

## **A Vision of God**

**Ezekiel 1:1-18**

**By Dr. Mark Dever**

Let's go to God now in prayer and ask for His assistance as we come to His word. Let's pray together.

*Lord God, we do thank You for the promise we have of a new world that You will create. We thank You for the way that You do give us glimpses of that through song. We thank You for visions of yourself You give us in Your word. We pray that even as Your Spirit inspired this word, even as You gave this vision to Ezekiel, we pray that You would help us to understand. We pray that Your Spirit would help us to apply the truths of this passage to our own lives; and we pray this, Lord, for our good and for Your glory, in Jesus' name. Amen.*

Well, friends, you can see in the bulletin that we're in Ezekiel, chapter one, for our study of the morning. Let me invite you to turn there. While you're turning there (page 692 of your pew Bible), let me just bring you greetings from Capitol Hill Baptist Church. Some of you have been with us before in our services. I know it seems like every third or fourth Sunday somebody will come up to me at the door afterward and say that Ligon Duncan sent them! So, Ligon, thank you for that...probably!

Some of you may be surprised that there is such a fellowship between a Baptist and a Presbyterian. Some of you won't be at all; you're really Baptists sitting here and prefer this church—well, welcome! I'm here, too! But I told this story at the workshop yesterday and it might be as good to recount it now as well.

I'm from rural Kentucky. I grew up in a Southern Baptist family. And my uncle, back in the 1940's as a little boy, went to a Boy Scout service at the First Christian Church. And I mean no disrespect to anyone of a Campbellite background who's with us here this morning, but he said when he came home very excited to his aunt — Aunt Charlie — he said to her, “Aunt Charlie, I love that First Christian Church! It's just like the Baptist church. Why, if the Baptist church ever burns down, I'm going to go to the Christian church.” And Aunt Charlie got very upset, and she said, “You will *not*.” She said, “If the Baptist church ever burns down, you'll go to the Presbyterian church!” She said, “The Christian church may look like us, but the Presbyterian church believes like us!”

Well, there is a Baptist church who understands that in Washington, D.C. I'm pretty confident they would have been praying for you all right around the time Ligon led us in praying for them, so thank you for your fellowship in the gospel.

And I just want to thank you particularly for your pastor. I cannot think of a Christian minister I esteem more than your pastor. I thank God for fellowship with him in the gospel.

The topic of my sermon is strange in too many of our churches. As I travel around and meet pastors and listen to sermons, I hear sermons on how to have victory over too much sin in your life, or too much weight on your body, or too little self esteem in your heart. Where I come from we even have sermons on how to have victory over Democrats or Republicans, sermons on how to use time, or do friendship sermons on loving yourself or managing your money. But as I say, I have a most unusual topic for a sermon these days, and even more needed than it is unusual.

I want us to consider this morning the answer to one question: What is God like? And to do that I want us to look at this first chapter of Ezekiel. It's an amazing vision.

Ezekiel's situation is an interesting one. He's a captive Israelite. He's in exile. He's about thirty years old. He has gone to the largest and most powerful city in the world at the time, gone as a captive. And in all honesty I have to tell you that Ezekiel is far from an ordinary individual. W.F. Albright, one of the leading Old Testament scholars of a previous generation, described Ezekiel as "One of the greatest spiritual figures of all time, in spite of his tendency to psychic abnormality." Well, he said that because the book that he produced has struck many people as strange and difficult to understand—so much so that I understand among Jewish rabbis there was a tradition of not letting young men read this book until they were thirty years old, lest they become discouraged at how hard the Scriptures are to understand, and so despise them. But I don't really think they're that hard to understand and they're rich in meaning, so here we go. Listen for a moment about God, from Ezekiel. Here's the first part of his record about an amazing vision he had one day. I'll let him tell it to you in his own words. (I'll be reading the NIV; it's very similar to the ESV.)

