

9.27.20

God of the Paradox

Almost certainly God is not in Time. His life does not consist of moments following one another. If a million people are praying to Him at ten-thirty tonight, He need not listen to them all in that one little snippet which we call ten-thirty. Ten-thirty—and every other moment from the beginning of the world—is always the Present for Him. If you like to put it that way, He has all eternity in which to listen to the split second of prayer put up by a pilot as his plane crashes in flames.

That is difficult, I know. Let me try to give something, not the same, but a bit like it. Suppose I am writing a novel. I write 'Mary laid down her work; next moment came a knock at the door!' For Mary who has to live in the imaginary time of my story there is no interval between putting down the work and hearing the knock. But I, who am Mary's maker, do not live in that imaginary time at all. Between writing the first half of that sentence and the second, I might sit down for three hours and think steadily about Mary. I could think about Mary as if she were the only character in the book and for as long as I pleased, and the hours I spent in doing so would not appear in Mary's time (the time inside the story) at all.

This is not a perfect illustration of course, but it may give just a glimpse of what I believe to be the truth. God is not hurried along in the Time-stream of this universe any more than an author is hurried along in the imaginary time of his own novel. He has infinite attention to spare for each one of us. He does not have to deal with us in the mass. You are as much alone with Him as if you were the only being He had ever created. When Christ died, He died for you individually just

as much as if you had been the man in the world. The way in which my illustration breaks down is this. In it the author gets out of one Time-series (that of the novel) only by going into another Time-series (the real one). But God, I believe, does not live in a Time-series at all. His life is not dribbled out moment by moment like ours: with Him it is, so to speak, still 1920 and already 1960. For His life is Himself.

If you picture Time as a straight line along which we have to travel, then you must picture God as the whole page on which the line is drawn. We come to the parts of the line one by one: we have to leave A behind before we get to B and cannot reach C until we leave B behind. God, from above or outside or all round, contains the whole line, and sees it all.

The idea is worth trying to grasp because it removes some apparent difficulties in Christianity. Before I became a Christian one of my objections was as follows. The Christians said that the eternal God who is everywhere and keeps the whole universe going, once became a human being. Well, then, said I, how did the whole universe keep going while He was a baby, or while He was asleep? How could He at the same time be God who knows everything and also a man asking his disciples 'Who touched me?' You will notice that the sting lay in the time words: 'While He was a baby'—How could He at the same time?' In other words I was assuming that Christ's life as God was in time, and that His life as the man Jesus in Palestine was a shorter period taken out of that time—just as my service in the army was a shorter period taken out of my total life. And that is how most of us perhaps tend to think about it. We picture God living through a period when His human life was still in the future: then coming to a period when it was present:

then going on to a period when He could look back on it as something in the past. But probably these ideas correspond to nothing in the actual facts. You cannot fit Christ's earthly life in Palestine into any time-relations with His life as God beyond all space and time. It is really, I suggest, a timeless truth about God that human nature, and the human experience of weakness and sleep and ignorance, are somehow included in His whole divine life. This human life in God is from our point of view a particular period in the history of our world (from the year A.D. one till the Crucifixion). We therefore imagine it is also a period in the history of God's own existence. But God has no history."

...CS Lewis

The Key to Unlocking God of the Paradox: Understanding the Creative Nature and Kinetic Energy of God

Introduction

If God is transcendent how is He also immanent? If His love is unconditional how can it have conditions? Jesus said He is the Way. How is the Way in, also the Way out? Can one be in the world and not of the world? If it was the beginning, how did Christ already exist? If He is the end of all things how is it possible for Him to also be the beginning of all things? How can He be the first and also the last, all at the same time?

These are paradoxical questions that have been asked by millions of people for thousands of years. **Paradox** is a word of Latin and Greek origin first used and defined in 1540 AD, as: a tenet contrary to received opinion.

That definition would quickly expand to include meaning: a statement that is seemingly contradictory or opposed to common sense and yet is true; a statement or proposition that, despite sound reasoning from acceptable premises, leads to a conclusion that seems senseless, logically unacceptable, or self-contradictory

Two seemingly contradictory statements that end up both being true. God is not only master of the paradox, He is a paradox. That He is a paradox - is a big deal. To the unbeliever and to those who have determined He does not exist, God is merely a contradiction of Himself; a parody defying logic and common sense. To those who believe and follow Him, the evidence that God indeed is a reality is discovered within the paradox. God of the paradox leads one who seeks Him, to the understanding of who He is - and the unlimited capability of His creative nature.

