

Not At All Like Me (Overwhelmed By a Mighty God Part 6)

The past few Sundays we've been talking about the fact that although we have been created in the image of God, we are in serious error if we begin to think that God is like us. Specifically, I told you that God is not like us with regard to love. His love is not based upon His emotions or feelings, His love for us is not based upon our worthiness or our response. Instead, his love is based upon his nature. **“This is love: not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.” 1 John 4:10.**

I told you that God is not like us with regard to forgiveness. Our forgiveness is often selective, given hesitatingly, reluctantly, even manipulatively. But God's forgiveness flows out of his nature as well. He is not hesitant to forgive our sins when we come to him in repentance and with faith in Jesus and his atoning sacrifice. **“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins...” 1 John 1:9.** The Lord is not like us. He is eager to forgive when we come to him and not only does he forgive our sins, he forgets them as well.

I told you that God was not like us in regard to sin. He is holy and totally without sin. We have never known life apart from sin. We were born with a sin nature. But this holy God loves us so much that he is willing to confront us with the hideousness of our sin and then provide for us that salvation that we need, the salvation that only He can provide for us.

I told you that God was not like us in regard to marking time. God is eternal. We mark time with watches and calendars but God sees all of eternity. **“With the Lord a day is like a thousand years and a thousand years are like a day.” 2 Peter 3:8.** God isn't in a hurry because he is the Sovereign Lord over time and eternity. God works in time but he is not limited by time. He's in control so you can trust him with regard to his timing in your life and in your circumstances.

God is not like us in regard to his attention span. God's attention never wavers from his creation. His attention is not diverted. His eye is upon you and upon me. The gospels tell us He sees the tiniest sparrow fall. Even the hairs on your head are numbered. You have his undivided attention.

Then last Sunday I told you that God is not like us in his view of life and death.

Our view is so tiny, so limited, often viewed from a position of fear, doubt, facing the unknown. But God's view of life and of death is one of certainty and sovereignty. Jesus declared, **"I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies."** **John 11:25.** I shared with you Sunday that because of Christ and his resurrection, we have been liberated from death's fearful and final grip. Death no longer has the final word in the life of a believer. Instead, it is Christ's voice we hear declaring that "...neither death nor life... nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord," Romans 8:38-39. Paraphrasing a line from the story I read last Sunday: "A little bit of death can't harm folks like us."

God is not at all like us. You recall the Scriptures I've referenced these past couple of Sundays. **"For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,' declares the Lord. 'As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.'"** **Isaiah 55:8-9**

"God is not a man that he should lie, nor a son of man that he should change his mind." **Numbers 23:19**

"These things you have done and I kept silent; you thought I was altogether like you." **Psalms 50:21**

You may recall that this thought about God not being like us actually came out of the messages I shared about being overwhelmed by a Mighty God. I began this series of messages talking about the experience of Ezekiel in the Old Testament. The prophet had this incredible vision of the glory of God. What he heard and what he saw and what he experienced left him speechless and overwhelmed and the bible tells us he sat for seven days, silent – overwhelmed by the glory and majesty of this vision of God.

Let me encourage you today – please don't ever allow yourself to come to the place where you think you totally understand God – his ways, his purposes, his dealings with us, his plans. Please don't ever allow yourself to come to the place where you have managed to neatly fit God into all the little cubby-holes and categories you created for him. Please leave room for the mystery of God, leave room for the majesty and

transcendence of this mighty God. He has revealed himself to us in creation. He has revealed himself to us through Christ the incarnate word. He has revealed himself to us through the Bible, the written word of God. But please guard against de-constructing God and his acts among men and breaking them down into neat little formulas that are custom designed for you and your life and your needs. The God we serve is so much bigger, so much greater than what we know, than what we understand. Please don't rob him of his sovereignty and His majesty and his glory and his ultimate power and his ability to lead us as he chooses. Don't take from him his sovereignty to both afflict us and heal us, to lead us through deep valleys but also to stand us upon mountain peaks, to hasten to our defense or to delay his deliverance, to take us to green pastures but also to lead us into the wilderness, to reveal himself in unapproachable brilliance or to hide in the shadowlands where even greater faith is required. You see, he is not at all like us. He is the eternal God, the one who is God from everlasting to everlasting and his ways, his plans, his purposes are not like ours. Though we may misunderstand, though the path may seem incomprehensible to us, he is leading us in faithful ways, in paths of righteousness, for his glory and for his kingdom, as an eternal testimony to His great faithfulness.

I guess the older I get and the more experiences I have, the deeper my trust in the sovereign purposes and timing of God. I know him to be trustworthy and I am grateful and thankful to say that I remain continually overwhelmed by a mighty God.

This morning I want to just share a couple of other thoughts concerning this idea that God is not like us. There are so many things we can say along this line, but let me focus on this primary thought: **God is not like us in his choices.**

We can see that just by looking around us. God chooses some folks as his servants, as his children, that we simply would never choose. We could walk through the pages of Scripture and name them again and again. From the patriarchs to the disciples we find a mixture of saints and sinners, almost all with feet of clay and we wonder why God would choose them. To the saints at Corinth Paul wrote, "**Brothers think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the**

weak things of the world to shame the strong. He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things – and the things that are not – to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him.” 1 Corinthians 1:26-29. And it wasn't just the characters of the Bible, it includes us as well. God is not like us in his choices, after all, he chose all of us.

