

What Is God Like?

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[0:00] As Mike said, I pastor at Westocia Lakes Church. Something unique about that is I pastor with my brother-in-law. We married sisters and have long wanted to be in ministry together and we are fulfilling that dream at Westocia Lakes Church in Salem, Wisconsin.

And it has been a pleasure to get to know Mike. You have a good pastor, a good man, loves Jesus, ably handles God's Word, and yeah, I have a ton of respect for Mike.

So what an honor to be with you and get to know some of you. I only know a couple of faces in the room. One would be Dr. Tully and one's Mike Savati. So just from those two faces alone, you guys are in good hands. Well, in his book, *Who is God?*, Richard Bauckham observes that within the big story of the Bible, there are a few key moments of what he calls divine disclosure, where God defines who God is for us.

These are not merely moments that are narrated once within the biblical story. They're more like reference points to which the rest of Scripture constantly refers back.

They are moments that reverberate through the whole story. Like all events of great significance, their significance is not grasped all at once and forever.

[1:13] They are moments whose meaning is never exhausted. So we should read them as events pregnant with meaning. Pointing us finite creatures to God and his inexhaustible and mysterious identity.

They should challenge our understanding of who God is and our relationship with God. One of these key moments is narrated in our text this morning. Exodus chapter 34 verses 6 and 7.

We're going to listen in as God tells us what he's like. The only evidence we need to demonstrate that these verses are significant is the fact that the other authors of Scripture, which include songwriters, historians, apostles, kings, prophets, they refer back to these words more than any other.

Exodus chapter 34 verse 6. Hear the word of the Lord. The Lord.

The Lord. The Lord. And Moses. The Lord. The Lord. The Lord. The Lord. The Lord. The Lord. The Lord. The Lord.

[2:48] The Lord. Amen. Amen. Well, in order to understand these verses more fully, we need to give them a bit of context. So if you have your Bibles open, flip back with me to Exodus chapter 3.

We're just going to look back to this first personal encounter that Moses has with God because it allows us to understand more fully what's going on here in Exodus chapter 34.

So Moses in Exodus chapter 3 sees a bush that's burning but not consumed by the flames. And as Moses approaches to get a closer look, God calls to Moses from the bush.

God tells Moses that he is sending him to Pharaoh to bring the people of Israel out of Egypt. And that's where we're going to pick it up in verse 13. If you look with me. Then Moses said to God, if I come to the people of Israel and say to them, the God of your fathers has sent me to you.

And they ask me, what is his name? What shall I say to them? God said to Moses, I am who I am.

[3:58] God gives a three-part answer to Moses' question. When they ask me what your name is, what should I say? This is another one of those moments of divine disclosure that I mentioned that is pregnant with meaning and significance.

It's never exhausted. The first part of God's response we just read right there. I am who I am. Which could be translated, I will be who I will be.

Now this is not God's name, but it's the meaning of God's name. Before God gives Moses his name, he tells Moses that he is completely self-determining.

That is to say, there are zero constraints and zero other factors that determine who God is or what God's going to do other than what God himself determines.

According to the counsel of his will. I will be who I will be. God will never be manipulated through the use of his name to do something he doesn't want to do.

[5:00] I am who I am. These words also communicate that God is the always existing one. He was and he is and he is to come.

He alone has existed in eternity past and all things that exist owe their very existence to him. He has always existed and yet he never changes.

He is the same yesterday, today, and forever. Or as James puts it, with him there is no variation or shadow due to change. I am who I am.

I will be who I will be. Well then God continues in the second part of his answer at the end of verse 14. And he said, say this to the people of Israel.

Say, I am has sent me to you. Well now God shortens the expression to just the words I am. I am. This still isn't God's name. But if you look at the bottom of the page in your Bible, there might be a footnote that tells you that God's name and the verb I am sound alike.

[6:01] And are built out of the same verb. So God is using a play on words to give the meaning of his name, I am. Which is short for I am who I am. Now God is ready to reveal his personal name in verse 15.

God also said to Moses, say this to the people of Israel. The Lord, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob has sent me to you. This is my name forever.

