

1 Timothy 6:11-16

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Date: 25 November 2018

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[0 : 00] Before we turn to consider part of the passage that we've read this evening, let's just bow our heads and pray.

Our God and Father, we do pray that the words of our mouth and the meditation of our heart this evening would be pleasing to you. And we pray that your spirit would be the one who would be helping us to hear the word your voice as you speak to us and helping us to respond as we ought.

And we pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen. In the morning we tackled or attempted to tackle a big question.

Why do we exist? What is our purpose? And we found an answer to that question in the words that are found in the prophet Isaiah. That we as God's people exist to display his splendor.

And we gave some thought to what that involved. So that's a big question. Why am I here? Why do I exist? What is the purpose of my existence? Well this evening we're going to be tackling a bigger question.

[1 : 16] Though it may seem difficult to imagine that there is a bigger question. But there is. And the bigger question that we want to tackle this evening at least in a measure is what is God like?

And in the passage that we've read the apostle Paul gives us quite an answer. In the midst of this charge to Timothy he erupts somewhat surprisingly and unexpectedly in words of doxology and praise.

And as he does he describes God. Not exhaustively. We're not capable of describing God exhaustively. But he does describe God accurately.

And so we can draw from his words truth about God. About what God is like. We can discover what God is like as we consider the words that Paul writes in this letter.

Just to recap how we got to where we've got to in terms of this passage. Last week we began to study this final section of 1 Timothy. Paul's charge to Timothy.

[2 : 23] And we spent a little time considering the nature of the charge. How he was to flee. How he was to pursue. How he was to fight the good fight. How he was to take hold of eternal life.

But then as well as seeing the content or the nature of the charge. We noticed the seriousness of it. Particularly in light of the witnesses that Paul calls to serve as witnesses to this charge.

That is being directed to Timothy. And the witnesses are none other than God the Father and God the Son. They are the witnesses. And so that we noticed inculcated to the charge that degree of seriousness to it.

But we also noticed the duration of the charge. Until when was Timothy bound by the content of this charge? And what we discovered and what we can see here in verse 14.

Is that he was bound to respond and to be true to the charge. Until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ. And this really takes us to where we want to begin this evening.

- [3 : 29] Because immediately having identified this as being the period of time. For which or during which Timothy had to be true to this charge.
- Until the appearing of Jesus. Then Paul erupts in this doxology. He goes on to say there in verse 15. Concerning the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ.
- Which God will bring about in his own time. God the blessed and only ruler. The King of kings and Lord of lords. And he goes on. We maybe, as we read these verses.
- We can maybe struggle to work out why Paul at this time. Introduces into his letter this doxology. Though it's something that he does do on occasion in his letters.
- He'll be treating some matter. And then in the midst of treating it. He'll suddenly erupt in praise to God. Now why he does so here.
- [4 : 27] Well we don't really know. But I think on the basis of what we read. I think we can draw some tentative conclusions. It seems that as Paul is drawn in his mind to the prospect of Christ's appearing.
- Of Christ's second coming. That's what he's talking about. Be true to this charge until Christ appears. And as this thought of Christ's appearing is brought to his mind.
- And as he considers the fact that this appearing of Jesus will be brought about by God the Father in his own time. Paul is drawn to celebrate and praise God's greatness and majesty.
- That he anticipates will be in a very wonderful way revealed on that day. And so he expresses himself in the manner that he does in these verses.
- So how are we going to tackle these two verses? It's really the second half of verse 15 and verse 16. So that's we're limiting ourselves really to just over a verse.
- [5 : 30] God the blessed and only ruler. The king of kings and lord of lords who alone is immortal. And who lives in unapproachable light. Whom no one has seen or can see.
- To him be honor and might forever. Amen. This is what we want to focus our attention on. And the way we'll do it is as follows. We're going to spend most of the time considering Paul's description of God in this doxology.
- In this eruption of praise. So Paul's description of God. What does he say about God in these words? Then we'll notice, and much more briefly.
- But we will notice Paul's response to the God he describes. How does Paul relate to this God that he describes in these words? And then finally, and also very briefly, just notice or suggest Paul's purpose in so describing God.
- Why was it significant that he described God in this way at this point in this letter? And suggest why it might be. But the primary concern we have this evening is to just consider Paul's description of God.
- [6 : 41] And let's simply go through what he has to say about God in these verses or in this verse and a half. So we'll start and consider it just in the order that we see it.
- There in verse 15. God, the blessed and only ruler. Let's start there. God, the blessed and only ruler. The first two words are the words blessed and only are adjectives or they serve as adjectives to the word ruler.
- So we'll start by thinking about the word ruler and then think about how this ruler is described by the use of these two adjectives.
- First of all, the word ruler. God is described by Paul as the ruler. The word ruler. The word that he uses here isn't the word that he would ordinarily use to speak of God as king or lord.

