

The Giganticness of Jesus!

November 19, 2017

Good morning everyone... and welcome to our Thanksgiving Sunday! I don't know about you,

- But, Thanksgiving is one of those holidays that always sneaks up on me...
- Probably because of how fast our stores all transition to Christmas just **after Halloween**.
- And, yet, I think that's the reason I like Thanksgiving so much...
- because it's traditionally been one of the least commercialized of all our national holidays.

I mean, the stores cash in on Halloween, Christmas, Valentine's Day, and Easter,

- But, beyond the Turkey farmers and supermarkets, there's not much of a Thanksgiving windfall for retailers.
- We're not expected to buy Thanksgiving candy or send Thanksgiving cards, or pass out Thanksgiving gifts.
- In a sense, all this holiday asks of us is to **gather together with family & friends** to share a large meal...
- And to consider all we have to be thankful for.

Oddly enough, some of the most memorable Thanksgivings Joyce and I have ever spent were when we lived in Central Asia.

- They were memorable because the distance between us and our families back home made us more thankful than ever for the gift they were in our lives.
- and so, we'd spend that Thanksgiving Day, **full of thanks for our family and friends** living on the other side of the world.

Of course, that's not to say that we spent all our Thanksgivings alone there.

- In fact, we enjoyed introducing our Tajik friends to a big Thanksgiving meal.
- It was fun watching them try pumpkin pie for the very first time!
- In fact, the adults with little kids tried to avoid it by trying to get their kids to eat it...
- Using their version of "open your mouth the train is coming!"

I don't know if you've ever thought about this, but most cultures in the world practice the same kind of baby talk that we do.

- The language might not be the same, but they're saying the same things.
- After they get their child to open the bridge for a big delivery of pumpkin pie,
- They'll start asking them, "Where's your nose?" "Where's your ear?"

And, of course, like us, one of their favorites is, "***How big are you?***"

And... do you remember what the answer is supposed to be? "So Big!"

- Week after week, month after month, they'll ask that same poor little kid, "***How big are you?***"
- And, at least until their next trick... the answer is always, "***So big!***"

Well, this morning we're going to reflect on what might be one of the most important question you could ever ask... and that is, "***God, How big are You?***"

- You see, I'm convinced that **the way we live** out our day-to-day lives **has everything to do with** how we answer that question.
- In fact, how we answer that question has everything to do with how we'll spend our Thanksgiving this Thursday.

So let me ask you... and, be honest with yourself... how big is Christ in your life right now?

- Truth is, to some degree... in **my life** and, I think, most of our lives... **our God is probably too small.**
- And **because of that** we're *not convinced*, for example, that we're perfectly safe in the hands of a fully **competent, caring, all-knowing, ever-present, all-powerful** God.

We may believe that in our heads... but if we were to be honest, we're not always convinced of it deep in our hearts.

- And so, we end up offering **prayers without faith, worship without awe, service without joy, suffering without hope...** and **thanksgiving without heart.**

- All of which results in **fear & retreat & loss of vision & failure to persevere.**
- So, honestly, guys... How big is God in your life right now?

You see, it's **against the backdrop of this question**, that I believe the Apostle Paul wrote what he did in **Colossians 1:15-20...**

- A passage, which most scholars believe was a first-century hymn **expressing the glory and power of Christ.**
- And so, **it's my hope** this morning that **as we walk through this passage, *that we too***, just like those first century believers who read and sang this very song together...

That we would all be captured by the **glory & greatness & giganticness** of our God.

- And, as that happens, I believe a renewed thankfulness over who our God is, will fill our hearts.
- So, as I read these few verses, just let the significance of each word sink in...

“He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. ¹⁶For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. ¹⁷He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. ¹⁸And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy.

¹⁹For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, ²⁰and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.”

In his book, *“If You Want to Walk on Water You’ve Got to Get Out of the Boat”*, author/pastor John Ortberg...

- Shared an experience he had as he and a few friends from his church were walking past a local bar.
- Like an old western, a huge fight had apparently spilled out from the bar into the street, where several guys were beating up on just one guy.

Well, they obviously knew that they really had to do something... so they went over to try and break up the fight.

- Needless to say, Ortberg and his two medium-framed buddies didn't exactly look like a group of Hells Angels!
- In fact, for the most part, their efforts at breaking up the fight were pretty much ignored.
- But all of a sudden, **the guys who are fighting looked at them** and were suddenly **struck with fear**... slowing shrinking back from the guy they were hitting.

Ortberg had no idea what was going on... till he turns his head and sees the biggest guy he had ever seen standing there behind them.

- This guy was **like six foot-seven**... weighed **probably 300+** pounds with maybe 2% body fat.
- Seriously... if **Hercules** ever married **Xena, the Warrior Princess**, this is what their child would look like.

