

GOD IS ETERNAL, IN CONTROL, AND ALL POWERFUL**ISAIAH 57:15, et al**

We live in a day and age that doesn't really think much about God at all. The late Wilbur Rees, a pastor, tried to capture how – even as Christians - we can trivialize God. He wrote, "I would like to buy \$3 worth of God, please. Not enough to explode my soul or disturb my sleep, but just enough to equal a cup of warm milk or a snooze in the sunshine. I don't want enough of Him to make me love a black man or pick beets with a migrant. I want ecstasy, not transformation; I want the warmth of the womb, not a new birth. I want a pound of the Eternal in a paper sack. I would like to buy \$3 worth of God, please." We can minimize God by wanting less of Him than who He truly is.

Today, I'm starting a new series of messages I've entitled "What's Most Important About You? What You Think About God." The title is based on an insightful observation by A.W. Tozer, a great Christian leader back in the middle of the 20th century. He said, "What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us." He's exactly right. Everything about how you live your life today and tomorrow depends on how you answer two questions. First, what is God really like? We're going to look at what the Bible says about God's attributes. His attributes are simply what we can know about God as it's revealed in His Word. But we're also going to ask and answer a second question each week. What difference do these attributes of God make in your life and mine? For example, today we're going to explore the fact God is eternal, in control and all powerful. Those are some of His attributes. But how do those truths about God impact our lives and how we live them? Let's see. First of all...

GOD IS ETERNAL.

If you want your mind stretched and boggled, just start thinking about what it means that God is eternal? Instead of looking at just one Scripture passage today, I'm going to mention several. All of them are listed in the message notes available to you on the website. Let's start with Is. 57:15 (NLT), "The high and lofty one who lives in eternity, the Holy One, says this: 'I live in the high and holy place with those whose spirits are contrite and humble.'" Listen to Ps. 90:1-2 (NLT) "Lord, through all the generations you have been our home! Before the mountains were born, before you gave birth to the earth and the world, from beginning to end, you are God." So, first, when we say God is eternal we mean God is beyond time. God exists in time and space, but He also exists outside of both time and space. Time can't contain God. C.S. Lewis said eternity is like a piece of paper stretching out into infinity in every direction. Try to picture that. Then imagine someone drawing a one inch line somewhere on that infinite piece of paper. That very little, insignificant one inch line represents all of time. It began here and it will end there. Every human being has lived and will die within that one little inch line we call time. But not God. Time has no effect on God whatsoever. God lives in a continual and forever present – in a continual and forever state of now.

God has no beginning or end. The first verse of the Bible says, "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth." (Gen. 1:1 NLT) But that refers to this world's beginning, not God's. God didn't begin to exist; He's always just been there. There

was never a moment when God didn't exist. And there will never be a moment when God doesn't exist. God was never born and He will never die. God has no past or future. Those are concepts that refer to things that exist only in the realm of time. Yes, you and I have a past and a future, but God doesn't. Yes, the Bible does say Jesus is the same yesterday, today, and forever, but that's referring to my yesterday, today, and forever. God has already lived every day of your past and every day of your future. God has already lived all of our tomorrows. Try and get your brain around that truth!

Secondly, to say God is eternal means God has no origin, source, or cause. Everything has a beginning – stars, planets, mountains, trees, animals, people. But nobody ever said, "Let's create God." If so, that being would be the real God and the god we worship wouldn't truly be God. But our God is the Cause of all things – the only entity in the entire universe that's uncaused. He Himself is the source of everything and everyone else. No one gave God life and He doesn't depend on anything or anyone for His life. Do you remember what God told Moses when he asked God to tell him His name? "I AM the One who always is. Just tell them, 'I AM has sent me to you.'" (Ex. 3:14 NLT)

Thirdly, to say God is eternal means He is measureless. He has no limits. Listen to Is. 40:25-26 (NLT): "To whom will you compare me? Who is my equal?" asks the Holy One. Look up into the heavens. Who created all the stars?... Because of his great power and incomparable strength, not a single one is missing." You might say men like Jeff Bezos or Bill Gates have unlimited wealth, but actually you could eventually measure their net worth. Is the ocean measureless? Scientists can estimate approximately how much water is in all of the oceans put together. You can find out how big the sun is or how much the Earth weighs. Incredible distances separate different objects in the universe so much so that scientists gave up using feet or meters as measurements. Instead, they refer to light years – how many years it would take to get from one object to another traveling at the speed of 186,000 miles every second. True, the universe has these fantastically enormous numbers associated with it, but everything in it can still be measured and has a limit to it. But not God. God and God alone is boundary-less, limitless, endless, and measureless. God is eternal.

