

No One Like Our God: A Heart Enlivened by God's Greatness
1 Samuel 7:18-29

"For there is none like you, and there is no God besides you..."

Introduction: *Indifference was the name of the game.* In my formative years of high school through college, there was a show that exemplified a trend and disturbing reality of people today. Though one of the funniest and most successful shows of all time, it was a show about insignificant, petty things that *normalized* indifference toward big, meaningful things, such as *marriage, family, religion, service, and social concern* in favor for a fixation on life's daily minutia. Now, it absolutely found the funny in the absurdity of the nominal, but *Seinfeld* made it fashionable to NOT care about significant things, to treat them with a big, "meh". In some ways, *Seinfeld* revealed what many people believe today, that it is cooler NOT to care about meaningful things and get worked up over minor things that matter little.

In his book "*Overcoming Apathy*" Uche Anizor wrestled with the deep seated apathy that exists in our hearts, seeking to unpack the reason why we have a hard time being consistently **zealous or passionate** about the things of the Lord, and why we are not as captivated as we should over the biggest and greatest things in the universe:

*"Some things evoke passion in us, while other things induce yawns. The **paradox of apathy** is that we are captivated by the things we don't really care about and lukewarm to the things that, in our **heart of hearts**, mean the most to us. We don't act on what we should act on, but we are awakened to things we should probably ignore.*

*Thus, **busyness and activity** are not necessarily the **antonyms of apathy**. What one writer says about sloth is true of apathy; 'It easily attaches to our hectic and overburdened schedules. We appear to be anything **but** slothful (read: apathetic", yet that is exactly what we are, **as we do more and care less, and feel pressured to do still more.***

*It is NOT care-less; it is **care-adrift, care-misplaced...our culture is a breeding ground for chronic apathy due to the proliferation of distractions available to us.** We are regularly invited to care, just not too much or about too important of a matter. In fact, our busyness may serve only to exacerbate our disengagement from meaning and to keep our spirits in a state of lethargy."*¹

Think about this in your own heart, since this is not a problem for someone else but for each of us this morning. Apathy dulls us to the truth and reality of who God is, the person and work of Jesus Christ, who we are and what we are saved from, and what we are called to do. We are tired, stretched thin, distracted, and longing for something to stir our hearts, so we look for the next movie to come out, or our sports team to win, or our kids to accomplish something great, but none of these is lasting. Apathy is not a new issue, but it has certainly found many participants in our world and church today. Fewer and fewer young people are considering a life in vocational ministry, church participation is on the decline, and overall happiness is falling off a cliff. There is a reason why Paul said in **Romans 12:11** "*Do not be slothful in zeal (eagerness, diligence), be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord.*"

This is not a sermon to guilt you into trying harder or doing more, or to drum up some fervor or passion that is NOT there. But it is a sermon to consider the zeal of our own heart. Zeal does not need to show

¹ Uche Anizor, "*Overcoming Apathy: Gospel Hope for those who struggle to care.*" P. 23-24

itself in the grandiose, but is rooted in the seemingly mundane: *committing to going to bed on time so that we aren't ruled by tiredness each morning, or committing to being with God's people every Sunday, or working hard at knowing God from His Word, or serving when we think we have no time, or dedicating ourselves to praying thoughtfully, preparedly, and with a plan.* On this last point is where we will take our cue from **David** as he sought the Lord in **thanksgiving, praise, and appeal** after receiving the news of the covenant pertaining to his house and kingdom to come. In this prayer he engaged *humbly before the greatness of God with the anticipation that God would deliver on what He promised.* This is the foundation for our hearts engagement in the most important things in the world, putting the trivial in their place.

