

Sunday, September 19, 2021

## So Big!

(Message 3; Series: *Extreme Discipleship: Living into our Mission*)  
(Colossians 1:15-23)

### Scripture:

*<sup>15</sup>The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. <sup>16</sup>For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. <sup>17</sup>He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. <sup>18</sup>And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. <sup>19</sup>For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, <sup>20</sup>and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross. <sup>21</sup>Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior. <sup>22</sup>But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation— <sup>2</sup>if you continue in your faith, established and firm, and do not move from the hope held out in the gospel. This is the gospel that you heard and that has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven, and of which I, Paul, have become a servant.*

### Message:

**When kids are small (just starting to walk) parents often ask them a question:** They ask it over and over: “*How big is Lucy?*” “*How big is Teddy?*” Over and over, every grandparent, aunt, uncle, acquaintance joins in, week after week, month after month. You’d think the kid would get tired of it: “*How big are you?*”

Kids everywhere always give the same response. You remember? (“So big”). Kind of a sing-song answer with the hand motions -- sooo big. The kid thinks: “I’m huge.”

Please understand, this is a great answer, but it can’t be used in every context. In fact, use it carefully. E.g., if your wife asks, “How do my hips look in this new dress?” don’t say, “sooo big.”

But we want little kids to say it because we want them to know they're growing. We want them to think of themselves as increasingly strong and confident. We know that what they learn early in life, what they think of themselves, will dramatically impact their self-esteem and how they live the rest of their lives.

**The answer to another question also impacts how we live: How Big is Your God?** You don't have to answer out loud or right away, but at some point, sooner rather than later, you do need to answer that question – everyone does. And saying God is “Sooo Big...” is not a bad general answer. It is a good start. But Paul also wants us to get specific, “How big is Christ in your life?”

The way you envision the Jesus Christ will significantly impact the way you **live** and spend **eternity**. I.e., people live in directly correlation to the size of their God.

## OUR PROBLEM

**Most people make God too small; they want to make him definable, manageable, and able to control.**

In a movie popular about twenty years ago entitled, “*Honey, I Shrunk the Kids*,” an eccentric scientist father invents a machine that inadvertently shrinks his normal sized children to dime-sized children.

Many people, even Christians, have shrunk God down, and as a result they no longer **trust** or are convinced that they're (completely) safe in the hands of a fully competent, all-knowing, ever-present God. They're not convinced of it deep in their bones.

And...a self-shrunken God significantly impacts the way we live. With a small God, we live in constant **fear** and **anxiety** because so much now depends on us. We refrain from sharing our faith because we worry doing it wrong and being rejected. We hoard our resources because we believe our financial security depends on us. When we make tough decisions, we tend to **conform** to what others think, because we don't have the security of a big God's acceptance.

If your God is small, when you're tempted to lie (perhaps to spouse or kids or boss) you probably will because you're more afraid of them than God. If you get credit at work for something you didn't do, you might take it because you don't trust in a big God who will reward you one day. If somebody gets mad at you or disapproves of you, you might get all tied up in knots because you're not sure your little God's love is sufficient.

When human beings shrink their God, they live their life without **vision**, pray without **faith**, worship without awe, serve without joy, and suffer without **hope**. They live in fear, and they often fail to persevere. Little-God-syndrome brings

misery and tragedy. Most people have little God days now and then; some have little-God days for extended times; some, all their life.

**Against that backdrop, the writers of Scripture never tire of celebrating the fact that God is big!**

In Colossae, there was a heresy known as **Gnosticism**. They believed that God is a spirit (they get that part right), but they believed that matter, physical creation, was evil and bad (that's wrong), so (they falsely concluded that) God could not have had anything to do with Creation. The idea God came in flesh was unthinkable to them; it didn't fit their system. Jesus might be a good person, but since he was in flesh (matter) he could not be God!

We may not believe that theologically; but sadly, many live that way today. Live with a **small** God and you will live a **small**, sad, frightened life. Live with a big God, and you will live a life of **risky** faith, fearless obedience, **awestruck** worship, passionate evangelism, and **extreme** discipleship.

## HIS PREEMINENCE

**In our text, Paul talks about the greatness of God and the supremacy of Christ.** He begins with a majestic hymn in **1:15-20** that is a statement of the sovereignty, supremacy and sufficiency of Christ, celebrating him with praise, wonder and awe. In **1:21-23**, Paul applies the hymn to counter the heresy in the Church in Colossae.

In **Colossians 1:15**, Paul writes, "*He is the image (lit. the icon or portrait) of the invisible God.*" (Paul goes back to the Creation story). This is an amazing statement about someone walking in human flesh here on earth. Paul is saying, "*When you **look** at Jesus, you are **seeing** God.*"

In Colossians **1:19**, Paul adds, "*For in him, (i.e., **Jesus**) all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell.*" Ever wonder what God thinks of children? Jesus said, "*Let them come to me.*" Wonder what God thinks of sinners? Jesus: "*I've come to seek and to save the lost.*" Wonder how God really feels about the suffering that tears us up? Look at Jesus weeping at the tomb of Lazarus.