The teaching series **God of the Paradox**, uncovers the biblical truth and realities of God's nature and how this becomes our greatest hope.

Together we will find out just how He is able to be here and there, near and far, beginning and ending, past-present-and future all at the same time.

The Key to Unlocking God of the Paradox: Understanding the Creative Nature and Kinetic Energy of God

Lets start with a limited hypothesis we can use to verify and confirm a logical conclusion about God as a paradox. We will build our conclusion using the undeniable evidence of biblical truth and our own personal experience.

God of the Paradox Hypothesis

"From the beginning, the nature of God is to create. That is why (in part) we call Him God Almighty, Creator of Heaven and Earth. His creative nature is supported by the power of His interminable and relentless movement. This kinetic energy is not unharnessed or uncontrolled; it is the relentless movement of God, willed and purposed to both nurture and give life to all He creates."

To build our case we must first define two critical ideas: Creative Nature and Kinetic Energy. As we said, by using the logical evidence of personal experience and revealed truth we will be able to attach those definitions to the nature and energy of God. Thereby revealing the God of the Paradox as not only our living hope, but our manifest destiny. Before we begin let's read to these two passages together.

John 1:1–5

"In the beginning the Word already existed. The Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He existed in the beginning with God. 3 God created everything through him, and nothing was created except through him. 4 The Word gave life to everything that was created, and his life brought light to everyone. 5 The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness can never extinguish it."

Romans 8:28–30

"And we know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose for them. 29 For God knew his people in advance, and he chose them to

become like his Son, so that his Son would be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters. 30 And having chosen them, he called them to come to him. And having called them, he gave them right standing with himself. And having given them right standing, he gave them his glory.”

[Defining Creative Nature]

Creative Nature: the inherent and intrinsic character of original and imaginative innovation and design; the essence to beget, to give life.

Romans 1:19–20

“They know the truth about God because he has made it obvious to them. 20 For ever since the world was created, people have seen the earth and sky. Through everything God made, they can clearly see his invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature. So they have no excuse for not knowing God.”

Job 12:10, 33:3-4

“In his hand is the life of every living thing and the breath of all mankind.

3 My words declare the uprightness of my heart, and what my lips know they speak sincerely. 4 The Spirit of God has made me, and the breath of the Almighty gives me life.”

The nature of God is to create. As God creates, he reveals His nature.

[Defining the Kinetic Energy of God]

Kinetic Energy: energy which a body, object, or mass possesses by virtue of being in motion; the purposeful energy of motion.

John 11:5-34

"Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. 6 So, when he heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was. 7 Then after this he said to the disciples, "Let us go to Judea again." 8 The disciples said to him, "Rabbi, the Jews were just now seeking to stone you, and are you going there again?" 9 Jesus answered, "Are there not twelve hours in the day? If anyone walks in the day, he does not stumble, because he sees the light of this world. 10 But if anyone walks in the night, he stumbles, because the light is not in him." 11 After saying these things, he said to them, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I go to awaken him." 12 The disciples said to him, "Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will recover." 13 Now Jesus had spoken of his death, but they thought that he meant taking rest in sleep. 14 Then Jesus told them plainly, "Lazarus has died, 15 and for your sake I am glad that I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him." 16 So Thomas, called the Twin, said to his fellow disciples, "Let us also go, that we may die with him."

17 Now when Jesus came, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb four days. 18 Bethany was near Jerusalem, about two miles off, 19 and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them concerning their brother. 20 So when Martha heard that Jesus was

