

## St. Mark Bible Study God's Immensity

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### *God's Immensity*

*For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it. For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? ([Matthew 16:25–26](#))*

*And your life is hid with Christ in God. ([Colossians 3:3](#))*

*Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ. ([Philippians 3:8](#))*

*Father, we're unworthy to think these thoughts, and our friends are unworthy to hear them expressed. But we will try to hear worthily and speak worthily. We know that we have looked upon evil sights, heard with our ears evil words and walked in evil ways. But now we trust that is behind us and our eyes are upon Thee. Show Thyself to us, O God! Shepherd, sweet Wonder, Jesus, we ask You now that this evening we may again have a vision of the triune God through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

Faith is of two kinds: nominal and real. The nominal faith is faith that accepts what it is told and can quote text after text to prove it. It's amazing how nominal faith and nominal belief can weave these texts into garments, cloaks and curtains for the Church.

But there is another kind of faith: it is faith that depends upon the character of God. You will remember that the Scripture does not say, "Abraham believed *the text*, and it was counted unto him for righteousness." It says, "Abraham believed *God*" ([Romans 4:3](#)). It was not *what* Abraham believed, it was *who* Abraham believed that counted. Abraham believed God, and the man of true faith believes God and his faith rests on the character of God. The man who has real faith rather than nominal faith has found a right answer to the question, "What is God like?" There is no question more important. The man of true faith has found an answer to that question by revelation and illumination.

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The difficulty with the Church now—even the Bible-believing Church—is that we stop with revelation. But revelation is not enough. Revelation is God's given Word. It's an objective thing, not subjective; it's external, not internal. It is God's revelation of truth. A man may believe that and believe it soundly and hold it to be truth. And yet he will have only an objective revelation of truth that has been objectively revealed.

### **Illumination**

There is another way to find an answer to the question, "What is God like?" and that is by illumination. The man of real faith believes the Word, but it has been illuminated so that he knows what the Word means. That doesn't mean that he's a better Bible teacher. But it means that he has had what the Quakers call "an opening." His heart has been opened to the Word. The given revelation is a means toward an end, and God is the end, not the text itself.

That's why I never fight over a translation and get all worked up and steamed up over it. A text is a means to an end. Now, since there's plenty of money and the printers will print anything, we're making the mistake of thinking that if we get the Word said in a different way there'll be some magic effect in that Word. We think that if it is read in the King James Version that's OK, but if we get a new version, varying just a little, we have automatically received something new. It doesn't follow!

The illumination is what matters and the Word of God is a means toward an end, just as roads are means toward destinations. A road is nothing in itself. Nobody ever built a road and fenced it in at both ends and planted posies along it and beautified it and said, "This is a road." They said, "This is a way, a means toward somewhere." The Bible is a whole series of highways, all leading toward God. And when the text has been illuminated and the believer of the text knows that God is the end toward which he is moving, then that man has real faith.

### **The Size of Things**

I speak often of a little book called *The Revelation of the Divine Love* written by a woman by the name of Julian six hundred years ago. One day as she prayed she had a little experience, and here's what it was. She said, "I saw a very small object

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as large as a hazelnut.” When I was a boy on the farm we had hazelnuts, and hazelnuts as we knew them were about the size of a large marble, no larger than that. She said she saw this little tiny object, and she asked, “What might this be?” And something in her heart said, “This is all that is made; this is all that is made.” This little tiny hazelnut-sized affair is all that is made. I want you to think about this with me: “This is all that is made.”

The great French philosopher and mystic mathematician, Pascal, said this: “We are halfway between immensity and that which is infinitesimally small.” He said you will find worlds beyond worlds out in space. Our solar system moves around another solar system. And that solar system moves around another solar system, and so on into infinite vastness. Then, he said, if you turn the other way, you will find little worlds within little worlds going down—the molecule, the atom, the electron and the proton, down into infinitesimal smallness. He believed that man, made in the image of God, is exactly halfway in between that which is infinitely large and that which is infinitesimally small. There is no way to prove that, but that’s a frightening place to be, half as big as the universe but also half as small.

We think that the sun is very large with its planets circling around it. But if you study astronomy—even elementary astronomy—you will learn that there are suns so large that each one could absorb our sun, all of its planets and all of the satellites that revolve around those planets into itself. They say that there are suns that are so large you could put millions of our suns into them. I give up. I don’t even try to understand it.

Then there is space. I don’t think space is a thing; I think it is just a way we have of accounting for different positions in the vast universe. We call it distance. We know they don’t measure it. If it’s the moon they say 250,000 miles or if it’s the sun they say 93 million miles. But after that they start talking in light years. They say that there are bodies millions of light years away—say 10 million just to get a start. So if you want to know how far it is from earth to that body I’m talking about, you multiply 5 trillion, 862 billion, 484 million by 10 million. Doesn’t that stun you? It makes my head ache! Seen over against this, you and I are terribly small.

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Now we're not the smallest thing there is, because you can dissolve us, melt us down and get at the molecules and atoms and bits of disembodied matter or energy that we call by various manufactured names. You'll find that we're, according to Pascal, half as big as the universe.

