachable light, whom no one has ever seen or can see. To him be honor and eternal dominion. Amen."**

Romans 11:33 through 36: **"Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgment and how inscrutable his ways! 'For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor?' 'Or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid?' For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen."** This is our God! If we had time (we don't), you could go read Job 38 through the end of the chapter. Job has some complaints against God, and God finally just goes on a tirade, a godly, holy tirade.

**"Dress for action like a man [Job]; I will question you, and you make it known to me."** "Where were you when I created the earth? Where were you when the sun was formed? Where were you when the ocean was put in its boundaries? Surely you know! Surely you could tell me." I mean, read it. It is terrifying, but

it's this spectacular literary device of communicating to you and me via the inerrant Word of God you simply don't know what you need to know in order to judge God.

Now let me tell you why God's holiness in his power, knowledge, and presence is so important. If you don't get that this is who God is, if you don't get that... So don't go all the way to practice. Don't come. If you start over *here* and you start with behavior, no shot. But if we start back *here* and we start with, "God is holy in his power. He is majestic in his power. He is good in his power. He is pure in his power. He is pure in his knowledge. He is gracious and morally perfect in his presence." If we can start there, then when God starts making promises, it's believable.

But if we don't start *here* and all he is... You can be a strong theist and miss out on holiness, because if God is powerful and he is present and he is wise but he is not holy, then you might just doubt what he says. You might not believe what he says he is going to do and accomplish. If you can't take God at his Word, then we have no shot at getting to external moral holiness. None. It will take this understanding of God's God-ness to get us to the place where we become that holy people, that holy nation, that priesthood, that royal priesthood we'll cover the last week of this series.

It has to start here. It can't start with you. So if you're in that place today where your play is, *I need to get better at this*, I just think you're going to get exhausted. I pointed out for years this kind of cycle I noticed people were on (I was stuck in it myself for a long time) where we started this sermon talking about that doubt where we feel like we take two steps forward and one step back. We climb up this mountain only to slide back down to the bottom and then climb back up and only slide back down.

I think what ends up happening in that moment is a failure to believe what God has promised that we can have confidence in because of who we see God to be. So what I've learned that a lot of people do is the Bible is clear we are born in iniquity. That means we have a bent toward certain things. For some of you, when you get anxious, when you get stressed, when you get overwhelmed, when you get lonely, you don't run to God. You run to some iniquity.

For some of you, that's drugs and alcohol. For some of you, that's just flirting with people who aren't your spouse. For some of you, that's sex and pornography. For others of you, that's just trinkets and toys. Are you constantly medicating yourself with new pants? For some of you, that's your physical body, trying to chisel yourself up (very much a sport in Dallas). You have these things you run to. What ends up happening in the type of church culture is the mantra is we come in and we go, *I'm not going to do that anymore*. The Word of God bears weight. That's not where you should be. This is where you should be.

Our mantra is, *Okay, I'm not going to do that anymore then.* Then how well do you do? Probably pretty good for a day or two, week or two, month or two, depending on whether you're "Type A" or not. Then what happens? You get stressed. You get in a fight. You don't get the promotion. Something happens, and then you run back to that iniquity rather than to the Lord.

Now you have a tidal wave of shame because not only are you doing that thing you know is wrong, but you also made a promise to God you wouldn't do it anymore, and you failed him. What ends up happening in that moment is you run from God. Then two weeks later, three weeks later, five weeks later, six weeks later, either you start to feel the weight of your decisions, or somebody brings you back to church or to group or something like that. Then all of a sudden you hear it, and then again right back to that mantra, *I'm not going to do that anymore.*

I mean, I just described your Christian life. How exhausting is that? How exhausting is it to constantly believe your right-standing before God has everything to do with your behavior. I mean, you can get a stitch in your side, a spiritual stitch running back and forth all the days of your life and know nothing of the joy and the peace that comes in resting in a holiness that is greater than what you're capable of. I'm getting ahead of myself, so I'm going to totally leave you hanging.

Here was my hope coming into today. My hope coming into today is that we might get our eyes up and look around at the majesty of God, that we might think on the purity and moral perfection of God, and we might, like our brother David, say, "Who am I that you are mindful of me? Who am I that you would give care to me?" That in the expanse of the universe God has set his affection on you in his all-knowing, ever-present power because he is holy. Let's pray.

Holy Spirit, I just ask for your help. I just ask you would open up our eyes, that you would open up our hearts, that you would stir up in us an understanding of your majesty. I know some of us are walking in difficult situations, painful situations, very real, tangible loss, pain, frustration, anger. I just pray you would meet us there, that you are not evil for allowing these things into our lives. I pray you would grow our confidence in you because you are who you say you are, because you are holy in your power, because you are holy in your presence, and you are holy in your wisdom. I pray you would stir our hearts to know that and to believe that and to be moved by that. We love you. Help us. It's for your beautiful name, amen.

I love you guys.