

When God Shows Up

Incarnation

September 16-17, 2023

Introduction

Hey everyone! I'm Mark, and I want to welcome you to our service! This weekend we are kicking off a brand new series called, *When God Shows Up*. We believe that the God of the Bible is intimately and intricately involved in the happenings of humanity and that our lives are never the same when we encounter Him.

In one of his most famous quotes, A.W. Tozer wrote, *"What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us."*

Do me a favor. Close your eyes. What comes into your mind when you think about God? Do you picture a vindictive judge or a loving Father? Is He a cosmic force or a dear friend? Are your feelings toward God warm? Distant? Indifferent? Open your eyes.

How we view God is foundational to everything about us — our beliefs, our behaviors, our relationships, our worship and so on. A distorted or inaccurate view of God will lead to major failures in our life!

If I perceive God to be a vengeful, vindictive judge who is quick to punish and quick to condemn or as a cosmic cop who is hiding in ambush waiting for me to mess up, I'm not going to want Him to show up at all! I'm going to want to avoid Him!

Similarly, if I view God as a cosmic force or energy I won't pursue a personal relationship with Him. There is no friendship to be had with energy.

If I perceive God to be distant, uninvolved, just a passive observer of evil and absent during my times of need, my prayers and my worship will be mostly rote. If I pray at all it will be empty of any passion or conviction.

If I view God as a cosmic butler or spiritual sugar daddy who exists to fulfill my wants and desires, or exchanges blessings and favor for good behavior I will become bitter and disenchanting whenever I don't get what I want or go through trials or hardships of any kind.

The sad truth is that for many of us, God looks a lot like...well, us! He believes like we do, is strict on things we disapprove of but lenient on the same things we are, He favors the people we like and disregards the people we don't. He votes like us, loves like us, and agrees with us on most things.

When we worship God, not for who He truly is but for who we make Him to be, we do ourselves a great disservice and Him a great dishonor.

This past week, my kids and I read a beloved classic for the first time, *The Boxcar Children*. It was published in 1924 and tells the story of four siblings who were orphaned after the death of their parents. Their only living relative is their Grandfather who is looking for them but, even though they've never met him, they fear that he is mean and will mistreat them so they spend much of the story on the run, living in fear, and trying to survive in an abandoned box car. At the end of the story (spoiler alert, you've had a 100 years to read it) their Grandfather shows up using a pseudonym. Not realizing who he is, the children develop a relationship with him and discover that he is incredibly kind and generous. Not to mention, he is the wealthiest man in town. Once his identity is revealed he invites the children to live with him in his beautiful home.

I grew up in a very conservative Church background. God was always talked about but He never seemed to be around. He wasn't near. So I learned a lot *about* God but I never really got to know *Him*. As I got older my family moved into a different Church context where I began to learn that God wanted a personal relationship with me. But at this point in my life I wasn't sure I really wanted a close relationship with Him. I already had a Mom and a Dad so I didn't want another authority figure in my life telling me what to do. In my mind, God was a strict authoritarian — a rule enforcer who was always mildly annoyed with me. So I kept God at an arm's length and just kept living life on my own terms. But God never stopped pursuing me. He never gave up on me. And at my lowest moments He was there. Slowly I began to change my mind about Him. Maybe He wasn't the strict angry Grandfather in the sky I had been avoiding all this time. Maybe He really did love me and want a friendship with me.

The good news is that God has made Himself known to us. We don't have to wonder or speculate. The Bible tells us exactly what God is like. Throughout history God has been revealing Himself in greater and greater measure.

Further Resources

Before we go any further, I want to highlight a couple of resources to help you grow beyond our weekend service. Here at New Hope Central Oahu we believe that weekend services are important but not exhaustive when it comes to living the Christian life. The few hours we spend together on the weekend are just one of many ways we grow in our walk with God.

God has a Name, John Mark Comer

The first resource is a book that was recommended to me by Kanoe Morihara. This book unpacks the significance of God's Name and His character for anyone asking the question, "What is God like?" If you're new to faith, exploring faith, or just want to learn more about the nature of God, I highly recommend this book.