Because God is great, because God is sooo big, we can be absolutely confident of his **love**, know he'll forgive us when we sin; call on him even when we feel **inadequate**, and run into his arms any time, night or day.

Even though my God is huge, I don't have to be afraid of him. I can immerse myself in his friendship, forgiveness, and love.

A little boy was drawing a picture. His mom asked him, "*What are you drawing?*" He responded, "*I'm drawing a picture of God.*" His mom replied, "*But nobody knows*

*what God looks like.*" The little boy said, *"They will when I get finished."* When Jesus was finished, we knew what God looked like.

Paul writes in **Colossians 1:15**, [He is] *"the firstborn (prototikus, i.e., Lord) of all creation."*

Jehovah Witnesses will tell you this verse "proves" Jesus is not God because he was *"the firstborn of creation"* (i.e., he was created). (They tend to select certain passages out of context to support their theology). But this *"firstborn"* is not about **sequence**, but about **supremacy**; Jesus is **Lord** over all creation; in fact, he participated in creation: *"In him all things in heaven and on earth were created."*

Jesus looked at his Father and said, *"How big shall we make the universe?"* His Father said, "About sooo big." Think of the size of universe God created: billions of stars, galaxies, supernovas, and black holes. God took a little water in his hand and poured it out. And there was the Pacific Ocean; a little more and he made the Atlantic Ocean. He shook the leftover drops off, and there were the Great Lakes.

The prophet **Isaiah asks (40:12a)** *"Who has measured the waters in the hollow of his hand, or with the breadth of his hand marked off the heavens?"* (The breadth of his hand – I have trouble palming a basketball, that takes a nine-inch breadth; to hold the heavens in your hand, how big does that make God?)

Picture creation in God's hand – a finite universe in hand of an infinite God; he's got the whole world in his hands.

**Isaiah continues his doxology (40:25)** – *"To whom will you compare me, or who is my equal?" says the Holy One. 'Lift up your eyes on high and see...'"*

This means we don't have to be afraid of anything in the **created order** because he holds it in his hand. We don't have to fear disease or sickness or anything that might affect our body. God can take care of us. We don't have to worry about what to eat or drink or our financial status. God can provide. Jesus said, *"Don't worry about what you're going to eat or drink or wear. God cares for the birds and flowers. He'll take care of you."* (cf. **Matthew 6:25ff.**) How big is that?

**Paul continues (1:16)** – He is *"Lord over things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers."* (Paul is now switching his attention from Creation to the Church).

Paul says every human power, government, corporation, addiction, supernatural forces and beings like fallen angels, are child's play in the hands of Jesus. Jesus is big enough to overpower any force hindering us from following him. All things are under his lordship. They may not know it yet, but it is already true. If he is Lord of them all, we don't have to live in fear of any of them. The Church knows this.

**Paul continues the hymn (1:17)** – *“In him all things hold [i.e., are sustained] together.”* God didn’t just create us and leave us on our own. He continues to sustain us day by day. We can’t hold it all together; but we don't need to. Jesus does. He does it for us. That's his job.

Christ is *“...the firstborn from the dead, so that he might come to have first place in everything. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross.” (1:18).*

With the Fall, the whole universe was impacted. Creation was impacted. Creation was impacted again with what happened on the cross. Jesus, the firstborn of **creation**, was now the firstborn of **dead**; not only was he involved in creation, now he is also involved in doing Church – the gathering of those who will be eternally resurrected.

John Ortberg tells of pastor who traveled with a funeral director doing funerals in small towns. One day, the pastor was really tired and lay down in the back of the hearse (empty after the graveside) to take a nap. While sleeping, the director pulled into a gas station and went into the mini-mart. The attendant pumping gas looked in the back of the hearse as the pastor woke up, opened his eyes, stretched his arms, and waved at the attendant. He says he never saw anybody run so fast.

Normally, dead is dead, but since the cross, since the resurrection, since our reconciliation, **death** has been **conquered**; one day we’ll rise! God is that big!

## **THE PRESCRIPTION**

**To be “Big-God” person, you must believe there is a big God right next to you and taking up residence in you.**

Moses went up against Pharaoh, apparently the highest throne, power, authority in the world. God promised him: *“I’ll deliver you, Moses. Take the people thru the Red Sea. You’ll have to put a foot in the water first. When you do that, I’ll divide it and save you.”* Moses lived with a big God who expected big things from him.

The question is, will you live with this big God? Will you be a big God person? If you say *yes* to being a big God person - and this is scary – the first step is to trust him enough to take that first step in faith, to act, to live like he’s right there with you.

Let’s talk about three areas in our lives where we should be increasingly **conscious** of a big God.

