

The God We Need Pt. 1

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Preacher: Rev. Thomas Hinson

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Thank you.

We it's we're looking put. becoming more and more and more subdivided as we add categories that divide one group from another. We are subdividing ourselves into smaller and smaller and smaller special interest groups.

And when we do that, we are building walls. You have nothing to say to me. You have nothing to offer me. You can't ever understand what it's like to be me. We are building walls. And it's tearing our social fabric apart. And Paul is saying the God that we worship, the God that we need, is the God who doesn't operate according to our categories. The God who doesn't give a flip about our categories. The God who shows no partiality whatsoever. The God who sees every human being as a beautiful creation that he crafted with his own hands. Someone who bears his image, even if they reject him, even if they spurn his love. Paul says what we need is a God whose desire is to draw everyone everywhere together in his son, Jesus Christ, as one great family once again.

That's who we need. So, so far we've seen two things. Paul says the God that you need is the God who made everything, who you can't curate. The God that you need is the God who unites us together in one common humanity, who doesn't operate by our categories. And the last thing that we see, that we have time to look at, is this. That this God, the God that we need, is the God who is able to give meaning to our lives.

[23 : 07] Every human being wants to know what life is all about. Every human being wants to know what their life means, if anything. In Athens, there were two major philosophical schools that attempted to answer this question. First, we had the Epicureans. And Paul had interacted with both of these groups quite a bit. We see from the way Paul speaks to them that he has a deep working knowledge of their various philosophical viewpoints. And so, the Epicureans were people who believed that the gods, if there were even gods, and that was debated, were far away. They were distant. They weren't concerned with the affairs of human mortal beings. And so, the Epicurean vision of life said, you know, the gods, if they're even there, they don't care about you. They don't care about your life and your piddly little conflicts. So, life is about having the most pleasurable, the quietest, the most peaceful life you can. Don't concern yourself with destiny. Don't concern yourself with purpose. Don't concern yourself with the afterlife. Just get the most you can while you're here out of your life. The Stoics, by contrast, were pantheistic, meaning they believed that God was more like an impersonal force that could be found everywhere in all things. And so, for them, life was actually about trying to tap into and align yourself with that divine inner presence, that divine spark inside you. And so, there was a high focus on the cultivation of virtue as a way of aligning yourself with the divine. And as you hear these, you may realize what's actually true, that there are versions of Epicureanism and Stoicism that persist in cultures around the world today. They never went away. They just sort of change form. They adopt.

They evolve. They fall under new labels. But today, you might see Epicureanism or Epicurean ideas in modern Western spirituality, right? It's a kind of deism that assumes if there is a God, he's not really concerned about our day-in, day-out lives, and he just wants us to be happy. He's there to give us the thumbs up, right? Stoicism persists today, and that tends to resemble some of the Eastern religions.

There's been a lot written on the parallels between Stoicism and Buddhist philosophy or Stoicism and Hinduism, right? These days, though, we're not just limited to these two philosophical schools of thought. We can go almost anywhere, and people actually look almost anywhere to find a source of meaning in their lives, right? So, people look to anything to give them a sense of meaning and purpose. So, again, because of the week that we've just had, I think it's germane to talk about the election and the fact that many people we know, including probably some of us, if we're honest, tend to derive our entire sense of meaning from political activism. I have close friends and family who I think derive almost all of their sense of meaning in life. The reason they get up in the morning is political activism. And so, Paul speaks directly to these various schools of thought. In verse 26, he says that God made everyone, and then he says, quote, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place. Verse 27, that they should seek God and perhaps feel their way toward Him and find Him. So, this is a powerful statement of meaning and purpose in the human life.

To the Epicureans, he says, you know, the Epicureans, people who thought that God was far away and unconcerned, to those people, Paul is saying, God's not far away, He's right here.

He is with you right now. And He is intimately involved in the details of your life, where you live, how you grow up, who your mom and dad were, who your siblings are, where you went to school, all of the experiences, the good, the painful, the bad, the ugly, all of those experiences in one way or another, God is intimately involved in those things, right? And then to the Stoics, Paul says, God is not simply this impersonal force that dwells in everything in the world. God is a personal being. He's a relational being. He's a being who exists outside of you. He's the being who made all of this, and He's a being who wants a relationship with you. And a relationship is only possible between persons. This God wants to know you, to have a relationship with you.

[27 : 44] So what this tells us, and we're going to get more into these themes next week, but what this tells us is your birth wasn't random. You weren't randomly assigned a family by genetic fate, right? The fact that you grew up when you did and where you did and with whom you did was intentional. God decided, I want this particular person here. I want this particular person here. I want this particular person here with these people facing these challenges, overcoming these obstacles. I want them here, right here, right now. That's what Paul's saying. So think of the people that we know show us this in the Bible. Think about Joseph, right? He was tragically betrayed by his brothers and sold into slavery, and for years he's thought to be dead by his father. But thanks to the blessing of God, rises in stature in the Egyptian government. And then many years later, when his brothers come desperate, looking for aid because of a famine, Joseph is the one who has to decide their fate, right? And many people would say, you wronged me. I'm going to wrong you back. Go and die a horrible death. But not Joseph, because Joseph believes that God determined and allotted the boundaries of his dwelling. God didn't abandon me. God was with me in all of this. And so his interpretation is to say, you know, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good. That's unbelievably transforming, right? Think about Esther. We looked at Esther not too long ago in our church. The Jewish people are facing annihilation. They're about to be wiped out. And Esther happens to find herself high up in the

