

God is...

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[0:00] I want to speak over this term on God. You might say, well, you do that every week. But I want us to look at who is God and what is God. It's been on my heart for a while to preach on the nature, the character, the attributes of God.

The Westminster Shorter Catechism, one of the documents that we confess we believe as a church, says this, what is God? God is a spirit, infinite, eternal, unchangeable in his being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness and truth.

And my plan is to basically take each word of that answer and try and expound them from scripture. We're going to really look at God on God, preaching God from the word of God.

We're going to do that because all of the Bible, all of scripture is given by the inspiration of God.

And it's profitable for us. And it gives us all that we need to know concerning how to live righteously, about holiness, about correction and about proof.

All that we need for the Christian life is contained for us in the word of God. And the word of God, the whole of the Bible declares God to us.

[1:13] The word of God doesn't simply try to prove God to you. One of the first words of the Bible, in the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. It doesn't pause at that point and say, before we go any further, let me give you the qualities of God, the characteristics of God, because you don't know him.

But the word of God does reveal God to us. I've chosen a text for this morning. It's Hebrews chapter 11 and verse 6. And I think it's a good summary statement to begin our series.

It says this. It says, Without faith, it is impossible to please God. For whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.

It's a whole cluster of words put together in that verse that assume that knowing God and understanding God and seeking God is something that you want to do.

Now, this verse assumes that we as human beings have a desire within us to please God. And it's telling us, isn't it, that you cannot please God.

[2:24] It is impossible for you to please God without faith. You cannot please God without believing that he is. And that he is a rewarder.

He rewards those who seek him. The verse speaks about drawing near to God. Because that is what you were made to do. And that God is the rewarder of all those who seek him.

Now, I think we are nervous of the word rewards, aren't we? You might be sitting there and you think, well, are we to seek God for a reward? And we don't do that.

We don't seek God for any reward. But actually, the Bible says we do. That's why we need to know God. To know who he is and his character and his being and his character, his nature, his attributes.

And we are to seek God. And as we seek him, he rewards us with revealing himself to us. And so I want to ask the question this morning. Why is it that you and I should draw near to God?

[3:30] Why is it that you and I should seek God? The first reason is this. The Bible makes it clear that is what you were made for. That is what we were made for.

We were made to please God. To know God. And we were made for his pleasure. And we were made to draw near to God. To worship him and to know him.

We were made to seek him and to be diligent in searching him out and knowing him. And he has made us so that we would find our reward, our fulfillment, our happiness, our enjoyment in him.

It's the reason why you exist. It's what you were made for. You were made to know God. To please him and to draw near to him. To seek him. To find your reward and your fulfillment in him.

And the Bible makes that plain in lots of places. Not only here in this text. The word of God makes it plain to us. That we were made to know God.

[4 : 34] But it also says to us that we will not find God by our own investigation. We will not be able to figure out God by our own investigation.

Do you remember in Mark chapter 8, Jesus has done these great miracles. And he says to his disciples that famous question, who do people say that I am? And then he says to them, and who do you say that I am?

And Peter responds, doesn't he? And he says, you are the Christ, looking at the Lord Jesus. You are the Christ, you are God's King, the Son of the living God. And Jesus turns to him and says, blessed are you Simon.

Flesh and blood did not reveal this to you. But my Father who is in heaven revealed it to you. In other words, Peter, you didn't figure this out yourself.

In other words, coming to know God and coming to know the Lord Jesus is a gift of his grace. And it is a revelation, a revealing of himself. Knowing God, seeking God, is not something that you come to by logical proofs.

[5 : 42] You'll find many great theologians have tried to set out the logical proofs that prove that God exists. But Hebrews 11 is very, very clear, isn't it? It doesn't matter how many logical proofs you set before someone, you need to believe.

It is a question of faith. Faith is a response to what God has revealed about himself. So how does God reveal himself?

First of all, God reveals himself. He shows you what he's like by his created order. His created world. God reveals himself in the very nature of the world in which we live.