Well... knowing that this guy, *whom they later named "Mongo,"* was on their side, they were suddenly filled with new spunk.

- In fact, they told those guys that **they'd better never see them** around there again!
- They were different people... suddenly transformed.
- And why? Because **they had this great big Mongo** guy standing right next to them.

And... with Mongo behind them, they were ready to confront with resolve & firmness...

- they were suddenly released from anxiety & fear... while filled with a new-found **boldness & confidence**.
- So, let me ask you... what if a guy like Mongo was with you 24 hours a day, seven days a week.
- **Would it change** the way you lived out your life? Would it give you confidence to step out more in faith?

Now, of course, we may never have a Mongo at our side like that... And yet, the Bible says that **there is One** who is greater than Mongo

- and He's with you 24 hours a day, seven days a week...

- when you **wake**, when you **sleep**, when you **speak**, when you **listen**, when you **work**, when you **pray**, when you **worship**...
- You see, we can go on living, ignoring the question, **holding onto this small God.**

But... live with a *gigantic* God... and you will live a life of **heightened expectation, risky faith & awestruck worship.**

- So, with this in mind, let's focus in on the incredible picture Paul paints for us in Colossians... of our **colossal, amazing God.**
- So, let's just walk through these few verses together starting in verse 15. **So, how gigantic is our God?**

First of all, Paul says: "He is the image of the invisible God." The NLT translates this saying, "*Christ is the visible image of the invisible God.*"

- In other words, Paul is saying, "*When you look at Jesus, you're seeing God.*" He is the image of the invisible God.
- Now, the Greek word he uses here for "*image*" is the work "eikon." We get our word "icon" from this word.

Among other things, the Greeks would use this word when referring to a portrait of someone.

- They obviously didn't have photographs in those days, so if you wanted a relative in another city to know what your grandkids looked like,
- you had to have portraits painted, and then you could show them. That was an icon.
- Well, Paul uses that word for Jesus. He says, "**He is like the portrait of God.**"

A little kid is drawing a picture one day and his mom says, "*What are you drawing?*" The little kid says, "*I'm drawing a picture of God.*"

- She said, "*Nobody knows what God looks like.*" The kid says, "***Well, they will when I get finished.***"
- So, how do we know what God is really like? Well Jesus says, "*You'll know when I get finished!*"
- You see, if you want to know what God is like, just look at the Son. "*He is the visible image of the invisible God!*"

Paul is adamant about this. Look at **1:19**, "*For in him... in Jesus... all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell.*" How much of the fullness of God? All of it.

- He says the same thing in chapter **2:9**, "*For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily...*"
- How much of the fullness of deity? The whole fullness of deity.
- So, how big is Jesus? He is the image, the living portrait, of the invisible God.
- Do you want to **know God**? Do you want to **grow as friend** of God... to **fall more in love** with God?
- Then **just immerse yourself** in the life of Jesus... the very image of God.

Then Paul continues, saying, "He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation."

- Now, when Paul uses the word "*firstborn*" here, he doesn't mean that Jesus was the first of God's creation.
- In fact, the word Paul uses here is "**prototikus**" from which we get our word "prototype."

Now, in the dictionary, a prototype is the **original from which something is based or created.**

- But in the Greek, it also took on the **meaning of preeminence.**
- In other words, as the *firstborn over all creation*, Jesus wasn't merely a part of creation...
- He was and remains the Lord of creation, the **One that presides pre-eminently over all of it.**

We read, in **verses 16-17**: "*For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. ¹⁷He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.*"

So, how gigantic is our God? We're told in **Isaiah 40:12** that "*God has measured the waters in the hollow of his hand.*"

- Have you ever put tried to cup water into your hands to drink?
- Well... when the water from God's one cupped hand poured out, the Pacific Ocean was formed...

- And when the water from his other hand poured out, the Atlantic was formed.
- And with those few drops still left over came the Great Lakes and Seas.

Isaiah continues, saying that God *"measured the waters in the hollow of his hand and **marked off the heavens with the breadth of his hand.**"*

- Now keep in mind that the "breadth" of one's hand is the distance b/t the thumb and pinkie.
- So God says, *"**How big should I make the universe? About that big.**"*
- God lifted up His hand... and **in between the distance between his thumb and pinkie**, He formed billions and billions of stars and solar systems and galaxies!

In **Isaiah 40:25** we read, *"To whom then will you compare me, or who is my equal?" says the Holy One. 'Lift up your eyes on high and see,'" he says, "See the stars, who created these? He who brings out their host and numbers them, calling them all by name."*

Each night, God brings out the stars... He calls each of them by name.