But, so what? What difference does the fact God is eternal make in your life or mine? First, it means you need God more than anything and anyone else. More than air, because God made the air. More than food and water, because God made food and water. More than life, because God is life and made life. God is an absolute necessity to you and me. Second, you can never escape God. That's both good news and bad news. If you want forgiveness, comfort, help, guidance, or encouragement, God is there because He can't be anywhere else but everywhere! He was in your yesterday and He's already living your tomorrow. You can't escape God by denying His existence. He's there just the same whether you believe in Him or not. You can't escape God by pretending He's someone else other than the God revealed to us in the Bible. God is Who He is – no more and no less.

Third, because God is eternal, you are immortal. Only God is eternal. Only He has no beginning and no end. Every human being had a beginning, but we will not have an

end. None of us will go out of existence ever. We're immortal. The Bible clearly teaches each of us dies physically, to be sure, but we go on living in another state. Some will live forever in Heaven. Others will live forever in Hell. Who ends up where and why? It's not – as most people believe – based on how good or moral a person has been, because human goodness is so far below God's standards as to be laughable. Instead, the Bible says it's based on our relationship to Jesus. If He has become our Lord and Savior, Heaven will be our eternal home. If we've rejected Him, we'll exist forever in Hell. Because God is eternal, every human being is immortal. But Jesus defines where we will spend eternity.

Fourth, because God is eternal, you can only find your deepest satisfaction in God. The Bible says God made you in His image. An inevitable outcome of being made in God's image means our deepest needs and desires can only ever be met in God and by God. Anything less than God – other people, a loving family, a healthy body, money, things, an inspiring job, achievement, whatever – can never fully satisfy us. All those other things I just mentioned are blessings God gives us. Enjoy them! Thank God for them! But the moment you make any of those other things as necessary to you as God, you've made a serious mistake. Only God is absolutely and always necessary. And only God is eternal. Let's think about another important attribute of God.

GOD IS IN CONTROL OR SOVEREIGN.

Here are a few Bible verses that underline this great truth about God. Dt. 4:39 (NLT) says, "The LORD is God both in heaven and on earth, and there is no other." God Himself says in Is. 46:10 (NLT), "Only I can tell you the future before it even happens. Everything I plan will come to pass, for I do whatever I wish." The prophet Daniel made this amazing claim about God, "His rule is everlasting, and his kingdom is eternal. All the people of the earth are nothing compared to him. He does as he pleases among the angels of heaven and among the people of the earth. No one can stop him or say to him, 'What do you mean by doing these things?'" (4:34-35 NLT) When we say God is in control or sovereign, it means He alone is supreme. No one is above Him. No one can frustrate His plans or will ultimately. Nothing is outside or beyond His control.

When we say God is in control or sovereign, it means – secondly – that God is free to do everything He wills or wants to do. Have you ever heard someone ask this silly question, "Could God make a rock too heavy for even Him to lift?" It's misleading to say God can do anything. The Bible never teaches that. For example, it says God cannot lie. It's better to say God can do anything He wants to do or whatever matches up with His own character. God is the only One in the entire universe who is absolutely free. No one can force God to do anything. No one can hinder, thwart, or stop Him. God will always be able to do whatever pleases Him everywhere and forever.

Third, because God is in control, He has all authority and power. You can be powerful but have no authority. A champion weightlifter might be a powerful person, but he has no authority over other human beings as a result of his power. You can have authority without power. The organization, the United Nations, might be an example. It believes

it has authority to tell other nations what to do, but it has no real power to back up its authority. God and God alone has both perfect and total authority and power.

Again, so what? What difference does it make to know God is in control or sovereign? The first truth is rather obvious, but we need to be reminded of it often. It means you and I are not in control. True, God does delegate a kind of control or freedom to human beings. We can make many of our own choices and decisions, but it's limited. You can decide not to eat, but you can't choose to keep on living if you don't eat food. You can murder someone, but you can't remove the consequences of that evil act. You can refuse to surrender to Jesus as your Lord and Savior, but you can't decide to go to Heaven anyway. The fact is you're not in control. Only God is in control. That leads to a second truth based on the first one. My response to God will result in either gain or loss for me both in this life as well as in eternity. If I seek God and a right relationship with Him, I will gain everything worth having in this life and eternity. If I reject God and His ways, I will lose everything worth having both in this life and eternity.