And thus I am to be remembered throughout all generations. You might be thinking, hmm. It's an interesting choice in name, the Lord.

But if you look at the bottom of the page in your Bible again, you'll likely have another footnote telling you that the Lord is a substitute for the divine name. The earliest Hebrew manuscripts that we have access to had only consonants and no vowels.

So we're not exactly sure how to pronounce God's name. But in all likelihood it was pronounced something like Yahweh. Which means he is who he is.

[7:04] Out of reverence for God's name and to keep people from using it in vain, people stopped saying the name and replaced it with Adonai. When vowels were added to the Hebrew text, much later the consonants of God's name were kept.

But they were combined with the vowels from Adonai. And this led to God's name being pronounced Yehovah or Jehovah. Many English translations have carried on the tradition of protecting God's name by translating Lord instead of Yahweh.

So anytime you see the word Lord in all caps in your Bible, that's standing in place of God's personal name. The problem with that is the Lord is what he is, but Yahweh, it's who he is.

All right, fast forward with me now. That was Exodus 3. Fast forward with me past the ten plagues, past the crossing of the Red Sea, where God delivers his people out of Egypt, makes a covenant with them at Mount Sinai.

He gives them the terms of the covenant, the book of the law, which contains the ten commandments that they are to keep. And then Moses goes up the mountain again.

[8:14] God tells Moses how to build the tabernacle. God tells Moses that Aaron and his sons will be the priests. And God tells Moses what the priests should wear. Meanwhile, Aaron is busy at the bottom of the mountain fashioning a golden calf.

An idol for the people of Israel to worship. Almost immediately after receiving the ten commandments, the people of Israel broke the first couple commands in an egregious way.

It's as if the people of Israel are committing adultery on their wedding night. In chapter 32 and 33 of Exodus, Moses spends a great deal of time interceding for the people of Israel, praying for them.

Moses asks God to forgive them. Moses wants to make sure that God is still going to go with them to the promised land. Moses wants to know if God is still committed to his sinful people.

And that's where we're going to pick the story up again in verse 18 of chapter 33. Moses said, please show me your glory.

[9:21] And God said, I will make all my goodness pass before you. And proclaim before you my name, Yahweh. And I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious.

And will show mercy on whom I will show mercy. So Moses asks to see God's glory. God promises to make all of his goodness pass before him.

God promises to proclaim his name to him. Those things are related. Right after God repeats his name, Yahweh. I will be who I will be.

He says something like it, doesn't he? I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious. And I will show mercy on whom I will show mercy. Part of what it means for God to be God is that he decides who he's gracious to.

He decides who receives his mercy. If you've ever wondered, why is one person saved and not another? The most fundamental part of that answer can be found in these words.

[10:23] Reflecting on this verse in the New Testament, Paul says, So then it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God who has mercy. Just as God cannot be constrained or coerced by any outside factors in anything he does, his grace cannot be manipulated.

God is sovereign over the dispensing of his grace, and he does so according to the counsel of his will. And when we consider the sinfulness of every heart in this room, mine included, it's amazing that God has mercy on anyone, isn't it?

So God continues his response to Moses in verse 20. But you cannot see my face, for man shall not see me and live.

And Yahweh said, Behold, there is a place by me where you shall stand on the rock while my glory passes by. And I will put you in a cleft of the rock, and I will cover you with my hand until I have passed by.

Then I will take away my hand, and you shall see my back, but my face shall not be seen. God will allow Moses to see his glory, but only a partial glimpse.

[11:38] Did you catch that? No one can fully behold the visible splendor and the majesty of our God and live to tell about it. Moses can only see what one pastor calls the afterburn of God's glory.

God then instructs Moses to come up again to him on the mountain with two stone tablets. The Ten Commandments need to be rewritten since Moses broke the last set of stones in anger.

God also tells Moses to make sure that no one else can be seen on the mountain. So Moses gets up early in the morning, cuts the stones, climbs the mountain. Then look with me at verse 5, chapter 34.

