

This series about how we all have a perception of who God is and what He's like.

And how, very often, our view of God sells Him short and in essence we make God smaller than He actually is.

And so for three weeks we've been seeing how there's MORE to God.

In last couple weeks,

Eric: controlling God v God who serves.

Mark: Security guard v Holy Gardener, bearing much fruit, cultivating our lives.

Joel: Hippie God-"It's ALL god", Sheriff God- punish bad, reward good v Savior God

Wow, how interesting you can grow up in church have such an "interesting" view of God.

And on that point, I'm the odd man out--I didn't grow up in church.

I didn't even visit churches when I was growing up.

My parents never talked about God. Actually, my mom did--when she was really mad because I'd done something bad, she'd say,

"God's gonna get you for that!"

Fortunately I came out of that pretty much fearing my mom more than God ;-)

So my view of God came out of movies, TV, any religious children's' books laying around in a doctor's waiting room etc.

So ironically, I think my view of God was less intense than the guys who grew up in church.

I saw God as this nice semi-curly white-haired old man. Kind of like Santa in a robe, leaning on a nice fluffy cloud, looking down and chilling.

As I got a little older, teens and early 20s, I thought of him, not so much like a Genie who grants requests--but probably more like an ATM:

If I do the right things, push the right buttons, work the system correctly, good things would come out of the Holy ATM.

Very cause and effect: do this, get that. Don't do this, don't get that.

And every flawed view of God is an example of why this series is important. Like in my case:

If I see God as an ATM, a system of doing the right things, to get blessings or favor of God.

Then where's grace?

Where's love?

Where's a relationship with a Father God who adopts me into His family?

Where's anyone outside of faith who would want to follow me into my ATM-God life?

And perhaps most important--How does God the Father *feel*--watching me live out my ATM behavior modification life--knowing His only Son endured a brutal death on a cross to make a grace-filled relational life between He and I possible?

He'd probably be face palming His semi-curly white-haired head as He rested His elbows on a big puffy cloud.

And here's a big deal, we usually don't think about:

When our view of God is too small or too off-base from reality--
it *reduces* what Jesus did on the cross.

And that's *personal*.

I don't think that I take that into account enough:

I know God's relational. But forget he's personal and displays perfect emotions:

He wept.

He loves.

Shows compassion.

Can be well pleased.

Can be angered.

Can grieve.

And so when we think of God as much less than all that He truly is, I imagine it must strike an emotional chord in Him. Let me show you what I mean:

If you're a parent, imagine that your child describes you by saying:

"My dad's just the guy who gives me money and fixes things for me."

"My mom's just the one who's there when I need a relational pick-me-up and makes sure there's always food in the house."

We would say, *"Whoa, whoa, whoa!!...I'm so much more than that."*
And we'd say that with a bit of sadness, a tinge of hurt feelings.

And we'd probably offer up:

"What about all the love I've given you?
All the times I forgave you?
All the times I was there for you?
All the ways I've sacrificed for you?"
All the ways I worked to create this life for you?

God is *our* father. And when we see Him as less than He truly is, we are responding poorly to all He's made available to us through the cross.

And so that's why this series--that's why seeing God fully is so important.

And to frame this in the A.W. Tozer quote looks like this:

"Fully understanding who God really is and what He's done for me is the most important thing about me because it reveals a heart that acknowledges that Christ on the cross forever changed me and redefined my world." A.W. Tozer quote, contextualized

SELAH

The other thing about having an inaccurate view of God, is it can lead us to an exhausting life.

If you think God's judgmental,
you're always going to try to keep from doing something wrong.

If you think God's too good for you,
you're going to feel less-than and try to get love in unhealthy ways.

If you think God helps those who help themselves,
you're going to try to fix everything yourself.

If you think God's love is conditional,
you'll try to impress God.

If you think God's too busy for you,

you'll be controlling and do everything yourself.

The wrong view of God can make for an *exhausting life!*

(SELAH)

And this is not a new phenomenon.

Jesus was a Jew and the Jewish people at that time had (and still have) Rabbis.