Here's a third truth. Because God is sovereign, you are chosen to be His child, saved by His grace, and kept by Him for all eternity. I wish I had more time to explore the answer to some interesting, but perplexing questions in this regard. For example, how do God's sovereignty and my freedom work together? Can God force salvation on someone against his or her will? Can someone frustrate God's grace and not become a follower of Jesus if God has willed it? I think about what Eph. 1:5 (NLT) says, "God decided in advance to adopt us into his own family by bringing us to himself through Jesus Christ. This is what he wanted to do, and it gave him great pleasure." There's Rom. 8:29 (NLT), also, "For God knew his people in advance, and he chose them to become like his Son." On the one hand, I cannot make myself God's child. God had to take the initiative by choosing me. I could not and cannot make myself right with God. God made my relationship with Him possible through the death and resurrection of Jesus – the benefits of which I receive as a gift. On the other hand, I believe God brings all of this about without violating my will, robbing me of my freedom, or somehow manipulating me behind the scenes. How God does both is a mystery, but also a fact.

A fourth truth emerges as to how God being in control impacts our lives. It's a particularly important one in light of the pandemic we're experiencing. Because God is sovereign, He will work all things out in our lives for His glory and our ultimate good. That's the clear promise found in Rom. 8:28 (NLT), "And we know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose for them." That verse never says everything is good. There's nothing good about a pandemic. But can God bring good out of a pandemic? Yes. God can bring good out of suffering and setbacks in our lives? Yes. God can even bring good out of the sinful choices and decisions we made in the past? Yes. Donald Rumsfeld was the Secretary of Defense at the beginning of the U.S. attack on Saddam Hussein's Iraq back in 2003. He was asked by a reporter about the "apparent failure to follow the war plan." Rumsfeld, who could get a little testy with the press, replied, "I don't believe you have the war plan." We can approach God like that reporter

approached Rumsfeld. Why doesn't God follow the plan? The plan we expect and want? God says to you, me, and everyone, "I don't believe you have the plan."

Because God is in control and sovereign, He can and will use everything and anything – the good and the bad, the triumphs and the tragedies, the successes and the failures, the wins and the losses, the joys and the disappointments – both to accomplish His will in this world and, also, to do in each of us personally what He wants to do. God never wastes anything. There's a wonderful promise in Ph. 1:6 (NLT), "And I am certain that God, who began the good work within you, will continue his work until it is finally finished on the day when Christ Jesus returns." Now, here's a third truth about God.

GOD IS POWERFUL OR OMNIPOTENT.

The Bible takes God's omnipotence for granted. Our English Bibles typically use the word "almighty" to describe God's power and omnipotence. We hear it in the first book of the Bible, God said to Abraham, "I am El-Shaddai—"God Almighty." (Gen. 17:1 NLT) In the last book of the Bible we read, "Praise the LORD! For the Lord our God, the Almighty, reigns." (Rev. 19:67 NLT) In Ps. 62:11 it says, "Power, O God, belongs to you." The angel declared to Mary in Lk. 1:37 (MSG), "Nothing is impossible with God." God is all powerful. His power is without limit or measurement. This is absolute power. Every kind of power that exists in the universe is derived from God's power ultimately – all the mighty powers of nature itself, physical power, intellectual power, spiritual power, you name it. God gives away power while retaining His own power fully. He gives power to the stars, to the wind, to the waves of the sea, but He's not any less powerful when He does so. He gives power to us but doesn't lose any power when He does so.

God has displayed His awesome power in creation. The Bible says God not only created the entire universe by His power, but He also maintains it. Heb. 1:3 (NLT) says, "He sustains everything by the mighty power of his command." If the sun was closer to the Earth, we'd burn up. If it was farther away, we'd freeze up. If our planet wasn't tilted on an exact angle of 23 degrees, we wouldn't have four seasons. And if it wasn't titled at all, we'd be iced over. If the moon didn't stay at its specific distance from the Earth, the ocean tides would completely cover all the land twice a day. If the ocean floor were a few feet deeper, it would cause the Earth's atmosphere to be so changed that no vegetable or animal life could exist. God not only created everything by His almighty power, but by that same power He sustains and maintains it all.

