

(Hebrews - Part 3): Godhead of the Eternal Son

by A.W. Tozer

The sermon explores the nature of God, focusing on the Godhead, the glory of God, and the relationship between the Father and the Son.

Duration: 31:47

Scripture: Matthew 4:19, Matthew 11:28, Mark 10:14, John 3:16, John 10:30, John 14:1, Hebrews 1:1-2

Topics: "Expositional"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher reflects on the overwhelming nature of certain biblical texts, particularly John 14:1 and John 3:16. He compares the experience of preaching on these texts to the challenge of carrying a heavy load. The preacher acknowledges that while these verses are profound and full of meaning, they can be difficult to fully comprehend and articulate. He also explores the human longing to understand what God is like and the various answers that philosophy and religion offer. Ultimately, the sermon emphasizes the importance of seeking a deeper understanding of God and recognizing our limitations in comprehending His greatness.

Transcript

I remember a great and celebrated but eccentric preacher, Sam Jones, said that when the average preacher took a text, it reminded him of an insect trying to carry a bale of cotton. And this text this morning, which comes in the natural course of things, is so overwhelming that I stagger under it. Maybe you, some of you are preachers here, certainly the Gray and Dr. Smalley and others of you here, you missionaries, and our brother here from Holland, maybe you have this experience too, that the more wonderful the text, the tougher time you have to preach on it.

And I suppose that two of the hardest verses for me ever to preach on is John 14.1, "...let not your heart be troubled." I have difficulty with that. It's just too full. It's like listening to Beethoven's Ninth Symphony.

It overwhelms you. Then another one is John 3.16. I think I've never preached on that but three times in my life that I can recall. It's just too much.

It's so big I don't know what to do with it. It crushes me. I feel better handling something that doesn't make the contrast so frightful between my ability to expound and what I have to expound.

Now we come in the natural course of things without choosing it. It's here without choice. In the book of Hebrews, you know it starts out by saying, "...God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed the heir of all things, by whom also he made the world." Now, we've dealt with that up to there, scepterally, as best we could.

Now we come to this wonderful passage, "...who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person." Or to change the construction a bit, to get a flat sentence, his Son is the brightness of God's glory and the express image of his person. That's what it says. This harmonizes with what Paul said in Colossians.

He said, "...Jesus Christ, which is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature, and that in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily." We have here, then, the Godhood of the Eternal Son. This is believed by all branches of evangelical Christians. In fact, the beautiful word, evangelical, if you like it that way, the beautiful thing about the evangelicals around the world is they are together on this.

They may have different opinions about modes of baptism or the coming of the Lord or church polity, but all evangelicals agree on the Godhood of the Eternal Son. Jesus Christ is God, that he is of one substance, was the Father begotten, not created. He is God.

This we believe in, and we must be very careful and very bold, almost if need be belligerent, in our defense of this truth. Let nobody by soft words argue you into a position where you admit that Christ is anything less than the very God of very Gods. Um verum deo vero, I believe, is the old creedal statement of it, the very God of very Gods.

We believe this. Now, it says here that this one named Jesus Christ, this one about whom the writer was writing, he is the brightness of God's glory, the Eternal God. This was a Jew writing, and he was writing the Jews, and he was talking about the one who was the God of Abraham and the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob.

He said that there was another one who had come and had been made flesh, but that that one was none other than this same God. He was not the Father, for the Father was never incarnated and never will be. But he is the Eternal Son, and he is the brightness of the Father's glory and the sunshine of the Father's faith.

I think we ought to do a little defining here when it comes to the word glory. The word glory is one of those beautiful, awful words that have been dragged down and have made to lose their meanings. This word glory, some people think of it as an aureola, a sort of shining halo, and a lot of the old artists have made the glory of Jesus Christ to be a luminous neon hoop around his head.

Whenever you see a picture of Jesus, you see a shining hoop around his head, that's the glory, they say. Well, the glory of Jesus Christ wasn't a hoop. The glory of Jesus, the glory of God, is not a yellow light shining.

