

NEAR GOD, FAR GOD ¹

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LORD, You have been our dwelling place in all generations. Before the mountains were born, or You did give birth to the earth and the world, Even from everlasting to everlasting, You are God ... For a thousand years in Your sight are like yesterday when it passes by, or as a watch in the night. (Psalm 90: 1- 4).

JOKE: Did you hear about Paddy the Irishman who was lying out in the green fields of Ireland looking up into the sky? He decided to try a conversation with God. "God, in your sphere 'o tings", he said, "what are a million years loyke?" God answered, "In My sphere, a million years are but as one minute." Paddy then asked, "Well God, in your sphere 'o tings, what would a million dollars be loyke?" God answered, "In My sphere Patrick, a million dollars are but as one single dollar." Emboldened Paddy asked a third question, "Well God, to be sure, to be sure, do ya tink You moyght be able ta spare me just one o' Your dollars?" God answered, "Patrick, just one minute!"

Today we continue our little series on [Big God, Little God; Near God, Far God](#) and we are reminded of what the theologians call the transcendence of God and the immanence of God. God dwells in an altogether entirely different sphere to us mortals, and yet He is nearer than our next breath..

BIBLE TRANSLATOR

I was talking to a Bible translator in Vanuatu. He and his family were living rough in the remote jungle of that island nation. They had lived for ten years without running water, without power, without the luxuries we enjoy. They had been learning the culture and the local language with a view to getting some of the New Testament into the people's tongue. And it just so happened he was ecstatic that after this time, they had just that very week completed the book of Matthew.

I asked the translator what was the hardest verse or the most difficult challenge he had faced in his work. He said, "That's easy to answer. Whenever Jesus did anything, whenever he performed any action, that was easy. But as soon as Jesus opened his mouth, anything he said, caused us enormous translation issues." Let me give you a couple examples to illustrate this challenge. Jesus said,

Are not five sparrows sold for two cents? And yet not one of them is forgotten before God. Indeed the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Do not fear; you are of more value than many sparrows"(Lk 12:6-7). The hairs on your head are **all numbered**. What does that mean? Two possibilities present.

1. The total number is known to God? God knows the grand tally of the hairs on your head. Even that is an amazing assertion ... the average human head has about 60,000 hairs ... before they start to drop off --- permanently. So just to keep tabs on your head and keep altering the tally is remarkable enough! Now consider that there are over 6 billion people on the planet. And God knows each tally for each individual, and that tally for each individual can change by the day, by the hour! They are **all numbered** --- not one hair is left out of the grand total! Oh, what a big God, little God we have! Our Father.
2. Each hair has an assigned number? The Greek may also read, **the hairs on your head are each numbered**. Each individual hair has a recorded number? Which means God has registered a number for each individual hair! (A God who has created universes, within universes within the Universe, as we have seen, and a God who can count in pico-seconds is surely able to do this!)

So, the hairs on your head are all numbered ... each individual hair is assigned its own number, *and* the total on your head is tallied up as well! Do you know the number of hairs on your head? Have you counted out each

¹ This is the second sermon delivered at Papamoa Family Camp in New Zealand, February 2019. Once again I ask the reader to make allowances for the hortatory nature of the notes.

individual hair? No? Well, so great is your Father's love and care for you that He has already done it. Do you know the number of hairs on the head of that darling head of that little baby, that son or that daughter of yours? No? No! Then how dare you be anxious for them, says Jesus. Your heavenly Father has already counted them! Stop worrying.

Not even one sparrow is forgotten before God, says the Son of God (Luke 12: 6) even though we don't even notice the sparrows, selling them for a pittance. (In the early days when sparrows were introduced, the government in Oz offered a bounty of a penny per sparrow head!) Considered a pest. But they are precious to your Heavenly Father! He is the big God, little God.

Let's not rush over what Jesus says here. "Are not five sparrows sold for two cents, and not one of them is forgotten before God" (Lk. 12:6). The sparrow is the tiniest of the finch family in the Middle East. The word itself is what's called a *diminutive* --- they are *little sparrows*. They are a common little bird. Jesus tells us that you can buy a pair for the equivalent of a cent. You can buy 2 pairs for 2 cents, and the dealer will throw in an extra one for nothing; you get 5 *little sparrows* for 2 cents. Sparrows are cheap, cheap, cheap, cheap, cheap (!)

But, "Your heavenly Father does not forget one little sparrow when it falls to the ground" I used to think Jesus means that not even the death of one sparrow goes unnoticed by the Sovereign Creator of the Universe. That in itself is remarkable enough. How many little sparrows are there in the world? (Feral cats in Australia eat 1 million birds *every day!*) Not one of them can die (fall) without your Father's knowledge. I used to think that. But remarkable as that is, I'm not so sure now that that is entirely what Jesus meant.

