



SERMON TITLE: God is Not Like Us

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SCRIPTURE: Selected Scriptures

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What we need most is to know God for who he truly is. How we answer the question, "Who is God?" will change our lives indelibly. The Psalmist sings, "Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised. His greatness is unsearchable!" There's a practical tension to this. If his greatness is unsearchable, then knowing him could be exhausting because there's no end to it. However, if his unending greatness is life-giving, then the journey of knowing him will always be worth it. Also, we should resist thinking about God on our own terms because distorted understandings of God can lead us down a path to ruin. God made us in his image, and we should run from the thought of making him in our image. So, what is God really like, and how do we know it? The story of Scripture reveals the answer to these questions. He's bigger than our categories of him, yet he invites us to know him through Scripture. And this story leads us straight to Jesus. In him, Scripture declares to us, "*Here is your God.*"

SERMON SUMMARY

As Christ-followers, we say we believe in God, but when asked, "What is God like?" we might hear several different answers. We tend to slant our view of God toward an attribute of God that is most important to us. But in so doing, we can end up with a distorted image of God. It's very important that we know God for who He truly is, not for who we want Him to be or think He should be. The starting point for knowing God is knowing that we will never be able to completely understand Him. God is incomprehensible—this is foundational. He's beyond anything that we can imagine or understand. However, even though we will never fully understand God, we can know Him. In Jesus, the invisible God has become visible. We can know the unknowable God through faith in Jesus Christ.

SERMON SCREENSHOTS & KEY POINTS

What is God like? How would you tell someone about God? When answering those questions, many of us tend to think of God and talk about God by emphasizing one of his attributes more than the others. "God is a loving God," you might say. Or, maybe your view of God is that, "God is a holy God—a God of wrath and judgment." Many Christians tend to "build-a-god" that fits their personality and preferences. But, when we do that, we end up with a distorted image of God. The most important question to answer when we hear the question, "What is God like?" is "What does Scripture say about what God is like?" That's what we will unpack in this new series.

In church history, when people talk/write about what God is like, it's traditionally referred to as a study about the attributes of God. A.W. Tozer defines an "attribute" of God this way: "An attribute of God is whatever God has in any way revealed as being true about himself." ("The Knowledge of the Holy") An attribute is not "part" of God—it's how God is. And, he's not more of one attribute than another. He doesn't possess "attributes" as "qualities." The attributes of God are how God has chosen to reveal himself to us.

The very first attribute of God that we need to study is this: God is incomprehensible. There are things about God that we cannot know b/c He's God for goodness' sake! Plus the fact, there are things about God that, in his infinite wisdom, he's chosen not to reveal to us. There's a paradox in all this. We are called to know a God who in some ways is unknowable. He's beyond understanding, beyond our ability to figure out, and beyond explaining. If we were to see him, he would be beyond our ability to describe. In the Bible, whenever you run into a passage where somebody see a manifestation of the glory of God they cannot understand what they're looking at—they're at a loss for words and they can't adequately describe what they're seeing.

Read Ezekiel 1:22-28 and Revelation 1:9-19. What are some of the key words they use as they attempt to describe what they are seeing? "Like," "appearance of," "as it were" Tozer again: "When we try to imagine what God is like we must of necessity use that-which-is-not-God as the raw material for our minds to work on; hence whatever we visualize God to be, he is not, for we have constructed our image out of that which He has made and what He has made is not God. If we insist upon trying to imagine Him, we end up with an idol, made not with hands but with thought; and an idol of the mind is offensive to God as an idol of the hand." What is God like? He's definitely not like us.

He's not like anything we see in this world. God is always infinitely more than our best attempts to describe Him (cf Isaiah 55:8-9, Job 11:7-8, Psalm 145:3). There's nothing simple about God—not even his name. Read Ex 3:13-14. God's name—"I am that I am" or "he is what he is" is a sentence! This is another paradox. His name is simple in its complexity and complex in its simplicity. Why this name? Because it defines who God is. It defines his essence, his being, his eternity, his immutability.

Christian, here is your God—high and lifted up—awesome in power and might—nothing in the entire universe, no created thing is like Him. No one can completely understand Him. He's unfathomable, incomprehensible, indescribable, and he is to be praised and proclaimed as the great God that HE IS!

But maybe some of you are thinking: "*Charlie*, I hear what you're saying and I can see that this image of God you've talked about in Scripture is true and right and accurate. But Charlie, that God intimidates me. That God feels distant to me. I mean, He's so far above me, unlike me. How do I relate to a God like that? That is a *great question*. Go back to *God's name* for a minute. I love how OT scholar Bruce Waltke talks about "I AM THAT I AM." Waltke says: "In its function God's name suggests his pragmatic presence. This sense of God's being can be captured in the English phrase "I am who I am for you." His simplicity shows that there is no variability in him. He is unchangeable. God is dependable; he can be counted on."

What is God like? What's Your Name? "I AM WHO I AM *FOR YOU*. HE IS WHO HE IS *FOR US*." The awesome God of Ezekiel and Revelation is *for you*. And to show you that, he came to be *with us*. (Read and think through Philippians 2:5-11 with the background of all that we've talked about in mind.) But the amazing thing is, the mind-blowing, take-your-breath away thing is—this awesome God is a personal God, a God who wants to have a relationship with us. You see, *In Jesus*—the incomprehensible God took on human flesh and became *relational*. *In Jesus*—the high and lifted up God became meek and lowly. *In Jesus*—the God who is infinitely powerful became weak and hungry. *In Jesus*—the God who is invisible became visible. *In Jesus*—the God who is indescribable became someone who we can find words for. *In Jesus*—the unknowable God became known, became *knowable*. Even though we cannot fully understand God, we can know him. It's possible to know something, but not fully understand. I understand that the curtains on the stage are black, but I don't understand how the rods and cones in my eyes send messages to my brain telling me black is black. I know it, but I don't understand it. You are invited into a relationship with an incomprehensible God. And, by faith in Jesus, you can know him even though it's not possible to fully understand him. The starting point for knowing God is knowing you'll never be able to fully understand everything there is to know about him. God is incomprehensible. But in Jesus, God has made himself known to us in a personal way—in a life-giving, sin-forgiving, shame removing way. Jesus said in John 17:3 (my personalized paraphrase): "This is eternal life, that you might know God as the only true God and through me, whom the Father has sent."

COMMUNITY GROUP QUESTIONS

KNOW IT

- God is incomprehensible. He is not like us. Read through Read Ezekiel 1:22-28 and Revelation 1:9-19
- How do Ezekiel's and John's attempts to describe the glory of God's majesty help you to have a bigger view of God? What else do you learn from these passages about the incomprehensibility of God?
- What does God's name—"I AM THAT I AM"/"YaHWeH"—tell you about what God is really like? (see Ex 3:13-14).

UNDERSTAND IT

- How can we know a God we cannot fully understand?
- How has Jesus made this God who is beyond understanding knowable? How does this picture of the incomprehensible greatness of God help us understand Philippians 2:5-11?

LIVE IT

- What difference does all this make in your daily life?
- How does the fact that God is both incomprehensible, but knowable change how you read/hear Scripture?

SHARE IT

- How can you explain to someone how you can know something and not be able to fully understand it?
- How can you explain to someone how you cannot fully understand who God is or how God works in this world, but yet you have a relationship with him?