It's a word, you would recognize it if you saw it in Greek because there are English words that are very similar to it. It's the word *dynasteo* from where we get the word obviously *dynasty*.

[7 : 49] And the sense of this word or the emphasis that is communicated by the use of this word is of God's absolute sovereignty.

This is a God who rules supreme over all. The cosmos and indeed anything beyond the cosmos constitutes his dynasty over which he rules supreme.

Of course, that truth is further emphasized by the second of the adjectives. He is the blessed and only ruler. The only ruler. Now, it's not that other rulers don't exist.

Indeed, in what follows, it's clear that there are other rulers. He's described in what follows as king of kings and lord of lords. And there, it's evident that there's a recognition that there are others who could be described legitimately as rulers.

Other rulers do exist. But all other rulers are subject to his rule. All other authority, all other rule is derived from or delegated by the only ruler who is God.

[9 : 06] He is the only ruler. Our God, your God is the only ruler in, over, and indeed beyond the universe.

The only ruler. But there's another word there that serves as an adjective describing this ruler. And it is the word *blessed*. And we want us to think about that word *blessed*.

God the blessed and only ruler. In what sense? We tend to use the word *blessed* of those who are blessed by another.

So, certainly as Christians, we would speak of how we are blessed by God. And we would give thanks to God for the blessings that we receive from him.

God blesses us. I find it interesting how in just common parlance and just in everyday language, the word *blessed* is appearing more and more.

[10 : 03] And you hear people speaking about being blessed. And curiously, they sometimes use the word without identifying there being a subject who is doing the blessing.

It's simply circumstances or whatever it is. They're blessed. Well, when we use the word as Christians, we're very conscious that we are blessed by another. We are blessed by God.

But that use of the word just doesn't work with God. God does not stand in need of being blessed by another. And here the word *blessed* has been used in the sense of *happy*.

Again, the Greek word is one that we've come across on other occasions. The Greek word *makarios*. Some of you who are of my generation will remember Archbishop Makarios, the happy bishop in Cyprus.

And I think here the word is being used in that sense of *happy*. God is the altogether happy, contented ruler. And this happiness does not originate from outside of himself.

[11 : 09] He contains all happiness in himself. He is altogether self-content. I think that the richness of this happiness, in the measure that we can grasp it or attempt to appreciate it, but the richness of it can be better appreciated when we bring to bear on this truth the fact that God is plural.

He is one God in three persons, to use the orthodox language to describe the Trinity. One God in three persons. And so there is relationship in God.

The Father related to the Son and the Son to the Father and the Spirit related to the Father and the Son. There is relationship in God. And this divine community, if we can call it that, is altogether happy.

And has been eternally happy. We maybe see glimpses of this happiness in God when in the Bible we witness the happiness of the Father in the Son.

Remember when Jesus was being baptized in the Jordan and the heavens opened and you hear the word of the Father looking down on his Son. He says, here is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased.