But it is not just his choices regarding people. It is also his choices regarding the paths in which he leads us as his people. His choices are not like ours.

We are typically looking for the easiest way, the fastest way, searching for the shortcut that gets us there with the least amount of hassle or problems. In our culture, most of the time we aren't looking for challenges, we are looking to “just get by.” “What's the least I can do and still get a passing grade in this class?” “What are the easiest classes I can take and still graduate?” Sound familiar? That's us, but God is not at all like us. **God chooses the best way, not the easy way.**

We are looking for the Cliff notes for life but there are none. There are no shortcuts in life and certainly not from God's point of view. If you have surrendered your life to Christ then you will quickly discover that God is choosing the way that is best for you but it won't be the easiest way. His way is the way of the cross. His is the way of sacrifice. His is the way of discovering ourselves by dying to ourselves and living for Christ. And the amazing thing is, although those words may sound frightening to some, at the very same time his way is the way of joy, the way of peace, the way of love, the way of completeness and fulfillment. It is not the easy way, but in every sense of the word, it is the best way.

Let me share a couple of examples of what I'm talking about from the Scripture. Turn with me to Exodus 13. This is the story of the people of God, Israel, leaving the bondage of Egypt and heading for the promised land. The Bible says, **“When Pharaoh let the people go, God did not lead them on the road through the Philistine country, though that was shorter. For God said, ‘If they face war, they might change their minds and return to Egypt.’ So God led the people around by the desert road toward the Red Sea.” Exodus 13:17-18.**

That makes sense to us, doesn't it? But you know what? I doubt it made sense to the Israelites. “Why are we going this way? This isn't the way to the promised land.

What in the world does Moses think he's doing, dragging us out into the desert. And how will we get across the Red Sea? I don't think he knows what he's doing! Why doesn't he stop to ask directions?"

God knew where he was taking them, because God knew the plans he had for them. He knew the times they were going to struggle and stumble. He knew the challenges ahead so he led them in the way that was best for all concerned, but it wasn't the easy way.

Sometimes he leads us in ways and in paths that don't make much sense to us. There is a direct route, we prayed and asked God for that job, for that friend, for that house, for that raise, and instead of moving from point A to point B, he took us the long way around to point J, K, L and M before bringing us back to B. Why? Because he knew what we would learn on the journey. He knew the road between A and B, although it was shorter, faster, quicker, easier, it was not the best. It would cause us to turn around and go back, it would take us to defeat. We weren't strong enough or experienced enough to handle point B without going through the desert of point Q. God's ways and his plans and his choices are not at all like ours.

Look with me at Judges 3. The bible says, **"These are the nations the Lord left to test all those Israelites who had not experienced any of the wars in Canaan (he did this only to teach warfare to the descendants of the Israelites who had not had previous battle experience)."** Judges 3:1-2. That sounds like a great plan to me. They needed training. They needed battle experience so they wouldn't be overwhelmed later on. But I doubt that it made much sense to the Israelites. "Why are we having to go through all of this? I thought God was going to lead us into a land flowing with milk and honey, not running over with giants and walled cities. Why are we being tested like this?" Because they needed to know how to fight. Because life wouldn't always be easy. Because their life and their nation wouldn't go unchallenged by the enemies of God. God could have run all the enemies out and led them in a path that avoided all those nations, but God doesn't choose the easy way, he chooses the best way – for Israel and for each of us.

Look with me at Deuteronomy 8. **"Remember how the Lord your God led you all the way in the desert these forty years, to humble you and to test you in order**

to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commands. He humbled you, causing you to hunger and then feeding you with manna, which neither you nor your fathers had known, to teach you that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord.”

Deuteronomy 8:2-3. He led them through the desert for forty years in order to humble them, to test them to know what was in their heart. He allowed them to be hungry and then fed them so they would learn a spiritual lesson.

Are we any different? Is it possible that God leads us through some desert places and wilderness places in order to humble us, to test us, to reveal to us what is in our own hearts, to bring us to a place of calling upon the Lord, of learning to trust in him and his word – to learn that obeying God’s word is more important than having food to eat. He has manna for us to eat, but we will only find it in the desert places.

Those words from Deuteronomy sound familiar to us because the gospel of Matthew tells of the Holy Spirit leading Jesus into the desert where he was tempted by the devil. Jesus became hungry after fasting for 40 days and the devil tempted him to turn stones into bread. Jesus quoted this passage from Deuteronomy. We don’t live by bread alone. We don’t rely upon the stuff we can see and hold and eat, we rely upon God and his word and we trust in Him and his purposes.

He leads us, sometimes in the difficult ways, sometimes in the valley of the shadow of death, sometimes in the dark and silent places, but he always leads us in the best ways. You see, he is always working towards redemption with an eye toward eternity.

