

Greater than Great; 'Gooder' than Good

September 6, 2012

God's greatness is GOOD, and His goodness—*cosmic generosity*—is GREAT! And for us that is wonderful truth! **He is so very great** that His name, His word, and His presence would kill us outright, except His great goodness allows us to be awed. God is great! Psalm 147:4 ***“He determines the number of the stars and calls them each by name. Great is our Lord and mighty in power; his understanding has no limit. The LORD sustains the humble but casts the wicked to the ground.”***

An example in the New Testament is just after Jesus finished praying in the Garden of Gethsemane, left with his disciples and crossed the Kidron Valley, and entered an olive grove where He would be arrested. John 18:4 says: *“Jesus, knowing all that was going to happen to him, went out and asked them, ‘Who is it you want?’* ⁵*“‘Jesus of Nazareth,’ they replied.*

*“**I am he,**’ Jesus said. (And Judas the traitor was standing there with them.) ⁶When Jesus said, ‘I am he,’ **they drew back and fell to the ground.**”* Be sure, the wicked were cast to the ground. This gives a glimpse of what would happen if God's good benevolence didn't intervene for the believer—for us. We could not stand in the presence of ***“I am he”***—His greatness—except for the exercise of His patient and kind goodness expressed by His love for us at the cross.

J. I. Packer in *Knowing God* says, “God's love is an exercise of His goodness toward individual sinners whereby, having identified Himself with their welfare, He has given His Son to be their Savior, and now brings them to know and enjoy Him in a covenant relation.” We need to personalize the further truth from Packer that “every single thing that happens to us expresses God's love to us, and comes to us for the furthering of God's purpose for us!”

• Great Goodness: Psalm 13:6 *“I will sing to the LORD, for he has been **good** to me.”* What are the chances—the odds? Packer again: “Calvary is the measure of the goodness of God!” Psalm 31:19 ***“How great is your goodness, which you have stored up for those who fear you, which you bestow in the sight of men on those who take refuge in you.”*** From that short verse we can glean the following truths:

1. God's great goodness is stored up for **those who fear Him**
2. God's great goodness is bestowed on **those who take refuge in Him**
3. God bestows that great goodness in the sight of men **as a witness**

Romans 11:33-36 *“Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out!*

³⁴*“Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor?*

³⁵*“Who has ever given to God, that God should repay him? ³⁶“**For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever! Amen (so be it).**”*

• Good Greatness: Job 26:14 says, “*And these are but the outer fringe of his works; how faint the whisper we hear of him!*” Later in Job 38:1 ff—The LORD speaks to Job, his friends, and us today: “*Then the LORD answered Job **out of the storm**. He said:* **2“Who is this that darkens my counsel with words without knowledge?** *3“Brace yourself like a man; I will question you, and you shall answer me.”* And for the next several chapters, God puts some hard questions before Job and all who would follow:

4Where were you when I laid the earth’s foundation?

5Who marked off its dimensions? Surely you know!

6On what were its footings set, or who laid its cornerstone?

8Who shut up the sea behind doors when it burst forth from the womb?

12Have you ever given orders to the morning?

16Have you journeyed to the springs of the sea?

17Have the gates of death been shown to you?

18Have you comprehended the vast expanses of the earth?

19What is the way to the abode of light? And where does darkness reside?

22Have you entered the storehouses of the snow or seen the storehouses of the hail?

24What is the way to the place where the lightning is dispersed?

25Who cuts a channel for the torrents of rain, and a path for the thunderstorm?

28Does the rain have a father? Who fathers the drops of dew?

29From whose womb comes the ice? Who gives birth to the frost?

31Can you bind the Pleiades or loose the cords of Orion?

32Can you bring forth the constellations in their seasons?

33Do you know the laws of the heavens?

34Can you raise your voice to the clouds?

35Do you send the lightning bolts on their way? Do they report to you?

36Who endowed the heart with wisdom or gave understanding to the mind?

37Who has the wisdom to count the clouds?

38Do you hunt the prey for the lioness and satisfy her hunger?

41Who provides food for the ravens when its young cry out?

