

“This is Our God”

a sermon by

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Deuteronomy 6:4-24
Ephesians 3:14-21

I have wrestled for some months now on what to say today. There is so much that my heart hopes you have heard me say over the last few years. But there is one thing, above all others that I want to make sure you have heard me say, and so, just in case you haven't, I am going to say it again. I began my tenure here talking about the grace and faithfulness of our God because I wanted to be sure that it was the first thing you heard from me. And now I want it to be the last.

We live in a hectic and crazy world. So often we run so fast ironically trying to attain some sort of normalcy, that our lives usually become anything but normal. And in the process, much too often we lose sight and forget those things that should be most important.

Which is why in our Old Testament text for today God instructs His people to “write His commandments upon their hearts and to tie them as symbols upon their foreheads.” Because God knew just how easy it would be amidst the demands of life for His people to forget His character and to forget His heart.

And it is in remembering who God is, and what God has done, that we recognize the grace that is at work in our lives. It is in remembering all that God has done, and all that God promises still to do, that we gain the ability to approach the future with hope instead of with anxiety and fear.

For the last several months, God has been reminding me about who He is and about what He has done. And so this morning I am going to pass along that reminder to you – just in case you need it as well, and it is my hope that in the midst of this reminder about who God is, that you will recognize His promised grace in your life afresh. So are you ready? It is quite a long list. Here it is.

Who is our God?

Our God is the One who laid the earth's foundation, who marked off its dimensions and set its cornerstone. Our God is the One who shut up the seas when it burst forth from the womb saying “this far you may come and no further.”

It is our God who gives orders to the morning, who shows the dawn its place, who knows the way to the abode of light and knows where darkness resides. It is our God who beholds the storehouses of snow and hail, who sends the lightening bolts along their way, who tips over the water jars of heaven and cuts channels for the torrents of rain.

It is our God who binds the beautiful Pleiades and sets loose the chords of Orion. It is our God who brings forth the constellations in their season, who knows the laws of heaven, who raises His voice to the clouds, and it is by His wisdom that the hawk and the eagle take flight.

Yet with all He holds in His hands, Our God is a God who is still mindful of us!

For it was our God that walked with Adam in the cool of the day. It was our God that brought justice to Cain when he murdered his brother in secret. It was our God that instructed Noah to build an ark so that his family might be spared from the deluge to come. It was our God that called Abram out of the land of his fathers with a promise stating, “I am your shield and

your very great reward.” And it was our God that gave that same Abram a new name and a new identity.

It was our God that rescued Lot and gave Sarah a child in her old age, who wrestled with Jacob and then reunited him with the brother he feared. It was our God that gave Joseph his dreams and then raised him from prisoner and slave to caretaker of Egypt. And it was our God that gave Joseph the insight and the grace to tell his brothers “what you meant for evil, God has used for good.”

It was our God that spoke to Moses out of a burning bush and it was our God that gave Moses the courage to face Pharaoh. It was our God who struck down Egypt’s firstborn, but delivered the Hebrews and brought them out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm – leading them with a pillar of fire and cloud. It was also our God who parted the Red Sea and who provided water out of a rock and bread from Heaven.

It was our God that showed His glory to Moses while hiding him in a cleft so that he might continue to live and it was our God who gave His people laws to live by and then charged His people to “write them upon the tablets of their hearts and teach them to their children so that they might remember all that had been done on their behalf.”

And that is only the beginning.

It was our God that spoke through Balaam’s donkey, who provided a promised land and who set up within it cities of refuge for the innocent. It was our God who caused the waters of the Jordan to bunch in a heap, who reduced the mighty walls of Jericho to rubble and brought low the great city of Ai. It was our God who ordered the sun to stand still over Gilgal and it was our God who gave His people victory over the Amorites, Amalekites, Canaanites, Hittites, Moabites, Midianites, and many other “might’s.”