Yahweh descended in the cloud and stood with Moses there and proclaimed the name of the Lord. Yahweh passed before him and proclaimed, Yahweh, Yahweh, God merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness.

God honors his promise to Moses to proclaim his name to him and make his goodness, his glory pass by him. But Moses already knew God's name.

[12:50] Why is God so insistent on proclaiming his name to Moses here? It's a good question. I think the answer is that just as I am who I am communicates the meaning of God's name, in the same way these words in verses 6 and 7 communicate the meaning of God's name.

They tell us who God is. What God is like. This is the answer God is giving to the question, who is Yahweh? It's striking that Moses sees God's glory by hearing his word.

Did you catch that? Isn't that really encouraging? You have access to the same message that Moses heard when you open up your Bible.

You can see glimpses of God's glory by reading and hearing God's word. I hope you're encouraged by that. God could have said something to the effect, Yahweh, Yahweh, I got sovereign and powerful.

Or, Yahweh, Yahweh, I got wise and all-knowing. But rather, God tells us that his goodness is communicated in relational terms.

[14:12] God wants Moses to see the glory of his goodness towards sinful people. If you're asking, why does God choose a sinful people to make a covenant with?

The answer may be this, that God is most glorified in displaying his goodness towards sinful people. If you're a note taker, I want you to write down these five traits.

So, if you want to sketch them down, these five things. God is gracious. That's one. God is merciful. That's two. God is patient.

God is rich in love. And God is great in faithfulness. God is gracious. God is merciful. God is patient. God is rich in love. And God is great in faithfulness. That's who God is. God shows Moses his heart towards sinful people.

[15:10] He has compassion on them. He has compassion on you. He showers them with good things. He shares his very presence with them.

He's patient with them in the midst of their waywardness. How does God treat a people who are prone to wander away from him? He remains faithful.

Never breaks a promise. Keeps his word. God has chosen to set his affection on sinful people. And because he loves them, he remains faithful to them.

Because he loves them, he's patient with them. And has compassion on them like a father does for his children. Because he loves them, he doesn't give them what they deserve. But he gives them good in return for evil.

I stole a phrase from Dave Ramsey so that when people ask me, Adam, how are you doing? I like to respond, better than I deserve. There's not one person who's ever lived that couldn't say the same thing.

[16:12] Better than I deserve. And if you don't think that's true, it's because you're confused about what you actually deserve. Psalm 103 is David's extended reflection on this revelation that God gives to Moses.

It's a great psalm. After repeating these five descriptions, God is gracious, merciful, patient, rich in love, great in faithfulness. David says this, he does not deal with us according to our sins.

So in your little notepad that you sketch those five things, put a banner over the top of those five things. Put like a little banner over the top that says, He does not deal with me according to my sin. That's the main point that God wants to communicate this morning. Give some space when you get home to meditate on that sentence. If your heart is far from God, it may be because you haven't given that sentence some fresh reflection or to think about it with clarity.

You've grown dull to how bad your sin really is. You've become hardened to the richness of the grace that God has extended to you in Christ. These character traits of God in that sentence is the spark that David uses to ignite the fire of worship in his soul.

[17:39] Bless the Lord, O my soul, and bless His holy name. He doesn't deal with you according to your sins. I think it's as if David is looking at the response of Moses who quickly bows and worships Yahweh and says, That's the response all of us should have.

Come on, soul, bless the Lord. Bless Yahweh. Everything that's in me, bless Him. He doesn't deal with me according to my sin. It's reason for worship.

In verse 7, God moves seamlessly from character traits to the way that those character traits manifest themselves in action. Keeping steadfast love for thousands.

Forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin. But who will by no means clear the guilty. Visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children's children to the third and the fourth generation.

Moses quickly bowed his head toward the earth and worshiped. Notice the three action words. Keeping. Forgiving.

[18:47] Not clearing, but visiting. It's unclear in our text as to whether God keeps steadfast love for thousands of people or to a thousand generations.

The ESV just says thousands. But other passages make it clear what God means here. For example, Deuteronomy 7, 9. Know therefore that Yahweh, your God, is God.