- How many stars are there in the universe? My best scientific guess is that there're a lot of them out there!
- Actually... Astronomers tell us that the distance b/t one end of the Milky Way to the other is 100,000 light years... and contains over 2 billion stars.
- The **Andromeda Galaxy** is 2.2 million **light years** away... how many miles is that? 117 with 21 zeros after it... containing billions and billions of stars

And there are nearly 20 smaller galaxies each containing billions stars!

And yet, **He knows them all by name.**

- Just a few weeks ago, Joyce, Sarah, and I went to an observatory at Liberty University where Sarah goes to college.
- We're staring at this stars... and all I can think of is, "Wow, God... You are SO huge!"

I can't even keep my kid's names straight sometimes... and I only have two! I call for one of them,

- *"Becca, Joyce, I mean, Sarah... whatever your name is, get over here."*
- God makes billions & billions of stars **and yet, He's on a first-name basis** with every one.
- **How big is God? That big! How much can we trust Him? That much!**
- We see Jesus as the very portrait of God... preeminent over all creation.

But... He's also the Lord over every power.

- In fact, Paul says in **verse 16**, that the Lord is over *"things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers."*
- In other words, Jesus has **power over** and **authority over** every **human power**, every **institution**, every **government**, every **corporation**, every **supernatural being** or **force**.
- So, how big is Jesus? Regardless of what **throne** or **power** or **ruler** or **principality** might come against Him...
- Jesus is big enough to send them running for their lives.

He's also the sustainer of all things. Verse 17 says that *"He himself is before all things (preeminent) and in him all things hold together."*

- Now, when Paul writes here, he uses the perfect tense, which **grammatically indicates continuous action** in Greek.
- In other words, in Jesus all things are **continually being held together**...

He didn't just create us and leave us on our own. He is sustaining us right now.

- He is the one, right now that **causes the sun to keep shining**.
- He is the one right now that **causes gravity** to allow us all to remain in our seats.

Hebrews 1:3 says that the Son *"is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being sustaining all things by his powerful word."*

- All things are **held together**... all things are **sustained** by His powerful word.
- If Jesus took even a momentary break or a snooze, the universe would be snuffed out like a candle.
- So... Every moment that you and I live is the result of the **sustaining, powerful grace** of Jesus. That's how gigantic He is!!

How big is Jesus? He's also big enough to conquer death. Look at **verses 18-20**; *"He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he might come to have first place in everything. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things **whether on earth or in heaven**, by making **peace through the blood of his Cross.**"*

That last phrase is pretty interesting isn't it... that through the blood of the Cross, *"God was pleased to reconcile to Himself ALL things whether on earth or in heaven."*

- You see, God wasn't just reconciling *US* back to Himself, but **ALL** things!
- Now I know what some of you are thinking... *"Does that mean that God is reconciling my little Fido to Himself? Will my dog go to heaven?"*
- Basically, I have no idea... maybe dogs... probably not cats.

You see, at the Fall, not just humanity... but somehow **all of God's creation** was affected.

- And while we won't be able to fully grasp what that means this side of heaven,
- it does remind us that **Cross is bigger** than we even thought...
- That through Jesus' victory on the Cross, through this Cosmic redemption, **not only were we, as His followers, reconciled to God...** but somehow, even the universe was set right.

Paul says in the beginning of **verse 18** here that Jesus is now the *"beginning and the firstborn among the dead."*

- Now, these are unusual words to use with reference to death.
- In this world, the word *"death"* rings of finality and destruction.

- We don't have firstborn among the dead. When you're dead, you're dead.

But **what we're seeing here, in verse 18**, is the second verse of this ancient hymn.

- The *first section* focuses on **Jesus & creation**, while the *second* speaks of **Jesus & recreation**.
- In other words, up till now, we've seen Paul speaking of **Jesus the Creator of all things**.

But now, we see Jesus as the redeemer of all things.

You see, before, He was the **firstborn of all creation...** and **now we're told that He's the firstborn of the dead.**

- And so, through his death on the cross, the **prototype of humanity and agent of reconciliation...**
- has become the **prototype of a new humanity...**
- where those, who are "in Christ" can now be raised with Christ from the dead.

How big is God? **Big enough to conquer death...** Big enough to offer everlasting life... big enough to say with boldness, ***"I am the resurrection and the Life."***

That's how big Jesus is! He's the **image of God**, the **agent of creation**, the **Lord of all**, the **sustainer of life**, the **conqueror of death**.

- How big is Jesus? So gigantic that he can **hold the entire universe** in the palm of his hand.
- So big He created everything by a word from his mouth -- **just a word and it all came into being...**
- And he **sustains it all** without any strain or effort at all.

How big is Jesus? So big that **in a word from Him storms cease and winds died and fish were multiplied**

- and the **lame leaped for joy** and the **blind opened their eyes** and saw, and **demons ran for their lives**.

