

***Does God Really Exist and Can I Know Him?***  
**Be Ready to Share** 2016 Summer Sermon Series  
Kenwood Baptist Church  
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**TEXT:** Isaiah 40:9-31



The question, *“Does God Exist, and if He does, Can I Really Know Him?”* still enters my mind from time to time. But, it has been many years since this question has gotten any traction in my heart and mind. I am at a place in my life where I don’t doubt His existence. I might still struggle to trust Him and submit to Him at times, but I don’t doubt that He exists, and I believe that He can be known, and when He is truly known, the only proper response is love and worship.

As I’ve told you before, I’ve been in church my entire life. God was a part of my vocabulary from the earliest years. And yet I have had a few seasons in life where I doubted if He was really there. The first time I can remember really wondering if God existed was when I was in fifth grade. My best friend at the time, had a cat who had given birth to a bunch of adorable kittens, and I wanted one—particularly the orange one. My parents yielded, with the understanding that this cat would be an outside cat. I brought this orange kitten home, named him Cheddar, and was on top of the world. But a few weeks later, this cute little kitten was killed in the middle of the night by a dog in my neighborhood. I was devastated, and I was angry, and as I wept in my back yard, I found myself wondering, deeply wondering, if God was real.

Another season of my life where I truly doubted the existence of God was the latter part of my senior year in high school, carrying over into my freshman year of college. But this season of doubt was not so much emotional, rather, it was intellectual. Now, as I look back on that time in my life, it really wasn’t doubt—it was more like Romans 1, denial. I had some legitimate

questions, and professors were presenting additional questions that I didn't know how to answer. But the bottom line was that I was 19 and I really didn't want anyone telling me how to live my life, especially God.

Perhaps you can relate to one of these stories, or maybe you know someone at a similar point right now. Now, I recognize the 5<sup>th</sup> grade story is not the most tragic thing that life can bring, but often times people who doubt the existence of God do so because of something deeply painful. Debilitating disease, significant loss, or a tragedy of some kind can lead someone to wonder if God is out there, and if He is, is He involved in the world and does He care? For people in this situation, an intellectual conversation really isn't the starting point. Compassion is. There will be a point where some difficult questions are raised, and we should seek to answer those questions in a biblical way (and the problem of suffering will be addressed in this series), but compassion is the starting point.

Our summer sermon series is an equipping series. The goal is for all of us to be better witnesses for Christ, and more confident and eager witnesses. Pastor David shared a very helpful acronym last week—**SALT**: **S**tart the conversation; **A**sk questions; **L**isten; and **T**ell the Story. Asking people why they don't believe in God, and listening to their response, can really help you know how to witness and minister. If someone does claim to believe in God, which many people *will* claim, a great follow-up question to ask is: "Do you believe in the God of the Bible?" Again, how they answer that question can be very informative and help you know where, and how, to direct the conversation.

Now, it must be admitted that the Bible does not seek to *prove* God's existence. Rather, the Bible *declares* God's existence, starting in Genesis 1:1. And the Bible is straight-forward about those who deny God's existence. It calls them fools<sup>1</sup>. Furthermore, Romans 1 insists on a universal knowledge of God; it's part of our human nature. Romans 1 says every human being possesses a natural knowledge of the living and true God, even though they sinfully distort and suppress that knowledge. Because of Romans 1, I am not going to devote significant time this morning to trying to prove that God exists. I am going to do what the Bible does—I *am going to declare that He exists!* I am a preacher, not a philosopher. Philosophy is certainly useful, and solid logic forces conclusions, even if you don't like the conclusion, but my aim this morning is to preach that God can be known, and that there is no one better to know.

I will, however, tip my hat to a few helpful philosophical arguments for just a moment.

1. **The Cosmological Argument:** This argument comes in a variety of forms. Basically, it argues that everything that has a beginning has a cause, and ultimately the existence of the universe must have a first cause, because scientists agree the universe had a

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<sup>1</sup> Ps. 14:1; Ps. 53:1; see also Ps. 10:4

beginning, and this first cause must be something outside of the stuff that makes up the universe, and this cause must be God. Mittleburg's book unpacks this concept. Question = *What is the first cause to the beginning of the universe?*

2. **The Teleological Argument:** This is also known as "the argument from (or to) design" (The Greek word "telos" means "purpose" or "design"). The argument goes like this: The universe evidences great complexity or design; thus, it must have been designed. There is just too much complexity for the universe to be the product of total random chance. Mittleburg's book discusses the fine-tuning that is necessary for our universe to exist. Scientists have figured out that a lot of things need to be "just so" for life and continued existence. This discovery seems to point away from a random "Big Bang" where everything worked out the way that it did for planet earth and humanity. Maybe there was a *bang* of some kind, but this argument says it had to be designed and guided. This argument makes some strong appeals to what scientists have discovered over the years. So science doesn't have to be our enemy—it actually brings some staggering realities to us.