Ezekiel, chapter one:

In the thirtieth year, in the fourth month, on the fifth day, while I was among the exiles by the Chebar River, the heavens were opened, and I saw visions of God. On the fifth of the month (it was the fifth year of the exile of King Jehoiachin), the word of the Lord came to Ezekiel the priest, the son of Buzi, by the Chebar River in the land of the Babylonians, and the hand of the Lord was upon him.

I looked, and I saw a windstorm coming out of the north, and an immense cloud with flashing lightning and surrounded by brilliant light. The center of the fire looked like glowing metal. And in the fire was what looked like four living creatures. In appearance their form was that of a man, but each of them had four faces and four wings. Their legs were straight, and their feet were like those of a calf, and gleamed like burnished bronze. Under their wings on their four sides they had the hands of a man. All four of them had faces and wings, and their wings touched one another. Each one went straight ahead; they did not turn as they moved. Their faces looked like this: each of the four had the face of a man, and on the right side each had the face of a lion, and on the left the face of an ox. Each also had the face of an eagle. Such were their faces. Their wings were spread out upward. Each had two wings, one touching the wing of another creature on either side, and two wings covering its body. Each one went straight ahead. Wherever the spirit would go, they would go, without turning as they went. The appearance of the living creatures was like burning coals of fire, or like torches; fire moved back and forth among the creatures. It was bright, and lightning flashed out of it. The creatures sped back and forth, like flashes of lightning.

As I looked at the living creatures, I saw a wheel on the ground beside each creature with its four faces. This was the appearance and structure of the wheels: They sparkled like chrysolite, and all four looked alike. Each appeared to be made like a wheel intersecting a wheel. As they moved, they would go in any one of the four directions the creatures faced; the wheels did not turn about as the creatures went. Their rims were high and awesome, and all four rims were full of eyes all around.

When the living creatures moved, the wheels beside them moved; and when the living creatures rose from the ground, the wheels also rose. Wherever the spirit would go, they would go, and the wheels would rise along with them, because the spirit of the living creatures was in the wheels. When the creatures moved, they also moved; when the creatures stood still, they also stood still; and when the creatures rose from the ground, the wheels rose along with them, because the spirit of the living creatures was in the wheels.

Spread out above the heads of the living creatures was what looked like an expanse, sparkling like ice and awesome. Under the expanse their wings were stretched out one toward the other, and each had two wings covering its body. When the creatures moved, I heard the sound of their wings, like the roar of rushing waters, like the voice of the Almighty, like the tumult of an army. When they stood still, they lowered their wings.

Then there came a voice from above the expanse over their heads as they stood with lowered wings. Above the expanse over their heads was what

looked like a throne of sapphire, and high above on the throne was a figure like that of a man. I saw that from what appeared to be his waist up he looked like glowing metal, as if full of fire, and that from there down he looked like fire; and brilliant light surrounded him. Like the appearance of a rainbow in the clouds on a rainy day, so was the radiance around him.

This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord. When I saw it, I fell facedown, and I heard the voice of one speaking.

Now I just have to resist going on and reading what he said. It's a compelling vision, and I would encourage you to realize that you don't have anything better to do this afternoon on the Lord's Day than to go ahead and read chapters 2, 3, 4, and 5 and see what the Lord says to Ezekiel. But we must stop here and look at this first chapter. And in order to help you take notes — for those of you who take notes — I want us to notice five things, and I'll try to point it out very clearly — five things from this text of Ezekiel 1 that we learn about God.

The first couple of things which this vision clearly teaches us, and which would have been no news to them then, today we need to learn. So I want to point these things out. And the most fundamental, maybe the most obvious so I don't need to point it out...but I think I do...is this.

### **I. Number one: God is not like us. God is not like us.**

You see in this vision, we have a vision of a living being who is not like us. The Lord says in Psalm 50, "You thought I was altogether like you." Friends, we have to admit this is a basic problem that we have when we come to God. We refashion Him in our own image, at least in our minds. If you're here today and you're not a Christian, this is the most fundamental thing we as Christians would want to communicate to you: Don't assume you know what God is like. Don't assume by your own intuition or inner sense that God must be a certain way than in fact He is. Why would we think that?

