

Introduction

Last week, I attended my great nephew's birthday, at which I asked him a question in jest, "What is the single most important truth you've learned in your 13 years?" Expecting him not to answer, I was surprised when he did, "God is." That was his reply, "God is." His insightful answer introduces us to one of the two most defining issues in human life. Referencing Revelation 4, I'm going to identify and explain what those issues are.

Does God Exist

According to verse 1, John had a vision. In that vision, verse 2 says, he saw a throne and **"One sitting on the throne."** That "One," according to verse 8, was God.

We see in the word "God" the very first issue in human life. By "first," I mean the one from which all other issues derive or flow. That issue is this. Does God exist?

This chapter and the entire Bible answer that question with a resounding "Yes, He does." That is in fact the Bible's very first revelation in Genesis 1:1. "God is there," as Francis Schaeffer said it.

And we're fools if we think otherwise. The psalmist minces no words in that regard. He declares in Psalm 14:1, **"The fool has said in his heart, 'There is no God.'"**

That verse always reminds me of the renowned 19th century evangelist Dwight L. Moody. Moody was given an envelope just before he rose to preach one night. He opened it and found a note with only one word on it, "Fool." It came from a group of skeptics who had been heckling him and trying to disrupt his services for days. Unruffled, he stepped to the pulpit and said, **"I have a rather unusual letter here. I've heard of people writing letters and forgetting to sign their names. But this person signed his name and forgot to write the letter."** He then promptly changed his sermon to Psalm 14:1 and

preached about the foolishness of believing God doesn't exist.

The message of Psalm 14:1 is simple and clear. Atheism is intellectual suicide. It's a point of view that doesn't stand up under the facts. The last part of verse 11 in Revelation 4 reveals one of those facts. It's the existence of "all things."

How do we explain that, the existence of the universe and everything in it. There are three and only three possibilities. First, something came from nothing. The matter that makes up the universe just popped into existence without any cause. Second, matter is self-existent. It has the power of being within itself. It has always existed. And third, there's a self-existent being who had the power and will to create it. He has always existed and decided to make "all things."

Which of those three is the most likely? It isn't the first. Clearly, something can't come from nothing. It isn't the second. Just as clearly, matter, because it's inorganic, not living, can't be self-existent, can't have the power of being within itself. The third is the most likely. It's the only one of the three in fact that's feasible. A living being can be self-existent and have the power and will to create the universe.

That then is the first issue in human life and its resolution. Does God exist? He most certainly does?

What Is God Like

That first issue leads us naturally to the second. What is God like? Revelation 4 tells us. The first thing it says about Him, in verse 2, is that He's sitting on a throne.

Verse 3 elaborates and gives us two details. He has the appearance of jasper and sardius stones and an emerald rainbow encircles His throne. That imagery conveys the majesty and unfathomableness of Him.

Verse 4 pictures 24 elders, with white garments and golden crowns, sitting on 24 thrones that surround God's throne. These elders may stand for a superior order of angels who represent God's people to Him.

Verse 5 depicts intense flashes of lightning and booming claps of

thunder coming from God's throne, which convey His awesomeness. It also mentions seven lamps, which are the seven Spirits of God. They may refer to the Holy Spirit.

Verse 6-7 present four living creatures around God's throne. Their forms suggest that they stand for the highest of all created beings.

Verse 6 makes clear that these creatures and everyone and everything else in the scene are separated from God's throne by a sea of glass like crystal. That separation signifies that He's utterly different than and infinitely above everyone and everything else that exists.

This may be the most awe-inspiring text in the Bible. It conveys generally what the God who exists is like. All of you know the Greek prefix *mega*, which means big or large. We talk about mega malls, mega churches, mega stars, mega box office hits, and more. There's a Greek word for worship that begins with *mega*. That suggests that we can legitimately use it to describe God. He is the mega God.

Two little children on a playground were talking about their fathers. The first asked the second, "**How big is your dad?**" To which the second replied, "**He's this big,**" stretching out her arms as high and wide as she could. The meaning was clear. He's as big as a dad can be. That's the message of Revelation 4 with regard to God. What is He like? He's BIG. How big is He? He's this big (arms as high and wide as possible), as big as a living being can be. That means He's infinite in power, presence, knowledge, love, holiness, joy, and much more.

Those then are the most defining issues in human life. Does God exist? Yes, He most certainly does. And what is He like? He's BIG. He's infinite in all qualities of competence and character.

How Big Is My God

Now, in order to love and trust God, we absolutely must personalize these issues. We do that asking and answering two questions.

First, how big is my God? That refers to our conception of Him.

30 years ago, J.B. Philips wrote a celebrated book titled *Your God Is*

Too Small. He argues in it that most Christians have a conception of Him that is beneath Him. He's right. If people communicated what they know and believe about Him to us, we'd conclude that their God is this big (index finger and thumb close together). He's too small.

