

MY GOD AND I

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Modern man is so busy, or perhaps we should say that his life is so cluttered with activities, that he often has little time for meditation or communion with God. As a result, God seems far away, a mere shadow, unreal. Our purpose in this study, is to make God seem more real to each of us.

I wish we could know God as personally as Moses knew him. As Moses neared the age of eighty, after he had spent nearly forty years in the wilderness, God came to him in a dramatic scene at the burning bush. The story is told in the scriptures in these words, "Now Moses was keeping the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian: and he led the flock to the back of the wilderness and came to the mountain of God, unto Horeb. And the angel of Jehovah appeared to him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush: and he looked, and, behold, the bush burned with fire, and the bush was not consumed. And Moses said, I will turn aside now, and see this great sight, why the bush is not burnt. And when Jehovah saw that he turned aside to see, God called unto him out of the midst of the bush, and said, Moses, Moses. And he said, Here am I. And he said, Draw not nigh hither: put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground. Moreover he said, I am the God of thy fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. And Moses hid his face; for he was afraid to look upon God." (Ex. 3-1-6).

I wish we could know God as personally as Abraham knew him. In the eighteenth chapter of Genesis we read of a conversation between God and Abraham concerning the inhabitants of the city of Sodom. At the beginning of the story "Jehovah said, Shall I hide from Abraham that which I do ..." (Gen. 18:17). Then there followed a conversation with God and Abraham talking freely with each other.

While we might wish to have such personal experiences with our God, it is not possible in our day, for God has chosen to reveal himself to us through his written word, the Bible. Several thousand times the word God appears in this book, telling us many things about the God who created the world and all things in it. As we read the Bible we achieve a certain understanding of God. To the degree that we read and meditate upon the scriptures do we achieve the personal relationship with God that was so real in the lives of Moses and Abraham and others of the long ago.

The Majesty of God

In our reading of the scriptures, we are overwhelmed with the majesty of God. The infinity of his power, together with other infinite qualities, develops within us an awe and reverence for a God so great. One of the most moving of the religious songs of our day has the title "How Great Thou Art," The words are as follows:

O Lord my God! When I in awesome wonder
Consider all the worlds Thy hands have made--
I see the stars, I hear the roaring thunder,
Thy power throughout the universe displayed,--

When through the woods and forest glades I wander
And hear the birds sing sweetly in the trees;
When I look down from lofty mountain grandeur
And hear the brook and feel the gentle breeze,--

At this point we feel the impact of the chorus of this great hymn:

Then sings my soul, my Savior God to Thee;
Flow great Thou art,--how great Thou art!
Then sings my soul, my Savior God to Thee;
How great Thou art, how great Thou art."

There is a final stanza which says:

When Christ shall come with shout of acclamation
And take me home, what joy shall fill my heart!
Then I shall bow in humble adoration
And there proclaim, My God, how great Thou art!--

The Scriptures Speak of God's Majesty

One cannot read the beginning chapter of Genesis without feeling great awe for the creative power of God: "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. And the earth was waste and void; and darkness was on the face of the deep: and the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters. And God said, Let there be light: and there was light ... And God said, Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters and let it divide the waters from the waters ... And God said, Let the waters under the heavens be gathered unto one place, and let the dry land appear; and it was so ... And God said, Let the earth put forth grass, herbs yielding seed, and fruit-trees bearing fruit after their kind, wherein is the seed thereof, upon the earth: and it was so ... And God said, Let there be lights in the firmament of heaven to divide the day from the night; and let, them be for signs, and for seasons, and for days and years: and let them be for lights in the firmament of heaven to give light upon the earth: and it was so ... And God said, Let the waters swam with swarms of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth in the open firmament of heaven ... And God said, Let the earth bring forth living creatures after their kind, cattle, and creeping things, and beasts of the earth after their kind: and it was so ... And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the heavens, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth. And God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them." (Gen. 1:1-3, 6, 9, 11, 14, 15, 20, 24, 26-27).

Many centuries later, David felt the impact of this same creation when he wrote, "O Jehovah, our Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth, who hast set thy glory upon the heavens! ... When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained; what is man, that thou art mindful of him, and the son of man, that thou visitest him ... O Jehovah, our Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth." (Ps. 8:1, 3-4, 9).

