

A God Who is Great, And Yet Near

2Chronicles 6:18-21 -

By Russell Muilenburg

Sunday, 23 May 2010 00:00

2 Chronicles 6:18-21 *No God Like You: A God Who is Great, And Yet Near* **Spiritual**
Math My

message today comes in the form of an equation. I'm not very good at math but one of the things I remember from my freshman algebra days is that any time you see that little "equal" sign it means that whatever shows up on the right side of the equation had better add up to whatever you have on the left side. Thus, $2 + 2 = 4$ and $5 + 5 = 7 + 3$ and so on.

And since this is the last week of school, I thought I'd try to express today's message in the form of a mathematical equation. I know all the kids are ready to shut down for the summer, but I think it's good for them to stay sharp. So I've tried to create a formula sort of like a chemist would.

But, of course, this formula has nothing to do with chemistry or even math. This is just a summary of what I think our Bible passage today tells us about God.

Here's the equation:

$$Gg + Gn = Gs + Gc$$

And here's what those letters mean:

A God who is Great + A God who is Near

equals

A God who is Strong enough to make a difference in your life

+ A God who Cares enough to do so.

It isn't your typical mathematical formula, but this is what we are going to learn today. If you keep notes you can write it down. These are the key words: A God who is great plus a God who is near equals a God who is strong and a God who cares. God is great and near and that

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means He is strong and caring.

Just like any good mathematical formula, the first half is balanced by the second. If the part on the left side of the equal sign is true, then the part on the right side needs to be also. The one equals the other.

And my agenda for our time together today is to show you that the first half of this equation is true.

Because, you see, the second half is what we want, that's what we need. We want to know that God is strong enough to make a difference in our lives, we need to know that He cares enough to do so. All of us, in our deepest heart of hearts, is looking for a God who is loving enough and strong enough to get into the middle of our lives and make a difference in the messes we have created.

And my belief is that if the first half of this equation is true, then the second half has to be also. My belief is that if I can show you from our passage today that God is big and huge and magnificent while at the same time He is close and loving and personal, then you can be confident that He is exactly the kind of God your heart is longing for. If God is Great and yet Near, then we can know that He is also a God who is strong enough and caring enough to make a difference in our lives.

Our text is 2 Chronicles 6:18-21. 2 Chronicles 6:18-21.

18

"But will God really dwell on earth with men? The heavens, even the highest heavens, cannot contain you. How much less this temple I have built!

19

Yet give attention to your servant's prayer and his plea for mercy, O LORD my God. Hear the cry and the prayer that your servant is praying in your presence.

20

May your eyes be open toward this temple day and night, this place of which you said you would put your Name there. May you hear the prayer your servant prays toward this place.

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21

Hear the supplications of your servant and of your people Israel when they pray toward this place. Hear from heaven, your dwelling place; and when you hear, forgive.

<<prayer>>

Uncontainable

Gg + Gn = Gs + Gc

Let's begin with the first part of the equation. Gg. A God who is Great. Our passage today gives us a picture of an Uncontainable God. A God who cannot be tied up or tacked down.

Verse 18 again:

But will God really dwell on earth with men? The heavens, even the highest heavens, cannot contain you. How much less this temple I have built!

Keep in mind the setting in which these words were spoken. We're in the midst of a series of sermons based on 2 Chronicles 6, which is the prayer Solomon prayed on the day of dedication for the Temple he built for the Lord. The temple is magnificent, filled with over 23 tons of gold and more bronze than anybody could keep track of. It's a true wonder of the ancient world.

And on this particular day, the King and all the people of Israel are gathered to invite God to come and dwell in this very building. It's a spectacular scene. All of the priests and musicians and singers, endless sacrifices, a grand parade behind the ark of the covenant... and then the cloud of God's glory descends from heaven and envelops the place.

It's against this backdrop that Solomon spreads out his hands and prays to the God who is unlike any other being in the universe.

