

The Gathering Church

Sonia's message 7/12/26

Know God As He Is – God Is Transcendent – Wk5

God is Transcendent
Worship in Awe
Worship in Reverence
Avoid, "I Will"
Respond with Trust
Creator Entered Creation
I Surrender All

*"Yours, Lord, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the majesty and the splendor, for everything in heaven and earth is yours. Yours, Lord, is the kingdom; you are exalted as head over all."
(1 Chronicles 29:11)*

There are some truths about God that do not merely inform the mind; they bend the knees. They do not simply add another idea to our theology; they lift our eyes, silence our pride, purify our worship, and put our lives back in their proper place. One of those truths is the transcendence of God.

To say that God is transcendent is to say that He is above, beyond, and infinitely greater than all He has made. He is not a larger version of us. He is not merely the highest being in the universe, as though creation were a ladder and God stood on the top rung. God is not on the ladder at all. He is the Maker of the ladder, the Sustainer of every rung, and the Lord over all things visible and invisible.

Martin Luther once rebuked Erasmus by saying, "Your thoughts of God are too human." That is a warning every generation needs. We are always tempted to shrink God down until He becomes manageable, explainable, useful, and safe. But the God of Scripture will not be reduced.

He is high and lifted up (Isaiah 6:1).

He is before all things, above all things, and through Him all things hold together
(Colossians 1:17).

A. W. Tozer famously warned that what comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us. If our thoughts of God are low, our worship will be shallow, our obedience will be casual, and our confidence will be fragile. But when we recover a high view of God, awe returns. Humility returns. Reverence returns. Worship becomes weighty again. So today we are asking the Lord to deliver us from small thoughts of Him and to restore in us the holy wonder of knowing that the Lord our God is high above all, yet near to the contrite and lowly in spirit.

1. God Is Above All Creation

The Bible does not begin by arguing for God. It begins by announcing Him:

"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth" (Genesis 1:1).

Before there was matter, time, space, light, land, sea, creature, angel, nation, temple, throne, or human breath, God was. He is not dependent on creation. Creation is dependent on Him.

That is why David can pray,

"Yours, Lord, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the majesty and the splendor"
(1 Chronicles 29:11).

Everything in heaven and earth belongs to Him. The kingdom is His. The authority is His. The glory is His. The universe is not self-existing, self-ruling, or self-sustaining. It is upheld by the word of the transcendent God (Hebrews 1:3).

Isaiah 55:8-9 gives us God's language for this: "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, says the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts."

Romans 11:33: Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out!

God is not merely smarter than we are. His wisdom belongs to another order altogether. His judgments are unsearchable. His ways are past finding out

God is not transcendent because He is physically farther away. He is transcendent because His being, holiness, knowledge, power, and glory exceed all creaturely limits. The heavens cannot contain Him

"But will God really dwell on earth? The heavens, even the highest heaven, cannot contain you. How much less this temple I have built! (1 Kings 8:27).

The highest heaven is not large enough to house Him. He fills all things, yet He is confined by none of them.

Acts 17: 24-25 "The God who made the world and all things in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands; 25 nor is He served by human hands, as though He needed anything, since He Himself gives to all people life and breath and all things;

God, who made the world and everything in it does not live in temples made by human hands, nor is He served by human hands as though He needed anything. He gives to all life and breath and everything. God is not a part of creation, nor is he dependent on creation. He is the living Lord before whom all creation depends.

From Genesis to Revelation, an unmistakable picture of God's transcendent almighty glory is revealed. Even as Scripture emphasizes that he is infinitely exalted above human comprehension, it also shows us that he yet perfectly and intimately governs all things.