coming, she went and met him, but Mary remained seated in the house. 21 Martha said to Jesus, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. 22 But even now I know that whatever you ask from God, God will give you." 23 Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again." 24 Martha said to him, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day." 25 Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, 26 and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?" 27 She said to him, "Yes, Lord; I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who is coming into the world." 28 When she had said this, she went and called her sister Mary, saying in private, "The Teacher is here and is calling for you." 29 And when she heard it, she rose quickly and went to him. 30 Now Jesus had not yet come into the village, but was still in the place where Martha had met him. 31 When the Jews who were with her in the house, consoling her, saw Mary rise quickly and go out, they followed her, supposing that she was going to the tomb to weep there. 32 Now when Mary came to where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet, saying to him, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." 33 When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in his spirit and greatly troubled. 34 And he said, "Where have you laid him?" They said to him, "Lord, come and see." 35 Jesus wept. 36 So the Jews said, "See how he loved him!" 37 But some of them said, "Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man also have kept this man from dying?" 38 Then Jesus, deeply moved again, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone lay against it. 39 Jesus said, "Take away

the stone." Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, "Lord, by this time there will be an odor, for he has been dead four days." 40 Jesus said to her, "Did I not tell you that if you believed you would see the glory of God?" 41 So they took away the stone. And Jesus lifted up his eyes and said, "Father, I thank you that you have heard me. 42 I knew that you always hear me, but I said this on account of the people standing around, that they may believe that you sent me." 43 When he had said these things, he cried out with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out." 44 The man who had died came out, his hands and feet bound with linen strips, and his face wrapped with a cloth. Jesus said to them, "Unbind him, and let him go."

God purposes the energy of His motion to creating life. The movement of God is an unstoppable life-giving force.

From these definitions and biblical truths, we can start to make a logical conclusion about God as Paradox. The last component needed for our conclusion is provided by the acknowledgement and confession of our own personal experiences with the Creative Nature and Kinetic Energy of God. **Take a moment and recall a moment or an experience where God was moving in you, towards you, or through you. What did the movement and motion of God create in you?**

This conclusion is our key to unlocking our understanding of God as a Paradox. This Paradox not only reveals who God is, but verifies, that He Is. Therein lies our one true hope.

Logical Conclusions

The nature of God is to create. As God creates, he reveals His nature. When God moves God creates. The movement of God is life giving energy. As God moves there is evidence of life, and where there is life there is always hope.

With these conclusions in place, we have the basic understanding needed to approach the three most profound realities of who God is. That He is fully capable of being the God of the Paradox to reveal Himself to His creation. These realities do not mean that the limited mind of man has figured out the unlimited reasoning and capabilities of Almighty God - that would be absurd arrogance (of that we are certainly capable). What it does mean is that humankind (you and I), can understand and know that the unlimited capabilities of the God of the Paradox have been willed and planned to give us (His Creation) life and hope through the love and sacrifice of His Son, Jesus Christ.

The Profound Realities - God of the Paradox

Omnipotent - possessing all power and authority; theologians regard God as having supreme power, meaning God can do what He wants; not subject to physical limitations like man; infinite or limitless power over wind, water, gravity, physics, etc.

Omniscient - having all knowledge and wisdom; means all-knowing; aware of the past, present, and future; total knowledge, meaning all that there is to know and all that can be known; complete knowledge of that which is know and unknown.

Omnipresent - present at all places at all times; present; capable of encompassing the whole of the universe; no space or place God does not or cannot inhabit; though distinct from the universe, yet inhabiting the entirety of it; everywhere at once.

10.4.20

God of the Paradox

The Paradox of Transcendence and Immanence

These two realities describe the very paradoxical nature of our relationship with God. Here are some well-known biblical examples: *the first will be last, the last will be first - the least will be the greatest - deny yourself to free yourself - whoever saves his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for Christ sake will find it. - you must humble yourself to exalt yourself* and so on. The rules of the paradox apply, yet because God is God of the paradox, He who made the rules them can break them, and at the same time fulfill them. God can neither deny or contradict Himself, and in that sense our relationship with Him can be *not of this world*, and yet at the same time, fully present *in this world*. His promises to us can appear forgotten and broken, and yet be fulfilled. Our prayers can seem unheard and unanswered, and yet being heard and answered at the same time. To the faithless unbeliever this is absurd and the justified reason for their faithless unbelief. To the faith filled believer this is the profound paradox of the *transcendent* God who is far away and at the same time *immanent*; present and moving to, through, and in us. Apart and beyond yet connected and close. Possible, not possible?

Remember, **omnipotent** (all powerful), **omniscient** (all knowing), **omnipresent** (all present at all times and places). Things that are impossible with man are fully possible with God.

The God of the paradox is about to get even better - because it is possible.