39:1Do you know when the mountain goats give birth?

5Who let the wild donkey go free? Who untied his ropes?

9Will the wild ox consent to serve you? Will he stay by your manger at night?

19Do you give the horse his strength or clothe his neck with a flowing mane?

26Does the hawk take flight by your wisdom?

27Does the eagle soar at your command?

40:2Will the one who contends with the Almighty correct him?

Then we stop for Job’s answer—which he cannot give: *4“I am unworthy—how can I reply to you? I put my hand over my mouth. 5I spoke once, but I have no answer—twice, but I will say no more.” 6Then the LORD spoke to Job **out of the storm**:*

8Would you discredit my justice? Would you condemn me to justify yourself?

9Do you have an arm like God’s, and can your voice thunder like his?

41:1Can you pull in the leviathan with a fishhook?

10bWho then is able to stand against me?

11Who has a claim against me that I must pay?

11bEverything under heaven belongs to me!”

Finally, in chapter 42 Job is able to humbly reply to the LORD, saying: ²“*I know that you can do all things, no plan of yours can be thwarted.*”

³*You asked, ‘Who is this that obscures my counsel without knowledge?’ **Surely I spoke of things I did not understand, things too wonderful for me to know.***

⁴*“You said, ‘Listen now, and I will speak; I will question you, and you shall answer me.’”*

⁵*“My ears had heard of you but now my eyes have seen you.*

⁶*“Therefore I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes.”* Notice how Job first of all 1) **agreed** with God—everything that God had said—and then 2) he **admitted his lack** of understanding and expressed his awe of God: Job was 3) **awed** by God Almighty. Awe of God will always cause us to recognize and despise our sin, humble ourselves—and repent! “I am convinced that the people of God miss many appropriate opportunities to fall face down to the ground,” said Beth Moore, “not in an emotional frenzy, but in complete awe of God. We don’t have a clue who we’re dealing with.”

In Exodus when Moses approached the burning bush, he drew close to get a ‘good’ look at the phenomena, and in 3:4 Scripture says God called out to him from within the bush: “‘*Moses! Moses!*’ And in verse 5 God warned: ‘*Do not come any closer,*’ God said. ‘*Take off your sandals, **for the place where you are standing is holy ground.** ⁶**I am** the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob.’ At this, *Moses hid his face, because he was afraid to look at God.*”*

Then after crossing the Red Sea, just before Moses received the Ten Commandments on Mount Sinai in Exodus 19:20 “*The LORD descended to the top of Mount Sinai and called Moses to the top of the mountain. So Moses went up and the LORD said to him, ‘Go down and warn the people so they do not force their way through to see the LORD and many of them perish. ²²Even the priests, who approach the LORD, must consecrate themselves, **or the LORD will break out against them.**’”*

Still later when God showed His glory to Moses, do we recall that He placed him in a cleft so that His glory could pass by without blinding and even killing the ‘called’ leader of the Israelites? Remember that Moses’ face glowed so brightly after being in God’s partial presence that the people could not even look at him? Does spending time with God, today, have the same effect?

When we say *God is great* and *God is good*, it slips off of our lips like so many words about Him. But our God is so much ‘greater’ than our understanding of great; He is so very ‘good’ that words from our dictionary—words we use every day—will not describe God’s attributes with any accuracy or justice at all. And all that He is, He is for us! “The way we live,” says John Ortberg, “is a consequence of the size of our God.” If we perceive a ‘small’ god, we will live a small life, but if we acknowledge the greatness of God Almighty, well then....

In view of God's Great greatness, the Seven Wonders of the World, except for the Grand Canyon—only one in the list naturally made by God—suddenly pale, do they not? Look at the 6 of the 7 ascribed to what man has made. But man could not have made any one of those without using God's building blocks.