The faithful God who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love Him and keep His commandments to a thousand generations. His love and His faithfulness never come to an end. Generation after generation. Generation after generation. Generation after generation. Generation after generation. Generation after generation. Generation after generation. The word keeps here is telling because it's talking specifically about God's covenant love.

God has covenanted Himself to a sinful people and He maintains His love for them. And one of the ways He does that is by forgiving sin. God not only keeps love in His covenant with Israel, but He forgives sin.

[19:58] Forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin. My hunch is that God uses three different words for sin here to communicate that He doesn't just forgive the small sins.

God's use of three different words accentuates the extent of God's forgiveness. He forgives all kinds of sins. Iniquity, transgression, sin.

And while God forgives sins, nonetheless, He reserves the right to punish sins. Visiting the iniquity of the fathers and the children and the children's children to the third and the fourth generation.

The question should be in our minds, how do we know who the guilty are who aren't cleared? But rather whose sin is visited to the third and fourth generation.

Well, when God gave His people the Ten Commandments, He said something similar to what we find here in verse 7. So this is in Exodus chapter 20. It says, I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God.

[21:05] Visiting the iniquity of the fathers and the children to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me. But showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commands.

So that tells us a little bit about which people are in each category. Those who oppose God can only expect God's opposition. Those who love God, albeit imperfectly, can expect His perfect, steadfast love.

Perhaps there are some of us here this morning that have been keeping God at arm's length. For one reason or another, you're distant from God. Maybe you've lived your life ignoring God, but you're convinced you're okay because you're not as bad as some others you know.

Maybe you've recently become distant from God because of a particular pattern of behavior that you don't want to cut ties with. I think Paul addresses this very thing in Romans chapter 2.

He says, Do you presume on the riches of God's kindness and forbearance and patience? In other words, are you presuming on the very character of God as it's revealed in our text this morning?

[22:25] Not knowing that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance. The last thing we should do is read Exodus 34, 6 and 7 and think that we in any way have a license to sin.

Rather, God's kindness toward us, His patience, His slowness to anger is meant to lead us to make a definitive break with sin. God wants to woo us to woo us to Himself with His goodness, with His patience, with His kindness.

But everyone who refuses to turn away from sin but persists in it, everyone who manifests a hard heart toward God through unrepentance, Paul says, is storing up wrath for themselves on the day of wrath when God's righteous judgment will be revealed.

You see, the danger for us this morning is that we hear the glorious character of God set forth in these verses. His gracious, merciful, patient, loving, faithful way of dealing with sinful people like us.

And we respond with presumption or indifference toward our sin. Rather than igniting the fire of worship in us, we remain lukewarm.

[23:46] Rather than leading us to repentance, we presume we're saved regardless of repentance. For those of you who have remained distant from God for perhaps the majority or most or all of your life, I want to say that there's good news this morning.

And that is that reflecting on the grace, mercy, patience, and love of God in Psalm 145, David says this, Yahweh is near to all who call on Him.

To all who call on Him in truth. That is, all who call on God with sincere, genuine faith, He will bring to Himself.

Or to use the wording of James, draw near to God and He will draw near to you. It's just the kind of God He is.

God in His mercy and in His grace still reserves the right to punish sin. I don't think it would be right though to come away from these verses with the idea that God only brings consequences on the sins of those who hate Him.

[24:58] And there's no consequences for our sins as God's people. We know that God's children sometimes face temporary, refining punishment for their sins as well.

There is fallout from sin. We even see this reality of God visiting the sins of the father's sins to the third and fourth generation in the lives of God's covenant people.

For example, the seed of Abraham's deception of Pharaoh and Abimelech shows up again in his son Isaac. And in his son Jacob.

And then it comes to full flower in the deception of Joseph's brothers. God visits the sin of Abraham in that case to the third and the fourth generation before Joseph makes a definitive break.

But the beautiful reality of our verses this morning is the contrast between God's steadfast love to a thousand generations and God's punishment to the third and the fourth.

[26:02] I think Jeremiah in Lamentations is reflecting on this when he says, The Lord will not cast off forever. And though He cause grief, He will have compassion.