Question = How do you explain our "just so" planet; how do you explain all the "fine-tuning" that scientists have discovered over the years?

3. **The Moral Law Argument:** According to this view, every person is born with an inherent understanding of right and wrong. Now clearly there is debate about what actually *is* right and wrong, but there is no denying that humanity has this component. And most people concede that objective morals do exist. If you don't concede that, then you *can't* call Hitler and the Holocaust evil. You can't even really call it sad or unfortunate. If you don't accept objective morals as real and legitimate, you can't push against racism or modern day slavery of children. Most people do affirm that certain things are right, and other things are wrong, even evil. Where did this internal understanding of right and wrong come from? The moral law argument says this understanding comes from God. He put it into the hearts of every person.

Question = *Where did this internal understanding of right and wrong come from?*

Now these arguments are actually much deeper and more complex than I just presented. And some philosophers attempt to poke holes in these arguments, and others have responded to that and said that the strength of these arguments might actually be found when you consider all of them at the same time.

If any of these intrigue you or help you, or might help you answer questions a neighbor or friend might have, I can point you toward more material<sup>2</sup>. I've never seen anyone hear one of

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<sup>2</sup> See William Lane Craig's 30 page response to Richard Dawkins's *The God Delusion* for a brief, but thorough argument [http://s3.amazonaws.com/tgc-ee2/articles/Craig\\_Atheism.pdf](http://s3.amazonaws.com/tgc-ee2/articles/Craig_Atheism.pdf)

these arguments and immediately proclaim *Jesus is Lord*, but I have seen these arguments help move people to suppress the truth of God's existence a little bit less, even a lot less. These types of arguments can be very helpful tools even without the fancy language, and these arguments should not be used in place of sharing the gospel message. Some people might need this kind of dialogue before they are ever ready to hear the gospel, but these arguments can't replace the gospel.

You see, the gospel message declares that God exists, that He is holy and gracious, and He has made himself known in creation, in His Word, in the human heart, and ultimately in Jesus Christ. The gospel message says that God is not hiding from us. Instead, He is making Himself known, and that is a good thing, because we are in desperate need of Him.

Last week, David mentioned "the rise of the *Nones*" from the Pew Research Study. While the study clearly reveals that fewer people are identifying as Christian, while 1 in 4 people are now claiming no religion, another Pew Study does indicate that up to 83% still affirm a belief in God, or at least a universal spirit of some kind. Sixty-three percent of those polled claimed *absolute certainty*, and the other 20% were *fairly certain*. Only 9% were emphatic atheists<sup>3</sup>. Now atheism is definitely on the rise—there is no question about that, but belief in God is not dead, although it is certainly suppressed. Many people have seasons of doubt, but many of those who claim no religion still believe in God, or some concept of God.

I loved what David said last week about this group of people. He said, "This is a group that cannot be reached with a mailer. This is a group that needs to be reached one on one, family to family, with intense relational effort." I agree 100%. This reality needs to be why we change some of what we do as a church and how we minister. Our message remains the same, but some of our priorities and methods here at Kenwood need to change if we are going to reach those around us. The Summer Community Groups are just one attempt to change some of what we do, and how we do it. And I am thrilled that so many have been open to the idea.

Our Scripture for today is Isaiah 40. Isaiah lived in a day that is not all that different from ours today, even though the time periods are thousands of years apart. Isaiah ministered and prophesied during the period of the divided kingdom; the major thrust of his message is directed at the southern kingdom of Judah. The people had lost sight of God and His greatness. They underestimated God and devalued Him; some even ignored or denied His reality. In Isaiah's day, God was replaced with idols of silver and gold, or wood, made with human hands. As a result, God had a righteous complaint against His people; discipline and correction was

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<sup>3</sup> [http://www.pewresearch.org/question-search/?keyword=belief in god](http://www.pewresearch.org/question-search/?keyword=belief%20in%20god)  
<http://www.pewforum.org/2015/11/03/u-s-public-becoming-less-religious/>

coming. This was Isaiah's message, and it was a message that usually fell on deaf ears. The people did not want to hear from God.