That means, as a practical matter, one or both of two things. First, they see Him as *less* than He is. They don't know much of what the Bible and creation reveal about Him. And second, they see Him as *other* than He is. They think some things about Him that are simply wrong.

A Christian, for instance, told me that God is more loving in the New Testament than in the Old. But that's wrong. One of His qualities is that He's immutable, that He never differs from Himself. Because He's infinite and perfect in competence and character, He never changes for the better or for the worse. So I told her this about His love. He *has never been* more or less loving than He is now. And He *will never be* more or less loving than He is now. Why? It's because His love is mega love. It's infinite and perfect and thus, never changes. Her God, you see, was too small. And if you don't know what I just said about Him, yours is too.

That illustrates what our call is. Make sure that our God is big enough. Make sure that our conception of Him is worthy of Him. Perceive Him as He really is, not *less* or *other* than He is.

How Real Is My God

We personalize those defining issues in human life by asking and answering a second question. How real is my God?

In a book of real life prayers to God, a 9 year-old named Jonathon said one that went like this: "**Dear God: I have been wondering if you are real or not. Please tell me.**" That prayer reflects the truth about Jonathon. God wasn't vivid and real to him.

Most of us can empathize with him because we've been there ourselves, and perhaps still are. It may be that God isn't vivid and real to us – not like the material world is at least.

Think of it in these terms. You wake up in the morning and your

stomach is growling. So, you feed it the best breakfast in the world - a glass of chocolate milk and a butter soaked piece of toast. The milk and toast are vivid and real because you tasted them and they made your stomach stop growling. But is God just as vivid and real to you?

If you're a typical person, the answer is, "No, He isn't," and here's why. It's because you know how to engage the visible material world, with your five senses, and doing so impacts you in discernible ways. But you don't know how to engage the invisible spiritual God. And because you don't engage Him, you don't experience Him. And because you don't experience Him, He isn't vivid and real to you.

So, I ask you again. How real is your God? Is He as vivid and real to you as the milk and toast are? As the material world is?

Making God Big and Real

If not, He can be and here's how - by doing two things. These two things together, if we're disciples of Jesus, make God big and real to us.

The first thing we need to do, as I've explained before, is this. Build a purposeful, thorough, and objective vision of God.

All of us have a vision or conception of God. All of us perceive Him as possessing certain qualities or traits. But where did we get our vision?

For most of us, it just happened, by accident or drift. We just randomly picked it up over the years from a variety of sources: a sermon here, a Sunday school lesson there - a conversation here, a magazine or devotional article there. We didn't consider what we heard or read or give it any thought. We just accepted it and added it to our mish mash of beliefs about God.

But there's a problem with that. Randomly formed visions of God are always incomplete and, to one degree or another, inaccurate. I know a Christian, for instance, who interprets all his problems in terms of what God is trying to teach him. He doesn't grasp that suffering isn't God's preferred way of dealing with us. Randomly formed visions of God always see Him as less and other than He is. They make Him too small.

So make your vision of Him purposeful, thorough, and objective instead. One of my strongest desires as a pastor is to assist you in doing that. That's one of the reasons we have the *Awesome God* ministry in our worship services. It's also why I wrote a study titled *The First Aim*, which reveals and explains, in detail, the qualities of God. Take advantage of those resources and build a vision of God as He is – big.

The second thing we need to do make God real is to take Him into account. Having built a vision of Him, we grasp that He is the dominant reality of the universe and that we literally live, move, and exist in Him. And grasping that, we take Him into account. We direct our thoughts and actions constantly and appropriately to Him.

Think of it this way. Suppose that you go to a ball game with me on a hot day. If someone makes a great play, I comment to you about it. If I decide to get a hot dog, I ask, "Do you want one?" If I buy a program, I offer to let you look at it. And so on. Do you understand the dynamics of that? You are important and real. So, I take you into account. I direct my thoughts and actions constantly and appropriately to you.

It's the same with God. I wake up and tell him, "Good morning." I bite into a strawberry and thank Him for inventing it. I get into a quandary and ask Him what I should do. I begin to watch a movie and consider if He approves. I see a sunset and worship Him for creating it. I want to be alone with Him and withdraw from people and things to be. I come across an inspiring line in a book and read it out loud to Him. And on it goes. Do you see what I'm doing? God is important and real. So, I take Him into account. I direct my thoughts and actions constantly and appropriately to Him.

Conclusion

I'd close with a question. How big and real is your God? Build a purposeful, thorough, and objective vision of Him. Also take Him into account. If you're disciples of Jesus, He'll become this big if you do (arms stretched out) and this real (show milk and toast).