"FALL" certainly can mean to die or to be destroyed. For instance, Jesus talked about how great would be the "fall" of that house which is not built upon the rock of his teachings. The Bible talks about falling by the edge of the sword, meaning dying by the sword. So certainly, in some contexts to fall means to be destroyed or to die and perish.

But in other contexts, to fall can mean simply to harmlessly drop. Crumbs may fall from the table. When the sower scatters the seed during planting, it is said to fall onto the ground with a view to a harvest.

So when Jesus says not one of the smallest and most common of the birds, *the little sparrow* can fall to the ground without Father's knowledge, did he mean your Father knows when each and every individual sparrow dies and perishes, or did he mean that each time every little sparrow hops off its perch onto the ground to feed, that your heavenly Father knows and *sees it throughout its entire lifespan?*

Either way. Jesus assures us, our Father in heaven is a big God, because He pays attention to the minutest of details about everything. How awesome that He who knows all things, cares for each individual every single moment. *Such knowledge is too wonderful for me, it is high, I cannot attain to it.*

Tell me, when you awoke this morning, did you think about birds. Were you concerned for them? Did you notice them? Well, I can tell you on the authority of God's own word, God was watching them. And it is guaranteed, whilst you slept God was watching you. Before you stirred, He was there. Before your mind kicked into gear, He knew your thoughts. Before your feet hit the floor, He knew what your first words would be. Big God, little God; Near God, Far God!

HOW DO I KNOW GOD IS LEADING ME? Now, let's be practical and apply this. Many strain for years trying to discern what God's will for their lives is and they are never sure they are in His perfect will for their lives. The problem is they can be looking in the wrong places ... dreams, visions, angelic visits, voices from the whirlwind, emotional highs, and so forth. But I am going to tell you a great secret. Are you ready for it?

When we are in the will of God, we will hear and feel nothing necessarily out of the ordinary. Let me illustrate:

When a *child* is doing the will of his parents, he will hear nothing from his mum or dad. Suppose you tell your youngster not to ride his bike on the road. If you see him riding on the street you will run out and yell at him, "Get off the road!" Or if you don't scream at him, you will simply act and run out and retrieve him from danger.

However, if you look out the window and see little Johnnie or little Suzie riding on the footpath as they are supposed to, they will hear or see nothing from you. Right? The same is true of our heavenly Father. When we are in His will, we will not necessarily hear anything out of the ordinary. All is relatively quiet and calm.

So, how does one get into His will? Quite simple. When alternatives present themselves, you pray, "Lord, You know I want Your will to be done in my life more than anything else. Not mine, but Your will be done. I am thinking of doing such and such, or going to such and such a place. If it's not Your will, please close the door. If it stays open I will move ahead with confidence in Your loving hand before me."

He is the God of Today and the God of Tomorrow. Don't worry, for God knows your needs even before you ask. He is the God of the rolling ages ... He is called the "eternal God" or, more literally, "the God of the ages of the ages". He holds the big picture in His eye, and yet, He knows when a hair on your head falls out, and when a little sparrow hops onto the ground. He is the God of this day, your day, this pico-second of a moment in eternity!

He is the Big God, little God. Whether you lose a loved one in death, or lose your car keys (to the cat!) you can take your heart to God.

A BOW AT A VENTURE. Remember how that wicked king of Israel, Ahab died? He thought he could thwart God's word against him. He went into the battle without his kingly robes. He tried to disguise himself. And for a while it looked like he might get away with his plot. However we read, **Now a certain man drew his bow at random and struck the king of Israel in a joint of the armor. So he said to the driver of his chariot, "Turn around, and take me out of the fight, for I am severely wounded" (I Kgs. 22: 20).**

A certain man fulfilled God's decreed counsel. What was his name? Don't know. The Bible calls him a certain man. How old was he? Not told. Which of the armies did he belong to? No idea. He is "**a certain man**". And he drew his bow **on a whim**. No purpose to it. Just a random shot. And this certain man let his arrow fly up into the air. No particular target chosen. But God's prophetic purpose must be fulfilled. So it flew with angelic aim. And where did this certain man's random arrow land? Ah! It struck between the joint of Ahab's armour ... not just the armour of any body. It struck God's intended target.

And that evening, as God's prophetic word had decreed, the dogs licked Ahab's blood from the bottom of the chariot, **according to the word of the LORD which He spoke (I Kings 22: 38)**. Big God, little God! He is in control of all the events in this Universe, big or small, near or far.