So why do we permit heretical dogmas like "name it and claim it," and "prosperity heresies" into our religious language? God is not our spiritual vending machine. He is not God who "sanctifies" our every wish just because it is our wish. The voices crying "if you give to me, God will give to you" has no respect for the God's transcendence, his "otherness", and have failed the litmus test of reverence for God and taught us to do the same. God will not be manipulated into being a doting Father. God is not walking timidly behind us waiting anxiously to placate us from life's moments of hard tears, spoon feeding us into profane views of his servanthood. Look, we are his servants. Earth is God's footstool, as both

This is what the LORD says: "Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool. Where is the house you will build for me? Where will my resting place be? (Isaiah 66:1)

'Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool. What kind of house will you build for me? says the Lord. Or where will my resting place be? Acts 7:49

That should be a reality check, a rough and necessary reminder.

2. God's Transcendence Humbles Human Pride

Scripture also shows us what happens when God's transcendence is minimized. Sin begins when the creature refuses to remain a creature. Pride says, "I will rise. I will rule. I will define good and evil

for myself. I will be like God.” That was the spiritual logic of Satan’s rebellion, and it became the temptation of humanity in Eden.

Isaiah 14:13-14 portrays proud ambition in the language of ascent: “*I will ascend into heaven. I will exalt my throne. I will sit (a position of ruling). I will ascend above the heights. I will be like the Most High.*” The repeated “I will” is the anthem of creaturely rebellion. It is the sound of a heart trying to climb into a throne that belongs to God alone.

Then in Genesis 3, the serpent offers that same lie to the woman.

“You will be like God” (Gen 3:5).

Our minds are twisted. Wasn’t humanity already *made in God’s image*

Then God said, “Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.” (Gen 1:26–27)

The temptation was to seize independence from God—to reject His command, distrust His goodness, and step outside the blessed limits of creaturely dependence on God.

This is why the doctrine of transcendence is not abstract. It confronts the deepest disorder of the human heart. Every time we insist on our own way against God’s word, every time we demand to be the final authority, every time we worship our own wisdom, we are reenacting the ancient rebellion. We are saying, “God may be high, but I want to be higher.”

God tells us in *Isaiah 42:8*, “*I am the Lord, that is My name; I will not give My glory to another, nor My praise to graven images.*”

No one can steal God’s transcendent glory. The outcome will always be the same. The one who grasps upward apart from God—falls downward. Satan is cast down. Adam and Eve are driven out. Pride promises elevation, but it produces exile. It promises freedom, but it brings bondage. It promises life, but it ends in death. And yet, as true followers of Christ, He *gifts us* with glory when He prays to the Father

(John 17:22–23), “I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one.” How stunning is that!

Ezekiel 28:17 reminds us of a detail about Satan, “*Your heart became proud on account of your beauty, and you corrupted your wisdom because of your splendor.*”

(Luke 10:18) records Jesus saying, “*I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven.*”

(Genesis 3:8, 23–24) Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the LORD God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the LORD God among the trees of the garden... 23 therefore the LORD God sent him out from the garden of Eden, to cultivate the ground from which he was taken. 24 So He drove the man out; and at the east of the garden of Eden He stationed the cherubim and the flaming sword which turned every direction to guard the way to the tree of life.

This shows Adam and Eve hiding in shame and then being expelled from the garden. When the creature refuses the Creator’s rule, exile always follows.

And after exile comes death *(Romans 6:23)* For the wages of sin is death...

3. Encounters with the Transcendent God Produce Reverent Fear

When men and women in Scripture encounter the glory of God, they do not become casual. They become undone. The fear of the Lord is not mere terror; it is the trembling awareness that God is God and we are not. It is the soul recognizing the weight of divine majesty.