What is the glory of God? I think it is very necessary that we decide on this, because we are likely to adopt in our thinking the current popular words, and we never ought to do it. Not only the preachers, not only the teachers, but everybody, everybody, the mother of ten and the man whose job it is to sweep the streets. If he is a Christian man, he ought to be a student, a philosopher, a theologian, a poet.

And there is no reason why he can't be. And we ought always to think accurately and correctly about things. Now, we may do what I do, use ninety words to say it when ten would have done, but we'll forgive that for human weakness.

But there is one thing we must never be guilty of, and that is using a theological word in a popular sense, unless you explain that that's what you're doing. So when we say the glory of God, we don't mean yellow lights and hoops, we mean that in God which excites admiration and wonder. That in God which excites admiration and causes the very seraphim to veil their faces in his sight and say, Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God of hosts.

The glory of God which gives him universal fame. The glory of God is that which wins from created beings love and worship, almost boundless, not quite, for there's nothing created that is boundless. Only God can have the word boundless applied to him with accuracy.

Everything else has boundaries, even the broad-winged seraphim before the throne, Michael the archangel who stands up for the people of God. His wing spread is tremendous, but it's measurable, so he's not boundless. Nothing is boundless.

We talk loosely about the boundless sky, and it's not boundless. You can bound it, but you can't bound the everlasting God. And so that in God which is boundless and which brings admiration and worship of all intelligent and moral beings, that which makes God famous throughout his created world, that is God's glory.

It is the character of God that is the glory of God, my brethren. It is not what people think of God, though God is not glorified until people think gloriously about him. God once dwelt in light no one could approach to, and in light there was no to approach.

But God, as I said in my last sermon before this one, that God was vocal in his, he wanted to give himself and express himself. He had to have some body that he could express himself to. And so he created the heaven and the earth and filled the heavens above with creatures and the earth beneath with men, that they might respond to that in him which is admirable.

And that response is glory. And it's that which God is that brings the glory, that is God's glory. So when we say that Jesus Christ is the brightness of God's glory, we say that Christ is the shining of all that God is.

He is the shining forth of all the wonders that are in God. He is the shining forth of all that which makes cherubim veil their faces, and cherubim cry, Holy, holy, holy. He is the shining forth of the effulgence of that in God which bluntly and simply is God.

Christ has the same relation to God as the sun rays have to the sun. You know, when the sun rays shine down from the sun, it's a part of the sun shining itself out, articulating itself to the worlds that are within range of its beams. And they can take the rays of the sun and analyze them, the scientists can, and tell you what the sun is made out of by the kind of light that is emitted by it.

Because the sun and the light of the sun are one, and the God who is the eternal Elohim, the eternal Jehovah, that God shone forth as Jesus Christ, and all that Jesus Christ gave when he shone forth, all that he expressed was simply God. And when God expressed himself, it was Christ. This, I say, is vastly important, and we must be very sure that we believe it with all our hearts.

And he is the expressed image of God's person. The word for person is a very difficult word. You know how it caused difficulty among the theologians down through the centuries? It's sometimes called substance and sometimes called essence.

Hypostasis is that which stands under that which is the real, back of that which seems to be. And Jesus Christ is the very image of that which stands back of and underneath, which can't be understood by the human mind. He is the very expressed image.

And the word expressed image here means pressed upon wax, something pressed upon wax. The incarnation was the seal, but both that which was sealed and the one who sealed both were God. He gave visible shape, Christ gave visible shape to the Deity, and so that when the invisible God became visible, he was Jesus Christ.

When the intangible God became tangible and dwelt among us, so our hands have handled of the word of life, it was Christ. When the God who could not be seen, nor heard, nor touched, nor tasted, came among us, it was Jesus Christ. Now that's what the man of God says here.