Transcendence

The **'transcendence'** of God means that God exists ***apart from***, and is not subject to the limitations of, the material universe. He is above and beyond, surpassing and excelling, superior to humankind.

Let's read a Biblical description of the transcendent God from the book of Job, and from the great messianic prophet Isaiah.

Job 37:5-24

"God thunders wondrously with his voice; he does great things that we cannot comprehend. 6 For to the snow he says, 'Fall on the earth,' likewise to the downpour, his mighty downpour. 7 He seals up the hand of every man, that all men whom he made may know it. 8 Then the beasts go into their lairs, and remain in their dens. 9 From its chamber comes the whirlwind, and cold from the scattering winds. 10 By the breath of God ice is given, and the broad waters are frozen fast. 11 He loads the thick cloud with moisture; the clouds scatter his lightning. 12 They turn around and around by his guidance, to accomplish all that he commands them on the face of the habitable world. 13 Whether for correction or for his land or for love, he causes it to happen. 14 "Hear this, O Job; stop and consider the wondrous works of God. 15 Do you know how God lays his command upon them and causes the lightning of his cloud to shine? 16 Do you know the balancings of the clouds, the wondrous works of him who is perfect in knowledge, 17 you whose garments are hot when the earth is still because of the south

wind? 18 Can you, like him, spread out the skies, hard as a cast metal mirror? 19 Teach us what we shall say to him; we cannot draw up our case because of darkness. 20 Shall it be told him that I would speak? Did a man ever wish that he would be swallowed up? 21 "And now no one looks on the light when it is bright in the skies, when the wind has passed and cleared them. 22 Out of the north comes golden splendor; God is clothed with awesome majesty. 23 The Almighty-we cannot find him; he is great in power; justice and abundant righteousness he will not violate. 24 Therefore men fear him; he does not regard any who are wise in their own conceit."

Isaiah 58:8-9

"For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the LORD. 9 For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts."

Immanence

Now let's contrast that to the **'immanence'** of God. Biblical or divine **immanence** means that He moves to, through, and in; abides and lives, **exists within**, all who believe in Him. Because of this reality, it is then possible to not only know that God is out there existing beyond all universes and to experience the immediacy of His intimate friendship and love. To not only know of Him, but to intimately know Him who was and is to come. Let's read together, from Paul's epistle of Philippians and John's gospel.

Philippians 2:5-11

"Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, 6 who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, 7 but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. 8 And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. 9 Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, 10 so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, 11 and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

John 14:6-11

"Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. 7 If you had known me, you would have known my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him." 8 Philip said to him, "Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us." 9 Jesus said to him, "Have I been with you so long, and you still do not know me, Philip? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'? 10 Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own authority, but the Father who dwells in me does his works. 11 Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me, or else believe on account of the works themselves.

According to the Biblical traditions of our Christian faith, the *transcendent* God, who cannot be approached or seen in essence or being, becomes *immanent* to us primarily in the person and presence of the incarnate Christ. The immanence of God is fulfilled in us - in Christ, and actively functions in the unity of the Spirit. The Biblical theology of the *immanence of God* is expressed as what is called the ***hypostases***: the union of Christ's human and divine nature. That the transcendent God of the universe and beyond, became immanent by coming to earth in the flesh (humanity) so that each and every one of His creation could be moved upon by His Spirit (divinity), both to know and to have new life in Him.

We described last week the creative nature and energy of God - the movement of God creates life. This I believe, is our moment for truth and reality - this is a moment for the Spirit's revelation. This is our spiritual understanding of how the God who transcends all, is also immanent and present in us.

God, who in his essence, is incomprehensible and transcendent, yet at the same time intimately present and living in us.

God the Father - God the Son - God the Spirit in complete and perfect unity immanently revealed to each one, in each one.

God of the paradox... wholly transcendent and incomprehensible; fully immanent and knowable all in the same moment.

The book of Job and the also speaks of God's intimate friendship and love.

Job 29:1-6

"And Job again took up his discourse, and said: 2 "Oh, that I were as in the months of old, as in the days when God watched over me, 3 when his lamp shone upon my head, and by his light I walked through darkness, 4 as I was in my prime, when the friendship of God was upon my tent, 5 when the Almighty was yet with me, when my children were all around me, 6 when my steps were washed with butter, and the rock poured out for me streams of oil!

