

'How Big is Your God? Bigger Than Not Understanding'

Romans 8:26-39

Intro

There are some passages that I read from the Bible where I end up saying to myself (if not out loud), 'I don't ever remember hearing that before'.

Well,...this is not one of those passages.

This passage, in fact, is the complete 180 of that where we come before so many memorable verses that, as a preacher, I was left with my head spinning as I asked myself the question, 'so where should we go, o where do we go?'

The query that I ended up asking myself as I prayed upon these words was this: is the love of God lessened if I am not able to wrap my head around how God works? Is the love of God decreased if I can't understand how God is at work in the world; at work in my life?

Because here's the thing: in between the memorable quotes that are very refrigerator ready (and end up reassuring and making us feel good) are some concepts that make you wonder, and that cause some fear if not some doubt.

So are you willing to roll with God, even when you might not like how God appears to be working? The scripture reads this way.

Romans 8:26-39

26 Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words. ²⁷And God, who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.

28 We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose. ²⁹For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn within a large family. ³⁰And those whom he predestined he also called; and those whom he called he also justified; and those whom he justified he also glorified.

31 What then are we to say about these things? If God is for us, who is against us? ³²He who did not withhold his own Son, but gave him up for all of us, will he not with him also give us everything else? ³³Who will bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. ³⁴Who is to condemn? It is Christ Jesus, who died, yes, who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us. ³⁵Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? ³⁶As it is written, 'For your sake we are being killed all day long; we are accounted as sheep to be slaughtered.'

³⁷No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. ³⁸For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, ³⁹nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

'How Big is Your God? Bigger Than Not Understanding'

So something transpired during the mission trip that doesn't happen a whole lot. And, if I am being completely honest with myself, I never got completely comfortable with it.

Now those of you who know me (or at the very least enjoy busting my chops a little bit), you might think that I am referring to the step construction that my particular crew was responsible for.

Ha Ha. Very funny. No. That is not what I am referring to.

But I am very grateful that Ed Thornton was helping to lead that project because I am pretty sure he has learned and forgotten more tricks to building than I've ever learned in the first place!

No, the thing to which I am referring took place at the beginning of the trip, at the end of the trip, and all throughout the trip. The thing that I never got completely comfortable with was being a passenger in whatever vehicle I happened to be riding in.

Now mind you, that is by no means a comment on any of the drivers with whom I rode. They all drove wonderfully...except for that one time (no, I'm kidding).

But the reality is, I'm used to being the one who is behind the wheel of the car and not to the seat just to the left, let alone in the backseat. I do my best not to be any kind of a backseat driver (at least I hope I do!), but not having the wheel in my hands feels strange, and even uncomfortable.

This passage very much feels like that for me. There are thoughts and ideas that are incredibly reassuring and as stated earlier, are very easily transformed into refrigerator ready inspirational quote material. 'That very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words', 'If God is for us, who is against us?', and 'I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord' are truths that have the power to build us up so that we are appropriately buttressed to take on whatever rolls up upon the shores of our life.

Said another way, they make us feel good.

The thing is, there is still a feeling that we are the ones who are behind the wheel.

But then there's this concept that shows up in the middle of all of these affirming words. Let me read it again. 'We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn within a large family. And those whom he predestined he also called; and those whom he called he also justified; and those whom he justified he also glorified.'

Now it isn't as if what we are told here is negative, but that whole concept of being predestined (that what takes place as being predetermined by God), especially coming out of the context that 'all things work together for good for those who love God' (which I can tell you does not mitigate make any current heartache) leaves you in this place of feeling like a passenger in your own life. There have been theologians throughout the generations who have written volumes on this concept.

It's part of scripture and we very much believe that scripture is God breathed.

But it is still a concept that leaves me...at a loss. I don't know what to do with it, especially with all of the scripture passages that speak to how we need to respond to the leading of God's Spirit in our lives. It would be so convenient to just ignore the concept all together.

And that would be utterly wrong because if we are going to trust in these words as the Word of God, well, that means that we need to be open to how God is speaking through all of them and not just the ones that make sense to us; the ones that make us feel good.

Which is why I was led to the question that I was: is the love of God lessened if I am not able to wrap my head around how God works? Is the love of God decreased if I can't understand how God is at work in the world; at work in my life?

We live in a world where if we don't understand something we are able to look it up immediately and find out the answer.

I mean seriously, two weeks ago during the commissioning of the mission team I made some sort of a comment in regard to what to do when you don't know what to do, to trust in God and look it up on Google! That's the world we now know.

On one hand, that is phenomenal because we are all able to become at the very least conversant in something that just a few moments earlier you didn't know the answer to or didn't have a clue how to do. We are firmly ensconced behind the wheel.

On the other hand, it leaves us struggling to lean upon anything other than what can be factually proven or explained, especially when it feels like we are going to end up losing control ('Jesus Take the Wheel' may be a catchy song...but most folks don't like it to get to that point).

So here we are confronted with a biblical concept that is hard to wrap our heads around and even when we feel like we are starting to get a handle on what it means it makes us feel all sort of uncomfortable.

But does that mean that God loves us less? Is the depth of God's love defined by how much we think we are able to understand how God works at all, let alone in totality?

I say the answer is a definitive, 'no'. The reason that I feel strong in making that declaration is because of the disciples. What I see through their examples in the pages of scripture are people who walked with Jesus in an extremely intimate way. They heard truths and experienced miracles that make us think, 'no wonder they were able to believe.'

And yet, how many stories do we know where the disciples, these people for whom we think believing in the ways God was at work should be so easy, don't seem to get it at all. Jesus tells them to love their neighbor and they question why Jesus is associating with the Samaritan woman at the well. They are told by Jesus that he would need to die before being raised again, and yet even after they are led to the empty tomb, they are still hiding behind locked doors. They were right there...and there was so very much that they struggled to understand.

Do you think God loved them less?

Neither do I.

And it is upon that foundation that I approach you to say, just because we are not able to understand all of the ways that God is at work in the world, at work in your life, doesn't mean that we are on the outside looking in in regard to the love of God.

None of us may be able to understand predestination (because it is one of those Divine mysteries that is simply not for us to get...at least not in totality)...and God's love for us is sure.

We may look at the trials that we have to face in terms of our health, or our family, or our job. The love of God for us is sure.

We may look at the world with the chaos that is able to manifest itself on a daily basis and wonder if any of these things that are talked about in this book could possibly be true...and the love of God for us is sure.

And remember, even in those days when the doubt creeps in all that much further, 'That very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words', 'If God is for us, who is against us?', and 'I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord'.

You may not have all the answers...and you don't have to. God's love is bigger than that!

After Sermon Prayer

Holy God, we know a lot...but we don't know everything. We are able to trust You with so much...but then there are those other areas that we just don't get and then we begin to struggle with doubts and fears. Lord, help us to trust that Your love is not contingent upon any level of knowledge, but rather the simplest level of trust that You do love us, so much so that You gave us Your son. Some of the other ways that You are at work might not make sense to us...but Your love is always there. Lord, thank You for this amazing gift. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.