I'm not arguing for this, I'm simply trying to state the best I can what the Holy Ghost said through the man who wrote the book of Hebrews. Now the question of the ages has been, what is God like? I don't suppose there's anybody here that has had a child that has grown past three or four years of age that hasn't been asked the question, where is God, what is God like, can God see me, and all such questions, and they are serious questions asked by serious little minds. But not only the little mind of the child asks what is God like, but the philosopher asks what is God like, and the religionist and the thinker generally will want to know what kind of God is God.

And Philip in the 14th of John made the same request, and he made that request for all mankind. He said, Show us the Father and we'll be satisfied. That's what they wanted all through the centuries, and Paul said later that they had felt after God if perchance they might find him.

I had said and I repeated it, and I remember I wrote it in something, and Dr. Edmund of Wheaton College wrote me and told me he'd always believed that. I was glad to have it expressed, that this yearning after God, this presence in the universe of the living, vibrant voice of God that causes the human heart to reach out after God, yet because sin has blinded us, we don't know where to reach. Because sin has made our ears heavy, we cannot hear that voice clearly.

So we are like birds that have no tongue, but that have in them the instinct to sing. It was Keats who told of the bird, the nightingale that had lost its tongue, and because it had in it the song of the nightingale but had not the tongue of the nightingale to express it, it died of suffocation in its valley. I've always thought that was a brilliant and beautiful flight of fancy.

But a nightingale without a tongue, what with the nightingale's heart and the nightingale's love of music, died of frustration in its valley because it could not express itself. I believe that God made man in his own image, and when he made him in his own image, he put something in that man that's not satisfied. He has set eternity in their hearts, says the Old Testament.

And while we have time in our hands and time in our feet and time in our hearts and time in our lungs and kidneys and livers, and they get old and time cuts them down, in our hearts we have eternity. And one of the woes of the fallen world and of fallen men is the constant warfare between the eternity in your heart

and the time in your hands. Some of you may have known my dear good friend Brother Dr. T. J. Bach, B-A-C-H.

The name I never can pronounce, because I'm not deaf. But this dear Brother Bach, oh, he's very old now, he is the President Emeritus of TEAM, the Evangelical Mission Team. I've known him for a great many years, and knowing Brother Bach is just like coming up to a warm fire on a cold day.

You find him warm. He wrote me a letter, just a jolly friendly little letter to tell me about something he'd seen in the Alliance Witness. He added below, as a kind of a postscript, he said, It's no sin to get old, but it's awfully inconvenient.

That's what I mean, that the inconvenience of having time cut your body down while eternity can't touch the heart of you. The question now we want to ask, and the question every human heart asks, because it's got eternity in it, the question is, what is God like? Show us the Father. A man by sin can't see God, though God stood across the road from him.

You remember back in Genesis, when man had sinned, it's written, Therefore the Lord God sent him forth from the garden of Eden. And that man who was sent forth never forgot the God that had sent him forth. He never forgot that he had been in there, and it's somewhere, if there is such a thing as racial memory, I don't know whether there is or not, and I'm cautious about that expression, I know where it originated.

But if there is such a thing as racial memory, then the memory of that garden is still in the hearts of men, but they can't find God. They've never forgotten that God was, but they've only forgot what God is like. And there are many answers, three that I shall mention.

What is God like, says the beating heart of the human race, and philosophy comes along with an answer. I just happened at the moment, more or less accidentally, to be reading Emerson's Plato. Oh, Plato had something all right.

If you want to keep humble, read biography. That's all you have to do. If you get to thinking you amount to anything, read biography.

Any of you missionaries think you amount to anything? Read the life of Carey or Livingston or somebody, and you'll be humble for the rest of your life. I'm also nibbling at that journal of Whitefield, and that's a humbling thing, too. Very humbling.

When I read Plato, I am so humble that I scarcely feel like raising my head. Philosophy, however, has tried to answer the question, What is God like? Their concepts have been so many and so contradictory and so self-contradictory, that yet it's about what you could expect a blind man to do. A blind man trying to paint a portrait of somebody, he is blind and he can't see, so he feels the face of the man and then tries to paint him.

