

Attributes of God - Greatness

by William MacDonald

The study of God's attributes leads to worship, trust, service, and conformity to his image.

Duration: 34:23

Scripture: Job 26:14, Psalm 104:32, Psalm 147:4, Isaiah 6:1

Topics: "Attributes of God"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker begins by acknowledging the doubts and uncertainties that people may have about how anything good can come out of certain situations. However, he emphasizes that God is working all things together for good for those who love Him, as stated in the Bible. The speaker shares a personal story of a friend who had a vision of God and was deeply moved by it. He then references Psalm 104:32 and Isaiah 40:12-17 to illustrate the greatness and power of God, highlighting that idolatry is the ultimate insult to Him. The sermon concludes with the reminder that God is our loving Father who cares for us and that we should trust in His plans for our lives, even when we don't understand them.

Transcript

What do you think is the greatest thought that can enter the human mind? Well, it has been suggested that the contemplation of God is that thought. And I rather agree with that. The contemplation of God, the greatest thought that can enter the human mind.

I tell you, we don't realize what a privilege we have to look into the Word of God and be illuminated by the Spirit of God and gaze upon the glory of God, his greatness, his majesty, his goodness, his wisdom, and his power. And we can just be thankful that God has given us minds, that we can think about him, although we'll never exhaust the subject. And the more we do think about him, and the more we're occupied with him, the more we're changed into his likeness.

I often think of some of the great scientists and philosophers of the world, and of some of the issues they've grappled with in their lives. But many of them, tragic waste, have never grappled with the greatest issues of all. The issues of the deity, the issues of things eternal.

What an enormous prostitution of the human intellect to live and die and never spend time seriously thinking about our God. Let's think tonight for a little about the greatness of God as revealed in the Word of God. And we're going to be turning to some scriptures and reading them together.

And as we do, I think you will find that the words that we read seem to bend under the weight of the ideas that human vocabulary is utterly inadequate to capture the immensity of the greatness of God. Turn, for instance, to Job chapter 26 and verse 14. Job chapter 26 and verse 14.

Now, in the preceding verses, we've had a marvelous description of the Lord by Job. And incidentally, living back there in the dawn of human history, living perhaps before the time of Abraham, it's marvelous the vision of God that this man had. Without an Old Testament, without a New Testament, I'll tell you he had great thoughts of God.

And he's telling about some of these thoughts. As in so many places in the Old Testament, we have these marvelous theophanies, these appearances of God. He describes such an appearance there.

And then when he gets all through, he says in verse 14, Lo, these are parts of his ways, but how little a portion has heard of him, the thunder of his power, who can understand? The revised version says, Lo, these are but the outskirts of his ways, and how small a whisper is heard of him, but the thunder of his mighty deeds, who can understand? That says that after we have exhausted human language, after we have exhausted vocabulary to describe the greatness of God, all we have really dealt with are the outskirts of the subject. And the more we contemplate his power and his greatness, all we hear is a whisper of him. And if a whisper of him is so great, what would the thunder of his power ever be? Marvelous, isn't it? Have you ever seen God? You know, there are men and women who've gone through life who've had a vision of God.

I remember reading the book, incidentally, it's back there, Harold St. John by his daughter Patricia St. John, and he was, in the latter days of his life, he was lying on bed and he said to Patricia, he said, have you ever seen God? She said, no, I never have. And he said, well, I have. He said, I'll tell you about it after I've had a nap.

And he took his nap and woke up in heaven. I had a friend back east, T.B. Gilbert, and he told me that he had a vision that he saw God. He had a vision of God in Indiana, but he said, I can't talk about it.

He said, I'd break down in weeks. Job had a vision of God, and he said, it's just the outskirts. It's a whisper of his power, but the thunder of his power, who can understand? Turn over, please, to Psalm 104, verse 32.

Psalm 104, verse 32. And incidentally, if any of you have a love for literature and for finesse of expression, you'll never find it exceeded beyond what we have in these wonderful passages. Psalm 104, verse 32.

It says, he looketh upon the earth and it trembleth. He toucheth the hills and they smoke. My, that's beautiful.

How, the psalmist says, how can I express the greatness of God? How can I express the power of God? And he says, well, I'll tell you, his glance produces an earthquake, and his touch causes Vesuvius to overflow. Isn't that what it says? His glance produces, if that's the kind of a glance that Jehovah has, what a great God he is. His glance produces an earthquake and his touch causes volcanic eruptions.

But it makes us feel how utterly minute and insignificant we are. I also love Psalm 113 and verse 6. Psalm 113, verse 6. It says, he humbleth himself to behold the things that are in heaven and in the earth. My, I tell you, if I stand on my tiptoes, I can't behold the things that are in heaven, can you? God has to humble himself to behold the things that are in heaven.