I remember once teaching a seminar on the doctrine of God, and one seminary student spoke up and said, "I like to think of God like this." And then he kept going. And after about five minutes, I interrupted him. He was going to keep going! And I said, "Look, Bill, thank you so much for telling us about yourself, but we're here to learn about God." Why would we assume that God is like what you or I want Him to be like? He is a real, existent, personal being! Friends, if we're going to learn about God in His being, in His character, He must tell us about himself, and that's what He's done in this amazing vision here. And the most fundamental thing we see, and that we have to begin with, is to note and sort of clean the slate over what our presumptions would be and realize that God is unusual. The Bible uses the word *holy*. And it is not simply that God possesses holiness, which He does, but that He is in fact holy. And therefore when we

approach Him, we do so with awe and reverence.

You see how this vision is meant to ratchet up the awe as we go along through it. Reading it, I thought of the movie *The Wizard of Oz*; Dorothy coming to the Emerald City and then going through that door where she'll see the wizard. And she goes down this long tunnel, and then I think turns to the left, and things get more awe-inspiring as she goes. Now of course that's a fable. Not only was there just a little old man in the fable at the end, but it really was just a fable.

But this is true. There really is a God like this. You will one day meet Him. When you meet Him, you will realize that all the intimations, all the suggestions of His glory and His majesty that you have had in your life are just suggestions and intimations compared to what will really be the case. We feel this in this vision as we read through it. You see, we have these great descriptions here in verses 4-14 of these living creatures that are magnificent in themselves, and then these wheels with them (verses 15-24). All of that is only to bring us to verse 22:

“Spread out above the heads of the living creatures was what looked like an expanse, sparkling like ice and awesome.”

And then in verse 25 we see even above that there was a throne, and above that one on the throne.

Friends, this is the great God of the Bible; the God who is inexhaustible; who, apart from His telling us about himself, is incomprehensible. Note even throughout this vision inspired by the Holy Spirit, in recounting it there is I think a kind of hesitancy on Ezekiel's part to describe in words. He was very theologically educated. He would have had a decade of theological education as a sort of “priest in training.” But when he comes to describe this to us, he keeps stumbling: *as if...; like...; the appearance of...* This is an awesome sight, so when Ezekiel finally meets this vision of this God that he believed in, what does he do? Give an eloquent prayer full of great learning, because he has a PhD from the University of Jerusalem? No. His mouth is silent and he falls face down, because this God truly is a great God.

As I have opportunity to be in different churches and different conferences and talk with Christians from around our country, I do find the strange tendency today to assume that intimacy with God is evidenced by how casual we are with Him. Casualness is assumed to be the height of intimacy. Friends, that's not true. I understand how that may be true in some ways—and only in some ways—but in some ways. In my relation with my wife or with good friends...whom I don't refer to as “Dr. Duncan III”, I refer to him as “Lig.” But when it comes to God, this one who is unlike us, the Bible nowhere suggests that you and I will become more casual with Him as we actually come to know Him better. Yes, we are assured of His love in Christ; yes, we can sing *What a Friend We Have in Jesus* and mean it; but there is with the God of the Bible a striking sense of reverence and awe, so

much so that we see here Ezekiel, after all of his theological training, falls face down just like Job did in Job 42. So for us and for our congregations and for God's name's sake, we need to know that God is not just the old man upstairs — a friendly chum, a pal, a grandfather. He is the utterly unique holy one. Oh, friends, if you would understand the God of the Bible you must begin there.

All right, that's the first point. If you're taking notes, that's Point One.

## **II. Point No. 2: God is all-powerful and all-wise. He is omnipotent and omniscient.**

Look again at a few of these verses. You see in verses 4-14 you have these living creatures, awesome in description, and then the wheels (verses 15-22).

If you're old enough, you may remember a secular popular book, best-seller, based on this chapter... Erich von Daniken's *The Chariots of the Gods*. It's an odd book that came out in the 1970's where this guy suggested that what you have here is really a UFO. You have an alien in an alien vehicle. And it's kind of true, but not in the way he meant it! This is the God who created the universe who is appearing, and He gives this vision of himself through these creatures and these wheels, and then finally the expanse and the throne above. And these things are not there so you can make a flannel graph in Sunday School to show the kids what God is like. These things are there to convey some very important truths about God.