So philosophy feels the face of the universe and tries to paint God, and it can't do it. Of course, there is a presence in the philosopher, and most of them admit there is a presence in the universe somewhere. They try to explain what it is, and they say it's law, they say it's energy, they say it's mind, they say it's essential virtue.

Thomas Edison said before he died a while, he didn't live long enough to try it, but he said that he hoped to live long enough, or hoped if he did live long enough, he could invent an instrument so sensitive that it

could find God. Well, that's about what you could expect of Thomas A. Edison. He made the electric light and other gadgets, but he didn't know any more about God than the little boy who delivers your paper, because he was just another man, that's all.

So philosophy has its answer, and then of course religion has its answer. The Pharisees say God is light, and so they worship the sun and they worship light and fire, and others say that it's conscience and so much virtue, and some say it's the principle that upholds the universe, and they are getting very near. And others say he is all justice, and so they are terrified, and others say he is all love, and so they are arrogant.

Then paganism comes on with its answer, and oh, how tragically they have gone astray, the pagans. They have said it's the sun, they looked around for God and they saw the sun rising in the east and moving in a blaze of fire across the sky to the west and going down in brightness. And they said, Apollo, they said, Zeus, they named this God.

They heard the wind roaring up the sea coast and they said, the Olus. They saw the waters of the ocean churning itself into foam, and they said, Neptune. Or they saw the waving fields of yellow grain and thought of the fruitfulness and everlasting recreating of itself year after year, and they said, Sirius.

Incidentally, don't look down your nose with such Christian pride, because every time you open a box of K rations, or I mean K cereal, or K cereal or puffed wheat, you are eating cereal. And cereal was named after the goddess of the grain, Sirius. I don't believe in the old lady, but I know where the name came from, Sirius.

She was the goddess of the wheat field, and so Kellogg Company took her and called that pill of stuffing that they feed us every morning, cereal. In the 1st chapter of Romans, the man of God tells us how the pagans did. They loved sin, and they wouldn't have the thought of God in their minds.

They crowded the thought of God out, and so God turned them over to the vile affections. But they still would be religious, though turned over and deserted by God. So they invented gods for themselves.

Clear down from man to the bird, to the beast, to the creeping thing, and the very insect that hawks and whistles, was worshiped by somebody somewhere. That's religion, paganism. Always remember that the morality of a nation follows its belief about God.

The moral decline of any church begins when they begin to think purely of God, or inadequately. The moral decline of any denomination sets in when that denomination starts thinking ignobly of God. As soon as I allow myself, by a Western guitar-thumping, rockabilly, cowboy, half-converted singer, to believe that Jesus Christ is simply a pal up there in the saddle, looking down, watching me, right there I've started to backslide where I can afford at least in my spirit.

I must think nobly of God. I must think worthily of God, or at least in a worthy manner. I must put God where he belongs.

I haven't been around here long enough to find out whether you are Calvinists or Arminians, and I don't want to know. But I will say this, that we could well afford to listen for old Presbyterian forebears and old Reformed forebears that told us how awful God is and how wonderful God is, that God is sovereign and awe-inspiring. I wouldn't go along with them all the way, but I'll go along with them while they kneel in breathless adoration before the presence of the One who dwells in light that no man can approach unto.

What is God like? I'm about finished. The answer of God is, He that hath seen my Son hath seen me. Jesus answered it when he said, He that hath seen me hath seen the Father.

The Father answered it when he said, He that hath seen my Son has seen me. The brightness of his glory and the express image of his person. And so the quest of the ages is over.

The quest of the Greeks was a noble quest, the quest of the Romans after God less noble but still worthy. The quest of the heathen feeling after God brought tenderness and sympathy to the heart of the greatest apostle of them all. I can imagine missionaries when they go and find the little shrines with meat and bread in front of it, see someone kneeling down before a wooden or a stone image, I can imagine the sympathy that's in their hearts.