And the primary thing that Rabbis did was interpret Scripture. Because Scripture must be interpreted.

You can't read it without making some kind of judgment call.

Example, the 4th Commandment:

"Remember the Sabbath day, keep it holy...do no work."

Ex 20:8-11

Exactly HOW do we keep it holy.

It says "do no work." What's "work?" When it says "no work" does that mean we can't clean up the dining room?

Or how `bout baptism:

Do you have to go completely under the water?

Some churches sprinkle some water, which is right?

My point: Scripture must be interpreted ;-)

SELAH

Ok, so these Rabbis in Jesus' day-- came up with long lists of what they allowed or disallowed--based on their interpretation of Scripture:

And each Rabbi's list of rules was called a "yoke."

And so their yokes made things more complicated and often exhausting, not unlike how our inaccurate views of God can make *our* life exhausting, creating our own self-imposed yoke, if you will.

So back then, you had to be in tune with the Scriptures AND you had to be in tune with the YOKE, all these extra rules of the Rabbi you followed.

And so now that we understand these heavy and complicated yokes, this passage makes more sense:

Then Jesus said, "Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. ²⁹ Take my yoke upon you. Let me teach you, because I am humble and gentle at heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰ For my yoke is easy to bear, and the burden I give you is light."

Matthew 11:28-30 NLT

So even though this series is called MORE, which 'more' always sounds like, "Great, you're telling me there's more, more to do, more to it, more to understand--greaaaaaat"

But Jesus is telling us that *His* yoke--*His* way of living--following Him, is EASY to bear. It's LIGHT.

Jesus' yoke is easy--it's not as heavy and difficult as these other Rabbis' yokes.

SELAH

So let's go back and see what Jesus' easy yoke looks like and where it comes from. And we're going to see something of God taking root in humanity in this passage: God's idea of *blessing*.

And we're talking about blessing, because God is not a genie--someone we pray to, to solve and fix things in our lives. He's not a wish-answerer.

His being is based in blessings. And here in this passage we're seeing his blessing plan unfold:

The LORD had said to Abram, "Leave your native country, your relatives, and your father's family, and go to the land that I will show you. ² I will make you into a great nation. I will bless you and make you famous, and you will be a blessing to others. ³ I will bless those who bless you and curse those who treat you with contempt. All the families on earth will be blessed through you."

Genesis 12:1-3 NLT

This is an amazing passage: God tells Abram that He's going to bless him and ALL THE FAMILIES ON EARTH, will be blessed through Abram.

This blessing that God is bestowing on and through Abram is the birth of the Jewish people that God will use to reach everyone.

Abram is the first in the genealogy that leads to Jesus' birth.

And here we see that God doesn't bless people just for their own sense of happiness, like a genie.

He doesn't bless people just so we feel good.

God blesses people so that we can bless *other* people.

It's like God started a world-reaching Holy game of tag with Abram--telling him to continue tagging people with blessings until Jesus comes back.

And here is the really important part:

This is one of those passages that reads like it's just about Abram, but this passage is universal--it's for and about everyone--you and me.

(I'm being your "rabbi" right now--I'm helping you interpret this passage.)

God isn't just saying He intends to bless people just through Abram, but through US!

This passage defines blessing and defines us, which means:

1. God blesses us, so that we in turn bless others. And so on, and so on.

Get this? We're blessed, *not* so we, just in our house can be happy. That would be a genie God.

We're blessed so that we can bless *others*.

2. We are blessed so that everyone can know blessing. That means we bless:

People who know God.

People who are not into God.

Good people.

Mean people.

People who are different & believe differently than we do.

Rich people.

Poor people.

Gay, straight, republican, democrat,

Every kind!

"So that all the families on earth will be blessed." **Genesis 12:3**

SELAH

The yoke of Jesus being easy and light lies in the truth that our focus isn't rule-keeping.

Our focus is not trying to keep doing all the minutia of a complicated religion.

Our yoke is to be like Abram: be people who bless people!

(((((Tell Evelyn story, as example of how easy His yoke is.))))