It was our God that made Deborah a prophetess, who recognized the warrior in Gideon, who gave uncommon strength to Sampson, who made Ruth’s heart faithful and who dried Naomi’s bitter tears. It was our God who turned Boaz into a kinsman-redeemer and it was our God who gave Hannah a child name Samuel “whose word went out to all of Israel and whose word never fell fallow upon the ground.”

It was our God who anointed Saul as Israel’s first king and then demoted him because “obedience is better than sacrifice.” It was our God who raised up a lowly shepherd boy named David, gave him victory over a giant, and then gave him the keys to the kingdom. It was our God who gave endless wisdom to Solomon and endless oil to the widow of Zarepath.

It was our God who proved Himself on Mount Carmel over the prophets of Baal, who spoke to Elijah in a whisper and then carried him home in a whirlwind. It was our God who brought justice to Ahab, who raised a Shunammite woman’s son from the dead, who healed Naaman’s leprosy, and stirred Nehemiah’s heart to rebuild the broken and tattered walls of Jerusalem.

It was our God who made Esther a queen, who allowed Job to be tested, who gave the psalmist the psalms, and who commissioned Isaiah to speak prophetically of a Messiah and a restored Israel. It was our God who selected Jeremiah, who appointed Ezekiel, and then instructed him to “prophesy to dry bones so that they might live.”

It was our God who showed compassion on both Jonah and Nineveh, who listened to Habakkuk’s complaints, whose word came to Amos, Micah, Zephaniah, Zechariah, and to countless others.

And that is only the Old Testament’s witness.

It was our God whose power caused a virgin to conceive and it was His incredible love that conceived the Eternal Word become flesh. It was our God who appeared to Joseph in a vision, who sent angels to announce the birth of His Son, and then sent wise men and shepherds to witness the miracle.

It was His grace that allowed an old man to see Israel’s consolation, His ingenuity that turned water into “Cana’s Finest Reserve”, as well as a few crusty rolls and a couple of sardines into a banquet for thousands. It was our God that gave the blind man his sight; that raised a dead girl, a widow’s son, and a sister’s beloved brother.

It was He who calmed a frightful storm, healed a paralytic, an official’s son, and a man possessed and plagued by demons. It was our God who reached out to an outcast Samaritan woman with a checkered past, who saved an adulteress woman from certain death, who dined with sinners, and defied modern physics by walking on water.

In case you haven’t noticed, strange and powerful things happen when our God is around.

It was our God who called and still calls common people to do uncommon things, who commissioned a coward to be the Rock of the Church, who chose to trust one whom He knew would betray Him to His death and then furthermore chose to hang upon a cross even though He didn’t have to; but in doing so, He inspired the faith of a centurion and countless thousands after.

It was our God who died, but then rose from the dead and ascended to Heaven. It was our God who commissioned His disciples and then sent them His Spirit so that they might have the power they needed to face the days ahead. And it was His power and anointing that fell upon the crowd at Pentecost.

He empowered Peter. He strengthened the spirit of Stephen. He sustained Paul. And it was His word that went out through each of them and many others to Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, Phoenicia, Cyprus, Antioch, Philippi, Thessalonica, Berea, Macedonia, Athens, Corinth, Galatia, Ephesus, Rome and to the very ends of the earth...even Charlotte.

What more can be said that has not already been said?

It is He who soars on the wings of the wind, mounted upon cherubim. It is He who spreads the snow like wool and scatters the frost like ashes. It is He who hurls down hail like pebbles and then it is His word that melts them. It is He who determines the number of stars and then calls each of them by name.

The heavens declare His glory and the skies proclaim the works of His hand. From the colors of Fall, to the fragrance of Spring, from the highest of heights to the depths of the sea, creation reveals His majesty.

His law is perfect. It revives the soul. His statutes are trustworthy. His precepts are right. His commands are radiant and His ordinances are sure. The earth is the Lord's and everything in it. All the ways of the Lord are loving and faithful.