Young Adult Seminar

The second resource is an upcoming event for high school and young adults. This will be a multi-church event hosted by Excel Church in Mililani on Saturday, September 23. Pastor Daryl is personally inviting the young people of our Church to learn about God's love and goodness and how He brings hope and purpose to our lives. Pastor Daryl has a heart for seeing young people live hope-filled and purposeful lives for Jesus so this will be an amazing time with young people from all over the island. If you want to RSVP please contact (808) 220-9476.

Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob

From the beginning of time, God has progressively revealed Himself to us. To the earliest ancestors of our faith — Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, God revealed Himself to be a faithful, covenant-keeping God. He also disclosed to Abraham that He planned to work in and through his family in order to bless the nations of the world.

This is a huge revelation! God wants to bless humanity (not condemn it, but bless it) and He plans to do it in and through humanity! (Not from afar but up close and personal). So we have an agenda. But at this point, much of God's character and nature was a mystery. We don't even know His Name! He was called 'El', but that's just a generic term for 'God'. Or 'Adonai', which means 'Lord'. But those are titles, not a name. It's like if I went around introducing Jalee as, "The Wife". It's facts but it's not personal! And even up until the time of Moses, God is often just referred to as 'the God of your fathers'. Who do you worship? My Dad's God.

Moses

But fast-forward the tape some 400 years to the time of Moses and we get a massive bomb-shell revelation about God. The Israelites have been delivered from Egypt and are to become

God's people. But other than some of the things they'd heard and some of the things they'd witnessed, they really didn't know much about this God. He's the God of our fathers (Dad's God).

Not to mention, most of the gods at that time were very unpleasant. They were unpredictable, vengeful, and capricious — given to sudden changes in mood and behavior. They constantly needed to be appeased through sacrifices and complex rituals. Some were characterized by militarism and conquest. Others demanded children as sacrifice. Would this God be different?

God's Self-disclosure

In Exodus 33, Moses is contending with God. He knows that God has called him to lead His people but he feels like there's so much to God he doesn't know. Moses wants more of God.

18 "Then Moses said, "Now show me Your glory."

19 And the Lord said, "I will cause all my goodness to pass in front of you, and I will proclaim My Name, the Lord, in your presence. I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. 20 But," He said, "you cannot see My face, for no one may see Me and live," (Exodus 33:18-20).

Moses is saying, "God! Show Yourself!" And God is saying, "I could show you, but then I'd have to kill you!" But seriously He says, "No one may see Me and live." But God offers to do the next best thing. He says, "I will proclaim My Name in your presence."

In the book, *God has a Name*, the author explains how in Biblical times your name was so much more than a label or the way you knew your drink was ready at Starbucks. It was your identity, your destiny, and it communicated something essential about you. For example, the name 'Abram' means "Exalted Father" but God changed it to 'Abraham', which means, "Father of many nations". This name-change speaks to Abraham's new identity and destiny.

So God tells Moses, "So that you, and My people, and all the world will know what I'm truly like, I will proclaim My Name to you." No more wondering, no more speculation, this is what God says He is like.

5 "Then the Lord came down in the cloud and stood there with [Moses] and proclaimed His Name, [Yahweh]. 6 And He passed in front of Moses, proclaiming, "[Yahweh], [Yahweh], the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, 7 maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet He does not leave the guilty unpunished; He punishes the children and their children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation," (Exodus 34:5-7).

Wow! This passage is so significant because it tells us everything we need to know about God. First of all, did you notice? We get a name! Yahweh! God has a name! And then we get what Yahweh is like. This passage of God's self-disclosure is so significant that the Biblical authors repeat these words over and over throughout scriptures as a reminder of what God is like. These words are sung back to God as worship in the Psalms. These words are prophesied as a reminder to the people so that they will repent. They are prayed back to God in times of need. These words should be an anchor for us as well any time we are tempted to think anything different about God. So what is God like?

Compassionate and Gracious

Yahweh shows deep concern and empathy for His creation. He cares deeply about what is happening in our world. He cares deeply about what is happening in your life. He extends unmerited favor and kindness toward us. He causes the rain to fall on the wicked and the righteous.

Patient and Slow to Anger

He isn't standing there, rod in hand, just waiting for us to mess up. He isn't a God who flies off the handle or loses it at every mistake. He sees our hearts. If you are genuinely trying to pursue God but are finding it difficult at times, God isn't rolling His eyes at you, He isn't checking His watch or tapping His foot. He is patient and lovingly bears with us.