- Jesus is so big that when He went to the cross, the **entire universe held its breath** and **time stopped** and **history was suspended...**
- as **He brought about the reconciliation of the entire created order** through the shedding of his blood.

He is SO big that **death could not beat Him** and **His tomb could not hold him.**

- So big that He's **numbered every hair** you've ever grown...
- and **every tear you've ever cried...** and **every breath you've ever inhaled...**
- and **every word you've every spoken...** and **every hope you've ever cherished.**

He's so big that He is surrounding your chair right now.

- He'll surround your car on the **way home**;
- your bed when you sleep this evening; your day when you wake up tomorrow.

He's so big that He'll be a **shield around you** from this moment until the day comes when He **presents you holy in his sight** without blemish...

- **free from accusation... free to live forever in the arms of his father.**
- But the question is, will you embrace this **big God** with all of your heart and mind?
- Will you be a ***gigantic God*** person? Will you trust Him, knowing the He is always with you.

Will you embrace this big God in your **relationships**... enough to pursue reconciliation or offer forgiveness to someone?

- Will you embrace Him and trust him in at **work**... to be your sufficiency?
- Will you embrace and trust Him enough to love like Him and serve like Him?
- Will you trust that **He's with you** and that **He will work through you** in ways that will so bless those whom you touch?

You see, **when we begin to see God for who He really is**, suddenly we're able to **offer up prayers of faith**,

- we're able to engage in **worship full of reverence and awe**,
- we're able to embrace **joyful, sacrificial service** & sacrificial giving.
- Suddenly, we're able to see beyond ourselves to what God sees!
- We begin to **feel more compassion!**

We begin to **take more risks of faith**; We discover all over again the **joy** of generosity and random kindness.

- Suddenly, we'll **find ourselves more thankful than ever** before knowing that at our side is the God of the universe.
- **How big is our God? He's that Big!**

He's big enough to **not only give us the vision for what He's calling us to be & do** as individuals and as a church...

- But He's given us the Holy Spirit who will always be present to empower us to see that vision come to pass.
- Things **won't always happen on our timetable...**
- and **there'll be all sorts of challenges** along the way.

And yes... it **will require our taking risks** together...

- It will require that we **allow ourselves to be captured by what captures God...**
 - o His love for those around us...
 - o His deep passion for those living without hope,
 - o For those living under the weight of injustice,
 - o for those living in poverty; for those who can't speak up for themselves.

You see, this Gigantic God has given us the Holy Spirit... and He's given us a mission... to continue the ministry of Jesus...

- by purposing to **live the way Jesus lived, teaching what Jesus taught, and doing what Jesus did.**
- He's set us on a mission... and He's put in our hearts a vision... to be that worshipping, kingdom Community of Hope to the world around us.

- How big is God? **He is big enough to turn this vision into a reality!**

But then... at the end of this hymn, in **verse 23**, Paul encourages the Colossians, saying, **“But you must continue to believe this truth and stand firmly in it.”**

- In a way, he’s telling them, *“It’s not enough that you once trusted God as a big God... do you trust Him now?”*
- So, without any guilt or shame behind it... just between you and God...
- Let me ask you again... Do you still believe that God is a big God...

Do you still believe that there’s nothing that can stand in the way of God accomplishing His vision **in and through us as His church?**

- Job declared: *“I know that You can do everything, and that no purpose of Yours can be withheld from You”* (Job 42:2). [L L L L]
[SEP:SEP]
- He’s given us a vision as a church... to be an empowered, worshipping Kingdom Community of Hope...
- that finds its **joy in His presence**, its **power from His Spirit**, and its **passion from all that empassions Him**.

Of course, He’s not only the **creator** of that vision... but He’s also the **sustainer** of that vision.

- Our job is to **remain faithful**... to **stay in the game** regardless of what the scoreboard is saying...
- to **never grow tired of taking risks**...
- to **live generously and to give sacrificially**...
- and to **always be about our ultimate calling as worshippers**.

Can we do it? Truth is, that’s not the question we should be asking. The real question is, **“Can He do it? Is He Big Enough?”**

- Is He big enough to accomplish His purposes in and through us?
- Is He big enough to **lead us** and **empower us** and **equip us**?
- Is He big enough? Guys, He is so gigantic, that *even now* we can begin to celebrate what He’s going to do.

He's big enough that *even now* we can begin to celebrate what He's going to do.

- He's big enough that *even now* we can joyfully invest our time & money knowing that...
- **the seeds that we're sowing** through your **service** and **prayers** and **giving** and **gifts** and **talents...**
- will make an eternal difference in the lives of so many of those around us.

How Gigantic is Your God? Gigantic enough that we can **trust Him with every part** of our lives.

- Gigantic enough to **step out in faith**. gigantic enough to **step out of our comfort zones...**
- as we expect bigger and bigger things from a God who is SO incredibly BIG!