The ultimate message in the book of Isaiah is this: God will righteously judge those who refuse to repent, but God will also bring about an astonishing plan of grace and mercy for wicked humanity. He will mercifully save sinners, for His own glory, through the suffering servant, Jesus Christ. Isaiah presents God in all His glory, worthy of all our trust and worship. God is the redeemer who rescues us from sin and restores all things.

Isaiah is a big book. It has 66 chapters. It is challenging to read, but it is important for Christians to have a good understanding of this book because the New Testament quotes it all the time. Some have called Isaiah the *fifth gospel*. We are in chapter 40 this morning, and this chapter marks a shift in the book. In the first 39 chapters, God is not speaking tenderly. God's righteous judgment and His absolute Holiness are central to those chapters. But in chapters 40-66, God's provision of salvation, ultimately through the Suffering Servant (who we know is Jesus) is central.

Chapters 40-55 is actually God's Word through Isaiah to the future exiled generation. So, Isaiah has prophesied that God's judgment is coming as a result of sin in chapters 1-39, and that judgment would come in the form of exile to Babylon in the 6<sup>th</sup> century. This section of Isaiah is God's Word to those exiles. It is a comforting message of hope and salvation. So let's look at it.

### **(Isaiah 40:9-11) God is Majestic and Compassionate**

When we witness, one of the questions we have to answer is: ***"What is God like?"*** This is a question that people have and need answers to. As you talk about the Lord with people, you will discover that many do not have a biblical answer to the question, "What is God like?" They are misinformed about God for one reason or another. In verses 9-11, we hear the announcement: *Behold the Lord!* And this announcement is good news. We aren't told: *Go find God, or try and figure out God, or just reason your way to God.* Instead, we are told: *Look, it's God!* God is not hiding. Passages like Isaiah 40 help us know Him. And what we see here is a beautiful contrast. God is both majestic and compassionate. Verses 9-11 answer the question, ***"What is God like?"*** What we see here in Isaiah, and what we see throughout the pages of Scripture, is that God is majestic. *Majestic* means large and impressively beautiful. *Majestic* means awe-inspiring. Verse 10 says that God's arm rules and reigns; He is impressively powerful and in control. He is mighty and strong. He has *Exodus Power*. The people in exile needed that reminder, and we need it too. God is not ever in panic mode, even today. His arm rules.

In this very same passage, and throughout the pages of Scripture, we also see that God is compassionate and gentle. I visited a family that had a child in the hospital this week, and I

watched the mom and the dad care for their son. It was so beautiful. It was so tender. It made me think of my wife Carol, and how she has so compassionately cared for our kids over the years. It made me think of my mom and my dad caring for me.

In verse 10, we see God's arm ruling. Then, look at verse 11. In verse 11, God's arm is gathering a lamb. He is pictured as carrying, and caring for, a little one with gentleness.

I tell my boys that manliness is being tough and being tender, and knowing when you need to be one or the other. Sometimes a situation calls for a man to flex his muscles and employ his broad shoulders to a situation that needs strength. Other times, manliness is all about being tender and gentle, and what makes that tenderness so meaningful is the knowledge that it is strength delicately controlled. Every man should aim to be like this, and every boy needs to see this and be taught it. But, only God Almighty can be infinitely both with absolute perfection. And that is exactly what Isaiah tells us He is. God is majestic and reigns with a strong and mighty arm—no one can stop Him; and God is compassionate and gentle—caring for us like a shepherd with his lambs. You can know God; He isn't hiding. You can know His strength and His gentleness.

#### **(Isaiah 40:12-17) God is Supreme**

Verses 12-17 give us another picture of God. In these verses, we see His supremacy. The images here are awesome. God is so big, so supreme, that the waters of the earth fit in His hand—He can scoop them up. Go stand in front of the ocean, or one of the Great Lakes, and think about that. All the mountains of the earth fit on His scale. The Blue Ridge Mountains, the Smokies, the Rockies, even Mt. Everest. The mountains of the earth stretch for miles and miles. Some rise so high that you barely have any oxygen at the top. And before God, all of them fit on a scale.

He never needs advice, or counsel. He is supreme in knowledge and wisdom. He has no need for school, or training, or coaching. God is Supreme. Furthermore, God knows justice, and is just. That is good news. His judgments are right.

Even as impressive as the greatest nations and empires are, or have been, verse 15 says they are like a drop in a bucket before God. His permanence, His presence, His Supremacy makes the greatest of nations seem pitiful and small. They are like dust that you brush off a table. God is so supreme, so worthy, Isaiah says, that all the wood in the area wouldn't be enough to fuel the burnt offerings that He deserves.

God is supreme. See this. Know this. Believe this. But there is more to know.