As we as a church have been praying for divine appointments and asking God for people to bless--have you sensed that yoke being heavy or quite the opposite?

Aren't you finding that blessing people is *energizing*?

Aren't you finding that blessing people is something you feel honored that you GET to be part, and not a heavy drudgery you GOT to do?

Doesn't blessing people feel like GET to, not a GOT to?

Don't you feel better after blessing someone?

Don't you find that this way of living is an *easy yoke*?

Not surprising, I haven't caught Jesus in a lie yet and He said,
"For my yoke is easy to bear, and the burden I give you is light."

Matthew 11:30

SELAH

Maybe it's been hard for you to live in the rhythm of blessing people.

Maybe it's been hard to consistently pray for divine appointments.

Maybe it's been hard to shake-off your inaccurate or too-small view of God and really embrace who He really is.

Let me try to help:

(Circles on flip charts: Big circle on each flip chart = our world.

Middle of one is us, middle of other flip chart is God.

With us in the middle, we'll tend to pray like God's a genie, "Me. My, mine..."

With God in the middle we'll pray like Gen 12 blessing, "You, your, your will..."

Your life is in one of these 2 illustrations.)

To see God correctly we need to see Him in the right perspective. Let me show you what I mean:

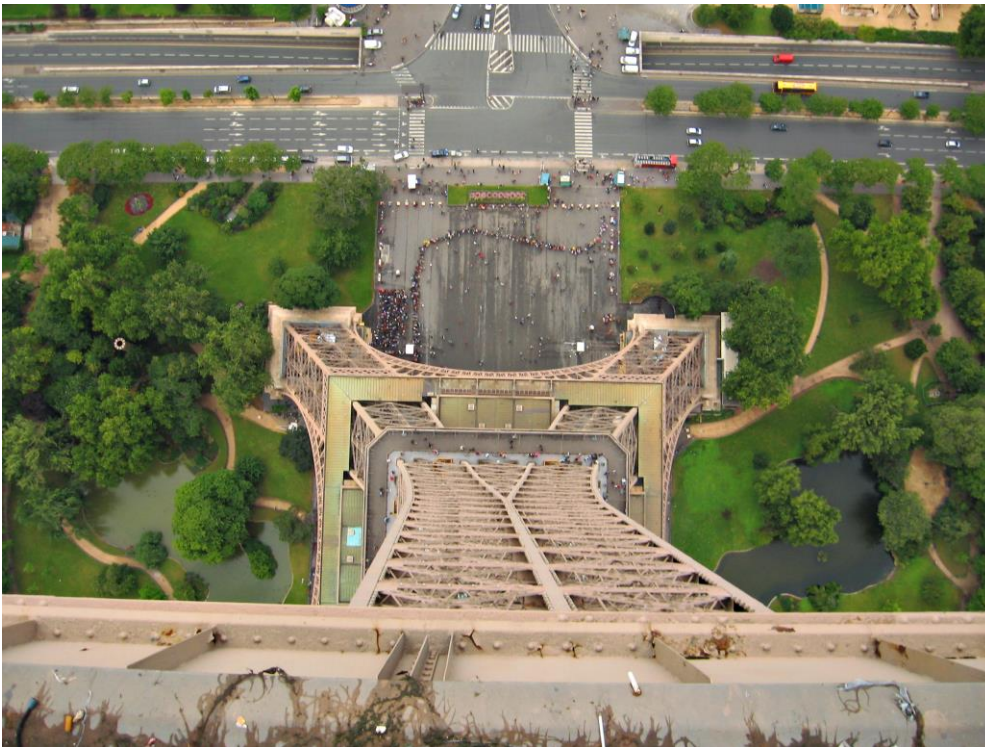
Here's a picture of the Eiffel Tower.

It's 1,063 feet tall. About size of 81 story building.



This perspective, makes it look small. It can even appear to fit in our hand. It's still huge, but our perspective has shrunk it.

Here's another picture of the Eiffel Tower.



This perspective, gives us a more accurate view of how big this tower is. (Who's getting dizzy?)