Abraham falls before God (*Gen. 17:3*). Moses hides his face at the burning bush (*Exodus 3:6*). Isaiah sees the Lord high and lifted up and cries, “*Woe is me! I am undone*” (*Isa. 6:1–5*). Daniel loses all strength (*Dan. 10:8*). Job, after demanding answers, meets the Lord and puts his hand over his mouth, retracting his complaints (*Job 40:4*). Jacob cried, “*How dreadful is this place!*” (*Gen. 28:17*). And Peter said, “*Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord*” (*Luke 5:8*). **The presence of the transcendent God exposes the poverty of human self-confidence.**

We live in a time that often treats reverence as cold, boring and too formal, and treat casual worship as authenticity. But Scripture does not know a worship that is both true and weightless. Angels cover their faces (*Isa 6:2*). Cherubim guard holy space (*Gen. 3:24*). Seraphim cry, “Holy, holy, holy” (*Isa. 6:2–3*). **Heaven is not bored with God. Heaven is overwhelmed with God.** If heaven is filled with awe, then the church should not be embarrassed by reverence. We do not need to make God more familiar than Scripture makes Him. We need to become more aware of the transcendent glory that has always belonged to Him.

4. The Transcendent God Comes Near in Jesus Christ

Yet here is the wonder of the gospel: the God who is above us is not absent from us. The God who dwells in unapproachable light has made Himself known (*1 Tim. 6:16*). The God whose ways are higher than our ways stooped down in mercy. **His transcendence does not make Him indifferent; it makes His nearness all the more astonishing.** If God were only transcendent, we might imagine Him as distant and unreachable. If God were only immanent, we might reduce Him to something ordinary, as though He were merely one presence among many in the world. But Scripture gives us both:

the Lord is high above all nations,... and yet He stoops to raise the poor from the dust
(*Psalms 113:4–7*).

He fills heaven and earth (Jeremiah 23:24), and yet

He is not far from each one of us (Acts 17:27).

This is where the danger of commonplace perception of God sits, broods, and waits for us to treat God’s nearness with contemptuous familiarity. “*Jesus died for us.*” (*Rom 5:8*) The proper view is that “*Jesus died obeying the will of the Father.*” (*Luke 22:42*) “*Jesus is a lamb who took away our sins.*” (*John 1:29*)

Well, the proper view is not the scapegoat perspective, but the unblemished Lamb who did what was impossible for us...because of *our blemished souls*, because of *our defection from God*, because we stopped knowing God as our transcendent, holy, eternal Creator.

Isaiah 57:15 holds this reality together beautifully when he says that *God inhabits eternity; His name is holy; He dwells in the high and holy place—and also with the one who is contrite and lowly in spirit.*

The high God comes near to the lowly. The transcendent God draws close to the humble. That nearness reaches its fullest revelation in Jesus Christ. John tells us, “*The Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us*” (*John 1:14*); *The One who was with God and was God entered time* (*John 1:1*).

The **Creator Entered Creation**. The eternal Son took on human nature without ceasing to be divine. Throughout the New Testament, Jesus does not defeat Satan through a display of raw, crushing cosmic force, but rather through a radical, unwavering commitment to submission, dependence, and humility.

Philippians 2:5–8 shows us the great reversal. Satan, a creature, grasped upward for equality with God and was cast down. *Christ, who truly is equal with God, did not exploit his divine rights for selfish advantage. He humbled Himself. He took the form of a servant. He became obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.* He remained God who is transcendent, who willingly descended so that we would be raised again.

The devil's language is *"I will ascend"* (*Isaiah 14:13–14*). Jesus' language in Gethsemane is *"Not as I will, but as You will"* (*Matthew 26:39*). Satan tries to rise by rebellion and falls. *Jesus descends in obedience and is highly exalted (Philippians 2:9–11).* In the wilderness, Satan tempts Jesus with the Eden strategy, to use his divine power apart from the Father's will, to test God, and to seize the kingdoms without the cross (*Matthew 4:1–11*). But Jesus answers every temptation with surrendered trust in the Word of God. In Gethsemane, the battle reaches its deepest point. *The first Adam stood in a garden and said, in effect, "My will be done" (Genesis 3:6). The last Adam kneels in a garden and prays, "Not my will, but Yours be done" (Luke 22:42).* The cross looked like weakness, but it was the triumph of God's wisdom (*1 Corinthians 1:18–25*). By humility, Jesus defeated pride. By obedience, He undid rebellion. By death, He conquered death. *That is the nature of God: Transcendent, and humble; Transcendent, and near.*

5. God's Transcendence Calls Us to Worship, Humility, and Trust

So how should we respond to the transcendence of God?