#### **(Isaiah 40:18-26) God is Sovereign**

In verses 18-26, Isaiah continues with the same kind of language we just saw in verses 12-17. Here, Isaiah paints a picture of God's sovereignty. He begins by pointing out no one can be compared to God, and an idol is just pitiful. In Isaiah's day, an idol was made by human hands. Someone with money might make it with gold and silver. Someone strapped for cash might opt for some decent wood that wouldn't rot too quickly. Either way, the skilled craftsmen would make it out of material that God created from nothing. This idol would be placed or stood up, and effort would be given to stabilize it, in the hopes that it wouldn't fall over.

Compare this to the supreme and sovereign God of the universe—He sits enthroned above the earth, and every living creature on it looks like a grasshopper to Him. There was a grasshopper in my driveway this week. I stood there watching it for a moment, and thought of verse 22.

Verse 22 also says that God stretches out the heaven like a curtain. Think about that image for just a moment. He calls the stars out by name, by name! Scientists say there are billions of stars in the universe. God's mighty power is on display every day, and every night. He is sovereign in the mountain air, sovereign on the ocean floor.

God answers to no one: He is sovereign. To whom will you compare God? Who are we to rebel against Him or suppress the truth that He exists?

These truths make sense, don't they? If the universe and all that is in it had a beginning, then it must have a cause, and if it has a cause, the initial cause must be something outside of time, space, and matter. Of course, God is supreme; of course, God is sovereign; of course, the heavens are like a curtain to Him, or the universe is like a tent He set up. And of course, our "just so" planet would be set up and sustained by a sovereign God.

***What is God like?*** He is Majestic and Compassionate. He is Supreme. He is Sovereign. But there is still more to know.

### **(Isaiah 40:27-31) God is Safe**

What we see in the last portion of this chapter, and what we see throughout the Bible, is that this majestic, supreme, sovereign God is also compassionate and safe—safe as long as you acknowledge *His* majesty, and *His* supremacy, and *His* sovereignty. He is safe as long as you admit that you have pushed against these truths and rebelled against these realities. You see, if we really understand our rebellion, His safety should surprise us. We don't deserve Him, or His mercy. And yet He offers it to us.

What Isaiah tells us is that God gives power to the faint; He gives strength to the weak. God never tires or faints; but He does restore those who do. Now keep in mind the original context of these words. These words are to God's exiled people who are under His discipline because

of their rebellion. Their circumstances could lead them to conclude that they blew it. Their rebellion and suppression of truth had severed their connection to God.

But remember, God is compassionate. Isaiah's message of comfort continues throughout the following chapters until we hear of the Suffering Servant who would come and provide salvation and redemption. And we know who this Suffering Servant was—it was Jesus. God has made Himself known in creation. When we look at the magnificent mountains and the delicate butterfly, we are supposed to perceive that God exists. God has made Himself known in His Word. When we read it, we are supposed to realize that it is truly inspired (the questions that some of us might have about it will be addressed in just a few weeks). But ultimately, and most clearly, God has made Himself known in Jesus Christ.

So the question that the exiled people would ask by Isaiah 40:27 is answered, and it's a question that all of us have. The question is: ***Does God know I'm here, does He care?*** The answer is: *Yes, He knows you are here, and He cares.* God's strength can meet your weakness. God's compassion can heal your pain. God's supremacy and sovereignty is also what makes Him safe. He is a good refuge.

Consider Isaiah 57:15: *"For thus says the One who is high and lifted up, who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: 'I dwell in the high and holy place, and also with him who is of a contrite and lowly spirit, to revive the spirit of the lowly, and to revive the heart of the contrite.'"*

God did this ultimately through the incarnation. In Christ and by Christ, God reveals Himself to the world, especially to all who repent and believe. John 1:14 says: *"The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen His glory."* Colossians 1:15 says: *"He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation."* Colossians 1:19 says: *"In Christ, all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell."* Hebrews 1:3 says that *"Jesus is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of His nature, and He upholds the universe by the word of His power. After making purification for sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high."*

When you look at the life and teachings of Christ, who can deny both His majesty and compassion? Who can deny His supremacy over all things? Nature obeys Him, disease disappears, demons flee, and death is but sleep before Jesus. In Christ, we see sovereignty. We see Him in control, even in His death, and clearly in His resurrection. And many know Christ's arms are the strongest, and the most caring, in all the world. If you don't know Christ in this way, I pray that this series will change that. Continue to join us, even with your big questions. We are not afraid of them. And if you do know Christ, and His strong and gentle arms, do not be ashamed to share Him with others.