Psalms 139

"O LORD, you have searched me and known me! 2 You know when I sit down and when I rise up; you discern my thoughts from afar. 3 You search out my path and my lying down and are acquainted with all my ways. 4 Even before a word is on my tongue, behold, O LORD, you know it altogether. 5 You hem me in, behind and before, and lay your hand upon me. 6 Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high; I cannot attain it. 7 Where shall I go from your Spirit? Or where shall I flee from your presence? 8 If I ascend to heaven, you are there! If I make my bed in Sheol, you are there! 9 If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, 10 even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me. 11 If I say, "Surely the darkness shall cover me, and the light about me be night," 12 even the darkness is not dark to you; the night is bright as the day, for darkness is as light with you. 13 For you formed my inward parts; you knitted me together in my mother's

womb. 14 I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; my soul knows it very well. 15 My frame was not hidden from you, when I was being made in secret, intricately woven in the depths of the earth. 16 Your eyes saw my unformed substance; in your book were written, every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there was none of them. 17 How precious to me are your thoughts, O God! How vast is the sum of them! 18 If I would count them, they are more than the sand. I awake, and I am still with you. 19 Oh that you would slay the wicked, O God! O men of blood, depart from me! 20 They speak against you with malicious intent; your enemies take your name in vain. 21 Do I not hate those who hate you, O LORD? And do I not loathe those who rise up against you? 22 I hate them with complete hatred; I count them my enemies. 23 Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! 24 And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting!

It is only when we understand the *transcendence* of God that you we see how profoundly amazing his *immanence* is, and the privilege it is to be able to enjoy intimate friendship and love with the great and almighty God of the world without end. God of the paradox.

10.18.20

God of the Paradox - The Paradox of Ending and Beginning

Revelation 1:5-8

"To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood 6 and made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen. 7 Behold, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him, and all tribes of the earth will wail on account of him. Even so. Amen. 8 "I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, "who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty."

Revelation 21:5-7

And he who was seated on the throne said, "Behold, I am making all things new." Also he said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true." 6 And he said to me, "It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give from the spring of the water of life without payment. 7 The one who conquers will have this heritage, and I will be his God and he will be my son.

Revelation 22:10-13

And the angel said to me, "Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is near. 11 Let the evildoer still do evil, and the filthy still be filthy, and the righteous still do right, and the holy still be holy. 12 Behold, I am coming soon, bringing my recompense with me, to

repay each one for what he has done. 13 I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end."

Three times in his Revelations writing, John of Patmos refers to God in Christ as the Alpha and the Omega. Alpha is the first letter of the Greek alphabet. It was derived from the Hebrew letter aleph and means leader. In English, the noun alpha is used as a synonym for **beginning**, or first. Omega is the 24th and last letter of the Greek alphabet and its English meaning is the extreme **end**. John says that God is the Alpha and Omega or beginning and the end. If that is possible (and with God all things are), the reverse would also be true. He is the Omega and the Alpha.

The Book of Revelation is a literary example of our teaching today. John's writing is **the paradox of ending and beginning**. His visions and revelations all describe the end of all things yet at the same time (in actuality), are the beginning of all things. He is writing about the future of all things and yet describing the end of them as they happen at the same time. An even greater reality is that John is describing God in Christ as a paradox - **the paradox of ending and beginning**. The paradox is, that God, at the same moment, is both the end and the beginning. I assure you that this is more than semantics and meta-physical theory. Not only is there a right answer there is also a right question. I want to teach today about the building-up and surety of our faith in God. And because He is God of the paradox, we can have complete faith and confidence in our decision to love and trust Him. The paradox of ending and beginning is the perfect lesson to do that. The logical and reasonable question of course is "how is something ending and beginning at the same time?" The first part of that answer is found in the profound Biblical reality of the supernatural sovereignty and timelessness of God.

The Profound Realities - God of the Paradox

That God is...

Omnipotent - possessing all power and authority; theologians regard God as having supreme power, meaning God can do what He wants; not subject to physical limitations like man; infinite or limitless power over wind, water, gravity, physics, etc.

That God is...