You say, what is this? Well, it's words. It's words captured by the Spirit of God, seeking to convey to our human intellect. Something of the greatness of this glorious person, who bows down to behold the things that are in the heavens.

And then one more verse in the Psalms before we go on, and that's Psalm 147. And this will always be one of my favorites. Psalm 147.

It says in verse 4, he telleth the number of the stars. He calleth them all by their names. He telleth.

Telleth means what? What does it say in the New American Standard there for telleth? Anybody have another version? Counts. Counts, that's what it means. You go to the bank and you go to the teller.

What does the teller do? Well, he counts, hopefully your money. The teller counts. God counts the number of the stars.

He calls them all by their names. My, that gives me a great thought of God. I'll tell you why.

Sir James Jeans said that it's very likely that there are as many stars in the heavens as there are grains of sand on all the seashores of the world. Do you believe that? I believe that. We know there are billions of galaxies and we know there are billions of stars in every galaxy.

What do you get when you multiply billions times billions? And it's interesting to me that when God made the promise to Abraham, he used those two things in the same breath. Seed like the sand which is by the seashore and the stars in the heavens. He put them together and Sir James Jeans comes along centuries later and he says it's very likely that there are many, as many stars in the heavens as there are sands by the seashore.

Grains of sand. And God counts them all. Not only that, he calls them all by name.

What a God of infinite variety. Call them all by name. Yes, and he never repeats a name.

You know, my parents came from the north of Scotland. There were very large families in those days. And, you know, oftentimes there were families there that had two Marys in them.

I have relatives where there are big Mary and little Mary in the same family. Talk about originality. They did.

They ran out quick, didn't they? They ran out quick. But God, he calls them all by name. He's the God of the telescope, isn't he? Ah, but look back at the previous person.

He's the God of the microscope, too. It says he heals the broken in heart and binds up their wounds. Dear friends, when I see verses three and four side by side in my Bible, I know that no man ever wrote this book.

No man would ever write that. Don't you think it for a minute. That the same God who can count the stars and give a name, a separate name to each one.

He stoops very low in grace. He heals the broken hearted and binds up their wounds. What a wonderful, wonderful God he is.

You cannot study the attributes of God seriously without becoming a worshiper. And no assembly, no local fellowship can take up a consistent study of the attributes of God without noticing the results at the breaking of bread. The trouble is we've drifted away and we picture God as one of ourselves.

Our God is too small. We've made him. We brought him down as it were to our own level.

And we think about him in two familiar terms. Somebody said recently, he may be your father, but he's not your dad. Josh McDowell said that.

He may be your father, but he's not your dad. He bindeth the broken in heart. He healeth the broken in heart and bindeth up their wounds.

He telleth the number of the stars, calleth them all by his name. Doesn't it make you want to bow your knee and just pour out your heart in worship to him. Turn over to Isaiah chapter six, that lovely portion.

So familiar to all of us. Isaiah chapter six and verse one. This really thrills me.

I hope you enjoy your Bible when you read it. It says in the year that King Uzziah died, I saw also the Lord. Isaiah was one of those men that saw the Lord, had a vision of the Lord.

Said I saw the Lord sitting upon the throne high and lifted up. Here it is. And his train filled the temple.

Do you ever think about that expression? His train filled the temple. See, what does that mean? Well, supposing you picture a great cathedral and they're having a wedding in that cathedral. And the bride is going to come.

And supposing her train fills the cathedral. Now, if her train fills the cathedral, what would her wedding dress be like? What would her veil be like? What this is saying is that the train of Jehovah's glory fills the temple. And it's leaving an unanswered question for you and me.

Did his train fill? If the train of his glory fills the temple, what is the unmeasured limit of his glory? I say the words seem to bend under the weight of the ideas. And our poor little minds push against the sides of our cranium, you know, trying to take it in. But we're just like little children with our buckets down by the edge of a boundless sea.

The train of his glory fills the temple. And then over, please, to Isaiah chapter 40 verses 12 through 17. Another lovely, lovely portion setting forth the greatness of God.

God quarreling with his people that have turned to idolatry. You know, as I read my Old Testament, the ultimate insult against God is idolatry. The ultimate insult.

To take this glorious person that we've been speaking about tonight and to try to liken him to a man or a bird or a four-footed beast or a creeping thing. Really, it's a marvel he didn't wipe the race off the face of the earth, isn't it? A marvel. The long suffering of God.

We'll be thinking about that. We'll be thinking about the long suffering of God. Lord willing, during our time together.