The Humble Prayer of Thanksgiving (18-21)

*Then King David went in and sat before the Lord and said, "**Who am I, O Lord God, and what is my house, that you have brought me thus far?**" 19 And yet this was a **small thing in your eyes, O Lord God.** You have spoken also of your servant's house for a great while to come, and this is instruction for mankind, O Lord God! 20 **And what more can David say to you?** For you know your servant, O Lord God! 21 Because of your promise, **and according to your own heart,** you have brought about all this greatness, to make your servant know it.*

Thanksgiving is a well-accepted practice. So much so we dedicate a whole day of eating before we jump online to start shopping for deals to get more stuff we want. But there is true power in giving thanks. It is difficult to stay **discontent** when we are quick to thank God for His blessings. It's challenging to stay down or depressed when one reviews all the ways God has delivered. And it is a clear antidote to **apathy** and the **pathway to worship** when we take stock in what God has already accomplished in our lives and what He promises to continue to do. Upon receiving this monumental news of the Davidic Covenant, David's first response was go **before the Lord**, which meant he most likely left his beautiful, cedar paneled house and sat in the tent that housed the Ark of the Covenant. David knew that in God's presence, there is fullness of joy (Psalm 16:11) and His right hand, pleasures forever. So He went into the tent to offer thanksgiving to His God. It is here that David truly found humility.

- **Humble thanksgiving recognizes our own frailty**

We can far too quickly take credit for our successes and shift blame for our losses. The parent whose child follows the Lord can pat themselves on the back while the one whose child walks away whips there's. When things work out in our favor we quickly congratulate ourselves but when the loss comes we are willing to point the finger at anyone and everyone for the reason we failed. The reality is, in positive or negative outcomes, we must remember who we really are.

"Who am I, O Lord God, and what is my house, that you have brought me thus far?"

If there was a mantra to adopt or a motto to embrace, this one would be particularly profound. Far from boasting in his newfound position of an eternal kingdom with a kingly line to boot, David did run around puffed up but sat in understanding that **he actually had little to do with it.** Yes, he walked faithfully and lived obediently, but he was highly self-aware of his own frailty. It was similar to Isaiah's response as he saw a vision of the glory and holiness of the Lord, could only utter: ***Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts!"*** (Isaiah 6:5) **Humility is sourced in a proper view of ourselves in light of God's glory and holiness.** When we see ourselves this way, the step to thanking God for everything is not a long walk. We can thank Him for the good and the hard, the comfortable times and the unrelenting, the time

He delivers and the time He causes us to wait. When we can say, “**who am I?**”, we truly can humble ourselves before His mighty hand.

Humble thanksgiving recognizes God’s saving purposes

Verse 19 is a bit challenging to translate. At the end of the verse, the Hebrew text literally says, “*this is the torah of man*”, which narrowly means “*law*”, but more broadly means *direction, instruction, teaching, rule or instruction*. What David seems to be saying here is that compared to **God’s saving purposes for the entire human race/mankind, the promise to David and His house seemed relatively small**. Even though the Davidic Covenant was one to rule them all, and by which the New Covenant would come, David had a *small part in the entirety of God’s plan*. He was grateful for it, but knew it was not truly about him. It was the sentiment of song sung by the sons of Korah:

Psalm 84:10 “*For a day in your courts is better than a thousand elsewhere. I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than dwell in the tents of wickedness*”

I spent a few days back in Atlanta with the Encompass Missions Board, which is our partnering missions sending agency, and was reminded once again of **God’s heart for the lost, the least reached, and our part in His plan**. We cannot do everything, nor were we called to do so. But we are absolutely called to have **zeal** for seeing the lost come to Christ and for those who have never heard the gospel to have that opportunity. We have a role as a church corporately and Christian’s individually to join other believer’s on the mission of **making disciples of all nations**, which absolutely entails *sacrifice, clarifying distractions with the truth, and making convictional decisions concerning evangelism, discipleship, and missions*.