But the quest is over. Whoever has seen Jesus Christ has seen the Father, for what Jesus is, the Father is. God now has uttered himself to mankind.

He has drawn aside the veil forever, and whoever looks upon the Lord, Jesus looks upon all of God. Jesus is God. Jesus is God being what God is.

Jesus is God thinking God's thoughts. Jesus is God feeling the way God feels. He is God doing what God did, he is God now doing what God does.

I've been reading again the gospel of John, and I've just finished reading that part again where Jesus tells the people, I can't do a thing of myself, I do whatever the Father does. The Father does in me all that I do. So they reached down for rocks and said, listen to that blasphemy.

Strange, isn't it, that some of the modern cults say Jesus never claimed to be God? 1900 years removed from him, they say he never claimed to be God. But those who heard him talk wanted to kill him because he did claim to be God. Jesus is God, and we know now what God is like.

We know how God feels toward a fallen woman. Woman, neither do I condemn thee, go, but don't sin any more. We know how God feels toward fishermen.

Come unto me, boys, he said, you workmen, come to me, and I'll make you fishers of men. We know what God thinks of babies. He took them up in his arms and blessed them.

I suppose the frustrated theologians have wondered what was hidden back of all that. Wasn't anything hidden back of that at all, nothing, not a thing. When you pick up a baby, I was up at Fair Havens on Lake Smithco, or whatever you are up there somewhere.

There was a conference of preachers last week. I was up there preaching to them, and the women were there and they just had one baby, just one, a 13-month-old girl named Valerie Patterson. In her hair I have never seen anything redder in any place in my life.

I was just looking for anything that was red. There was nothing that was red. Of course, as soon as Valerie had her rumping over the lawn and she and I had a nice time together, why do I pick Valerie up and pat her red head? Any deep profundities there, any theological types? No, I just like babies.

And why did Jesus pick babies up and bless them? He was a human being. He was God. What is there in the universe more lovable than a baby? All sorts of them.

I'm glad they don't come all one color. I think that little Chinese-Japanese baby that runs around here is absolutely delightful, I could swallow her. I'm glad for that.

I'm glad for the different colors and the different way their eyes go. I wouldn't want them all to go straight across like mine. God made babies and loved them.

And Jesus Christ showed that he did by holding them up in his arms, patting them and blessing them and turning them loose. Of course, he turned them loose quick because they want to run. He didn't want you to hold them just a brief minute, and away they go again.

We know what God thinks about birds, because Jesus talked about birds all the time, and if you are such a businessman that you won't see a bird, you are missing an awful lot, brother. We know what God thinks of flowers, where he pointed to the flowers. We know what he thinks about food and marriage and life and suffering and death and the world to come.

We know what God thinks of everything, because Jesus Christ talked about almost everything. So when you read your New Testament and see the attitude of Jesus Christ the Lord toward all things, you'll know exactly how God feels toward all things. This man, though he had made the world, still a woman took him up in her arms and crewed him to sleep, when he whimpered in her arms.

I don't know where to look in all the vast new world for anything as beautiful, as utterly, awfully, deeply beautiful as the story of the Incarnation. God made flesh to dwell among us. We sang a while ago, O could I speak the matchless word! O could I tell the glorious forth which round my Savior shined! I'd soar and touch the heavenly strings and vie with Gabriel, while he sings in notes all most divine.

I'd sing the characters he wears, and all the forms of love he bears, exalted on his throne. In loftiest songs of sweetest praise, I would through everlasting days make all his glories known. For you older people, there is a stanza, I don't know whether we will sing it this morning or not, it runs like this, Well, the delightful day will come, when my dear Lord shall take me home, and I shall see his face.

Then with my Savior, brother, friend, a blessed eternity I'll spend, triumphant through his grace. Jesus is God, says the writer, and the world above and the world below and the poor world beneath, join to say amen and amen, Jesus is God.

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