

Paradox of the Gospel // Creation I: The Creator

Review & Intro

- Practice memory passage: Psalm 34:1-3
- **What is a paradox? Why are they a normal part of our faith?**
- Last week we talked about the 4 movements of God's Big Story
 - ◆ **What are they?** (creation, fall, redemption, restoration)
 - ◆ **What do each of them involve?**
- This week and next week we'll be focusing on the first movement of the story: creation. We'll focus today on God, the Creator, and then next week we'll discuss ourselves as his creatures.
- Pray to open.

Lesson

- We could spend a long, long time talking about God as the Creator. There are a lot of paradoxical aspects to his character. **What are some things you've wondered about God before?**
- Today we're going to look at two of God's characteristics: his transcendence and his immanence.
 - ◆ This is just a fancy way of talking about how God is both infinite and beyond us (transcendence)... and yet at the same time, he is a personal God that we can know (immanence).
 - ◆ The fact that God is both transcendent and immanent sets him apart from other gods (e.g. Greek gods are personal but not infinite; the god of pantheism is infinite, but is not personal)
- Let's talk about God's transcendence.
 - ◆ Scripture has a lot to say about this topic (have students read verses)
 - **Isaiah 55:8-9** (God's ways & thoughts are higher than ours)
 - **Romans 11:33** (God's ways are "inscrutable", which leads to praise)
 - **Psalm 145:3** (God's greatness is unsearchable)
 - **Job 26:14** (all the things Job said earlier in the chapter are just scratching the surface of God's ways... a "small whisper"; reference God's response in the last several chapters of Job)
 - ◆ Because this aspect of God's being is infinitely different from us as created beings, it can be really hard to understand. This is where some of the paradoxical elements of this subject can come into play.
 - ◆ Let's look at just one specific attribute of God: he transcends time (in other words, he is not limited by time like we are).
 - **What ways are we limited by time?** (only experience the present moment; one direction of time; don't know the future, etc.)
 - **Psalm 90:1-4** (God has no "start" or "end"; he sees and knows all of time)
 - **2 Peter 3:8** (God is intimately aware of every single moment of every single day)
 - In these ways, God is outside of time... but more than that, he created time itself!

- And yet, even though this is the case, God also enters into and acts within time, intentionally (this is actually an example of his immanence, which we'll talk about in a moment)
 - ◆ These are difficult things to understand and believe sometimes, because our own experience is infinitely different as created beings (we'll talk more about this next week).
 - ◆ God's transcendence means that he does not *need* anything. He is completely content and satisfied in and of himself. He does not *need* our worship in order to be God.
 - ◆ And yet, paradoxically, he chooses to interact with us.
- Let's talk about God's immanence.
- ◆ When we talk about God's immanence, we mean that he is personal and knowable
 - ◆ God is personal = God is relational
 - **What do we usually think about when we talk about God and relationships?** (We can have a relationship with Him)
 - But actually, God doesn't need us in order for him to be relational! This is because God is a Trinity (one God, three Persons)
 - The Trinity is one of the biggest paradoxes in Christianity... how can God be Three in One?
 - We could spend a lot of time on this, but for now we'll summarize in three facts that Scripture affirms over and over:
 - ◆ **John 14:26** - God is three distinct Persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
 - ◆ **John 1:1-4; Acts 5:3-4** - Each Person is fully God.
 - ◆ **Deuteronomy 6:4-5** - There is one God.
 - If only (any) two out of the three statements were true, it would be way easier to explain. But the Bible won't let us do that: we are told that all three are true!
 - This is an example of a paradox that isn't fully explained in the Word. We can understand up to a point, and then recognize that because God is transcendent, we won't be able to understand every piece of it.
 - So God is relational in and of Himself; he doesn't need us. But he designed us to be in a relationship with him. All the way back in Genesis, we see him walking with humanity, talking with them, and sharing his presence with them.
 - This would be impossible if there wasn't a way for us to know God, so it's a good thing his immanence makes this possible!
 - ◆ God is knowable
 - **What is the starting point for us knowing God?** It is God himself! No matter what we're learning about, it is always the result of God revealing himself to us.
 - Because God is transcendent, we can't know him exhaustively (that is, every detail about him). But we can still know him, and know him truly, because he makes himself known.

- **What are some ways God reveals himself?**
 - **Romans 1:18-22** - through creation
 - **Heb 1:1** - Through his word
 - **Heb 1:2** - Through Jesus
 - We see a kind of progression here: creation reveals that there is a divine Creator, one who is all powerful. But God then makes himself known specifically to people through his word and action (choosing a people for himself, revealing his character and power), which is shown most clearly in His Son, Jesus Christ.
 - It is through Jesus that we are best able to know God, for he is the very image of God.
 - **Colossians 1:15, 19** (Jesus is the image of God, whose fullness dwelt in him)
 - **1 John 2:13** (people who know Jesus also know the Father)
 - Jesus makes it possible for us to know the Father, to be in a relationship with God, which is what we were created for.
- The fact that God is both transcendent and immanent impacts how we interact with him and how we live our lives in response. We'll have a chance to talk more about this in our small groups.

Group Discussion // Paradox of the Gospel (Creation I)

1. Practice your group's memory passage together.
2. Walk through the following discussion questions:
 - a. What did you think about the lesson? Did anything stand out, surprise, or confuse you?
 - b. How would you describe God's transcendence? His immanence? What are some examples that stuck out to you?
 - c. Why is it a good thing that God is both transcendent and immanent?
 - d. We want to live our lives in light of this truth about God, but sometimes we don't. How do you think our relationships with God might be impacted when we don't live as if he is transcendent, or immanent?
 - i. In other words, if we don't live as if we believe God's ways are higher than ours (transcendence), what might be the result?
 1. *We might not trust him as much when difficult things happen, we might struggle more to see his word as trustworthy and good, we might not treat him with the proper reverence and worship*
 2. *We can sometimes get too focused on figuring everything out or having an answer for everything*
 - ii. If we don't live as if we believe that God is personal and knowable, what might be the result?
 1. *We might not seek to know him through his word, or pray to him if we think he's unreachable*
 2. *When we experience doubts, we be discouraged from searching for answers (believing that since we can't know everything, we therefore can't know anything)*
 - e. What's one specific thing you can take from the lesson and try to apply to your life?
3. Ask for prayer requests and pray for one another.