Are we thankful not only for the salvation that God has brought to us, but also that we get to play a part of His redemptive plan, as Ambassadors of Christ who are commissioned to plead, urge, and beg people to be reconciled with Christ? (2 Cor. 5:20)

Humble thanksgiving recognizes our inability to fully express our gratitude

David was obviously a word smith, a writer of poetic phrases who had a mastery of language. His psalms and songs are eternal, standing the test of time. He knew rhythm, meter, and variety. But even David’s words failed him when he considered the glory of God and his own status. “**And what more can David say to you?**” Now, David was also a leader and teacher, so though he was undone and had no more words, he went on to say many more! But there are several points to be made here **1)** When we consider God’s greatness, it should leave us speechless. Think about being in the presence of a famous person or someone you’ve always wanted to meet, and sometimes you simply have nothing to say; **2)** David simply **reflected back to God Who God already was**. In other words, one of the best prayers to pray when we are not sure what to pray, is praying **God’s Word back to Him, reflecting on His promises and goodness**. If you have never done this in your personal devotions or time with the Lord, it is a powerful practice that fills your mind and heart with truth, filling the gaps that when our ability to craft words leaves us.

The Awe-filled Prayer of Praise (22-24)

*Therefore, you are great, O Lord God. For there is none like you, and there is no God besides you, according to all that **we have heard with our ears**. 23 And **who is like your people Israel**, the one nation on earth whom God went to redeem to be his people, making himself a name and **doing for them great and awesome things by driving out before your people**, whom you redeemed for yourself from Egypt, a*

nation and its gods? 24 And you established for yourself your people Israel to be your people forever. And you, O Lord, became their God.

God's Greatness Beheld:

Sometimes when we skip the step of beholding the greatness of God, we indirectly or unintentionally lower Him in our minds. One of the BEST ways to pray, if you are struggling with the practice, is simply to reflect BACK to Him Who He already is. Notice that David did this, by pointing out His **greatness**, His **exclusiveness**, and His **preeminence**. This is seen all through Scripture as writers tried to summarize or give language to God's greatness. What we THINK about God should come out in our words through prayer, and a lack of prayer this way signals we don't think less of God, but don't think about Him at all.

Exodus 15:11 – “Who is like you, O LORD, among the gods? Who is like you, majestic in holiness, awesome in glorious deeds, doing wonders?”

1 Kings 8:23 “Then Solomon stood before the altar of the Lord in the presence of all the assembly of Israel and spread out his hands toward heaven, 23 and said, “O Lord, God of Israel, **there is no God like you, in heaven above or on earth beneath**, keeping covenant and showing steadfast love to your servants who walk before you with all their heart;”

Jeremiah 10:6-7 “**There is none like you, O LORD; you are great, and your name is great in might.**
⁷ Who would not fear you, O King of the nations? For this is your due; for among all the wise ones of the nations and in all their kingdoms there is none like you.

God's Greatness Sourced:

“according to all that we have heard with our ears”. There are two sources where we come to behold the beauty of the Lord: His Word and what we've experienced through His Sovereign hand. Now the **first** is of utmost importance, but the second should be evidence of knowledge lived out. We cannot look *outside* of Scripture to understand the awesome nature of God, since the world is opposed to His glory and will give a skewed view. So we grow in our understanding of His character by studying the whole of Scripture, including the hard parts and the Old Testament. The **second** is that we can look back at His faithfulness in the past and praise Him for His care and the fact that He has done above and beyond what we could even ask or think (Eph. 3:20). This helps us connect His greatness with real life, and often it's hard to see or feel in the present, so we understand it by looking **back** at the overall story of His faithfulness in our lives.

God's Greatness Enjoyed:

Not only could David see the greatness of God, but he saw the greatness of Israel, God's people, through the lens of God's grace. Remember, God chose Israel because of His own set of gracious standards that did not jive with conventional wisdom (see Deuteronomy 7). Israel was **singled out** to be significantly blessed and to be a blessing to all. Israel, through no greatness of their own will be an eternal people, a nation that God promised peace and through Whom God made a name for Himself. As David reflected on this, the fact that HE was a part of this great nation, he was able to **praise God and reflect back His greatness**.