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But now, in the middle his prayer, Solomon faces reality. While he has built this temple as a home for the Lord, Solomon is not so naive as to think God will actually live there. Solomon understands that God doesn't live in houses. He doesn't need a roof over His head to keep away the rain. He doesn't need four walls around Him to keep Him warm.

And so, Solomon asks a rhetorical question: "But will God really dwell on earth with men?" In other words, now that this house has been built, does it mean that the Temple in Jerusalem is the only place God can be found? Now that the Lord has put His name here, does that mean He dwells here and nowhere else?

And the obvious answer is, "Of course not!" God isn't like men, able to be in only one place at a time. God isn't like the worthless idols of the surrounding nations--some deaf and mute piece of stone that never leaves its shrine. God can't be shut up in a box or tied to one location. It would be foolishness, pure foolishness, to think that the God who created heaven and earth can be contained in a house of stone. Lest the people think that they have somehow cornered God, Solomon reminds them that He is very, very great.

And to make his point, Solomon calls our attention to "the heavens, even the highest heavens." Not even the farthest reaches of outer space can contain God.

Solomon is inviting us here to cast our eyes to outer space. He wants us to look to the heavens, even the highest heavens, and compare it to God. He wants us consider the size of the cosmos, the vastness of the universe, the final frontier, and then think about God.

So let's do that.

On the screen is a video that's going to take us on a journey from earth into the highest heavens.

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We begin on earth.

10 Km. This is about the height of Mt. Everest. From here you can see the curvature of the earth.

100 Km. This $\frac{1}{4}$ of the way to the space station. If you reach here, you are considered an astronaut.

100,000 Km. This is about $\frac{1}{4}$ of the way to the moon.

1 million Km. Now we're past the moon. The moon is the bright dot now, you can barely see the earth.

100 million Km. We're still not to the sun. The sun is about 150 million Km, or 93 million miles from earth.

10 Trillion Km. Now we've zoomed past the sun and all the planets.

10 to the 15

th

power. That's 10 with 15 zeroes. Don't know what to name that number. At this point, the sun is just a dot.

10 light years. To get to this point you'd have to be able to go the speed of light and you'd still travel for 10 years. What we see is the sun surrounded by about 11 other neighboring stars.

1000 light years. Now you can't see the sun, but you're looking at a cluster of stars that includes the sun.

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Even further. We've left our galaxy, the Milky Way, and we're able to see a cluster of about 100,000 stars inside of the Milky Way.

Even further. Now we can see all of the Milky Way galaxy. We're buried in there somewhere.

Even further. Now you can see our galaxy surrounded by other galaxies. Those dots aren't individual stars anymore, but they are each entire galaxies.

10 million light years. We're looking at more galaxies. The Milky Way is one of those dots. Conservative estimates say there about 350 trillion galaxies in our universe.

100 million light years. Clusters of galaxies now. Beyond this we do not have telescopes to reach.

(video and narration found at

www.crazylovebook.com

, under "The Awe Factor of God", Francis Chan)

We live in a really, really big universe. When you go outside at night and turn your attention to the heavens, you are looking out on space that is exponentially bigger than anything you could possibly imagine.

And yet, Solomon, talking about this same universe, says it is not big enough to contain God. As big as the Universe is, God is still bigger. He made it all. He designed it. It is all under His control (cf. Isa. 66:2).

He is the "uncontainable" one. He is not limited by space or time. He cannot be figured out or controlled. He is the Sovereign, Creator King of the universe.

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“The heavens, even the highest heavens, cannot contain you.”

The point that Solomon is making is that God is a very, very BIG God.

- As great as the highest mountains are, God is greater.
- As strong as the pull of gravity is, God is stronger.
- As smart as the smartest computers are, God is smarter.
- As large as the heavens are, God is larger.
- As grand as the brightest stars are, God is grander.

He is magnificent, immeasurable, incomprehensible. He is uncontainable. He is a great God.

□

What is man?

Given this picture of an incredibly big God, we can't help but to wonder how we fit into His plans. In Psalm 8 David writes: “When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him?”

