

REAL FAITH FOR REAL PEOPLE
“IS GOD FOR REAL?”
Acts 17:22-28

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Sooner or later it is bound to happen: A child or grandchild will pop the question, a young adult will want to know, a person dying will need the assurance. Sooner or later everybody asks, “Is God for Real?” It is the central, critical question confronting the Church and the world today.

If I were a theologian, I could give you ontological arguments for God’s existence, but I am not a theologian. If I were a sociologist, I could remind you that 95% of Americans say they believe in God, but I never see that many in worship, not even on Easter. So instead of an argument or a survey, let me simply tell you about the God who took my hand as a child and continues to guide my life today.

MEET THE GOD WHO IS

God recruits Moses to tell Pharaoh to let the Israelites go. With a stuttering tongue, and a hesitant spirit Moses replies, “*Suppose I go, when I get there, whom shall I say sent me?*” The Lord God Almighty replied, “*I AM WHO I AM. Tell them the I AM has sent you*” (Exodus 3:14). God is! That is enough!

Being control freaks, as most of us are, we prefer to finish the sentence. God is great. God is good. God is judge. God is just. God is out there. God is in here. There is a prayer and a hymn in our hymnal celebrating the God of many names. Let us not be so quick to rush to a definition.

I’ve been called a lot of names too. Some of them help, some of them hurt. When I get all dressed up in my white robe to lead worship, it’s not unusual for a young child to lean over to his parents and ask, “Is that God?” While I may be tempted to keep the kid believing, all of us know it’s a case of mistaken identity. I am not God. Neither are you. God is God!

God doesn’t need Democrats to define him or Republicans to promote him. God is neither an American nor a Korean. No religious denomination holds exclusive rights to His name.

God is a God who ACTS - INTERVENES – GETS INVOLVED.

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. In the midst of slavery, God called Moses to set his people free. In the midst of evil, God sent his prophets pleading for justice to roll down like a river and righteousness like a mighty stream.

In the midst of our human frailty, God sent his Son to save us.

We post-modern people want to make God abstract, impersonal, distant, impotent, and irrelevant. Some atheists not long ago demanded the removal of the words “In God We Trust” from our money. If I were an atheist, I would want that too. What I don’t understand is the reply of the political deists who said, “We don’t mean anything by it, just let God be whatever you want.” That’s what happens when God is reduced to civil religion.

So Paul stands up in the public square of Athens and says, *“Men of Athens, I see that in every way you are religious. For as I walked around and looked at your objects of worship, I even found an altar dedicated to the unknown God. Permit me to make that God known to you! Meet the God who is!”*

MEET THE GOD IN WHOSE IMAGE WE ARE

Is God way out there or deep in here? Religions have wrestled with that question for centuries. The Christian answer is not either/or, but both/and. God is big enough to rule this mighty universe, but small enough to live within my heart.

There is a God gene in our spiritual DNA. The Bible makes the point numerous times.

“So God created human beings in his own image, in the image of God he created them”

(Genesis 1:27).

“In God we live and move and have our being. We are his offspring” (Acts 17:28).

“The spirit himself bears witness with our spirits that we are the children of God” (Romans 8:16).

“I will put my laws on their minds and write them on their hearts, and I will be their God” (Hebrews 8:10).

Our founder, John Wesley, believed God’s image in us to be three-fold. He called it the natural image, the political image, the moral image.

Natural Image: The natural image is our ability to reason, understand, make choices freely, and take responsibility for our actions. Reason and religion go hand-in-hand insisted Wesley.

Political Image: The political image has to do with leadership and management. *“You made mortals to be rulers over the works of your hands,”* said the Psalmist. *“You put everything under his feet.”* Stewardship is not about fund raising for church budgets. It’s about responsible management of all that God entrusted to our care.

Moral Image: The moral image is about justice and mercy, right and wrong, truth

and fairness. Regardless of the relativism of our day, there remain some things that are right, some things that are wrong, some things that are proper, some things improper, some things fair and other things unfair. We do not break the laws of God; we are merely broken upon them again and again.

The image of God creates a hunger. There is a hunger for God in our souls. Even when life has given us more things than we could even long for, more pleasure than we can imagine, more opportunities than we ever dreamed about, there remains in our soul
a deep hunger. It is our need for a vital relationship with the living God.

The last words John Wesley spoke on earth were these:
“Best of all, God is with us.” God is never far from any of us.

When I am scared, I sing. My singing sometimes frightens other people, but it comforts me. I remember lying on a gurney in a hospital corridor once waiting for eternity to get another test. As the hopes and fears of all the years began to swell up in inside me, I began to sing:

My God and I go down this road together,
We walk and talk as good friends should and do
He takes my hand and whispers in the shadows,
My God and I are going to see this through.

As I drifted off into that spiritual conversation, an orderly came by and said, “Sir, are you all right?” To which I replied “Wonderfully so,” “Wonderfully so.” That’s what a personal relationship with the living God can do for you.

MEET THE GOD WHOSE NATURE IS LOVE

Atheist Richard Dawkins, in his popular book [The God Delusion](#), says the God of the Old Testament is arguably the most jealous, proud, petty, unjust, vindictive, blood thirsty, homophobic, racist, megalomaniac, sadomasochistic bully one could imagine and the God of the New Testament is not any better.

Unfortunately, there is enough religious hatred in the world to give Dawkins plenty of ammunition. I found a web site this week named, “Love God’s Way Ministries Where Fags are Hated.” That Christians or Muslims would consider any war to be holy is a training ground for relentless evil. What have we who believe in God done to the God in whom we believe?

The Apostle John had a better idea, “*Whoever does not love, does not know God, because God is love*” (I John 4:8).

Last September, I preached among the ruins of a church where John penned these words. John was old then, probably in his nineties. As I preached, I kept thinking

how this disciple who knew Jesus up close and personal, who took responsibility for Mary, wrote one of the gospels, who was imprisoned on the Isle of Patmos and who became a bishop of the early church. How could he finally come to the end of the way and put everything he had seen, heard, touched, and believed into three words. God is love.

The dictionary defines love as an intense affection. Tina Turner says love is a second hand emotion. Good marketing urges us fall in love with cars, jewelry, and property.

John says, "*God is love.*" Pure, unbounding, love.

The love of God is greater far,
than tongue or pen can ever tell.
It goes beyond the highest star,
and reaches the lowest hell.

Is God for real? He is for me! He's been my friend since I was a kid. I am counting on God to lead me home.