Isaiah 40 and verse 26 says to you, lift up your eyes and see. Who created these? Go into the night sky, look up and see.

He who brings out their host by number calls them all by name. By the greatness of his might and because he is strong in power, not one of them is missing. He created these.

[6 : 45] In other words, you go to the night sky and there is a voice that booms out of the stars when you look up. And the message of the stars in the night sky is, look who made these.

Look at the one who made them. They're all in order, not one of them is missing. And he gives them a name. The created world says there is a God who is great in might and strong in power.

Now that's a lot we learn. And that's good, isn't it? It's a start from the nature of creation. And Paul takes up this theme. And he develops it further.

He says in Acts 14 and verse 17, Yet he did not leave himself without witness. For he did good by giving you the rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, satisfying your hearts with food and gladness.

The heat wave. And London and the parched ground. And the rains came. And it was so refreshing, wasn't it? So delightful that again we had rain.

[7 : 52] We've had this wonderful, wonderful spell of weather where the sun has been shining. But everything was dry and arid. And yet the rain came. But the rain was giving you a message from God.

God says, do you look at the rain? It is a witness to the fact that I am God. God did not leave himself without a witness. He sends the rain and the seasons and the fruit.

All these things say that there is a God. A God who is great and mighty. And he's revealing something of himself in the way that the world is created and put together.

Of course it's made much more explicit in that famous verse from Romans chapter 1. For what can be known about God is plain to everyone. Because God has shown it to them.

For his invisible attributes, namely his eternal power, his divine nature, has been clearly perceived ever since the creation of the world in the things that have been made. So that they, all of us, are without excuse.

[8 : 53] What these texts are saying to us is that the first glimpse we have, or hint that we have, that there is a God, is in the nature of the world in which we live.

And a voice booms out of creation. So that every direction you look, wherever you are, the order and the majesty of the created world shouts at you, there is a God.

But when you look at the pinnacle of creation, which is the creation of human beings, men and women, boys and girls. The Bible tells us that we, you, are created in the image of God.

That in some sense, God has put a knowledge of himself inside of you. The book of Ecclesiastes says, God has set eternity in our hearts.

John Calvin, a great theologian, when he thought about this, and he thought about the way that we've been created, the nature of God, that we've been created in the image of God.

[10:00] He said that Satan is like one of those people that comes and, like a graffiti artist, and sprays over the piece of art. But the devil is like someone coming along and finding an image of God, and he sprays all over it to destroy the glory of it.

And that's what's happened to us. We are glorious, but we are glorious ruins. There's something wrong. The graffiti, the paint has been sprayed on us.

But the image of God has not been obliterated. It has not been defaced. So every single human being has a sense of God. It's in your heart.

It's wired into you. It is engraved into us because of the way that we've been made. We've been made in the image of God. And so the creation of the world is a magnificent testimony, and God has not left himself without a witness.

But you, yourself, are a statement of the nature of God. And of the way that God is. And of all that God has done. The sense of divinity is on every single one of us, which means you matter incredibly, doesn't it?

[11:10] And that you were made to know God. Because you are part of his creation. And the image of God, yes, it's been defaced. It's been covered with graffiti.

It's been damaged. The effects of sin have affected your mind. They've affected your will. They've affected your affections. But the image of God is not totally lost. Don McLeod writes, If our understanding of Paul in Romans 1 is correct, there is no such thing as an atheist.

John Calvin said, God has endued all people with some sense of the Godhead. And the result of that is that a sense of deity is inscribed unto every heart.

And that sense of deity is indelible. You can't get rid of it. We never lose it. And so that explains to us, isn't it, that the Bible describes the person who says there is no God as a fool.

The fool says in his heart there is no God. Why? Because what's the fool doing? He's suppressing the truth that he already knows.

[12:20] The agnostic person, well, they're more honest, aren't they? They say they don't know. But they're suppressing the truth too. Everywhere we look, every single human being knows that there is a God.

And that means every single human being knows that they were made to know him. Donald MacLeod, I've been reading lots of him this summer, he writes this.