[12 : 28] And we have a glimpse of the happiness of God in the divine community. Our God, your God is blessed.

He is the altogether happy God. But what else does Paul say about God? Well, let's move on to what follows here in his doxology. God, the blessed and only ruler, the King of kings and Lord of lords.

In this language, the King of kings and Lord of lords, Paul seems to be drawing on the language of Deuteronomy chapter 10. Let's just quickly have a look at what is said there in describing God.

In Deuteronomy chapter 10 and verse 17, we can read as follows. Deuteronomy 10 verse 17, God is described.

For the Lord your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome. The Lord your God is God of gods and Lord of lords.

[13 : 33] So it's not exactly the same language as Paul uses here, King of kings and Lord of lords. But we can see how it's certainly an echo of the language of Deuteronomy.

And of course, that is a reminder that Paul isn't making this up as he goes along. Paul, directed by the Holy Spirit, is bringing to bear what has already been revealed concerning God.

And speaks of it and declares it here in his letter to Timothy. This title serves again to emphasize God's absolute sovereignty over all powers.

Yes, there are lesser kings. Yes, there are lesser lords. But he is the King of kings and the Lord of lords. He is the one who enjoys all authority over every other power, human or non-human, seen and unseen.

The King of kings and Lord of lords. But of course, this language perhaps particularly brings to our attention the noteworthy and revealing reality that the very same language is used in describing Jesus in the book of Revelation.

[14 : 49] So, if we turn to Revelation, we've gone all the way back to the Pentateuch, to the books of Moses and Deuteronomy. And now we move forward to Revelation. And there, read what is said about Jesus, the eternal Son of God.

And how is he described? Well, in Revelation chapter 17 and in verse 14 we read, They will all make war against the Lamb, but the Lamb will overcome them.

This is a reference to Jesus, the Lamb of God. The Lamb will overcome them. Why? Because he is the Lord of lords and King of kings.

Those are the same names, simply the titles inverted. The Lord of lords and King of kings. And then just a couple of chapters on in Revelation in chapter 19 and verse 16 we read, On his robe and on his thigh he has this name written.

Now, we're not reading the whole section, but just in verse 13 at the end, the one who has been spoken of is described as the Word of God. And of course, we know that is a description of Jesus.

[15 : 56] And what is said of him? What is his name? King of kings and Lord of lords. And so Paul, as he praises God, as he describes God in his praise, he identifies him as the blessed and only ruler, the King of kings and Lord of lords.

But then he goes on to say something else concerning God. He says of God, who alone is immortal? Notice there in verse 16. Who alone is immortal?

Again, the stress is on the uniqueness of God in respect of this attribute of immortality. Who alone is immortal? He alone.

Whatever we understand by immortal, and we'll touch on that in a moment. But the point is, he alone is immortal. Immortality, eternity is intrinsically unique to God.

To use the language that is used by John in his gospel, where he speaks of God having life in himself. You know, we all have life, but it is life that has been given to us.

[17 : 06] You know, life has been breathed into us. We have received the gift of life. But God enjoys life in himself. He is intrinsically immortal.

Immortal. And yet, even while we acknowledge that and recognize what Paul is saying about God as being alone, immortal, it maybe raises a question in our mind.

And it would be a reasonable question. And it would be this, that the Bible speaks of us, men and women, created in his image as enjoying, in a sense, and in a very real sense, immortality.

You know, the Bible describes our future as being an immortal one. This physical body will die, but we look forward to continuing existence forever and forever.

And indeed, in due course, a renewed physical existence that will be everlasting. There is a very real sense in which we enjoy immortality. So how can Paul speak of God who alone is immortal?

[18 : 11] Well, I think the difference, and maybe it's a very obvious one, but it's certainly a crucial difference, is that our immortality is not intrinsic to us, but is granted to us.

Just as we are granted life, so we are granted by God immortality. He, of his own prerogative, chooses to grant us immortality.