So if you look at these living creatures, you see they have four faces, one facing each direction. Now why would that be? Because it's showing you can't do anything behind their back. They can see you. Wherever you are, they see. And it's not just one of them; you've got four of them, so this is complete surveillance! And then what are those wings doing there? Those wings are there — and you see they speed back and forth like lightning — to show that space is no barrier. This God of the Bible is being represented even by these attendants. And the wheels are the same thing. You notice that they go in every direction, but without even turning.

Friends, you live in a state capital. I live in the nation's capital. We're surrounded by people, our congregations are full of people (basically I'm talking about you) who think you have great power. Oh, friends! Not a one of us has anything compared to God. He is the one who long after our names are forgotten on this planet will be the all-marvelous, the all-splendid, the all-powerful, the all-knowing God. He is the great one, and that's what this vision is showing us, both with these living creatures and with these wheels.

Now, as I say, this wouldn't have been news to Ezekiel, but it is to a lot of people today. Sigmund Freud in his famous book *Totem and Taboo* said, "At bottom,

God is nothing more than an exalted father.” Some of you have studied philosophy and know that some have suggested that God was just a projection of our own desires, and that's what Freud is picking up on. And I'm not surprised at Freud being able to notice some things that are accurate, even though he doesn't understand them. So, for example, does everyone have a longing for a parent figure, for authority, for approval, for meaning? Well, yeah, it seems so. It seems that's a basic part of us. But I guess my question would be, well, why is that the case? Why would we all be like that? Could that be part of the image of God in us? That He has made us specifically to know Him? That the most important thing you can do in this life is to come to know truly this God? And that's what I think the Bible tells us clearly.

If you're here today and you're not a Christian, that's what we want you to know. I speak of “we” now; I'm not a member of this congregation, I'm not even a Presbyterian. But we are Christians, and we would like you, our friend who visits here today, we would like you to know this more than anything else: God made all of us in His image. That's where that longing comes from. But we have by our own sin separated ourselves from God. We have called down His wrath upon us because He is a good God; because He says murder and lying and adultery and greed and pride are not OK. So because He is good, He will punish us. And friends, that leaves us in a terrible situation, facing the wrath of God.

But in His great mercy, the eternal Son of God became flesh. Jesus Christ lived the life you and I should have lived: a perfect life, a life of complete fellowship and obedience with His Father. And then He died a death He did not deserve, but we deserve. He died a death for all of those who would ever repent of their sins and trust in Him. And three days later, He was raised from the grave for our justification, vindicating all the claims that He made. And He ascended to heaven, and we're called now through the preaching of the word to turn from our sins and to trust in Christ; to repent and believe. And that's how we know you, my friend, will come to have eternal life...a life that begins even today. If you want to know more about this, please talk to me down here at the front or Lig at the door in the back, or any of the other friends you see here who would love to talk to you about this.

This all-powerful, all-wise God wants to come to know us. Christian friends, this is why our time together should be marked with reverence and trust.

Now, I don't think there is only one style of reverence, but I do think there needs to be reverence and trust. I don't know about you in your Christian life, but in my own Christian life, the more I've come to understand God's power, God's wisdom, the better able I am to trust Him. Come to know more about God, and you will find trusting Him made easier. This God is eminently trustworthy. He is omniscient and omnipotent.

### III. God is not limited by circumstances

Well, the next truth about God is I think the point of this passage for Ezekiel. Number three: God is not limited by circumstances.

God is not limited by circumstances. In this case, it would have been God is not limited to Jerusalem. You know, what he was seeing here was kind of like the arc of the covenant on wheels. It was sort of a chariot, showing that God is not limited to this temple in Jerusalem. He had told them that; they didn't seem to remember that. But they wondered, in losing their land had they lost their God? And the wonderful answer in this vision comes: No! God is the God of the whole earth. He will come to them. I wonder if that's why in verse 28 you even have this mention of the rainbow — "...like the appearance of the rainbow in the clouds" — recalling the universal covenant God had made back after the flood, in Genesis.