According to the abundance of His steadfast love. He doesn't afflict or grieve His children from His heart. Or again in Lamentations 3, He says, The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases.

Generation after generation, His mercies never come to an end. They are new every morning. Great is your faithfulness.

Hurricane Ian hit the shores of Fort Myers in the fall of 2022. My parents have a place there. So I remember following in the coverage of that hurricane as it was happening. And I remember some of the news.

One person in particular was a gentleman recording from his phone on the balcony. And he was just showing that all around, everywhere you look was just water. And then he looked at one area in particular and said, That used to be a pool.

[27:11] But now the pool is gone. But I think more accurately we could say, The pool is still there. It's just been engulfed in an ocean.

And I think what God is communicating this morning is that His right to punish sin is still there. But it is engulfed in His steadfast love for His people.

God's right to punish sin is still there in the lives of His children. But it has been swallowed up by His love. So that even when God visits the sins of His people, He does so in a way that serves their eternal good.

How great is our God? You might be sitting in your seat thinking, But why does God visit the iniquity on the children? That's a good question.

And there is some mystery here. Why does God execute His judgment for sin on the loved ones of those committing the sin? The reality is that sin is a social thing.

[28:17] Our sin always has consequences for our loved ones, even our most secret of sins. You fool yourself if you think sin is merely a private thing affecting only you.

You see, my secret sins dull my capacity to rejoice in and love Jesus. They snuff out my love for others.

They diminish my abilities as a dad or a husband or a pastor. Sin does that. And yes, children often bear the brunt of the fallout from our sin.

We need to look no further than the Exodus generation, whose children wandered in the desert for 40 years because of their unfaithfulness. And yet, no child bears ultimate judgment from God because of their parents' sin.

One pastor put it like this, Sin is a disease. My children don't suffer because I have the disease. My children suffer because they get the disease from me, and they have it too.

[29:25] That's the reality of sin. All of us have it. All of us receive just punishment from God because we have that sinful disease in us. All of us have a need to turn to God and call on His names in hopes that He will draw near to us.

And yet, there is one who stands as yet having never sinned. And if we ask the question, In God's providence, why would a child bear the consequence for sin?

We must take into consideration Christ. In God's providence, generations and generations and generations of people's sin were poured out on Him.

And as Jesus goes to the cross, One who is full of grace, full of truth, perfectly reflecting the heart of the Father as is revealed in Exodus 34, we see for the first time with clarity the justice and the forgiveness of God meeting in a way that should draw us to our knees and bring us to worship our Heavenly Father and God the Son.

The crucifixion of Jesus waves across the pages of Scripture like a banner that reads, God does not deal with me according to my sin. God dealt with Jesus according to my sin.

[30:49] God does not deal with you according to your sin. If you have faith in Jesus, God dealt with Jesus according to your sin.

That's why we can receive forgiveness and mercy and patience from God. Jesus did not get what He deserved on the cross in order that we don't get what we deserve for our sin.

When we come to the beautiful and climactic revelation of the heart of God and the person of Jesus, it's fitting then that Jesus' name is Yeshua.

Yahweh is salvation. In the person of Jesus, we see the love and the faithfulness of God on display in all of its riches. In the person of Jesus, the heavenly storehouses of God's saving graces and mercies gush forth for those who trust in Him.

So as we read Exodus 34, 6 and 7 with an eye to Jesus, let's allow that to stoke the fire of worship in our soul.

[32:10] Let's be quick to make a definitive break and turn away from sin and turn to Christ in faith. If God is calling out through His voice this morning, don't harden your heart, but draw near to Him by calling on His name in truth.

Let's pray. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Father in heaven, we praise You for being a God who is gracious, merciful, slow to anger, abounding in love, great in faithfulness.

Father, would You be wooing us to Yourself again and again by putting on display Your glory, Your goodness as You deal with us sinful people.

Father, I pray for all of us that our hearts would be drawing near to You now. Would You give us the response of Moses that we would quickly bow our heads and worship the one true God.

[33:21] We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.