Sometimes we can start to wonder, just like Israel no doubt wondered, just where in the world are we headed? Does God really care about me and where I’m going? I’m not sure he is leading me in the best path. This is so hard, so difficult. I’m hurting, tired, alone. Am I still on the right path? If I’m in the desert, in the wilderness, then where is God? Why is he leading me on this path through the wilderness, with these nations coming against me, with the devil tempting me, with me hungry and wanting bread. Why? Is there any good reason or eternal purpose? It’s frustrating when we don’t understand his choices for our lives.

Think about Job for a moment. God didn’t choose an easy path for Job.

Everything was taken from him. Only God and the devil understood what was going on. Job was left in the dark, wondering why was this happening to him, a righteous man, a blameless man. Was there any reason? We are allowed to hear heaven's conversation between Satan and God so we can see from the story-teller's viewpoint but Job couldn't. Job never was told why it all happened, why God made the choices he did.

Was there some eternal purpose and reason? We know there was. The testimony was given in the end, that Job's path was certainly not an easy path, but it was the best path, the right path, the path that brought him to a new and glorious revelation and understanding of God. Job said, **"Surely I spoke of things I did not understand, things too wonderful for me to know...My ears had heard of you but now my eyes have seen you."** Job 42:3-4. Job's story left for us a testimony and a witness that has brought hope and encouragement and renewed trust in God and his sovereign plans throughout the generations. God's choices are not like ours. He doesn't choose the easy way, but he always chooses the best way. Believe it!

I've quoted from Jim McGuiggan's book twice now. Allow me to quote from it one more time. Speaking of Job and of others who have found themselves in the desert rather than on the easy path, suffering without knowing the conversations that were held in heaven where God bragged about us and our steadfast trust in him, he writes, "What would lead God to stand by and watch such suffering? If there isn't something of infinite importance going on, if there isn't something of profound, even eternal, significance going on in and through all this, is there not a good reason to protest against heaven? God stands by because we have a need greater than unbroken happiness, greater than unending health and prosperity – we need redemption! We may smile and dismiss this as nothing, but God won't. We may rage and say that happiness at the social and physical level is all that matters, that come what may the body should be catered to. But God won't accept that. Listen, it's never our body that's under attack; it's our life before God. In the war against sin and death, in the process of fulfilling his overarching and loving purpose for the whole of humanity, God reserves the right to express his steadfast love as he sees fit even if it means pain for his children. Understandably we don't like to hear this when suffering comes

thundering at our door....”

I know some would take exception to that statement. “God wouldn’t ever inflict pain upon his children.” Sure he would. He never would without purpose. He never would without a profound reason. Lamentations says he wouldn’t do it willingly, not without cause but he would. You would. You did when you took your child to the doctor and held her down while he gave her a shot or while he sewed up that cut in her scalp or while he set that broken wrist. You wouldn’t do it willingly, not without a very good reason. God’s got a very good reason for the choices he makes. They aren’t like our choices because he doesn’t choose the easiest way, he chooses the best way for us.

McGuiggan continues, “The book of Job stands as a lasting witness that God can’t always be depended on to act as we’d like him to act.” (Again, his ways are above our ways – his thoughts are above our thoughts. He is altogether not like us.) “And in our better moments we don’t want him to be a heavenly sweetheart. We want him to wage war, however he sees fit, against all the wickedness within us and around us, and if that means we share the pain of this world that is condemned and in need of rescue, we’ll take it on. We’ve all met people who blaze with glory even in their trials. They are burning bushes for God; they burn but they’re not consumed. You know the kind I mean. God shows them suffering [the cross they will bear] and asks them to bear it. They walk around it, look it up and down, check it out thoroughly, noting the sharpness and bitterness of it, fully aware of the hurt and loss that it is. ‘Sure,’ they say to him. ‘Sure, I’ll take that on if you want me to.’ And he who is no heavenly sweetheart glows with admiration and takes note of it all.” – Jim McGuiggan in *Celebrating the Wrath of God*

God is not like us because his interest in us is greater than our interest in ourselves. He sees what can be, what will be, what should be, and to bring that forth in our lives, he chooses the best way but not the easiest way. He may choose a way of challenge, a way of battle, a way of difficulty, a way that has seasons of suffering, but there is an ultimate reason, a redeeming purpose, as McGuiggan said, there is something of “infinite importance... something of profound, even eternal, significance going on in and through all this.”

How many of you have been going through something and wondering what you are doing out in the wilderness? Wondering why God has made the choices he's made in your life. Wondering if there is any reason or purpose to all of this. Don't be discouraged. God doesn't choose the easy way, but he chooses the best way. He is moving you towards redemption. Your stand for God, your determination to remain faithful to the Lord is frustrating the devil and he is losing the wager today. You are one of those burning bushes that continues to be ablaze with his glory. Heaven is applauding your stand. The saints and angels are rejoicing because of your faithfulness. God takes note of it all and like Job, you will experience his provision and most of all you will bask in his presence and know him as never before. His choices are not like our choices, but his choices are always best. Trust him!