Now friends, if you see what this means...if you're here today and you're not a Christian, this means for you that you really can't escape this God. You may have thought that you can escape Him by running from Him. You may have thought you can escape Him by taking on an appearance of religiosity, when in your heart you really couldn't believe or care less. But this passage stands here as a warning to you that this God is not limited to where you last think you saw Him. You will one day face Him.

There are others of you here today who may very well be thinking, 'Well, OK. But somebody like me? This God that you have said is so holy would not want someone like me. You can't know the things I've done. I'm not nearly as good as all these people sitting around me. This is...you're telling me about a God that is clearly not for me.' Friend, if that's you, think again. If you think you're beyond God's care and concern, look at how He goes and seeks out His people here. Do you know why His people were in captivity? Why they were out in exile? Because they had sinned. They had done what they should not do. They had worshiped other gods. They had been adulterous. And yet even those who are lost in spiritual adultery, God in His grace and mercy and love came seeking. Friend, if you think you are beyond being sought out by this God, think again.

I know you here are doing studies in *Pilgrim's Progress*. I heard Derek this last Wednesday night. Wonderful studies. John Bunyan also wrote other smaller less-known works. One of them is called *The Saint's Knowledge of Christ's Everlasting Love*. It's a meditation on Ephesians 3:18, 19. One of the things Bunyan said in that piece is this:

Sometimes a man is, as he apprehends, so far off from God that they think themselves beyond the reach of God's mercy. But [writes Bunyan] when we think His mercy is clean gone and that ourselves are free among the dead, and of the number that He remembereth no more, then He can reach us. This should encourage them that for the present cannot stand,

but they do fly before their guilt. Them that feel no help nor stay, I will say before thee and I will pray thee hear me: Oh, the length of the saving arm of God! As yet thou art within the reach thereof. Do not thou go about to measure arms with God. I mean do not now conclude that because thou canst not reach God by thy short stump, therefore He cannot reach thee with His long arm. Look again! Job 40: 'Hast thou an arm like God?' It becomes thee when thou canst not perceive that God is in the reach of thy arm, then to believe that thou art within the reach of His; for it is long, and none knows how long.

Friends, this is a rebuke to our impatience when circumstances are not as we would imagine them to be, and so therefore we would get discouraged. It is a rebuke to our wrong attachment to something. Don't be too dependent on particular means, whether an author or a speaker or preacher, or a certain building, a certain style of singing, a certain friend, certain job, certain dream. Have hope, if you're separated in time or circumstances from some past place of blessing.

Some of you will remember worshiping at First Presbyterian Church with the saints in the 1940's when you were in a different building. Now you have this lovely new expanded edifice. Friends, if the Lord tarries and you have life, you'll see another building sometime. Maybe because you'll move, or maybe because something will happen here and you'll do something. But friend, you realize that God's blessing is not tied to the temple in Jerusalem. It's not tied to the building on State Street. It's not tied even to your husband or wife. God's blessing comes from God! And He is not limited by any earthly circumstances through which you've known His blessing in the past. God is not limited by circumstances.

Let's go on to the fourth thing. A couple of more things about God which are not expressly taught in this passage, but which this passage gives us examples of and which is typical of God as the Bible reveals Him, and which are important for us to notice.

#### **IV. God initiates.**

Now, Number four: God initiates. God initiates. There is divine initiative here, and they knew God was like this. They should have known from the history. They were surprised it could happen even when they were in Babylonia, when they were far away from the Promised Land. But you see here we don't find that Ezekiel was such a great religious seeker that he has been praying and fasting for forty days, and that in response to his earthly religion, his personal virtue, God will condescend to reveal himself. We don't find in the first verse that Ezekiel reaches up and rends the heavens. No, we see here in verse 1 the heavens were opened, and that passive lets us know that it was God that did it.