He says, So children, the kids that you go to school with, this week, they know that there's a God. The neighbors on your street, they know that there's a God. The people that you work with, they know that there is a God. The Apostle Paul, when he went and preached in Athens, he didn't try to make them religious.

Do you remember? He said, I perceive that you are very religious. The evidence of their religion was all around him. In their temples, the paraphernalia of their city, all men have a sense of the Holy One.

[13:30] All men have a feeling of dependence. All have God's law written on their hearts. All know that they are answerable to God. It is not our calling as a church to instill those instincts into people.

Our responsibility is to build on that foundation, to speak the truth that they already know. that they've been made by God, for God, to know God.

I think that's an enormous help, an enormous encouragement. But it's only one side of the truth.

That's what we were made for. Because the other side of this truth is confirmed in the revelation of a book, of God's own words, that God has written down.

Here is the wonder of the glory of God, that he chooses to reveal himself in creation, yes, and in human beings, but also to reveal himself in a book. He not only speaks the word and says, okay, and pass that on to the next generation and to the next generation after that, because when that happens, we know that that gets distorted.

When I was growing up, there was a game that was called Chinese Whispers.

[14:49] I've tried to think of a more politically correct phrase. Those of you who are Chinese, I'd love to know what you called it in your culture. But do you remember that game? Let's call it Whispers, all right?

And you'd tell a message to the person at the front, and then they would pass it to the person, they'd whisper it to the person back, and then they'd whisper it, and they'd whisper it, and they'd whisper it. And at the end of the road, do you remember, there's a completely garbled message. Some kind of game. You all played it at some point, I'm sure. The transmission of words gets garbled, doesn't it? And gets altered. And so sometimes, the message from the start to the end, it came out the exact opposite from what the original purpose was.

Somebody's accent was different, and they pronounced the words. You know how it is. Nobody's quite sure what was said originally. But that isn't what happened with God's word. That isn't what happened with the Bible.

God gives us his word, and he puts it into print. And he causes it to be written down, and he watches over it from generation to generation. And so the Bible that you've got on your laps is trustworthy.

[15 : 55] Don't fall for the Islamic lie that it's somehow been corrupted. He has revealed himself in his word. But he's also revealed himself more explicitly in the Lord Jesus Christ that you might know him.

John 17 verse 3 says, this is eternal life. You want to know what eternal life is? That they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ who you've sent. John 20 verse 31.

Why was John's gospel written? It was written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Son of God, the Christ, and that by believing, you might have life in his name. And that theme is picked up in the Old Testament again, isn't it?

Jeremiah 9 verse 23. Let not the man, let not the wise man boast in his wisdom. Let not the mighty man boast in his might. Let not the rich man boast in his riches.

Let him who boasts, boasts in this, that he understands and knows me. One of the things Jeremiah is saying, this wisdom, riches, might. But more important than any of that is that you might know God.

[17 : 05] That's why you were made. Hebrews chapter, Hosea chapter 6 and verse 6. God says, I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice. It's an amazing verse. I desire the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings.

I desire that you know me, not just that you turn up on a Sunday morning. They were coming in their worship with all their burnt offerings and their sacrifices and God is saying, I want you to know me. That's what we were meant for. To know God and the glory of his word is that he's revealed himself. But he reveals himself ultimately in the Lord Jesus. 2 Corinthians 4 and verse 6.

God who said, let light shine out of the darkness. The God who said, let there be light. And there was light in the world has shone in our hearts.

To give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. That God has made us to know him and to know his glory. And he says, this is how you will come to know me.

[18 : 10] Not simply through the rain and the stars. Not simply through the written word. But what is written here as it points to the Lord Jesus. You will know me in my glory.

Do you know that's what you were made for? To know God through Jesus. John Calvin, he wrote that Calvin's Institutes are some of the most remarkable writing this world has ever known.

But the Institutes actually started as a very small book. He wrote it early on in the Reformation. And it had just six chapters in its very first edition. He was a young man.