GOD HAS GIVEN THE GOVERNMENT OF THIS WORLD TO HIS SON.

Heb. 1: 2 'In these last days God has spoken unto us in His Son, whom He appointed as heir of all things, through whom also He prepared the eons ...' The Bible says God is working through His Son to accomplish His everlasting purpose. That universal dominion which properly belongs to the Sovereign Creator Himself, He has now bequeathed to His Son. God has appointed Jesus as the rightful inheritor of universal dominion.

So you see, the significant element in the creation of this magnificent mass of rolling spheres and stars is not the vastness of the material worlds, but the evolution of God's purposes through the ages, through the eons. **And he [the Son] upholds all things by the word of his power (Heb. 1:3).**

The meaning of **upholding** is seen in such expressions as that of Moses in **Numbers 11**. Moses is feeling overwhelmed by the burden of "carrying" the nation of Israel in the desert. The burden of their administration and care and government is weighing Moses down. Every day the people are complaining to him about their conditions. 'Give us something to eat! Give us some fresh water to drink!' No wonder he's getting downright depressed. Moses complains,

Why have You been so hard on me, Your servant? Why have You laid the burden of all this people on me? I alone am not able to carry all this people... (vs. 11-14).

That's the exact meaning of **"upholding all things by the word of his power"**. It means the risen Christ carries responsibility for the government and guidance of the people of God. (It does not mean that Jesus was the Creator of the Genesis beginnings. It does not mean the Son now sustains and holds all the material universe together! Jesus has told us it's our Father who created in the beginning and who maintains the material universe.) Just look at the context. It says, God has appointed Jesus His Son to administer the kingdom and to govern its people and affairs!

As God's appointed king and Messianic Lord, Jesus upholds --- manages, administers ---- all things because **the government is upon his shoulders (Is. 9:6)**. God has prepared the ages and world epochs for His Son --- and His saints --- to manage.

The Bible says that through the church of Christ, God has **brought to light what is the administration of the mystery which for ages has been hidden in God, who created all things; in order that the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known through the church to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly places. This was in accordance with the eternal purpose which he carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord (Eph. 3: 9-11)**.

Magnifying Glass ... I used to love to start fires by concentrating the power of the sun through my magnifying glass. Used to sit up the back in Sunday school with the winter's sun streaming through the window. The naughty boys of whom I seemed (I now say to my shame) to be the ringleader, would huddle around and I would focus the sun through the lens onto the church's hymn books! I could get quite a cloud of smoke up, and some flames, until the Sunday school Superintendent confiscated the magnifying glass!

The point is this. Think about the big bright, fireball we call the sun. I could impress you with its size and the nuclear reactions going on, and how much fuel it burns every second. It sends every second out into the solar system so much energy. But such a tiny fraction of that heat and light hits our tiny planet. So many rays just hit nothing out there. They just get dissipated into outer space. Seems such a waste. But then think of the tiny, tiny bit of light that hits New Zealand! (I mean no disrespect to Kiwiland!) It's miniscule. Yes, big sun! But think of the smallest fraction of the sun's light that hits you! How warming and comforting that spec of heat is! It's just for you. At any moment of time, that sun is warming you!

God is the Big God of the Universe, but His rays of warming love still reach each of us individually. There is enough for everyone.

Jesus is like that magnifying glass. As we look at God through him, we see the Deity perfectly. Through Jesus we experience all the focused love and warmth of the Creator and Father. Jesus is the image of the invisible God. The image is not the original, but is the likeness of the original. And it is through our Mediator Jesus Christ that we experience all the love and warmth of the Living God. Jesus dwells in **"the bosom of the Father ... and has explained God" (John 1:18)**.

The Big God has focused Himself into the perfect man, Jesus our Lord Messiah. God gave him the fullness of His Spirit **without measure (John 3: 34)**. We see in Jesus the Big God, little God perfectly revealed. Jesus said that the words he spoke and the works he did were the words and the works of His Father God. Through the faith of Jesus we see the power of God stilling the storm and saving the witless disciples. Big God! Through the faith of Jesus we see the compassion of God miraculously feeding thousands effectively from a few crumbs of bread. Big God! Through the faith of Jesus we see the love of God in noticing a poor widow's offering of two cents. Little God! Through the faith of Jesus we see the children taken up effectively into God's lap and blessed. Little God!

Well might we with Paddy the Irishman worshipfully exclaim, "O Lord, to be sure to be sure, in Your sphere 'o tings you are the everlasting God who knows the hairs on our head and all about the life of the tiniest of sparrows, and we bless you our Big God, little God, our near God and our far God!"