If you want to see how big, how much MORE there is to God, try changing your perspective by putting Him in the center of your life.

If you want to be used by God to be more of a blessing to people, put Him in the center of your life.

Do you know what God and the Eiffel Tower have in common?

 Their shape,
 their presence,
 their being does not change.

If they don't seem big enough to us, it's *US who has to move*.

And with God, we need to move out of the center of our lives and put Him in the center. Make HIM the most important thing.

SELAH

Let me ask another question:

 Do you feel like your yoke, your life, is exhausting?

Do you feel like every road in your life leads back to your shoulders?

Then odds are, *you* are at the center of your life.

When we are in the center of our life, when we are the most important thing in our life, *we create an enormous unbearable yoke for ourselves*.

And Jesus says to us, "*My yoke is easy.*"

If our yoke feels crazy, we're probably doing it wrong.

And it's probably because we've hokey-pokeyed ourself:

 We've put our whole self in the center of our life.

Let's see the vastness and a true picture of God as we walk through **Colossians 1:15-23** in *The Message*:

((¹⁵⁻¹⁸ We look at this Son and see the God who cannot be seen. We look at this Son and see God's original purpose in everything created. For everything, absolutely everything, above and below, visible and invisible, rank after rank after rank of angels— *everything* got started in him and finds its purpose in him. He was there before any of it came into existence and holds it all together right up to this moment. And when it comes to the church, he organizes and holds it together, like a head does a body.))

Notice it says HE holds everything together?

 Are you tired of trying to hold it all together??

((He was supreme in the beginning and—leading the resurrection parade—he is supreme in the end. From beginning to end he’s there, towering far above everything, everyone.))

Remember our view from atop the Eiffel Tower?
That’s like being on a curb for God.

There’s so much MORE to God that He “towers over” our biggest challenges--“far above *everything* and *everyone!*”

((So spacious is he, so roomy, that everything of God finds its proper place in him without crowding. Not only that, but all the broken and dislocated pieces of the universe—people and things, animals and atoms—get properly fixed and fit together in vibrant harmonies, all because of his death, his blood that poured down from the cross.))

Whatever is broken is us--whatever is jacked up, whether self-inflicted, life inflicted--- Jesus’ blood, flowing from the cross, can miraculously fix and restore the fractured puzzle pieces of our life back together!

((²¹⁻²³ You yourselves are a case study of what he does. At one time you all had your backs turned to God, thinking rebellious thoughts of him, giving him trouble every chance you got. But now, by giving himself completely at the Cross, actually *dying* for you, Christ brought you over to God’s side and put your lives together, whole and holy in his presence.))

God PAID for us--with His Son’s life.

If we are in Christ, we are His evidence, His poster child that He redeems and adopts--

Because He DIED so that we may LIVE, we are never alone, but forever relationally tied to a God of love.

((You don’t walk away from a gift like that! You stay grounded and steady in that bond of trust, constantly tuned in to the Message, careful not to be distracted or diverted. There is no other Message—just this one. Every creature under heaven gets this same Message. I, Paul, am a messenger of this Message.))

And Paul says, we appreciate God’s gifts to us every day.
We don’t His death for us for granted.
Every day, we respond to His death by choosing to put God in the center of our life.

SELAH

If you’ve just heard these words from Colossians 1 and they ring true with you. And if you’ve never asked Jesus to give you and lead your life. Let me give you that opportunity.

"Father, I believe Your words that I've heard today: that Jesus is your Son who never sinned, the Son who holds this whole world together, this Son who even gave up his life and hung on a cross to pay for everyone of mankind's sin--to pay for all of my sins.

(In your own words, ask Jesus to forgive your sins and to lead your life.)

Heads still bowed...maybe you're here and you are in a relationship with Jesus, but you've realized today that you are still at the center of your life.

Your yoke is heavy because all roads in your life lead to you and not to God.

Tell him you're sorry. Ask God to help you place Him and keep Him in the center of your life, making Him the most important thing in your life.

Prayout!