He is a refuge for the poor and a shelter from the storm. He heals the brokenhearted and binds their wounds. It is He who longs to wipe away your tears and return your wasted years. He is a father to the orphan, a healer to the broken, a fountain for the thirsty, and a lover for the lonely. Untamable, unchangeable, incomparable, He is. It is He who wrestles with the sinner's heart, who restores the lost, who brings peace to our madness and comfort to our sadness.

By His power the weak often lead the strong. He is our supply, our breath of life, our perfect gift, our great reward. All that satisfies, all that gives hope, all that sustains, all that helps us persevere, comes from Him. It is from Him that we gain every skill, every success, every victory.

There is no place you can go to hide from Him, just ask Adam or Eve. There is no place where you can escape from Him, just ask Cain. Only a fool says in his heart there is no God, because He hems us in – both behind and before. If we go up to the Heavens, He is there. If we make our bed in the depths, He is there. He created our inmost being and has declared us fearfully and wonderfully made. He is our rock, our deliver, our fortress, our horn of salvation, our stronghold, shield, defender, and vindicator.

If you rise on the wings of the dawn or if you settle on the far side of the sea, even there He will find you and His right hand will hold you fast. He will stand by you in the fiery furnace – just ask Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. He will deliver you from the pit, just ask Daniel, God delivered him from the mighty lions den.

It is our God who provides food for the Raven and satisfies the hunger of the wild beast. It is He who knows when the mountain goat gives birth and when the doe bears her fawn. By the power of His spoken word, creation took place. From Him darkness tried to hide and trembled at His voice. It is He who endows the heart with wisdom and gives understanding to the mind.

How great is our God?

From age to age He stands and time is in His hands. He is an ever present help in times of trouble and many are the wonders He has done. His love is unfailing and His compassion is great. Let me repeat that. His love is unfailing and His compassion is great. Trust in Him and He will make your righteousness shine like the dawn, the justice of your cause will shine like the noonday sun.

Be still before the Lord and wait for Him. For it is He who washes away our iniquities and blots out our transgressions. It is He who cleanses us with hyssop and makes us whiter than

snow. Our salvation comes from Him and His grace is sufficient. Let me be sure to say that again, because all too often we don't believe it. His grace is sufficient! Believe it!

Many times the people of Israel rebelled, but He always took note of their distress when He heard their cry. For their sake He remembered His covenant and out of His tremendous love, He gathered those who had been scattered to the East, to the North, to the South, and to the West. There is nothing that we can do to separate us from the love of God. Please hear me when I say that. There is absolutely nothing that you can ever do that will separate you from the love of God.

Surely He will save us from the fowler's snare. He will cover us with His feathers and under His wings we will find refuge. His faithfulness will be our rampart and our shield.

Therefore we need not fear the terror of night, the arrow that flies by day, or the unsettledness of transition. For He will command His angels concerning us, to guard us in all our ways.

Therefore, lift up your eyes to the hills because He will not let your foot slip. He who watches over Israel will not slumber. He will be your shade at your right hand. The sun will not harm you by day, nor the moon by night. The Lord watches over your life. It is our God, the mighty, powerful, awesome God that we have been talking about, that watches over your life.

Trust in Him. Delight in Him. Commit your ways to Him. For He is our Hope and our Consolation. We are God's dream and I say God's dream because even though He holds the power of the universe, He has seen fit not to coerce us but instead to woo us. Therefore let us not live in fear, but instead let us live in faith. Let us live in promise. Let us dwell in the good land that He has given us.

Because what He has done once, He promises to do again!

This is our God. It is to Him that we belong and He has promised good things to us. This is our God and He is faithful. He has proven His faithfulness time and time again. He cannot be anything else. It is who He is. It is His character. It is His nature. His word can be trusted because He does not, He cannot, go back on His word.

Therefore I charge you, be strong and courageous. Remember all that God has done. Remember His amazing power and His tremendous love. And do not be anxious. Do not be discouraged. For the Lord our God promises to be with you wherever you go¹.

¹ The descriptors of God found within this sermon are all taken directly from Scripture itself, with the exception of a few which were drawn from a selection of praise songs by Chris Tomlin.