First, with worship. When we get a glimpse of the true God who is above all nations, above all powers, above all wisdom, above all history, above all fear, and above all sin, praise becomes the only fitting response. Saint Augustine said, "O God, when I would speak of thee, I can't, and yet if I did not, somebody must speak." Jesus' comment to the Pharisees regarding their critique of his disciples was, *"If they keep quiet, the stones will cry out"* (*Luke 19:40*) a reminder that we are called as image bearers to worship our God who transcends everything in creation.

Second, we respond with humility. God's transcendence reminds us that we do not sit above His word as judges. We sit under His word as servants. We do not edit His commands to fit our preferences. We bow before His wisdom even when we do not understand His ways.

Third, we respond with trust. If God's ways are higher than ours, then we should expect that there will be seasons we cannot explain. But mystery is not the same as absence. *The transcendent God sees what we cannot see, knows what we cannot know, and governs what we cannot control.*

And finally, we respond with lowliness before one another. Paul does not give us *Philippians 2* as a museum piece of theology. He gives it as a pattern for relationships, as he tells the church,

"Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves" (Philippians 2:3).

That means the doctrine of God's transcendence must reach our homes, our conversations, our church conflicts, our leadership, and our service. *The people who worship a transcendent God should not be consumed with self-exaltation.* We know the awful fall that follows that attitude. We should be free to serve, forgive, yield, and love, because the highest One became lowly for us.

Conclusion: High and Holy, Near and Merciful

Church, our God is not small, manageable, dependent, surprised, or contained by heaven and earth.

He is the blessed and only Sovereign, King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone has immortality and dwells in unapproachable light (1 Timothy 6:15–16).

Yet this high and holy God has come near. In Christ, the transcendent God has shown us His face (John 14:9) *Jesus answered: “Don’t you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father’?”*

(Col. 1:15). The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation.

The Word became flesh and opened the way for sinners to draw near (John 1:1–14; Heb. 2:14–15; Heb. 10:19–22). In Christ, the One above all things bore our sin, disarmed the powers, conquered our enemy, and opened the kingdom to all who believe

(Col. 2:14–15) having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us, which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross. **15** When He had disarmed the rulers and authorities, He made a public display of them, having triumphed over them through Him.

So let us repent of thoughts of God that are too human, laying down the pride that says, “I will ascend,” and receive the mind of Christ that says, “Not my will, but Yours be done.” Let us worship with awe, trust His wisdom, and serve one another in humility because the highest One became lowly for us.

This is not mere doctrine, but as an invitation to worship. Let it search our pride, quiet our anxious striving, and comfort our weary hearts with this truth: **the God too great to be contained is not too great to care**. He is high and holy, and He is near to the lowly.

The Te Deum (short for *Te Deum Laudamus*, Latin for “Thee, O God, we praise”) is one of the oldest and most celebrated hymns in the Christian Church. Dating back to the late 4th or early 5th century, it was sung as an anthem of profound joy, praise, and public thanksgiving:

“We praise you, O God; we acclaim you as the Lord; all creation worships you, the Father everlasting. Throughout the world the holy Church acclaims you: Father of majesty unbounded, your true and only Son worthy of all praise, Holy Spirit our advocate and guide. We praise your name forever. For we have put our trust in you. In you Lord, is our hope: And we shall never hope in vain.

—to you be greatness, power, glory, majesty, and splendor, now and forever.

Benediction

May the transcendent God who dwells beyond the highest heavens yet stoops to dwell with the humble in heart, lift your eyes to His majesty and steady your soul in His mercy. **May His glory be your wonder, His wisdom be your rest, His holiness be your shelter, and His nearness be your peace.** I pray that you live and thrive beneath the blessing of the Father, in the grace of the Son, and by the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, until the day when every knee shall bow, every tongue confess, and all creation joins the song: Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. Amen.