

What is God like?

What is God like? It's an interesting question isn't it. Over the years we have seen various depictions of God in TV series and movies. Some ones I remember are **Simpsons, Monty Python, Good Omen, Bruce Almighty**. Maybe you can think of some others. But do any of these really capture aspects of who God is? At best they are often over simplifications of one part of God's character. So what is God like?

The question can be approached from 2 different directions. To explain let me tell you about a lecture I had when studying theology (which is the study of God). The lecturer started by asking the question **can we know God?** And he said Yes, a key fact about God is that he is knowable, he is describable. This then got chuckles from our lecture hall. The lecturer noticed and stopped the class and asked what was funny. It was funny because having said clearly that God was describable, at the time one of the most popular songs in churches was the song called Indescribable. Both the song and my lecturer were answering the question "What is God like?" but from different perspectives. On one hand the song said that there is nothing like God, you can't fully comprehend him, you can't fully describe him, he's just too big. It's like a 4 year old might know if they let go of a ball it will fall, but they can't comprehend quantum physics.

You see, We are limited humans and we can't fully know an infinite God. But on the other hand, my lecturer wanted us to realise that although we can't fully know God there are things that we can learn and know about God. He is not a complete mystery who doesn't reveal himself at all. He is not completely foreign to us. We can learn about God. And it's this second area that we are going to look at today. In answer to the question "**What is God Like?**" we are going to explore some of the things we CAN know about God that we find in our passage today.

So how do you get to know God? I remember a breakfast show on TV a few years ago interviewed a minister of a church about an extremist who was supposedly doing things in the name of God, claiming they had spoken to God. The interviewer sarcastically tried to contrast the calm, rational minister with the extremist and said "you don't talk to God do you?" The minister looked

politely back and said “Actually, Yes I do. I pray every day”. At which point the interviewer spluttered oh, that’s not what I meant. I meant he doesn’t talk to you and you talk back.

And that’s true for the majority of people today. We don’t have a conversation back and forth with God. But someone who did was Moses. He was able to speak to God and in our passage today the conversation that Moses has with God reveals a lot to us about what God is like.

Before looking at the specific characteristics of God that Moses discovers, I want to look at why Moses and the Israelites want to know God.

Have a look at Chapter 33:13, Moses is talking with God and says...

“If you are pleased with me, teach me your ways so I may know you and continue to find favour with you. Remember that this nation is your people.”

You see Moses wants to know God better so that he can find favour with God.

Just before the bit that we read out, the Israelites were in God’s bad books. God was angry at them for disobeying him and not pleasing him. God had said “Go up to the land I promised on oath to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, saying, I will give it to your descendants. I will send an angel before you and drive out the people there. Go up to the land flowing with milk and honey. But I will not go with you, because you are a stiff necked people and I might destroy you on the way.” God was promising to give them everything they wanted, they get a new land, their enemies defeated, a plentiful land of milk and honey but they don’t get God. They could have everything they had been grumbling about in the previous chapters they just don’t get to have God with them.

It’s an interesting thought isn’t it. Getting everything you want, just not God. I suspect quite a few people in the world today would take that deal. I mean if you could have everything you want, surely you can live without God. Well, what did the Israelites do? It says that “When the people heard these distressing words, they began to mourn.” The Israelites weren’t happy with that deal. It’s actually the starting point for this conversation between Moses and God. Moses wants to know God better so that they can please him and find favour with him so they can stay with him.

Knowing someone well makes it easier to please them. I remember when I was first dating my wife Emily, to some extent it was harder to know what to do to make her happy than it is now because I didn't know her as well. Sometimes I was lucky and got it right like when I decided to take her to a Jazz place and have **Malaysian**. Other times I got it very wrong, like when I took her to a theme park and discovered she hates heights and **scary rides**. But as I got to know her better I could please her more easily.

Moses is asking the same thing here. He wants to know God better so that he can find favour with God, so he can please God.

So what does Moses find out about God. We first see that no one can see God's face and live. For Moses to see God he has to be put in a cave to wait for God to pass by. Moses is only allowed to see God's back. This harkens back to that song I mentioned at the beginning of my talk. The idea that God is indescribable. He is not completely knowable. We are finite human beings and he is an infinite God. Moses mind would have been blown if he saw God in his fullness. Instead he gets to see God's back , it's like he's sees where's God has been and what God has done as a way to understand who God is. So what does Moses get to see when he sees God's back. We see that in the next chapter that we read out and it ends up not being a visual description, what Moses actually gets to do is to hear God describe himself. **"The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished"**

Here we seem to get two different sides to God. On one hand we see that God is compassionate, gracious, slow to anger and abounding in love and faithfulness. We have seen these characteristics as we have looked at Exodus over the past weeks. God has been compassionate by providing food for the Israelites when they were hungry, he is faithful to the promises that he made 100s of years ago to get the Israelites out of slavery and into the promised land. He gives grace because the Israelites themselves have done nothing special to deserve being saved or to get a land for themselves and he has been slow to anger as the Israelites have complained time and time again yet God keeps providing for them. And if that was the end of the description of God I

think a lot of people would be happy. It's a very attractive God with no negative side. But God doesn't stop describing himself there he goes on to say; Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished; and we have seen this side of God to. Whether punishing the Egyptians or Israel when they disobey.

What does this side show us about God? It shows us that God is just. He will not allow the guilty to go unpunished. As we were reminded last week, God takes disobedience seriously, he gets angry about our disobedience. There is punishment for those who disobey and reject God.

So how does that work? On one hand do we have a God who is compassionate loving and wants to forgive and yet on the other hand we have a God who wants to punish the guilty. How can that work? how can we reconcile these two pictures of God?

We can have these two pictures because God made a way for all the punishment to be put on to one man so that others could be forgiven. It wasn't through Moses, through the obeying of laws. The rebellion of Israel, the rebellion of every one, from then till now could only be paid by one person, God's perfect son, Jesus. He is the only person who could permanently take the punishment of sin for others, for the whole world.

Jesus dying on the **cross** at Easter meant that God could both punish the guilty and forgive. Jesus took the punishment for all the guilt in our lives, for every single person in the world. That is the true reflection of the grace and love that God displays in his character. And that promise of forgiveness is there for all of us. All we need to do is believe that God is there and that we need to be forgiven and that Jesus is the way to be forgiven. If we accept this truth, then we will get to go to the land promised to us, which is heaven.

Moses spends his time in this passage wanting to know God. What about us? We're not in the same situation as Moses, so how can we get to know God? Well, we are actually in an easier situation. We don't need to be hid in a rock cave for us to see God. Because you see Jesus is the best way to understand what God is like. Jesus said about himself

John 14:6,9 "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you really know me, you will know my Father as

well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him.” “Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father.”

So if you want to get to know God better, if you want to know more about his character, let me suggest to you, that one of the best ways to do it is to read about Jesus in the bible. Read one of the gospels - Matthew, Mark, Luke or John. Pray and Ask God for you to know him more.

The Israelites knew that having the good life - being in the promised land, without GOD was not worth it. They'd rather stay in the desert with God, than have all the good things given to them.

Here's the challenging question for us.... What about you? Would we trade all our treasures and our rewards so that we can know God? Can we see as the Israelites see, that God is worth knowing and is worth more than getting everything else that you desire.

My hope is that each one of us might want to know God, so that we can experience God's goodness, God's kindness, God's forgiveness, mercy, compassion and amazing LOVE.

If you have any questions and want help praying or reading the bible. Please come and see me after the service, or Matt or Leonie. And we would love to speak with you about how you can get to know God better.