Persian government, right? And think of Mordecai coming to her and saying that Esther has been brought to the Persian court for such a time as this to intervene and save her people. Seemingly random events knitted together in a tapestry of redemption and salvation, right? So according to Paul, this isn't extraordinary with God. This is ordinary. This is normal, mundane reality when you know the true God. In other words, every single one of us is like Joseph or Esther. We can all say the same thing.

I'm here for such a time as this, right? What the world, what my family, what co-workers, what that horrible boss, what the person who abused me, what they meant for evil. Somehow, in some mysterious way, God was in it. God was working through it somehow. And this completely transforms how we make meaning of our lives, right? It transforms how we think about the election, which has been very traumatic for many people. What it tells us is that no matter who sits in the Oval Office, God's purposes are not thwarted.

God's purposes are not thwarted, right? The Bible has powerful people or powerful examples of God using pagan political leaders like Cyrus for his purposes, whether they know it or not. God can use people whether they believe in him or not, right? So the idea that if God's man isn't elected, that somehow we have failed or that God has failed or that all is lost or that God now doesn't have power over the direction of our country, that idea, in my opinion, is more of a pagan idea than a Christian idea.

Because unlike the Greco-Roman pantheon, the God of the Bible is sovereign over all human affairs. His purposes can never be thwarted. That's what it means to be sovereign. All right, so it changes how we think about the election. It transforms how we think about the pandemic.

[31 : 14] We believe that sickness and death are the result of sin. It's part of what it means to live in a broken world. But I know people who have gotten sick, who have lost loved ones, who have lost their jobs, who have struggled financially. I know people who have every right to complain, every right to shake their fist at God, right, according to how most people think. But I know people like this who are looking at their suffering and they're saying, you know, I don't know, I wish this hadn't happened to me. It's been hard. But God has been in it. I feel closer to God than I ever have before. My prayer life is richer. And more than that, I can see how God is using these experiences to completely change how I think about my priorities, where I spend my time, right, how I spend my money, how I spend my energy.

People are completely rethinking their lives and seeing God's fingerprints on that change. It transforms how we make sense of and think about our past, our own childhood, the family we grow up in, right? I was actually just a couple of weeks ago talking with a friend of mine who's a black Christian man who grew up in a majority white setting, right? He went to a white neighborhood, white, mostly white church, white school. And he was talking about how hard it is because the culture these days, there are a lot of people telling him that he should be angry, that he should be angry at his parents, that he should be angry that that happened to him, that he was robbed of his death ethnic identity, or worse, that he's living as a sellout. And he quoted this verse to me. He quoted Acts 17.

And he said, you know, when I look at my life, I believe that God determined the boundaries of my dwelling. And then what he said is, he says, you know, I believe that God gave me these experiences because he's called me to a ministry of reconciliation. And all my life, he's been preparing me for that.

Right now, nobody else can tell him that, right? But because he believes in a God who's determines the boundaries of our dwellings, a God who's intimately involved in the details of our life, he trusts God when he tries to make sense of his childhood. He trusts God's purposes in it.

So all of these examples point to the truth that the God that we need is the God who is sovereign over all human affairs, a God who gives meaning and purpose to our lives. And here's the truth for you to consider this morning. You will never know your purpose in life apart from that God.

[33 : 51] You'll never know it apart from a relationship with him. So I encourage you, ask God why you're here. Ask God what his purposes in your life are. There's a reason that God put you here.

So perhaps the most important decision that we need to make in our lives is this. Not am I going to worship, but whom will I worship? Will I worship the God that I think I want? Or will I worship the God that I truly need? As we've seen, the God that we want is a God who can be remade into our image.

But the God that we need is the God who can remake us into his. The God we think we want is tribalistic, right? He's for me and my people. He's against my enemies. But the God we need is the God who unites us in a common humanity. The God we think we want is far away, uninvolved, impersonal, incapable of a relationship or doesn't care about having a relationship and lets us do whatever we want as a result.

But the God that we truly need is personally and intimately involved and has orchestrated all time and space around one central mission to reclaim you for himself.

And the good news of the gospel is this. As Paul says in verse 27, the God you truly need is not far away. He's right here. And in fact, he went so far as to send his son into the world and through his death and resurrection, he's opened the way for us to come to him in faith and to be forgiven and restored. And one day, along with the world, remade.

[35 : 50] Let's pray. Lord, we thank you for your word. And again, only you know what we need to hear because you, unlike us, are intimately involved in the hearts and lives of each person listening. And so I simply ask you to be the God that you are, the God that we need, the God who's able to speak to us in ways no one else can. And I pray that you would you would kindle in us faith, hope, and an assurance that we are deeply, deeply loved.

We pray this in your son's holy name. Amen.