

## **INTRODUCTION**

I'd like to begin today by asking you a mathematical question. Which is greater? Is it the difference between 1 and 2? Or is it the difference between 2 and 1,000,000,000,000? The answer is this. It's the difference between 1 and 2. The difference between 1 and 2 is far greater than the difference between 2 and 1,000,000,000,000.

That's because "1" is different in kind than any other number. It is totally unique – in that it's singular. No other number is. So, when we go from 2 to 1,000,000,000,000, we go from one plural to another. Thus, the number does not change in kind. But when we go from 1 to 2, we go from singular to plural. Thus, the number does change in kind, which in turn makes the difference a radical one.

The number "1" is the only one of its kind in other words and you know what – so is God. He's the only one of His kind and that's what I'm going to preach about today. Turn to Revelation 4:1-8.

## **THE TEXT**

In my view, this is the most awe-inspiring text in the entire Bible. I just love reading it and trying to imagine what it pictures. Do that now as I recount its details to you.

God gives John a vision here and it begins in verse 1 with an open door in heaven. It's through that door that John sees what he does in the succeeding verses.

The first thing that he sees, in verse 2, is God sitting on a throne.

Verse 3 elaborates on that and gives two details. It says that God has the appearance of jasper and sardius stones. It also says that a rainbow that has the appearance of emerald encircles the throne. That imagery conveys the majesty and unfathomableness of God.

Verse 4 pictures 24 elders, with white garments and golden crowns, sitting on 24 thrones that surround God's throne. These elders probably 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. Keeping in mind that seven is the perfect number in the Bible, the seven lamps and spirits may stand for the Holy Spirit Himself.

Verse 6 presents a sea of glass like crystal before God's throne and four living creatures, full of eyes in front and behind, around that throne.

And finally, verses 7-8 go on to describe the appearance and activity of those four creatures. With regard to appearance, they look like a lion, calf, man, and eagle respectively. Commentator Henry Swete explains what that imagery means: *"The four forms suggest whatever is noblest, strongest, wisest, and swiftest in animate nature."* The creatures, in other words, stand for the highest of all created beings. With regard to activity, they praise God continually, "24-7" as we say it. They cry out without ceasing how holy and mighty He is.

## **ONE OF A KIND**

It's a spectacular scene and in verse 6, John records a detail that I'm going to focus on. Notice what the sea of glass does. It separates God from everything including the highest of living creatures. That is, in my opinion, the most significant detail in the text because of what it reveals. God is separate from literally everything else that exists.

When I say separate from, I don't mean spatially or even relationally. Spatially, we know that God fills the space around us. And relationally, we know that we can have an intimate relationship with Him.

When I say separate from, I mean in kind. He is a different kind of reality than literally anything else that exists. He is such an utterly special and unique kind of reality that nothing else is the same as Him or even the opposite of Him. Even human beings, who are made in His image, are in the end not even remotely like Him. They are less than remotely like Him. He is the only one of His kind, in other words, just like the number "1" is. Or as theologians say it, He is transcendent.

You might think of it this way. There are ultimately only two kinds of reality. There is that which is God and there is that which is not God. There is only one which is God. That one is Yahweh. There are trillions which are not God, including you, me, this building, the trees outside and so on. God is transcendent, the only one of His kind.

An analogy helps explain this. Which is greater? Is it the difference between God and Gabriel, the highest of all angels? Or is it the difference between Gabriel and the slug in your garden?

The answer, from a Biblical point of view, is clear. As magnificent as Gabriel is and as primitive as the slug is, the difference between God and Gabriel is infinitely greater than the difference between Gabriel and the slug. That's because Gabriel and the slug are of the same kind. They are finite creatures. In contrast, God is the only infinite creator.

He is transcendent in other words, the only one of His kind. He's a unique kind of reality, different than literally everything else is, including Satan. Not being very thoughtful, I used to think that the opposite of God is Satan. But I realize now how wrong I was. Satan isn't the opposite of God because God has no opposites. For something to be the opposite of Him would mean that it is the same kind of reality that He is. But nothing is the same kind of reality that He is. So, Satan isn't the opposite of God. He is the opposite of Gabriel. The difference between God and Satan is infinitely greater than the difference between Satan and the slug. That's because God is the only one of His kind.

## **HALLOW GOD**

And we need to hallow Him because He is. That's our proper response to His "one of a kind-ness" and I'm quoting Jesus in Matthew 6:9. Just as the creatures in verse 8 do, we need to hallow Him.

Most people associate the word "hallow" with Halloween and ghosts. But it has an entirely different connotation with regard to God. It means to locate Him in a separate and very special kind of reality.