But nobody ever granted him immortality. He alone is immortal. What else does Paul say concerning God? Well, let's simply read on what he says here.

He says, Now, in what Paul says here, he seems to be picking up on or echoing the language of Psalm 104 that we sang just a moment ago.

Indeed, the hymn that we sung immediately following Psalm 104 also picks up on the language of the psalm. Psalm, then in the psalm, Praise the Lord my soul, O praise him.

[19 : 18] Lord my God, you are so great. Wrapped in light as with a garment, clothed in majesty and estate. God wrapped in light.

God who inhabits unapproachable light. Who alone is immortal and who lives in unapproachable light. God's light.

Language that attempts to portray something of his blinding glory which no human eye can see. And maybe what comes to our mind when we think of God described in this way, what can come to our mind is the experience of Moses on Mount Sinai.

You remember when Moses was on Mount Sinai and his request of God was to see him. I want to see you. And what did God reply? Moses, you can't see me and live.

You can't look upon me and live. The sight of me would be the death of you. You're not capable of looking on me in that way.

[20 : 21] And remember when Moses, though he caught only a glimpse of God as it were, yet even so when he came down from the mountain, such was the glory of the reflection of God that the Israelites couldn't look on Moses.

They had to look away. Because even the reflected glory of a man who had seen, as it were, just a glimpse, caught just a glimpse of God was sufficient to blind those who looked on him.

But of course when Paul here speaks of God as living in unapproachable light, when the psalmist speaks of him wrapped in light, light is a picture.

Light, as we know, has physical properties. And this is not intended to be a physical description. God is not physical. God is a spirit. But light is a picture of God's holiness and God's righteousness and God's truth.

Blinding holiness. Blinding righteousness. Blinding truth that we cannot look upon. Such is the wonder and the glory of it.

[21 : 30] And so Paul says that this God whom he is praising lives in unapproachable light, whom no one has seen or can see.

When Paul here speaks of our inability to see God, it's sometimes suggested that this is solely because of our sinfulness.

And if we're saying that this light is a picture that speaks of his holiness, then you can see the problem. How can we as sinners look upon that which is altogether holy and pure?

Now of course that is true. But it's also true, as we read in Isaiah chapter 6, that the sinless angels cannot look upon God without covering their faces.

And so it's not simply a matter of our sin being a barrier, though it is. But simply the wonder of God's glory and majesty is such that even sinless creatures cannot look upon him without covering their faces.

[22 : 34] But when we listen and ponder on what Paul is saying here about this God who lives in unapproachable light, whom no one has seen or can see, we do need to be careful or introduce a note of, I don't know if caution is the right word, or simply of explanation.

The idea is not, and Paul is not saying that God is unknowable, but that he is, in a sense, unseeable, if we can make that distinction.

We can know God. That's the whole point of Paul speaking in these terms, that we would know God, that we would discover what he is like. And we can.

And we can. We can know God, but there's a very real sense in which we can't see him. Now we can't move on, even as we reflect on these truths.

We can't move on without acknowledging with grateful hearts that God, in his grace, has made himself visible in the person of Jesus.

[23 : 36] This is why Jesus came into the world. Certainly one of the reasons why he came was that God might become visible for us, that God would present himself to us in a way that we can see and look upon him, that we might behold his glory.

You remember the language in the first chapter of John's Gospel. You know, the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory. We saw his glory in the person of Jesus.

And Jesus, who, the same Paul who writes this letter, reminds us in his letter to the Colossians, Jesus is the image of the invisible God.

So this God who is invisible, who is unseeable, is made visible by Jesus, who is his image. And as Paul contemplates or speaks about this God whom no one has seen or can see, I wonder if there's also a sense in which his mind has been brought to consider these matters as he anticipates the appearing of Jesus.

Remember, that's what provoked the words of dexology, his reflection on the fact that Jesus would appear, that God would ensure that Jesus appeared in God's time.