He was 26 years of age. And he wrote it as a defense of Christians. Because in France they were being persecuted. And in his introduction, the preface to the king, it's a very powerful document.

He begins by saying that the sum of all knowledge is to know God and ourselves. And then he goes on to say, I don't know which one comes first. We can't know ourselves without knowing God.

[19 : 13] And we can't know God without also coming to know ourselves. It's very profound. He wrote a little catechism. When he was a pastor in Geneva. And his catechism began in this way.

What is the chief end? What is the most important thing about human life? And he says this, that human beings may know God by whom they were created. You see that where the short catechism got it, don't you?

That you may know God by whom you were created. We read in Hebrews 11, verse 6, that those who draw near to God need to believe that he is.

And so why should you draw near to God? Why should you study God? Because that's what you were made for. But there's a second thing. Why should you draw near to God?

You need to know him in order to worship him. You need to know him in order to worship him. The more that we know God, the more that we're drawn to worship God and to give glory to God, the English word comes from, the old English word of worth-ship.

[20 : 25] To worship God is to know the worth of him. It's to know and grasp the value, the honour, the place, the standing, the person and all that he is.

The worship of God is knowing the worth of God. And the more that we know the worth of God, the more that will breed in us an awe and reverence and adoration.

The prophet Isaiah, when he saw that vision of the glory of God, he hears in Isaiah 60, angels crying, holy, holy, holy is the Lord.

And in John's Gospel, Jesus picks that up and Jesus says, when Isaiah saw that glory, he was speaking of my glory, the glory of Christ. And Isaiah saw the angels crying out, he is holy, he is holy, he is holy.

And he cried out, woe is me. I'm done for. I'm undone. I'm a man of unclean lips and I dwell in the middle of a people of unclean lips.

[21 : 34] For my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts. And when he grasps the sense of the worthiness of God, how much God is worth, he sees his own unworthiness in the presence of God.

A similar thing happens in the book of Revelation when in Revelation 5, the apostle John hears every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea and all that is in them saying to him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honour and glory and might forever and ever.

And the four living creatures said amen and the elders fell down and worshipped. Why? Because they had a sense of the worth of God.

And that's what he's speaking of in Hebrews chapter 11 when he says draw near to God of pleasing God of seeking God. It means coming to know God and to grasp his worthiness. How much he's worth.

So that we join in the chorus of standing in front of a glorious God and saying you oh God are worthy. worthy is the Lamb to receive honour and glory and dominion and power forever and ever.

[22 : 41] Knowing God breeds worship. To know God breeds worship. In Hebrews it uses the language of drawing near to God.

If you've got your Bible open let's just have a look at this. Look at Hebrews chapter 4 and verse 16. He says to us let us with confidence draw near to the throne of grace that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in our time of need.

What an encouragement to pray. But did you notice the context? We have a great high priest who's passed through the heavens Jesus the son of God. And we don't have a high priest who's unable to sympathise with us in our weaknesses but in every respect has been tempted as we are yet is without sin.

He takes you to Christ and he says look at your high priest look at the gospel of good news you want to draw near to God draw near to him. You need to know him.

Look at chapter 7 and verse 25 it's the same phrase. Consequently he's able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him since he always lives to make intercession for us.

[23 : 53] He goes on in that passage to speak of the priesthood of Christ and all that the Lord Jesus has done that he's offered himself once and for all and drawing near to God is through the Lord Jesus.

Knowing him we know God through Jesus and it breeds our worship and adoration. Chapter 10 and verse 22 let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith our hearts having been sprinkled clean from an evil conscience our bodies having been washed with pure water the blood of the Lord Jesus has opened up to us his death has opened to us a new and a living way that we have a great high priest over the house of God.