But listen. Who hath measured the waters in the hollow of his hand and meted out heaven with the span and comprehended the dust of the earth in a measure and weighed the mountains in scales and the hills

in a balance? Who hath directed the spirit of the Lord or being his counselor hath taught him? With whom took he counsel and who instructed him and taught him in the path of judgment and taught him knowledge and showed to him the way of understanding? Behold, the nations are as a drop of a bucket and are counted as the small dust of the balance. Behold, he taketh up the aisles as a very little thing.

And Lebanon is not sufficient to burn, nor the beasts thereof sufficient for a burnt offering. All nations before him are as nothing. And they're counted to him less than nothing.

And then who has measured the waters in the hollow of his hand? The Atlantic. And the Pacific. The Arctic.

And the Antarctic. The Indian Ocean. And Lake Koronis.

And he measured them all as a hollow of a hand. Dear friends, what kind of a hand does God have? Tell me. And I never can think of a hand of God without thinking of those nail-pierced hands pierced for me on the cross of Calvary.

Can it be so? To think that I'm kept today at the hollow of his hand. And Isaiah, his glorious vision of the Lord, says, Oh, he measures the waters in the hollow of his hand, and he meets out heaven with a span. What does that mean? Well, of course, the span is the distance from the tip of my little finger to the tip of my thumb, isn't it? And he measures out the heavens with his span.

Why, I wouldn't measure very much of them, would I? The hand of God. Comprehended the dust of the earth in a measure and weighed the mountains and scales and the hills in a balance. Just think of what the scales of God are like.

They're not like our little postal scales or the butcher scales either, are they? No, he can put all the mountains and all the hills in them. But they don't add up to very much to the scales of God. Isaiah said when he was doing all of this, when it is wisdom, love and power, he was creating all things.

Whom did he call in for consultation? When it is wisdom, love and power, he was creating all things. Whom did he call in for consultation? From whom did he get advice for all to answer the question? To ask the question is to answer it. Don't be ridiculous.

God is self-sufficient. He doesn't need advice from anybody. But as we see, he has never learned anything and will never learn anything.

God, because he knows. Behold, the nations are as a drop in the bucket. My, we tremble when the great Russian bear rattles the saber.

And all the nations of the earth tremble. God, the nations of the earth are like that drop of water in the bucket. After you've emptied out the bucket and there's just that little drop left.

Not to be accounted of. God is not overawed by the nations of this world. They're counted to him as the small dust of the balance.

There's your balance in the apothecary, the drugstore and a little dust gas. No. Not very much.

Behold, he take it up the aisles. That's a very little thing. And then that lovely expression in verse 16.

Lebanon is not sufficient to burn. And this picture is a tremendous forest of Lebanon. The hills of Lebanon shimmering with the green of the cedars.

Marvelous cedar trees. And Isaiah said, look dear friends, if you took all the trees together and made one great fire. Really, it wouldn't be suitable to make an offering to this great God.

If you took all the animals in Lebanon, all the animals grazing on the hillside. You wanted to make a real fit offering for the Lord. It would really be too mean.

Really be too tiny. Would never do. Isn't that what it says? Lebanon is not sufficient to burn.

Nor the beasts thereof sufficient for a burnt offering. And yet he says to you or to me. Tonight, my son, my daughter, give me thy heart, thine heart.

The sacrifices of God are a broken and a contrite heart. Marvelous, isn't it? You wouldn't think he'd care. Nobody else but God ever would.

All nations before him are as nothing. They're counted him less than nothing. And then what's Isaiah doing? Well, by contrast, and after all, he has to describe in terms that we can understand.

I can understand nations. I can understand the oceans of the world. I can understand the forest of Lebanon and animal.

By contrast, he's just showing me the unparalleled, immeasurable greatness of God. And then perhaps just one or two more that we might look at. Nahum chapter one and verse three.

Some of the versions, some of these verses might not be the same, but Nahum. Chapter one and verse three. It says the Lord is slow to anger and great in power and will not at all acquit the wicked.

The Lord hath his way in the whirlwind and in the storm. And the clouds are the dust of his feet. I like that.

Yesterday evening, flying from San Francisco here, 40,000 feet up, 75 degrees below zero outside the plane and skimming along over the clouds. What a lovely thought, the dust of his feet. They look like the high Sierras to me.

They look like the Alps to me. They were just the dust of his feet. And that's beautiful.

He hath his way in the whirlwind and in the storm. The whirlwind and the storm have their way with us. God has his way with them.

He plants his footsteps in the sea and rides upon the storm. And then finally, in the book of Habakkuk. The book of Habakkuk in chapter three and verse four.

It says, well, I should read verse three. Habakkuk 3.3. God came from Timon. This is one of those marvelous theophanies, one of these great descriptions of God moving.

The Holy One came from Mount Perun, Selah. His glory covered the heavens and the earth was full of his praise. And his brightness was as the light.

