

“Character of the King”
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Jeremiah 10:6-16; Romans 2:1-11;
Luke 12:22-34

In Jeremiah, we heard a description of God. I was taken as I was hearing it read, about the description of us as well. But let's stick with the description of God—God made the earth by his power and founded the world by his wisdom, and stretched out the heavens by his understanding. It is incredible to think about a God who is creator, a God who has that kind of power. Jeremiah goes on, over and over again, talking about the nature of God's power—the overwhelming, mighty power.

It was that idea of power that I was thinking about. At times I think about God and God's awesomeness is overwhelming. Yet when I think about God in terms of power I begin to struggle a little bit more. It's not because I don't believe in a creator God, but it's the struggle I have with the idea of power. When you think of power, what do you think of? What kind of words do you think of? What's your view of power? Is it just about control?

Knowledge is power. ~ Francis Bacon

Nearly all men can stand adversity, but if you want to test a man's character, give him power. ~ Abraham Lincoln

Power does not corrupt. Fear Corrupts. Perhaps the fear of a loss of power. ~ John Steinbeck

And power without compassion is the worst kind of evil there is. ~ E. J. Patten, *Return to Exile*

With great power there must also come great responsibility! ~ Stan Lee

The day the power of love overrules the love of power, the world will know peace. ~ Mahatma Gandhi

Power is a word the meaning of which we do not understand. ~ Leo Tolstoy, *War and Peace*

When we think about power, what do we think about? I think I tend to think about the controlling nature of power, or that power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely. Those kinds of things. So how, then, do we think about God as a God of power?

Is power to be feared? Does power corrupt? Is all power corrupted? Can power be used? What is power? Is it just the capability to do something or is it the ability to make others to do what you want them to do? Oftentimes I think of power, particularly in the

human sphere, as that kind of controlling power, of force, making others do what you want them to do. How do we deal with power?

When we think of power, a God of power and might, is God something to be feared? Psalm 111, verse 10 says, “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.” So perhaps there is a starting point there, but it’s just the beginning. Where does it take us? If we think about God as powerful, does it mean God controls us? Do we have to be afraid of God? What is the nature of that power?

When we think about the kingdom of God, when we think about the nature of God’s power, is it like the human sense of if you put somebody in power pretty soon something corrupt is going to happen or they’re going to use that power in some way that’s hurtful? I think as we think about God, there’s a mitigating factor. I’m going to call it the character of God. A verse from 1st John: “There’s no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear.”

So we begin to think about the character of God. I have another set of ways of thinking about God. As we look at the Gospel reading today about God preparing a way for the lilies of the field, a way for everything to live and grow and show themselves and have the food they need, it begins to ask us what is the character of a God that creates a world like this. One of the things I did was wonder what scripture says about what God is.

Deut 10:17 – For the Lord your **God is** God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who is not partial and takes no bribe.

1 Chron 12:18 – For your **God is** the one who helps you.

2 Chron 30:9 – For the Lord your **God is** gracious and merciful.

Psalm 7:11 – **God is** a righteous judge, and a God who has indignation every day.

Psalm 46:1 – **God is** our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.

Psalm 47:7 – For **God is** the king of all the earth; sing praises with a psalm.

Psalm 68:19 – Blessed be the Lord, who daily bears us up; **God is** our salvation.

Psalm 116:5 – Gracious is the Lord, and righteous; our **God is** merciful.

Daniel 9:14 – The Lord our **God is** right in all that he has done.

John 3:33 – Whoever has accepted his testimony has certified this, that **God is** true.

John 4:24 – **God is** spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.

Romans 3:30 – since **God is** one...

1 Cor 1:9 – **God is** faithful; by him you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

1 Cor 14:33 – For **God is** a God not of disorder, but of peace.

1 John 1:5 – This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that **God is** light and in him there is no darkness at all.

1 John 4:8 – Whoever does not love does not know God, for **God is** love.

We just heard a whole number of ways to describe God. God is... The character of God is good, it's true, it's faithful, it's love. It is that character that is shown in God's power. I am continually taken by that conversation in 1st Samuel 8:8-9 between Samuel and God as the people come to God and say, "We want a new king. We want a human king." Samuel is distraught, and God says, "Listen to the people. Let them choose." As we heard the character of God, we didn't hear anything there that said God was a tyrant who was going to make us be a certain way.

God has given us a creation to live in and then God invites us, gives us a way of living in that creation. But it is a choice. It is a choice to hear, and we know all too well that people do not always make that choice, that evil is all too present. This week alone I woke up Monday morning and again felt the grief of an event that demonstrated evil, human choice, the loss of life. I often think we don't think our choices matter that much. Sometimes we see a single choice that makes a big, dramatic impact, and this one was evil. But I would suggest that all our choices matter. Every choice we make is a choice to live into a particular kind of life. It's a choice whether we hear what God is calling us to be, to reflect God's character. Or it's a choice to ignore that. In Romans it talks about self-centeredness causing choices that lead to struggle. We know those things. We know that if we get in a group of people and we all choose to care for one another we have a much better experience than if we all decide we're all going to compete with each other and back-stab one another.

We just heard all these different passages about how God basically has compassion, has love, has mercy, is righteous. When we reflect that character of God, we enter God's kingdom. I was struck in the very end of the Romans passage, where it says, "Seek the kingdom of God. Be those who reflect God's character and show that kingdom." It goes on to say, "...because it's God's pleasure to give you the kingdom." That was striking to me. It is suggesting that it is we who demonstrate the kingdom. If the kingdom of God is to come, if the will of God is to be done, kingdom of heaven on earth, it happens as we reflect God's character.

God gives us the kingdom to be those who reflect the very character of God. God as king demonstrates something very different than what we usually think about as the powerful king of human beings who wants it all for himself, who gets this ability to control others. God is the opposite. God is the king who wants to give people life, and life abundantly. God gives us that life as we choose to reflect God's character, to do the good God calls us to, to be God's people. It indeed then, as we pray for God's will to be done and God's kingdom come on earth, it happens when we reflect the character of God, when we do the will of God, when we recognize the choice God has given us to be God's people and to know the love of God and to demonstrate it in our lives.

May God's kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven. Amen.