1. Egypt's Great Pyramids
2. Taj Mahal in India
- 3. Grand Canyon in Arizona**
4. Panama Canal
5. Empire State Building
6. Saint Peter's Basilica
7. China's Great Wall

The most precious (wondrous) things in life cannot be built by hand or bought by man: The God-given abilities to see, to hear, to touch, to taste, to feel, to laugh, and to love—and for all of this and all of creation we can applaud our great and good God! How does even the Grand Canyon compare with the immense greatness of God? Though God's creation is amazing, there is nothing that we can see with our eyes that would compare with the Creator of it! Creation is simply a glance. Psalm 8:1 "*O LORD (Covenant Father), our Lord (Anointed One—Jesus), how majestic is your name in all the earth! You have set your glory above the heavens.*" Great (Majestic in Latin) and it means greatness!

It is so important that we understand as much as God will allow us to know of His greatness and goodness while we're still here on earth, so that we will act in accordance with it—acknowledge Him, trust Him and reverence Him—so we will worship Him. "Magnify" the Mega Lord! *The Magnificent* in Luke's Gospel is Mary's 'Song' about the greatness of God: The divine initiative—His plans, purpose, and power—the steps God took to make Himself known to us! Sarah Young in *Jesus Calling* wrote, "This is a form of worship: sensing your smallness in comparison to My Greatness."

John Ortberg, "**I need to worship because** without it I can forget that I have a Big God beside me and live in fear. **I need to worship because** without it I can forget his calling and begin to live in a spirit of self-preoccupation. **I need to worship because** without it I lose a sense of wonder and gratitude and plod through life with blinders on. **I need to worship because** my natural tendency is toward self-reliance and stubborn independence." And he believes it is no accident that the account of Peter walking on water ends in the boat with worship: "*Truly you are the Son of God!*"

•John the Baptist of Jesus in John 3:30-31 "**He must become greater; I must become less.** *31The one who comes from above is above all; the one who is from the earth belongs to*

the earth, and speaks as one from the earth. The one who comes from heaven is above all.”

•The Samaritan woman to Jesus in John 4:12—“*Are you greater than our father Jacob...?*” And the answer we know is a resounding: Yes, yes, and yes!

•Solomon’s message to the king of Tyre in the Old Testament: 2 Chronicles 2:5-6—“*The temple I am going to build will be **great, because our God is greater than all other gods.** **But who is able to build a temple for him, since the heavens, even the highest heavens, cannot contain him? Who then am I to build a temple for him, except as a place to burn sacrifices before him?**”*

2 Chronicles 7:1-3 “*When Solomon finished praying, fire came down from heaven and consumed the burnt offering and the sacrifices, and the glory of the LORD filled the temple. ²The priests could not enter the temple of the LORD because the glory of the LORD filled it. ³When all the Israelites saw the fire coming down and the glory of the LORD above the temple, they knelt on the pavement with their faces to the ground, and they worshiped and gave thanks to the LORD, saying, ‘**He is good;** his love endures forever.’”*

2 Chronicles 9:22-23 “*King Solomon was greater in riches and wisdom than all the other kings of the earth. ²³All the kings of the earth sought audience with Solomon **to hear the wisdom God had put in his heart.**”*

• On Saturday night, June 4, 2011, I was scrolling through the channels on my bedroom TV and stopped on 186—National Geographic (NTGEO). All I could see was some kind of catastrophic event taking place and someone in it had their cell phone on and was recording while they were in peril. Fascinated, I discovered the program title was *Witness: Disasters!* In the course of the special program, individuals were involved in tornados, hurricanes, earthquakes, mud slides, volcanic eruptions, and one young man with a camera in his helmet was caught in an avalanche—buried in the snow I could hear him struggling for every breath, before he was rescued. Wow—that was riveting stuff.

• The eye witnesses were themselves victims, and often there were many others involved as well. The one constant audible refrain was “O, my God”...“O, my God”... “O, my God” uttered from the young, the old, and almost always from the one with the recording device. And I wondered why we all will not cry out those words before disaster strikes? When presented with the greatest of our Creator’s works, the extreme goodness of our God, and his immense glory, why will we not proclaim in slow, meditative, reverent awe “O, my God!”

Remember that the prophet Isaiah, in 9:6, looked down through time and proclaimed the very GOODNESS of God—**Jesus**—to be Wonderful, Counselor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace while He was yet an infant child in a manger. How **GREAT** is that?