You may say: *easy for David to pray this way!* He was given all kinds of gracious, monumental, eternal promises that would flow through his life and future family, an eternal covenant given that would never be broken! Sure, give that to me, and I'll spend my time praising God. Give me assurance of the future and comfort in the present, and I'll give God a shout out! But the reality is this, that all who have

received the grace of God in *forgiveness, restoration, and reconciliation through His Son Jesus Christ, our King and Lord!* God HAS done the miraculous in our lives and *continues to do so*. We have to look no further than our own testimony to see and savor the greatness of God, knowing that NO OTHER God can save, ALL other gods of the world offer and cannot deliver, and that God blesses us in the present and future. **Where does zeal with knowledge come from? *An ongoing and growing awareness of our frailty yet glory of the saving purposes of God that we enjoy in our own life.***

The Fervent Prayer of Appeal (25-29)

And now, O Lord God, confirm forever the word that you have spoken concerning your servant and concerning his house, and do as you have spoken. 26 And your name will be magnified forever, saying, 'The Lord of hosts is God over Israel,' and the house of your servant David will be established before you. 27 For you, O Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, have made this revelation to your servant, saying, 'I will build you a house.' Therefore, your servant has found courage to pray this prayer to you. 28 And now, O Lord God, you are God, and your words are true, and you have promised this good thing to your servant. 29 Now therefore may it please you to bless the house of your servant, so that it may continue forever before you. For you, O Lord God, have spoken, and with your blessing shall the house of your servant be blessed forever."

Praying According to God's Promises

When we request or ask God for things, we often ask for things we *want*, which is good: *"You do not have, because you do not ask. 3 You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions"* (James 4:2b-3). But often our prayers reflect **our will**, not God's. Notice how David framed His prayer of asking: *"confirm forever the word that you have spoken...do as you have spoken"*. The basis for his appeal was what God had already promised to do! This is not redundant but rather begins to align *our will with His, seeing life and the future through a proper Biblical lens*. David could pray courageously for blessing of his life and house *because* God promised blessing to his life and house!

Is this how we pray when we go before God and ask Him to do things? Do we pray for His kingdom to come and His will to be done? Or is our prayer filled with requests that make our life easier, more comfortable, or palatable? Do we know the promises of God? Do we pray like Jesus showed us, asking God for daily bread, knowing He promised to care for us (Matt. 6), and when He delivers each day, reflect back thanksgiving and praise? Or do we take this for granted, thinking that somehow we deserve it.

Praying According to God's Glory

David knew that God's glory is always at stake, so praying that God would do all that He said would ultimately bring Him glory, which is the point of life. As we close, we want to also remind ourselves that God's glory is what allows us to pray with hope **in spite of** the fact that God may keep us in a position of pain, or a time of trial, or a lingering of affliction **FOR OUR GOOD AND HIS GLORY!** When we understand that prayer is not just asking for and getting what we want, but lining up our will with His, knowing that His will is best and glorious, we can pray: **God accomplish your will in my life, family, church, and situation. Keep me in the situation as long as you need to in order to teach me all that you desire. Give me what I need and no more. Keep me in whatever tension you choose to keep me dependent on you. I will thank you and praise you if the answer is "yes" or "no". If the answer is my loved one dies, I will praise and thank you. If they recover, I will praise and thank you. But we ask that you would DO WHAT you promised to your glory, and if I never understand the particulars, I will praise you still.**

This was the heart of Paul as he understood the New Covenant message he received and the greatness of it, but also the frailty of the vessel that received it (we are merely jars of clay). But because God was accomplishing His purposes and His grace was saving more and more, Paul could also pray:

2 Corinthians 4:16-17 ***"So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. 17 For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, 18 as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.***

Our zeal for God will never be slothful when we understand who we are, the greatness of God, and the fact that God accomplishes all that He has promised, either in our lifetime or beyond, and is working IN us to prepare for our life forever with Him.