When we consider that God governs a cosmos that is a minimum of 15,000 million light years across, we might well ask the same question: “What is man?”

Isn't it just a little bit vain to think that a God who is greater than the heavens would be concerned with us? Why would the God who controls planets hundreds of times bigger than Earth worry about a 5'10”;, 180 pound, 38 year-old from Iowa? It just doesn't make sense. You would think a God that big would not trouble Himself with something as insignificant as a human being. Logic would suggest that the One who sets the orbits of planets and the movement of galaxies would have little concern for the affairs of men.

Indeed, if verse 18 were all that we had to go with, we might conclude that God has little time or interest in our world. If all we had was verse 18, Solomon's temple would just be a tragic and misguided edifice built for a God who is far too busy to notice.

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But, amazingly, that's not the case at all. Verse 18 is followed by verse 19. And just as surely as Solomon knows that God cannot be limited to an earthly building, so surely does He know that God has chosen this place. Even while he knows the greatness of God, still Solomon is steadfastly confident that God hears his prayer. The God who is great is also a God who is near. The magnificent God is also personal.

□

The Attentive One

Here's the second part of our equation. Gn. A God who is Near. Our passage also gives us a picture of an Attentive God. A God who listens and loves.

Verse 19:

Yet give attention to your servant's prayer and his plea for mercy, O LORD my God. Hear the cry and the prayer that your servant is praying in your presence.

Here Solomon describes God as a friend. I think of the character Wilson on the 90s sitcom *Home Improvement*.

Most of you are probably familiar with the show, it still plays on cable. It chronicles the life of Tim "the Toolman" Taylor and his wife Jill as they work at marriage and raising three boys. And whenever something goes wrong on the show--which is about once a week--Tim goes out to his backyard to talk it over with Wilson--the hat-wearing, next-door neighbor who is always just across the fence. Wilson is an ever-present source of help for the Taylor family. He is friendly, caring, and compassionate. He is attentive.

To me, that's the picture of God that emerges from Solomon's request here. Even though Solomon knows that God is far greater than the heavens, he still believes that God is concerned with the affairs of His people. Even though God fills the universe, Solomon also knows that He is as close as a next-door neighbor--closer even. While God is a mighty King, He is also a dear friend who is deeply interested in and aware of the events of our lives. He is an attentive God.

And so, Solomon prays that God would give His attention to the prayers and pleas of Israel. While he knows that God cannot be contained in this temple, nevertheless he asks that God put His presence in this place in a special way. He asks, in

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verses 20-21

, that God would open his eyes "toward this temple" and put His "name there" so that the people of Israel will be reminded that their God is not only far above creation, but also present in their midst.

The point Solomon is making is that God is a personal God. God interacts with and takes an interest in His creation.

Again, this separates the God of the Bible from the idols of other religions. He is not some piece of stone who can neither speak nor be spoken too. He is not some aloof deity who has set the events of history into motion only to watch from the sidelines. He is not so busy with the rest of the universe that He doesn't have time for what happens on earth.

Indeed, it is precisely because God is such a great God that Solomon can be so confident He is also near. Only a God who is greater than creation can be counted on to hear and answer our prayers. Only a God who holds the course of our lives in His hand can be expected to make a difference.

And so, the amazing lesson of this portion of Solomon's prayer is that while God is very, very great, He is also near.

- The magnificent God is also a personal God.
- The immeasurable God is also a God close by.
- The incomprehensible God is also a God who has made Himself known.
- The uncontainable God is also an attentive God.
- The God of the cosmos is also our friend.

The message this morning doesn't get any more complicated than that. Perhaps it doesn't even sound all that exciting. But think about it...the God who built this world is the same God the Bible says wants to have a love-relationship with you. The God who controls the thunder and lightning is the same God who is interested in your prayers. The God who knows what is happening in the far corner of the universe is also as close as your next breath. We serve a powerful, caring God.