Abundant in Love and Faithfulness

God's love for you is abundant and unwavering. He is steadfast and faithful in His commitment and promises to His people. When we walk out on God He doesn't walk out on us. When we give up on Him, He never gives up on us.

Forgiving

God is willing to pardon even the greatest of sins when we genuinely repent and seek His forgiveness. There is no sin too great for God's mercy. Nothing can keep you from God's love.

Justice

While God is merciful, patient, and forgiving, He is also just. No good parent lets wrongs go uncorrected or unpunished. God disciplines those He loves. But His punishment is never arbitrary or unpredictable. We don't have to wonder what mood God is in today. He is always loving and fair in His justice.

Jesus

So God revealed Himself to Moses like never before. Moses learned the Name of God and His attributes. But God was not finished revealing Himself. In Jesus, we get the most perfect picture of who God is and what God is like. To Moses, God gave His Word. The prophets spoke His Word. But in Jesus, the Word became flesh.

14 "The Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us.

[That Word that God spoke on the mountain to Moses took on flesh and became one of us!]

We have seen His glory, the glory of the One and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth," (John 1:14).

Moses asked to see God's glory — to see His face. He was denied this request. But in the person of Jesus we see the glorious face of God Himself. In Jesus, God showed up.

17 "For the law was given through Moses; [That was the old way of relating to God] grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. [We have a new way of relating to God through Jesus] 18 No one has ever seen God, but the One and only Son, who is Himself God and is in closest relationship with the Father, has made Him known," (John 1:17-18).

If you want to know God, you need to know Jesus.

⁶ “Jesus answered, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me. ⁷ If you really know Me, you will know My Father as well. From now on, you do know Him and have seen Him,” (John 14:6-7).

What Jesus Reveals about God

A lot of people have this picture of the God of the Old Testament as a strict grumpy old man and Jesus as His progressive laid-back Son but they're one and the same! Jesus is the perfect representation of the Father. And Jesus invites every one of us to follow Him regardless of what we've done or what's been done to us.

The Story of the Cracked Pot

I recently heard a beautiful story about an old woman who would walk to the river every day to gather water for her daily needs. She gathered this water in two large pots that hung on each end of a pole that she carried across her neck.

One evening, while the woman lay sleeping, one of the pots turned to the other and said, “You should be ashamed of yourself. That crack in your side makes it so that you spill half the water you carry by the time we get home! I always bring back every drop but you always come back half full. You're no good.”

The next morning the woman went to gather her pots and saw the cracked pot looking sad.

“What's wrong?” She asked the cracked pot. “I'm ashamed” said the pot, “This crack in my side causes me to spill half of my water on the way back to your house. You should get rid of me.”

The old woman looked at the pot with compassion and said, “As we walk to the river I want you to tell me what you see.”

When they reached the river she asked the pot, “What did you see?” “Nothing really,” said the pot, “Just some sticks and stones and grass.”

“Now,” said the woman, “As we head back to the house, tell me what you see.”

When they arrived back at the house the woman asked the cracked pot, “What did you see?” The cracked pot could barely contain itself! No pun intended. It said, “I saw flowers! Beautiful flowers of every kind. Red ones, yellow ones, so many kinds of beautiful flowers!”

The Old Woman held the pot and said, “I've known about your crack from the day I saw you. So I planted flower seeds on your side of the path and every day while we walk home you water them. Those flowers bring beauty to the world and decorate our home so without you being just the way you are I would not have all this beauty to grace my house.

Conclusion

How many of you want to be crackpots for Jesus? That'll be our volunteer shirt for next year. “Crackpots for Jesus.” God, in His compassion and mercy, says, “I want you to be mine.” “But God” we say, “I'm broken, I'm inadequate, I'm no good. You should find someone else.” But God says, “I'm not looking for perfect people. Have you read the Bible? It's full of crackpots! No, I want you just the way you are. With all of your scars, and hurts, and brokenness. And I'm going to fill you with the living waters of my Spirit. And through brokenness and humility you will pour out my love to others and bring beauty to My world.