

North Main, 2.11.18

SovereigntyOfG21118

Title: *That I Am God.*

Texts: Psalm 46:10. Scripture Reading, Exodus 3:13-15

Last week: “Be still and know . . .” This week: “. . . that I am God.” When I consider these words, I am mindful of Exodus 3:14 “I Am Who I Am.” “I Am has sent me to you.”

Israel has been captive in Egypt for 430 years. Moses sees a soldier beating an Israeli. Moses kills the soldier and flees to Midian. Moses gets married. One day, while tending his father-in-law’s sheep, a bush begins to burn but doesn’t burn up. God speaks from the bush, telling Moses to return to Egypt to set Israel free.

Moses begins to list excuses: “Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?” (Exodus 3:11). Suppose they ask me your name? (3:13). God replied: “I Am Who I Am” (3:14). “I Am has sent you” (3:14).

More excuses: What if they don’t believe me? What if they don’t listen to me? I’m not good with words. Essentially, God responds: Moses, be *still*, and know that I am God!

About all God says about direct self-identity in Scripture is found right here: I will be who and what I will be. The morning text uses essentially the same language: “Be still and know that I am God.” Not much to go on. But there is one important detail: “Be still . . .”

That was the message Elijah, the great Jewish prophet, heard at Mount Horeb. Prior to this, Elijah had conducted a contest with the prophets of Baal and Asherah. Elijah won. They lost. Eight-hundred-fifty false prophets died. Queen Jezebel sent a message to Elijah: I’m going to kill you just like you killed my prophets.

Elijah ran for Mount Horeb, where God found him hiding in a cave. God called Elijah out of the cave: “Go out and stand on the mountain before the Lord, for the Lord is about to pass by” (1 Kings 19:11).

A great wind shattered rocks, but God was not in the wind.

An earthquake shook things up, but God was not in the earthquake.

Next, fire, but God was not in the fire.

Then sheer silence: “When Elijah heard it, he covered face, went out and stood at the entrance of the cave. Then there came a voice to him that said, ‘What are you doing here, Elijah?’” (1 Kings 19:13). Essentially, God says to Elijah: Be *still*, and know that I am God!

Moses and Elijah, two great Jewish Prophets and heroes. To Moses, God says, “No more excuses. Be still. I Am Who I Am. Know that I Am God.” To Elijah, God says, “Shhh, don’t be afraid, be still and know that I am God.”

Eight simple words: “Be still and know that I am God.” In this text, a silent spirit, a still heart,

seem to be required to comprehend God. But how in the world do we even do that?

All humans are looking for some understanding of the Great Mystery that is God, which leaves us with our tongues glued to the roof of our mouth. Eventually words fail us. For millennia, the human imagination has groped around in the dark for construct of God. We can presume some things about God, but we cannot arrange a definitive explanation of God.

The authors of the Pentateuch—Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy—all tried and failed.

The prophets tried and failed.

The authors of wisdom literature, like Psalms, tried and failed.

The New Testament authors tried and failed.

Even Scripture cannot *prove* God's existence, and doesn't try. Scripture *assumes* that God exists: "In the beginning God . . ." (Genesis 1:1). Psalm 146 is a Zion Psalm. The author assumes that God exists. God is too big for human explanation. But we are compelled to try. Can't help ourselves.

Wednesday afternoon, I emailed Idella the sermon, up to this point, asking: "Do you get any of this?" Her response: "I get it. So, are you, oh wise one, going to tell us how to reach God if he is too big for human explanation, and even the New Testament failed?" My response: "I'm going to try, knowing that I will fail, too."

No human can fully prove God's existence, no matter how wide the vocabulary, no matter how wise, no matter how much study or research. But the text reads ". . . know that I am God." That implies physical evidence, scientific proof.

Suppose a careful scientist was to set up a controlled experiment to test for God: "I will believe, without doubt, that God exists if God makes this cup disappear." And the cup disappears!

He will then look for an explanation for the cup's disappearance. The scientist might say, "Someone played a trick on me." Or, "The cup was never actually there." Or, "My mind and eyes are playing tricks on me."

Or suppose the researcher concludes that the cup was there and disappeared. Based on the scientific "principle of uniformity," he will rerun the experiment to verify it.

Suppose the cup disappears a second time. The scientist then publishes his results in a peer-reviewed article. Others try the same experiment in their own labs. If the cup doesn't disappear for these scientists, scientist number 1 will be deemed a nutcase, and the whole thing is forgotten. If the cup disappears every time, the scientific community will declare that a natural phenomenon accounts for this and begin developing a new theory to explain it.

I'm not knocking science. We reap countless benefits from it. But science, being what it is, will never find, or be satisfied with, any decisive conclusion about God.

“Be still” implies surrender “. . . and know” implies faith in knowing that God is God. Listen to what happens if I change one word out of eight: “Be still and *believe* that I am God.” Embracing the reality of God requires belief, faith, conviction.

I often use metaphor and simile to explain God: God is . . . God is like. So how would you finish this sentence: “God is . . .” “God is like . . .” Wednesday afternoon, every metaphor and simile I conjured up fell short. I needed stories. Here are two.

An aging Arab philosopher was asked how he knew God existed. He asked the asker, “How do I know whether a man or camel has passed my tent when I am asleep at night?” Long pause, “By the footprints.” God cannot ultimately be found. Yet we find evidence of God.

In 1995, I spent five weeks of my first sabbatical in Alaska. I became acquainted with a local pilot. He consented to take Idella and me on a short jump over the Chugach Mountains. Ten minutes off the ground in Anchorage, all signs of civilization vanished. As far as the eye could see: wilderness. Our plane was a speck in the cosmos. Though I could not see God peering into the windshield of that airplane, I recognized God's work and presence in what I saw *through* that windshield. I sat in silence, awestruck by the infinite magnitude and detail of the universe.

When I finished this message, ten books were strewn around on my desk. As I began to put them away, I noticed a quote by Philip Yancey: “Searching for God is like looking for my glasses while wearing them” (*Searching for the Invisible God*, p. 149, Philip Yancey).

“Be still and know that I am God” (Psalm 46:10). The Great I Am was with Moses. The Great I Am was with Elijah. The Great I Am is with us. Always. Especially as we move toward major changes.

“Be still and know that I am God” (Psalm 46:10).

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