**The first area is in our relational life.**

Many of us have a person in our life we're **estranged from**; they let us down or betrayed us. We are angry, even bitter, with them. We know you should forgive and seek reconciliation. But we don't have it in us...

That is true. We don't have it in us. We need a big God in and beside us. Then you take one step toward forgiving (make a call, approach the person, take the first step) and God will give you the power to forgive. But you've got to take that first step.

Some of us have a person we **need to love**, but we're emotionally empty: "*I don't have it in me to love that person.*" True, but we have a great big God, so we need to take a step towards servanthood.

Maybe we need to grow in **compassion** toward people from a different culture, of different ethnicity, or with a different opinion. Maybe we need to walk a mile in someone else's shoes. We need to take that first courageous step.

Maybe you have offended or deceived someone. You need to **confess** (to God and to them), and you're frightened to do that. Well, you get started with saying the first sentence...

We need to live with a big God in our relational life, because living with a big God will make us more like Jesus and living like Jesus will change your world.

**The second area is in our **service (ministry) to the **body** of Christ.****

It's Fall sign up. We have ministry fair tables set up; and many of us are starting to think up excuses why we can't serve. Maybe we consider serving on a ministry team, leading a small group, or making coffee a menial task that has nothing to do with the size of our God.

But what if God is asking you to do something **really** big? Big God's have big expectations. What if God called you to be a missionary to Haiti, Peru, or Russia—no chance you say. But God is big enough to do that in your life. Maybe he's asking you to adopt an orphan or a child with special needs.

Maybe God is calling you to start an evangelistic small group, organize a neighborhood outreach event, or prayer walk your block. Maybe God wants you to work with kids - two-year-olds or teenagers.

Maybe God is calling you to give sacrificially—a significant contribution to underwrite a ministry, an entire salary, or make a significant endowment gift.

Some of those things are possible for you if you have a big God! Join me in praying God will raise up people from this congregation...to do some of those life-changing and destiny altering things.



Are you going to trust God with your spiritual gifts and use them for his service and glory? Take **one** step. God is big! Take that first step and see if God doesn't prove trustworthy and **faithful**!

**The third (final) area is making God real big in your evangelistic life.**

Paul writes, *"Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior. But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body [note emphasis on Christ in flesh] through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation."*

Paul is saying: *"I've become a servant of that gospel,"* and so have you and I. The Gospel of Christ crucified and risen must impact our life.

I've talked with unchurched men and woman over the years who were experiencing relationship disasters. Men behaving badly. Women making bad decisions. They needed spiritual wisdom and understanding. I invited them to come to a worship service, join a small group, commit their life to Jesus. A few did; but most continued to ignore the God who sits on the throne of the universe.

The world desperately **needs** what you and I have to **offer**. And we need to make sure we **offer**—in Jesus' name—what this world **needs** – that is our mission.

The evangelistic potential of this church is **huge**, sooo big, but it all depends on whether we're willing to live with a **big** God and take that first step of being an extreme disciple of Jesus, an ambassador of the Kingdom and an evangelist for the King.

Be bold. Extend an invitation to your neighbor. Ask a co-worker one question about their spiritual life: What do they think about God? How big is there God? If you take that first step, you'll discover there's a great big God walking with you.

A great big God deserves a great big proclamation of his *"bigness."*

## **THE POSTLUDE**

**Let's turn our attention once back to the praise and worship on the lips of Paul as he celebrates the **sovereignty, sufficiency, and supremacy** of our Lord Jesus Christ. Let us make our God as big as the God of the Scriptures. Our Lord, Christ Jesus, is:**

...sooo big he created everything by a word from his mouth—a word and it all came to be. Now he holds entire universe in his hand...without any strain or effort at all.

...sooo big that he was able to place all the fullness of God in a baby born to poverty-stricken parents and laid in a manger.

...sooo big that at word from him storms cease, and winds die; a few loaves and two fish are multiplied to feed 5000; and the lame leap for joy, the blind see, and demons run for their lives.

...sooo big what when he went to the cross, the entire universe held its breath; time stopped and history was suspended, and he brought about the reconciliation of the entire universe through the shedding of his blood.

...sooo big that when he went to his tomb the grave couldn't hold him, the guards were terrified and ran away, and the evil one has been running ever since.

...sooo big that he has numbered every hair you've ever grown, every tear you've ever cried and every breath you've ever inhaled, every word you've every spoken, every thought that has passed your mind, and every hope you've ever cherished.

...sooo big he is surrounding you right now, your car on the way home, your bed as you sleep tonight, your day when you wake up tomorrow. Truth is, he has taken up residence in your life.

...sooo big he'll be a shield around you from this moment until he comes to present you holy, without blemish, free from accusation to live forever in the arms of his Father.

How big is your God? God is sooo big he commands our full **attention**, demands our complete **obedience**, and covets our undivided **worship**.

**Please stand as we acknowledge the presence of our great Lord and Savior and pray together...**