I've been reading this book by Don Carson it's got a little essay on worship he's a Baptist sometimes we quote Baptists and he says this although there are things that can be done to enhance corporate worship that's what we're doing this morning gathering together to worship there is a profound sense in which excellent worship cannot be attended by merely pursuing excellent worship in the same way that according to Jesus you cannot find yourself until you lose yourself so you cannot find excellent corporate worship until you stop trying to find excellent corporate worship

and pursue God himself despite the protestations one sometimes wonders if we are beginning to worship worship rather than worship God sheep he says lie down when they are well fed and they are more likely to be restless when they're hungry feed my sheep Jesus commanded Peter and many sheep in Christ's church are unfed if you wish to deepen the worship of the people of God above all deepen their grasp of his ineffable majesty in his person and in all his works what is clear is that if you try to enhance worship by simply livening up the tempo updating the beat you may not be enhancing worship at all on the other hand dry as dust sermons loaded with cliches and devoid of the presence of the living God mediated by the word do little to enhance worship either what we must strive for is growing knowledge of God and delight of him not delight in worship per se but delight in God why should we study the doctrine of God why should we seek to know

God well first of all because it's what you were made for secondly because it puts vitality in our worship he's worthy of our worship but thirdly because we desire to serve him I'd hope to get them today but I hope that you will read and if you've not read it J.I. Packer's book Knowing God it's a classic it's a 20th century book it's rich powerful biblical teaching teeming with scripture and one of the most remarkable points that J.I. Packer makes in that book is that he picks up the text of Daniel chapter 11 verse 32 and he says the people who know their God will stand firm and take action or I think he is it the people who know their God will do great exploits we will not be able to serve God in the way that he is worthy of unless we know God know God in the way that he's revealed to us and Packer says this those who know

God number one have great energy for God number two have great thoughts of God number three show great boldness for God and number four have great contentment in God now children those of us who were at Holiday Bible Club we saw that in Daniel didn't we that Daniel was a man who knew his God so he goes as a 13 14 year old man and he's taken off to Babylon and he knows God and yet he's strong he stands firm in the classroom and he comes out the other end remember on day one not simply smarter than the others but he comes out at the end of Daniel chapter 1 having stood for God escaping from Nebuchadnezzar full of the spirit of God and the grace of God and in this Babylonian empire hundreds of miles from home these men stand and they stand in the public square and when the population is commanded to worship in a way like everyone else does but it's not appropriate for those as followers of the living God to worship they refuse and they will not fall down they stand up and when the persecution invades the privacy of their own home it moves from the public square into the private home and they're told they can't pray

[28:47] Daniel still goes home doesn't he in private and he prays and when they stand in front of the fiery furnace they stand boldly looking at the king and they say well if our God saves us he saves us but if he doesn't we want you to know oh king that we will not bow down to your image and where do they go they go into the fiery furnace they're thrown in there but who is with them one like the son of man who was in the fiery furnace with them it's the Lord Jesus and when Daniel goes into the lion's den because he kept praying in his own home God sends an angel and so Daniel was able to serve God in his generation for the best part of 70 years because he knew his God and in our generation in which religion is attacked in the public square and persecuted in the public square we need to know God if we're going to serve him and what happens if it moves from public to private well we need to know God because at that point those who know God will be able to stand because if you don't know God you will not stand on that day let me move really quickly to my fourth and final point we need to worship

God we need to know God not only because that's what we were made for it's part of the very fabric of the way we are not only because we desire to worship him not only because if we are going to serve him we need to know him lastly we need to know him in order to enjoy him he who comes to God remember the verse must believe that he is that he is a rewarder of all who diligently seek him that doesn't mean that all of a sudden we do something good because we want the reward it simply means this that when we seek him it is himself that we are seeking and it is himself that we shall find and the reward is himself that we shall know him that's what the apostle Paul wanted wasn't it it's all the apostle Paul wanted do you remember to know him and the power of his resurrection it's what

God said to Abraham in Genesis God says to him I am your protector and I am your exceeding great reward and God gives nothing but himself and all the other blessings that you have in life they're simply small things in comparison to knowing him and being found in him and so this morning we need to believe that he is that God is and that he is the reward of those who diligently

seek him and my prayer across this term is that as we study the doctrine of God as he's revealed to himself in the word of God that he will awaken in our hearts that this will be a church family of diligent seekers after God may God so work it let's pray may