We see in verse 4 the storm came; in verse 25, a voice came; in verse 28, one was speaking. You see, again and again it's God that takes the initiative. And we're not surprised at this if we know our Bibles. This is what the God of the Bible is like, so in Exodus it is God who comes seeking for Moses when he's just out tending sheep. He's already in retirement. He's eighty years old, and God decides to use him to bring a people to himself. Or, the great story of course of Isaiah in the temple, and God reveals himself to Isaiah. Or Saul on the road to Damascus, as the risen Christ appears to him. You know, one study I read recently suggested that 84% of those who call themselves evangelicals — 84% of those who call themselves evangelicals here in America embrace the notion that in salvation God helps those who help themselves. Well, friends, the story that we find in the Bible is not of us finally working together with God to save ourselves; but it's God initiating to those who are spiritually dead.

I love the story in the gospels where Jesus speaks to the deaf man. And that's a story of your salvation and mine, if you're a Christian here this morning. Jesus speaks to the deaf man. His action of speaking, accompanied by His Spirit, creates life, and that's what we've known. We are not good enough for God to love; God has chosen to love us. God initiates. We are utterly dependent upon Him, and our response is to be one of grateful praise and humble prayer.

One more thing. One more thing. There's no doubt that creation can speak beautifully of the Creator. It's true of man-made things. This is a lovely space. Congratulations on getting this done. (And can I say as a visiting preacher I so appreciate having the pulpit in the middle! This is a good thing architecturally, and it is the right thing theologically, so it's good to see this here.) I love architecture, and when I see architecture that excites me, it will so often make me think of God, just like music will. And certainly the natural creation...we know from Psalm 19 that the heavens are telling the glory of God.

I remember when I lived in Britain, I think one time when I'd gone up to see Ligon in Edinburgh, I went on up further north and west to a western coastal town in Scotland, which was renowned for its sunsets. And as I was driving along the little road to get to it, all the cars were pulled over because it was that time of day. The doors were open and people standing out just looking at the sky. I think it's probably the most amazing thing I've ever seen — the sunsets there in Scotland. I don't know why they're there. If you want to explain it to me physically afterwards, I would love to know, but it's an extraordinary vision of beauty. But even that is only a dim reflection of the God that Ezekiel here has a vision of. So friends, if we would come to know the God of the Bible, we have to do more than see something physical that's amazing. The Grand Canyon may inspire your soul, but that is not the thing that finally will bring us to know this God.

## **V. God communicates.**

And what we see in this vision (No. 5, if you're taking notes) is that God communicates. God communicates. This is at the heart. It's assumed. It was new to them that it could happen there, but they knew this about God. But we need to know this.

We like special effects today. We think this beginning windstorm is cool! You know, we think the lightning and stuff flashing back and forth is great! But then if you or I, or someone in Hollywood, were planning this, we would put that at the end as the climax. But this vision starts with sight and then moves to sound — the sound of those wings — and then it climaxes (verse 28) in a voice of one speaking words. Do you see that? We would tend to go for the spectacle because we like the immediate impression.

But what God is doing here is He's showing through all of this spectacular attendance around Him, it's calling attention to Him. And even the way He appears to Ezekiel in this is calling attention to what He says; to His word. The word is at the center. It's not just an architectural preference. It's a reflection of the story of the Bible, of how God has revealed himself to us. Sight, sound, speech — you see, this God wants not mere adoration from a distance, but He wants a personal relationship. He wants not mere encounter and sensation, but He wants covenant love. And for that, my friends, there's going to have to be information exchanged. There's going to have to be communication, proposition going back and forth, so that we understand what we're seeing, so that we understand what it means.

Now I know that being in a Presbyterian church that I am addressing a highly educated audience here, and some of you will have thought of objections already to my thesis about communication being at the center. And some of you have reached back into the depths of your philosophical study and come up with this objection: 'Mark, I have a dog. This dog is my best friend. This dog understands me. When I go home today, this dog will accept me, and by the very look in their eyes, I will know that they understand everything hard that I've had happen to me this week. This dog disproves your thesis that communication is at the heart of relationship.'

