

The Incomprehensibility of God

We begin with God's incomprehensibility

- humble acknowledgment that God is infinite and we are finite
- God will always be beyond us – a mystery
- and yet we can truly know him!

Psalm 147:5

Great is our Lord, and abundant in power;
his understanding is beyond measure.

Psalm 145:1-3

¹ I will extol you, my God and King,
and bless your name forever and ever.

² Every day I will bless you
and praise your name forever and ever.

³ Great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised,
and his greatness is unsearchable.

Isaiah 40:25-28

²⁵ To whom then will you compare me,
that I should be like him? says the Holy One.

²⁶ Lift up your eyes on high and see:
who created these?

He who brings out their host by number,
calling them all by name,

by the greatness of his might,
and because he is strong in power
not one is missing.

²⁷ Why do you say, O Jacob,
and speak, O Israel,

“My way is hidden from the LORD,
and my right is disregarded by my God?”

²⁸ Have you not known? Have you not heard?
The LORD is the everlasting God,
the Creator of the ends of the earth.

He does not faint or grow weary;
his understanding is unsearchable.

Job 11:7-9

⁷ Can you find out the deep things of God?

Can you find out the limit of the Almighty?

⁸ It is higher than heaven – what can you do?

Deeper than Sheol – what can you know?

⁹ Its measure is longer than the earth
and broader than the sea.

The natural response to God is worship

Romans 11:33

Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!

Since God is incomprehensible, we cannot know him without his gracious condescension

Deuteronomy 29:29

The secret things belong to the LORD our God,
but the things that are revealed belong to us
and to our children forever, that we may do all
the words of this law.

Galatians 4:8-9

⁸ Formerly, when you did not know God, you were enslaved to those that by nature are not gods. ⁹ But now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how can you turn back again to the weak and worthless elementary principles of the world, whose slaves you want to be once more?

Therefore, we must not imagine God as we like

Exodus 20:4-6

⁴ You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. ⁵ You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the LORD your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me, ⁶ but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments.

God's perfect revelation is in Christ

Colossians 1:15

He is the image of the invisible God.

John 14:8-10

⁸ Philip said to Jesus, “Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us.” ⁹ Jesus said to him, “Have I been with you so long, and you still do not know me, Philip? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father’?”

¹⁰ Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me?

To know God is our ultimate joy

Hosea 6:3

Let us know; let us press on to know the LORD;
his going out is sure as the dawn;
he will come to us as the showers,
as the spring rains that water the earth.

Psalm 139:17-18

¹⁷ How precious to me are your thoughts, O God!

How vast is the sum of them!

¹⁸ If I would count them, they are more than the sand.

I awake, and I am still with you.

Notes

Introduction

- we're going to do an extended meditation on God
- two reasons:
 - (1) Our knowledge of God is superficial and thin | who is our God?
 - (2) Our problems ultimately come from not knowing God | we are alienated from him
 - as we focus on Him, our problems will be put in right perspective

Theologians distinguish between God's attributes

- communicable attributes: how we are like God | imago Dei
 - incommunicable attributes: makes God distinct from his creation | “none like him”
 - creature/Creator distinction
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We begin with God's incomprehensibility

- proper place to begin study of God – think how never know God *as he is in himself*
- in fundamental sense, God will always be incomprehensible to us

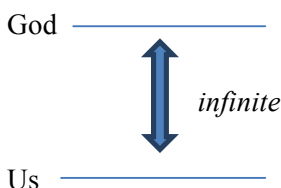
Reason is that God is infinite and we are finite

Psalm 147:5

Great is our Lord, and abundant in power;
his understanding is beyond measure.

It is very difficult to grasp the infinite proportions of God

- all of God's attributes are infinite in dimension
- he is infinite in wisdom and knowledge | infinite in power | infinite in greatness
- God is beyond all measure



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We can spend a billion years exploring the greatness of God, plumbing the knowledge of God

- and not get any closer to exhausting how amazing and without limits he is
- for all of eternity, we will be in his presence and he will never-endingly stun us with his brilliance
- “his greatness is unsearchable” – imagine a cave, or a new land | you cannot exhaustively explore it

Isaiah 40:25-28

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A little astronomy

- in Milky Way, there are estimated 100-400 billion stars
- just by way of comparison | go beach, pick up a grain of sand – look at vast quantity of sand on that beach
- there are more stars in Milky Way than sands in all beaches of Earth
- estimated 100-150 billion galaxies in observable universe (again, imagine each galaxy as a grain of sand)
- the actual universe could be million times larger than that | what about multiverse?