Omniscient - having all knowledge and wisdom; means all-knowing; aware of the past, present, and future; total knowledge, meaning all that there is to know and all that can be known; complete knowledge of that which is known and unknown.

That God is...

Omnipresent - present at all places at all times; present; capable of encompassing the whole of the universe; no space or place God does not or cannot inhabit; though distinct from the universe, yet inhabiting the entirety of it; everywhere at once.

To consider and fully embrace these three profound realities is to open the door to understanding that God is indeed God of the Paradox and certainly capable of being the end of something while being the beginning of it all at the same time - with both realities being true. One hint to understanding this paradox comes from the natural order of God Himself. Light, dark, light. Work, rest, work. Listen, speak, listen. Believe, pray, believe, Life, death, life. These are all the natural order of God.

Because God sets natural order it does not mean He is incapable of anything else - it means that is how things are to be. In God's natural order He begins, ends, begins. That does not mean that each is independent of and unrelated to one another - it means that is how things are to be. Here is the powerful truth to this concept of God's natural order. In God's supernatural sovereignty and timelessness (omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresence) both the ending and beginning can be the same thing and happen at the same time. Our best example of this comes from the Gospel of John the Beloved, written nearly thirty years before the book of Revelations. In his biography of the life of Jesus, John describes the closing events of the crucifixion of Jesus. I'm very interested in your thoughts and feelings about this passage as I think this will be helpful in building up your faith and assurance in the possibilities and potential of God in your life, and God as your hope. Take moment and close your eyes while I read this to you.

John 19:23-30

"When the soldiers had crucified Jesus, they took his garments and divided them into four parts, one part for each soldier; also his tunic. But the tunic was seamless, woven in one piece from top to bottom 24 so they said to one another, "Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it to see whose it shall be." This was to fulfill the Scripture which says, "They divided my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots." So the soldiers did these things, 25 but standing by the cross of Jesus were his mother and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. 26 When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to his mother, "Woman, behold, your son!**" 27 Then he said to the disciple, "**Behold, your mother!**" And from**

that hour the disciple took her to his own home. 28 After this, Jesus, knowing that all was now finished, said (to fulfill the Scripture), "**I thirst.**" 29 A jar full of sour wine stood there, so they put a sponge full of the sour wine on a hyssop branch and held it to his mouth. 30 When Jesus had received the sour wine, he said, "**It is finished,**" and he bowed his head and gave up his spirit."

What do you think and feel when I read this to you?

No matter how many times I read this my first reaction is always a thought of "well, the bad guys killed Jesus, that's it - it's over, the end." Even though I know the truth, I have that moment of being in the moment and it feels like - the end. Then the reality pulls me from out of the moment and reveals to me the paradox of ending and beginning. Jesus said, it is finished - the end, and that was indeed true. But in that instant it was also true that it was the beginning. The end of life brought the beginning of life and both were happening at the same time. Within this paradox Christ reveals our hope and the very reason for our faith. Lets read from John's gospel the interaction between Jesus and Martha. Martha was the sister of Lazarus who had died 4 days earlier - they were all dear friends.

John 11:21-26

Martha said to Jesus, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. 22 But even now I know that whatever you ask from God, God will give you." 23 Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again.**" 24 Martha said to him, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day." 25 Jesus said to her, "**I am the resurrection and the life.****

Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, 26 and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?"

Conclusion

Surely you can hear the words of Jesus as He proclaims that He is the paradox of the ending and beginning. Whoever believes in Him - though he die, yet will he live. In Christ, what is the ending is also the beginning. Regardless of the circumstances, at the very moment when something is ending in our lives it does not mean it is the end of our life. It means that in Christ, it is the beginning of life and all that new life brings.

10.25.20

God of the Paradox - The Paradox of First and Last

1 Peter 2:6-8

For it stands in Scripture: "Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone, a cornerstone chosen and precious, and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame."

7 So the honor is for you who believe, but for those who do not believe, "The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone," 8 and "A stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense." They stumble because they disobey the word, as they were destined to do.

God is not only master of the paradox, He is a paradox. The Epistle of Peter describes Jesus as both the most important building block and yet the biggest stumbling block. To the believer this is one more paradox from the God of the universe and beyond. The God who sits outside of time capable of knowing all, doing all, and being all inside of time.