Nowhere is this seen better than in the person of Jesus Christ.

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Dwelling Among Us

I think that it is a little ironic that some 950 years after Solomon asked: "Will God really dwell on earth with men?" fully expecting the answer to be no, God came along and did that very thing. It is one of the great scandals--and mysteries--of history that the transcendent, sovereign God of creation really did come and make His dwelling among men. He chose to take on human flesh and walk among us, subjecting Himself to our weaknesses and even to our death.

The
gospel of John

expresses this mystery with echoes of Solomon's prayer:

The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. (John 1:14)

The
letter to the Philippians
contains this hymn:

[Jesus Christ], being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death--even death on a cross! (Phil. 2:6-8)

Elsewhere it says of Jesus that "all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form" within Him (Col. 2:9) and that He is the "radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being." (Heb. 1:3)

If you ever wonder just how near God is to the affairs of men or just how much interest He takes in what happens on earth, remember Jesus Christ. More than any earthly temple, Jesus Christ truly manifested the presence of God on earth. The great God of the universe is so concerned about the affairs of men that He stooped to take on human flesh.

Think about that...

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- That means that when Jesus was working in His father's carpenter shop, the fingerprints He left on the tools were the fingerprints of God.
- When He went for a walk on the sandy beaches of the Sea of Galilee, the footprints He left were the footprints of God.
- When He hung on the cross to die, the blood that He shed was the blood of God.

Our God is a very, very great God. And yet, He is also incredibly near. His attention is very much focused on the prayers of His people. You need look no farther than the cross for proof.

□

Two Lessons

So what does all of this mean for us? Well, it takes us to the second half of the equation. If it is true that God is great and also that God is near, then it must also be true that God is strong and God cares. Remember, the whole point of the first half of the equation is to help us see that the second half is true.

So, Gs. God is strong. God is strong enough to make a difference in your life. Remember, "heaven, even the highest heavens" cannot contain Him. If our God is bigger than the universe, then He is certainly bigger than our difficulties.

And I'm not trying to make it sound like the problems we face are small. Life is full of big and perplexing issues. We are all faced with concerns and fears and trials.

But the point is, no matter how big your biggest problem, God is still bigger. He is bigger than cancer and disease. He is bigger than bankruptcy and financial need. He is bigger than divorce and relationships. He is bigger than miscarriages and infertility. He is bigger than death and grief. No matter how big your biggest problem, God is big enough to make a difference.

But more than that, God also cares. Gc. Not only is God big enough to help you with your problems, He also cares enough to do so. Not only is God able to help, He is also willing.

This is so significant. If this wasn't true, having a great big God would be a lot like having a fancy, shiny car in your garage without the keys. It's great to look at, but it doesn't get you anywhere.

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But God isn't like that. The great thing about Solomon's request in verse 19 is that later, in chapter 7, when God gives His answer, He says yes. Solomon prays for God's attention and God turns around and says: "Yes, I will give my attention to your prayers." He says, "My eyes will be open and my ears attentive to the prayers offered in this place. I have chosen...this temple so that my Name may be there forever." (2 Chr. 7:15-16)

Likewise, God says to you and me: "I care about what happens to you. Just look at the cross. Your problems have not escaped my attention, and your prayers do not go unheard. I will give you what you need to find true joy in the end."

God is big enough to help you with any problem, and He cares enough to do so.

Our God is a God who is great. And He is also a God who is near.

2Chronicles 6:18-21 (ESV)

18 "But will God indeed dwell with man on the earth? Behold, heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain you, how much less this house that I have built! 19 Yet have regard to the prayer of your servant and to his plea, O

Lord

my God, listening to the cry and to the prayer that your servant prays before you,

20

that your eyes may be open day and night toward this house, the place where you have promised to set your name, that you may listen to the prayer that your servant offers toward this place.

21

And listen to the pleas of your servant and of your people Israel, when they pray toward this

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place. And listen from heaven your dwelling place, and when you hear, forgive. (

[ESV](#)

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