A good analogy is retiring the numbers of athletes. The Yankees,

for instance, have retired Mickey Mantle's number "7". That signifies something specific. They consider him extraordinary and hold him in higher regard than they do ordinary or even good players. Consequently, they desire to locate him in a reality that is separate from those players. They do that by retiring his number and hanging it in a visible place.

That helps us grasp what it means to hallow God. We locate Him by thought and action in a separate and very special kind of reality. We uniquely respect him, that is, in a way that we respect no one or nothing else. We regard Him more highly than anyone or anything else. And because we do, we *view* and *respond to* everyone and everything else primarily in terms of Him not them.

Henry Blackaby relates a story that illustrates what I mean. A pastor friend of his divorced his wife, left his church and married a woman with whom he had been having an affair. Two years later, he asked Henry to meet with him and he did. His friend began to weep and confessed for the first time that he had sinned grievously against God, his wife, his children, and his church. He was sorry, he told Henry, and asked him to pray for him in that regard. To which Henry replied: *"I will but let me tell you how I'm going to pray. I'm going to pray that God will forgive you but also that He will deal with you in such a way that anybody who sees the sin you committed won't do the same. I'm far more concerned about restoring His name in the hearts of people than yours. I care about you, but I want you to know that I care far more about what you have done to God."*

Now, most people would have viewed and responded to that situation primarily in terms of the people involved – the pastor, his wife and children, and the church. But Henry didn't. Don't misunderstand me. He treasured the people. But he treasured God more. He thought and acted, therefore, primarily in terms of Him not them.

And that's what it means to hallow God. We locate Him by thought and action in a separate and very special kind of reality. We regard Him more highly than anyone or anything else. And because we do, we view

and respond to everyone and everything else primarily in terms of Him. I'm diagnosed with an aggressive cancer. My thought isn't that I'm going to die. It's how I can glorify God as I do. I get a promotion at work. My thought isn't the money and prestige it brings me. It's how I can use that to serve God. That's the way it is with everything. My wife leaves me, I have to file bankruptcy, I graduate from college, I meet the girl of my dreams and so on. To hallow God means to regard Him so highly that we think and act in all those things primarily in terms of Him.

## **SEE HIM AS ONE OF A KIND**

Let me ask you a personal question that you can answer to yourself. Do you truly hallow God? If you don't, you can and here's how. It's by seeing Him as He really is – one of a kind. Seeing Him as one of a kind requires two things.

First, we must study what He reveals about Himself to us. He reveals what we need to know about Him through the Bible and His world. So, we study the Bible and His world and learn what He reveals.

I studied passages like Malachi 3:6 and James 1:17, for example, and learned that God is immutable. That means that, because all of His qualities are infinite and perfect, He is incapable of change. He will, for instance, never become more loving than He is now because His love is infinite. He also will never become less loving than He is now because His love is perfect. Unlike everything else, He does not change. I know that because I studied the Bible.

Seeing God as one of a kind requires a second thing. We must give serious thought to what we learn from our study. Once we learn what He reveals about Himself to us, we ponder what that means to our world and us. I've given His immutability serious thought, for instance, and recognize what it means to us. It means that we can count on Him. Pagan religions and even Islam worship temperamental gods who regard and treat them according to their whims at the moment. But the true God, Yahweh, isn't that way. If I sin today, for example, and repent, He

will forgive me. If I sin next week and repent, He will forgive me. If I pray today, He hears me. If I pray next week, He hears me. There is total reliability in our relationship with Him.

So that's what seeing God as one of a kind requires. We must study what He reveals about Himself to us. We must then give serious thought to what we learn from our study. If we do that in a well-directed and unrelenting fashion, we'll eventually hallow Him.

I read about a party of people who hiked in the Rocky Mountains, where a little girl somehow strayed away and got lost. Her parents of course became panic stricken when they discovered she was gone and searched frantically for her. They eventually found her safe and sound.

In discussing the incident later, the father said something that was quite revealing. He said that before his daughter was lost, he was just enraptured by the breathtaking beauty of his surroundings. His mind was lost in the utter majesty of what he saw. But the moment he discovered that his daughter was gone, he didn't even notice it. He treasured her far more than he did the mountains in other words. And because he did, he thought and acted primarily in terms of her, not them.

That same thing will happen to us once we see God as the one of a kind that He really is. He and not the people and things around us will dominate the landscape of our thoughts and acts. We'll naturally and consistently view things and respond to them primarily in terms of Him.

## **CONCLUSION**

And that is our deepest need. The deepest need of human life is to hallow God. I know most people think that's a ridiculous thing to say but it isn't. The deepest need of human life is to hallow God. Nothing will go right for us until we grasp God's uniqueness and honor it in our everyday lives. We cannot have orientation and rightness in our lives until we do that. So let's do that. God is one of a kind. Let's think and act as if it's so.