And that is a strong argument! I want to respect you in this brilliant argument you've come up with. I, too, have a dog, and we like our dogs. My family loves our dog. I like our dog. But even as much...as close a relationship as you may feel you have with your dog, I would suggest that if you go home today...you know, you go in the kitchen or wherever you keep the dog (maybe down here it's out back, or wherever it is, anyway)...you go and you find the dog, and that dog looks up at you and says, "How was church today?" that will change your relationship with that dog! Communication is at the heart of relationship. It's not just an abstract theological idea about propositional truth.

No, friends, you know that in your own life. Communication is at the heart of

relationship. So here in this vision I'm not surprised that it climaxes with God speaking. [It just kills me we can't go on and look at what God says, but there's value in us just looking at this first chapter, inspired for our instruction, and I think we're being instructed in this.] But what I'm saying to you, whether you're here not as a Christian or as a Christian, don't be satisfied just by your own intuition. Don't be satisfied with mere superstition, with reverence to a mute god. The real God has spoken.

I had a friend one time at Cambridge who was going to a student fellowship, and he said for two hours at this student meeting the students were there with their hands up, singing, crying out in prayer for God to speak to them. The whole time, their Bibles were lying there closed on their chairs.

Friends, the God of the Bible has spoken to us. The real God, the God who created this world, who has acted to save us, and who will one day judge us—this God has spoken. We can know what He's like.

People often asked Luther what he did to “do” the Reformation, and he explained,

“I simply taught, preached, wrote God's word. Otherwise I did nothing. And then while I slept or drank Wittenberg beer with my Philip and Amsdorf, the words so greatly weakened the papacy that never a prince or emperor inflicted such damage upon it. The word did it all.”

Friend, that's why in our corporate times together we want to have the preaching of God's word being central; we want to have prayers to God being central...not just “worshipful experiences.”

I so appreciate the way Bill (or whoever) lays out the bulletins. These are my favorite bulletins in the country. When we give them out...when you send them to us every month, we give them out in staff meeting. It's one of the few things our staff don't just throw away that I give to them! But they keep them, and they see that you all explain...like, even the way we had the words to the song that was just sung. It's not that music is unimportant; but friends, as Christians we know from the way God has related to us, the words are hugely significant. The words reveal.

You know that in your own experience. If you have a friend who's so busy he just won't listen to you, just won't talk to you, it takes a toll on the relationship, doesn't it? This God communicates.

All right. Well, that's it. Let's just review the five points again. First, God is not like us. Second, God is all-powerful and all-wise. Third, God is not limited to circumstances. Fourth, God initiates. And, fifth, God communicates.

Will Rogers said that "It's not what you don't know that will get you in trouble, but what you know for certain that just ain't so." Well, I think that's true. This God is the one we worship, and no other.

A.W. Tozer said in the first chapter of his book *The Knowledge of the Holy* that the very essence of what it means to be a Christian really is to love this God, to know this God. He wrote:

What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us. The greatest question before the church is always God himself, and the most portentous fact about any man is not he at a given time may say or do, but what he in his deep heart conceives God to be like. We tend by a secret law of the soul to move toward our mental image of God.

If you have any hesitation about the truth of that statement, just go down the list of things we've said this morning. What difference does it make if you don't think God is just like you — if you do think He's just like you? If you don't think that God is wise, or able? If you decide He's limited to this place or that situation? If you think He simply stands and waits for your initiative? Or if you think that He's mute, that there's no way you could know what He thinks about you and life and the universe? Friend, what difference does that make?

It makes all the difference in the world. And more.

Let's pray together.

*Lord God, we thank You for how You have loved us in Christ. We thank You for how You have come seeking us. We pray that by Your Spirit, through Your word, You would come seeking us again today, and we pray that for each person here. In Jesus' name. Amen.*

Friends, as we celebrate this great God, let's take our hymnals and turn to hymn No. 92, *A Mighty Fortress Is Our God*.

[Congregation sings.]

*And now may the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, the fellowship of His Holy Spirit, be with us all evermore. Amen.*

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