Isaiah says God knows each and every star and knows them by name!

Job 11:7-9

⁷ Can you find out the deep things of God?

Can you find out the limit of the Almighty?

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⁹ Its measure is longer than the earth
and broader than the sea.

In a fundamental sense, God will always be a mystery to us

- we will always feel the infinite distance between us and God
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We feel overwhelmed by the greatness of God

- but rather than that being unpleasant, we feel the pleasant sense of awe
- “fear of God” | not “fear” as in fear of something evil and malicious, but wonderful and awe-some

Romans 11:33

Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God!
How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!

Awe takes us out of ourselves

- it decenters us | and draws our attention to beauty and truth and majesty
- this is what we were created for – to know and worship God

We often emphasize *God's immanence*

- but we need to balance that with his transcendence
- Jesus captures, “Our Father in heaven”
 - God is both near and approachable
 - and far above us in his majesty

Since God is incomprehensible, we cannot know him without his gracious condescension**Deuteronomy 29:29**

The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law.

God does not speak to us as a peer

- rather, b/c of his infinite distance from us, God has crouch down, like a father with his child
- God speaks to us using “baby-talk,” the way we speak to very small children
- Scripture is God’s baby-talk to us | this does not mean it is wrong or inaccurate
- but rather, God’s word to us is an accommodation to our finite creature-liness
- in other words, just as a child has very limited but real understanding of his parents, so us with God
- therefore, we know God only by his grace | only by his gracious condescension
- we cannot go seeking God | we are helpless without him taking the initiative

Galatians 4:8-9 ⁸ Formerly, when you did not know God, you were enslaved to those that by nature are not gods. ⁹ But now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how can you turn back again to the weak and worthless elementary principles of the world, whose slaves you want to be once more?

Interesting that Paul takes pains to emphasize the unidirectional nature of our knowledge of God

- we cannot “know” God without God first “knowing” us and revealing himself to us

Therefore, we must not imagine God as we like

Exodus 20:4-6 ⁴ You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. ⁵ You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the LORD your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me, ⁶ but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments.

Second Commandment is not a redundancy of the First Commandment

- why are we not to make images of God?
 - because in the image-making, we cast God in our own imagination
 - 2nd Commandment is asking us to wait for God to reveal himself to us | epistemological humility
 - any image we craft for ourselves will inevitably diminish God – golden calf seemed grand, but reduced God
 - therefore, we must read the Bible | only in Scripture do we see the real God
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Colossians 1:15

He is the image of the invisible God.

God's perfect revelation is in Christ

- ancient Israelites imagined God as a “golden calf”
- but God's true self-disclosure is Jesus of Nazareth
 - utterly astonishing the humility, gentleness and meakness of God in the flesh
 - who could have imagined such a thing?

John 14:8-10 ⁸ Philip said to Jesus, “Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us.” ⁹ Jesus said to him, “Have I been with you so long, and you still do not know me, Philip? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father’? ¹⁰ Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me?”

Lot of people get offended at the exclusivity of Christianity

- Christianity says, “only in Christ can you know God”
 - but the “Incomprehensibility of God” logically necessitates the Incarnation
 - the author of the story is so far above the characters, he has to write himself into the story
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To know God is our ultimate joy

- we should be filled with wonder and stunned gratitude that we can know God

Hosea 6:3

Let us know; let us press on to know the LORD;
his going out is sure as the dawn;
he will come to us as the showers,
as the spring rains that water the earth.

In agricultural world – spring rains was imagery of deep joy

- satisfying, soul-refreshing joy of knowing God

Everybody wants to be happy

- here is true happiness and true delight – awaiting us in Scripture
- Scripture is not easy to read | often, dry and difficult
- but it is like treasure hidden in ground and requires excavation and work and effort

Psalm 139:17-18

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Final meditation

- we will never tire of knowing God | infinite layers and depths to God to explore and think upon
- even all of eternity will not be enough to plumb the depths of God
 - so that after a billion years of knowing God, it will be as if we just began