He had horns coming out of his hand. It says, and there was the hiding of his power. And of course, the question again is, if that's the hiding of his power, what would the full revelation of his power be? Now, I

know that might be different in some other version.

That's beautiful, isn't it? There was the hiding of his power. And in these ways, the Holy Spirit of God seeks to communicate to your mind and mine. Something of the ineffable character of our God and all for a purpose.

And in our times together this week, I'd like to think with you about some of the attributes of God. Don't be afraid of the word attributes if it's new to you. Really, it's just a word that's used to mean the characteristics of God.

Words are ideas that help us to formulate a scriptural concept of God in our mind. But first of all, who is God? What is God? And up on the sheet at the back, if you can see it, we've taken the definition that came from the old Shorter Catechism. And as far as I'm concerned, it's a good definition.

It says God is a spirit. Infinite, eternal, and unchangeable in his being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth. And what that says is that in order to define God, you have to cite his attributes.

And you'll notice that that definition is filled with the, not all of them, it's filled with the attributes of God. God is a spirit. Infinite, eternal, and unchangeable in his being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth.

Would I really believe with all my heart that one of the greatest studies we can take up in the day in which we live, when God is spoken of as the man upstairs, take up a study of his attributes. And this study is designed to lead us to worship, trust, service, and conformity to his image. How can you think of the attributes of God without wanting to worship him? You ever stop to wonder why so many of our worship meetings are so dull and have such long, awkward pauses? I'll tell you, the late evening show doesn't inspire worship.

A study of the attributes of God would, it's designed to lead us to worship. The chief end of man is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever. And we never find our proper place in life any better than when we're worshipping the Lord.

To lead us to trust him. And it's a wonder we ever doubt the Lord. It's a wonder we ever worry, isn't it? Do you worry? Say, of course I worry.

If I didn't worry, there'd be precious little of it done in our house. Listen, dear friends, worry is a sin. You know that nobody, nobody will ever be delivered from worry till he's willing to get down and confess it as sin.

Worry is a sin. Someone has said worry is a sin. It doubts the wisdom of God.

It says he doesn't know what he's doing. It doubts the love of God. It says he doesn't care.

It doubts the power of God. Notice the attributes of God. It doubts the power of God.

It says God is not able to deliver me from the thing that's causing me to worry. If you and I were walking with the Lord in fellowship with him, we wouldn't have to worry at all. In fact, that's exactly what it says in Philippians 4 in Phillips paraphrase.

Don't worry over anything, whatever. It's ridiculous, dear friends. It's not ridiculous.

It's the word of God. Is God your father? Does he love you? Does he care for you? If your life is entrusted to him, can anything come to your life apart from his purposes? Of course not. We know it intellectually, but we have to apply it.

The study of the attributes of God should lead us to the deepest trust in him. No matter what comes into our life, we could say, he was so father, so it seemed good in thy sight. God hasn't made his first mistake yet.

If you and I could see the end of what he's doing, we'd plan our lives just exactly the same way he's planning them, wouldn't we? If you could see the end of what he's doing. People have trouble with that verse, Romans 8, 28. All things work together for good.

They say, oh, I don't see how anything good can come out of this. I hear a nervous laughter. I'll tell you what good comes out of it.

It's in the next verse. I never really understood that. God is working all things together for good to them that love him.

The next verse says why? How? How is he working? How that we should be conformed to the image of his son. Now, that's the good that God is working, that we should be conformed to the image of his son. Contemplation of the attributes of God should lead us to greater service for him.

My, what a privilege to serve the Lord. When I think of it, I become deliriously happy sometimes. God should ever have chosen a worthless thing like me and privileged me to serve him down here in a way angels are not permitted to do.

It just makes you wish you had several lives to lay at his blessed feet. And then the contemplation of the attributes of God should lead us to the desire for conformity, that we might be more and more conformed to his image. More like the master I would ever be.

But we all with unveiled face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord. When I study the holiness of God, it should make me want to be more holy. When I study the righteousness of God, it should make me want to be like that in my everyday life with men and women.

When I study all of these marvelous attributes, the love of God, oh my, we'll be talking about that, Lord willing. We need a fresh baptism of the love of the Lord in our assemblies, in our individual lives these days. So in the morning, Lord willing, we'll start with some of the attributes of God.

We'll be thinking about his holiness and some of these other wonderful attributes. But let me tell you something so you won't be disappointed. God is greater than the sum of all the attributes we'll be talking about.

Shall we pray? Father, we just thank you that we can come now and bow in spirit before you in the throne room of the universe and say how great thou art. Oh God, we just thank you tonight with full hearts that we've ever come to know you through the Lord Jesus Christ, that your grace came down and reached us. Father, we just feel like looking up into your face tonight saying, Father, we'll love you forever.

We give you thanks, the Savior's worthy name. Amen.

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