In another of our favorite Psalms, David wrote, "The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament showeth his handiwork. Day unto day uttereth speech and night unto night showeth knowledge. There is no speech nor language; their voice is not heard. Their line is gone out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world." (Ps. 19:1-4). When we read these great passages and when we observe the marvelous works of God's hands about us in the realm of nature, we feel the majesty of God. It is with this in our minds that we often sing with such deep feelings "How Great Thou Art."

The Nearness of God

There is a second side to God's nature, which at first might seem a contradiction of the first, but it is merely another indication of the greatness of God. For all his power and majesty, God is also very near to those who are his children. There is a second song that we often sing with unusual feeling and meaning. Its title is "My God and I" and the words are as follows:

My God and I go in the fields together;
We walk and talk as good friends should and do;
We clasp our hands, our voices ring with laughter;
My God and I go through the meadow's hue.

He tells me of the years that went before me,
When heavenly plans were made for me to be;
When all was but a dream of dim conception,
To come to life, earth's verdant glory see.

My God and I will go for aye together;
We'll walk and talk as good friends ever do;
This earth will pass, and with it common trifles,
But God and I will go unendingly.

This song, while so appealing in expressing so vividly the intimate relationship which we try to achieve with God, implies an equality which is offensive. While discounting this implication of equality as presumptuous, we still find the song emphasizing a feeling that is just and right. God's child can draw near to him and enjoy a wonderful relationship, even though God always remains God and man always remains man.

This closeness of relationship is taught in the great sermon that Paul preached on Mars Hill in Athens. Midway in his message to these learned men of the long ago, in describing the true God whom they had not yet known, Paul said, "The God that made the world and all things therein, he, being Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands; neither is he served by men's hands, as though he needed anything, seeing he himself giveth to all life, and breath, and all things; and he made of one every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, having determined their appointed seasons, and the bounds of their habitation; that they should seek God, if haply they might feel after him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us: for in him we live, and move, and have our being; as certain even of our own poets have said, For we are also his offspring." (Acts 17:24-27).

It was Christ who first taught us the full meaning of the fatherhood of God. In the opening of John's gospel we read, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him; and without him was not anything made that hath been made ... And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us (and we beheld his glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father), full of grace and truth ... No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him." (John 1:1-3, 14, 18).

Christ came and lived among men, revealing the true nature of God to mankind. This is put very directly in John 14:6-9, where the conversation between Christ and Philip is described, "Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, and the truth, and the life: no one cometh unto the Father, but by me. If ye had known me, ye would have known my Father also; for henceforth ye know him, and have seen him. Philip saith unto him, Lord, show us the Father, and it sufficeth us. Jesus saith unto him, Have I been so long time with you, and dost thou not know me, Philip? He that hath seen me hath seen the Father." Such passages as these lead us to feel the closeness which God intended between his children and himself.

The majesty of God and the nearness of God are both possible, because of the comprehensiveness of God's nature. Even in man, however we can see some suggestive trace of both these qualities in the same person. For example, the President of the United States is the first citizen of his nation, which in turn suggests that he is probably the first citizen of the world. His name and reputation are known far and wide. Potentates from all over the world seek audience with him. Whenever he speaks, a nation, and perhaps even a world, eagerly listens. Wherever he goes crowds assemble just to see him. A letter bearing his signature is passed on proudly to one's children and grandchildren. A few moments of private conference are considered the experience of a lifetime, yet on the other hand, the members of his own family do not find it difficult to be in his presence. While he may be the President of the United States, to them he is husband, or father, or brother.

Theodore Roosevelt was one of the most influential of our Presidents, yet his biographer tells that how at the end of the day he would change his clothes, go into the nursery, get down on his hands and knees, and play horse with his children. This suggests at least something of the possibilities of God's infinite greatness, and at the same time the wonderful nearness which he feels to his children.

Conclusion

God has loved us with an infinite love, has created the world for us, has created us in his own image, has blessed us with every conceivable blessing, and then has prepared a place for us to spent eternity with him. All he asks in return is our love. How wonderfully blessed we are; how little it is to give our unstinted love in return.

It may be that some of us have never yet declared openly before men our love for God, and have never yet taken our place in his family. Let me appeal to you to confess the name of Christ before men, turn from the world with its sin, and then be buried with your Lord in baptism in order to arise to live a new kind of life with him. As one obeys these simple God-given commandments, he is born again and begins to live in this close, intimate relationship with his God as Father. All are invited; none is excluded. Will you heed his call as once again we extend his invitation.