[24 : 55] And as he contemplates that, as he anticipates the appearing of Jesus, as he anticipates a day when we will be enabled to see God in a manner or with a perception thus far beyond us.

And we think of the words of John in his epistle in 1 John 3 and verse 2, contemplating that day. And notice what he says there that would seem to be at variance with what Paul says here.

But I think it's a case of understanding what it is he means by it. But let's just listen to what John says in his first letter. In 1 John 3 and in verse 2.

Well, maybe if we read from verse 1 just to get the sense of it. How great is the law of the Father has lavished on us that we should be called children of God. And that is what we are. The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him.

Dear friends, now we are children of God and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, when Jesus appears, we shall be like him for we shall see him as he is.

[26 : 08] We shall see him face to face. And so on that day we will be given the opportunity to see God in the person, in the face of our saviour, Jesus Christ.

So we have this description of God in the words of Paul. But then, just in a very fleeting manner, notice secondly, Paul's response to the God he describes.

Well, it is of praise. Indeed, the very description is an act of praise. You know, Paul isn't writing a book on theology and saying, well, these are the attributes of God and here's chapter 1 and chapter 2 and sub point 1 and sub point 2.

No, he's not doing that. He is telling us what God is like, but he is doing so in the context of praising God. And indeed, that becomes very evident when at the close of what he has to say, he exclaims to him, be honour and might forever.

This is a statement of praise. To him be honour and might forever. It's been said, and rightly so, that theology must lead to doxology.

[27 : 19] Knowledge of God must lead to the worship of God. If knowledge of God doesn't lead to the worship of God, then it is a dry and pernicious thing. Theology must lead us to doxology.

It must lead us and take us to our knees in worship of the one who we discover as we are given great theology in God's word.

Knowledge concerning God. This is how God or Paul relates to the one he describes in praise. But what about Paul's purpose in so describing God?

My first thought was, well, does he need a purpose? Paul is just so captivated by the glory of God that he can't help himself as he exalts and prays. But I think there is a clear or discernible purpose in speaking about God in this way at this point.

I think Paul is looking to instill confidence in Timothy and in his readers. He is instilling in them the confidence that God will deliver on his promise. He's just said that God is the one who will ensure that Jesus appears in his own time.

[28 : 28] And they're looking forward in hope to that day and he's saying you don't need to be concerned that it's not going to happen because this is the God who has promised it will happen. He is a God who enjoys absolute authority.

Nothing will stand in his way. This will happen because this God has determined that it will happen and so they are to be confident in his promises.

I think his purpose is also to encourage perseverance. Timothy and men and women of God in every age are to persevere in the service of such a great God in the knowledge that however powerful their enemies may appear to be or indeed in reality are they are as nothing compared to their blessed and only ruler.

And so they are to persevere in their service of God. And I think his purpose also as it will always and ever is to inspire praise. As he praises God he would have them join him in the praise of God.

Indeed the word amen has that sense of drawing others in. Amen so let it be. Join with me in praising this God whom we have discovered and whom we know in the person of Jesus.

[29 : 42] God the blessed and only ruler the king of kings and lord of lords who alone is immortal and who lives in unapproachable light whom no one has seen nor can see to him be honor and might forever.

Let's pray. Heavenly Father we do thank you that you are indeed a God that we can know. We thank you that we have come to know you in and through your son Jesus.

We thank you that he is the image of the invisible God. We thank you that the word became flesh and dwelt among us and we beheld his glory full of grace and true.

And so we thank you for that great privilege of being able to know you. And yet we pray that as we thank you for that privilege we would have an ever growing sense and understanding of who you are.

We thank you that you are inexhaustible to us. Indeed eternity itself will not grant time or opportunity sufficient for us to exhaustively discover and know all that you are.

[30 : 50] but we look forward to the continuing opportunity to discover more and more of your majesty and greatness and glory. And we pray these things in Jesus' name.

Amen.