God has displayed His power in our salvation. The Bible says in Rom. 1:16, "For I am not ashamed of this Good News about Christ. It is the power of God at work, saving everyone who believes." Because God is all powerful, He sent His Son to be born through a virgin. Because God is all powerful, His Son, Jesus, took the penalty of our sin upon Himself and died in our place. Because God is all powerful, He raised Jesus from the dead. Because God is all powerful, He takes a sinner like you and me and forgives us, fills us with His Holy Spirit, and gives us eternal life. Because God is all powerful, Jesus will return to this Earth one day and we will spend eternity with Him.

But, again, why does this matter? What difference in our daily lives does God's power and omnipotence make? It means you can live life confidently. If you belong to Jesus, there's no reason to live life fearfully or anxiously. Imagine a common housefly finding its way onto an airplane. Imagine it being worried that its own weight will now somehow make the plane too heavy to take off. Here's this mighty airplane weighing about 90,000 pounds and carrying additional tons of fuel, luggage, and passengers. How ridiculous it is for that little fly to worry about its own additional weight! We sound even more ridiculous when we say or think things like, "I'm not sure God can help me. I'm not sure God can protect me. I'm not sure God can guide me." You can live confidently.

It also means you can live life victoriously. Did you know the words "hard" and "easy" can't apply to God? Since He already possesses all power, nothing is hard for God to do. Yes, we get our own lives into some pretty difficult, tangled messes. But God never finds it hard to help us solve our problems. He can do it as easily as He creates a new galaxy somewhere out there in the universe. You might have a very messed up personal relationship. A very serious physical condition. A very difficult work situation. You might be having a very hard struggle with a personal issue like your temper, pride, lust, resentment, or fear. But God is never intimidated by anything in your life or mine that looks impossible, or hard, or difficult. That's why we can always come to Him and ask Him to deliver us, protect us, heal us, and intervene on our behalf. I love the attitude of the little girl who couldn't get an impossible knot out of one of her shoelaces. Finally – in total exasperation – she took that shoe to her father, dumped it into his lap, and said, "Daddy, could you please get this knot out of my shoe? I'm going out to play!" You and I need to have the same attitude with our Heavenly Father.

What difference does God's power and omnipotence make in our lives? It means we can live life hopefully. The Bible says in 2 Cor. 4:14 (NLT), "We know that God, who raised the Lord Jesus, will also raise us with Jesus and present us to himself together with you." Death isn't the end. Because of Jesus, it's now just the doorway you and I have to go through to get to eternity. The same almighty power that raised Jesus from the dead will raise you from the dead one day and give you an eternal home in Heaven. Because God is all powerful and omnipotent, we can live today and every day confidently, victoriously, and hopefully.

Tim Brown, a pastor, tells the story of a friend named Tim Vanderveen. His friend was tall and broad-shouldered. Handsome guy with curly hair and a big, broad smile. Great student. Tim Vanderveen got a great job out of college and scampered up the ladder of business success quickly and easily. But one day, Tim, the pastor, got a phone call from Tim, his friend. "Hey, how are you doing?" A weak, trembling voice said, "I'm not doing so good." Tim, the pastor, asked, "What's up with you?" "I'm in the hospital. I got the flu or something," said Tim, his friend. "I'm going to be in town later today," said Tim Brown. "Maybe I can stop by and see you." "I'd like that a lot," was the reply. By the time, Tim Brown got to the hospital, Tim Vanderveen found out it wasn't the flu he had after all. He had leukemia.

That began a very hard three years that ended with the death of Tim Vanderveen. Tim Brown visited his friend the day he died. He was lying on his side. They'd put pillows between his now skinny legs. He didn't have enough energy to look up at his friend, so Tim Brown got down on one knee so he could look at his friend eyeball to eyeball. After the initial greeting, there was a long, awkward silence. Tim Vanderveen finally broke it. He said, "I've learned something." Tim, his pastor friend, asked, "Tell me, partner, what have you learned?" Back came the answer, "I've learned life is not like a VCR." Tim Brown didn't understand that unusual observation. So he asked, "I don't get it. What do you mean?" Tim Vanderveen said, "Life's not like a VCR. You can't just fast forward through the bad parts." There was a long pause. Then he added, "But I have learned that Jesus Christ is in every frame. And right now that's just enough."

No, the fact that God is eternal, in control, sovereign, all powerful and omniscient doesn't mean any of us can just fast forward through the bad parts of this life like a VCR or a DVR. But it does mean Jesus is still in every frame of our lives past, present, and future. And that means we can live today and every day confidently, victoriously, and hopefully.