To the unbeliever and to those who have determined He does not exist, the idea of an intentional and supernatural God who Created heaven and earth and everything in it is merely a contradiction; a parody defying logic or common sense. The paradoxical nature and capability of God is more than the unbelieving little heart of a secular humanist can bear. The very unbelief they swear by is the stumbling block to the very truth they swear about. Why would someone surrender in obedience

and trust to something or someone they do not believe exists? Why would someone settle for last when all they have ever wanted to be is first? Why indeed?

To those who believe and follow Him, the evidence that God indeed is a reality is discovered within the paradox. God of the paradox leads one who diligently seeks Him to the understanding of who He is - which is the why to the unlimited capability of His creative design and purpose. To those who do not believe, or perhaps no longer believe, this is absurd since nothing is by design but by accident. And nothing can have purpose since everything is a coincidence. The contrast between Biblical worldview of the believer and the secular worldview of the unbeliever is revealed in the paradox of the cornerstone and the stumbling-block. This contrast is the central key to understanding the God of the paradox that is revealed in Christ.

One of the most profound paradoxes of Jesus is recorded in three of the four gospels. I love Mark's direct recollection of his time with Jesus, and the day He challenged the self-serving pride of the disciples with *the paradox of the first and last*.

Mark 9:33-37

And they came to Capernaum. And when he was in the house he asked them, "What were you discussing on the way?"

34 But they kept silent, for on the way they had argued with one another about who was the greatest.

35 And he sat down and called the twelve. And he said to them, "If anyone would be first, he must be last of all and servant of all."

36 And he took a child and put him in the midst of them, and taking him in his arms, he said to them, 37 "Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me, and whoever receives me, receives not me but him who sent me."

We have been culturally conditioned to the recognition, significance, and perceived benefits of being first. In the context of a competitive marketplace, gamesmanship, or athletic contest this is truly not evil. In fact, when kept in balance with the right motivation and perspective it is quite healthy and productive in the development of social and emotional intelligence. When the need to be first becomes obsessively self-serving and narcissistic then it is toxic and unhealthy - both spiritually and physically. The writer of Hebrews, and the apostle Paul illustrated the healthy need to compete, endure, and win.

Hebrews 12:1-2

Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, 2 looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.

1 Corinthians 9:24-27

Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it.

We of course in true humankind fashion have blown the healthy benefits of competition and the goal of finishing first right out of the water. The push back you all know has been against toxic masculinity with the cultural and authoritative overreach to destroy God designed masculinity and the drive to be a man's man. The lesson of Jesus is paradoxical in that being both and first and last appears to be a contradiction yet in the expectations and unlimited capabilities of God in Christ Jesus, both are true. Both are true but both are not righteous. Both are true but both are not preferred by Christ when we allow ourselves to become proud, selfish, arrogant, conceited, and obsessive about ourselves, our status and how we are perceived by others. Jesus teaches from this paradox the character lessons and spiritual value of humility and preferring others above and before ourselves for both men and women. The greatest among you is not always the first but can also be the least. If you want to be first, you must least of all and serving all.

In his biography of Jesus, this topic is recalled another time when Jesus is in a very intense conversation with the wealthy young ruler. The up and comer has decided that he wants to follow Jesus. However, Jesus quickly perceives it is for the wrong reasons and motives. These end game motives are exposed the very moment Jesus suggests to the young man that to follow Him he needs to go and sell all of his possessions and then return. Jesus does not ask the rich young man to do something he cannot do, He asks him to do the one thing He knows He will not do.

The rich young ruler *will not give up being first to end up being last*. In the process he misses his only real opportunity in being last to ultimately become first.

Mark 10:23-31

Disheartened by the saying, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.

23 And Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, “How difficult it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!”

24 And the disciples were amazed at his words. But Jesus said to them again, “Children, how difficult it is to enter the kingdom of God!

25 It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God.”

26 And they were exceedingly astonished, and said to him, “Then who can be saved?”

27 Jesus looked at them and said, “With man it is impossible, but not with God. For all things are possible with God.”

28 Peter began to say to him, “See, we have left everything and followed you.”

29 Jesus said, "Truly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands, for my sake and for the gospel, 30 who will not receive a hundredfold now in this time, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions, and in the age to come eternal life. 31 But many who are first will be last, and the last first.