### **The Immanence of God**

Then there is God. God has the attribute of immanence and immensity. God is immanent, which means you don't have to go distances to find God. He is in everything. He is right here.

God is above all things, beneath all things, outside of all things and inside of all things. God is above, but He's not pushed up. He's beneath, but He's not pressed down. He's outside, but He's not excluded. He's inside, but He's not confined. God is above all things presiding, beneath all things sustaining, outside of all things embracing and inside of all things filling. That is the immanence of God.

God doesn't travel to get anywhere. We may say in prayer, "Oh God, come and help us," because we mean it in a psychological way. But actually God doesn't have to "come" to help us because *there isn't any place where God is not*.

If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea; even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me.... If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there: if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there. ([Psalm 139:9–10, 8](#))

So it's impossible to think of a place where God is not.

### **The Immensity of God**

The Scripture also teaches the immensity of God. It says in Isaiah, "Who hath measured the waters in the hollow of his hand, and meted out heaven with the span, and comprehended the dust of the earth in a measure, and weighed the mountains in scales, and the hills in a balance?" ([Isaiah 40:12](#)).

Imagine going out millions of light years into space and finding a body so vast that you could throw all our solar system into it. Like throwing a shovelful of coal into a furnace, it would simply swallow up our solar system and go on. After

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you've thought of all that, remember that God contains all that. Remember that God is outside of all things and inside of all things and around all things. Remember that our God made it. That is the immensity of God.

The Holy Ghost is bigger than all the universe, this little hazelnut that Julian saw. "Behold, the nations are as a drop of a bucket" ([40:15](#)). You know, it's awfully hard to get a Christian scared. It's hard to get him panicked if he really believes in God. If he's just a church member, you can get him panicked. But if he really believes in God it's very difficult to do it.

It's very difficult for a big-mouth like Nikita Khrushchev [leader of the former Soviet Union in the 1950s and 1960s] to scare anybody who really believes in God. Khrushchev is beginning to sound more and more like Adolf Hitler—and where is Hitler? The same God who disposed of Adolf can dispose of Nikita one of these days. "Behold, the nations are as a drop of a bucket, and are counted as the small dust of the balance: behold, he taketh up the isles as a very little thing" ([40:15](#))—so small He doesn't even notice them. "All nations before him are as nothing; and they are counted to him less than nothing, and vanity" ([40:17](#)).

Old Dr. Neighbor used to say that the word *vanity* in the Hebrew meant "a soap bubble"—something that floats along on an infinitesimally thin skin. You touch it and it's gone; no one can find it again. That's what it means: all the nations of the world are to Him as a soap bubble.

It is he that sitteth upon the circle of the earth, and the inhabitants thereof are as grasshoppers; that stretcheth out the heavens as a curtain, and spreadeth them out as a tent to dwell in. . . . To whom then will ye liken me, or shall I be equal? saith the Holy One. Lift up your eyes on high, and behold who hath created these things, that bringeth out their host by number: he calleth them all by names by the greatness of his might, for that he is strong in power; not one faileth. ([40:22](#), [25–26](#))

Now this passage is probably the most daring flight of imagination ever made by the human mind. We have here in Isaiah that which is vaster and more awesome than anything that ever came out of the mind of Shakespeare. It is the thought of the great God, the Shepherd of the universe, moving through His universe, with its

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billions and trillions of light years, with its worlds so big that our whole solar system would look like a grain of sand by comparison. And God stands out yonder and calls all of these millions of worlds as His sheep; He calls them all by name and leads them out across the vast sky.

I'd say this is the highest thought I know of, in the Bible or out. And God does this "by the greatness of his might, for that he is strong in power; not one faileth" ([40:26](#)). Just as a shepherd keeps all of his sheep and not one is lost, so God keeps all of His universe. Men point their tiny little glasses at the stars and talk learnedly, but they've just been counting God's sheep, nothing more. God is running His universe.

And then in the Psalms we read,

Bless the LORD, O my soul. O LORD my God, thou art very great; thou art clothed with honour and majesty. Who coverest thyself with light as with a garment: who stretchest out the heavens like a curtain: who layeth the beams of his chambers in the waters: who maketh the clouds his chariot: who walketh upon the wings of the wind. ([Psalms 104:1-3](#))

There we have the greatness, the immensity, the imminence of God, set over against the vastness and the littleness of the world. For Julian said, "I saw all of this vastness reduced, and I saw how big it actually was, set over against God Almighty. 'Twas the size of a hazelnut." Then she said, "I marveled at one thing"—and I've thought of this myself—"I marveled at what could hold it together."

### **God Holds What He Loves**

Did you ever wonder about what held things together? Did you ever wonder why things didn't fall apart? I have! I've wondered how things didn't tear loose at the seams. "I marveled," she said, "how it might last." Since distance is all involved, since matter depends on God's word and since life is a ray from God's heart, then there isn't too much to worry about! But she said, "How can all this last, how can this hold together?" Then she said, "It came to me. I saw that all things have their being in the love of God and that God made them and God loves them and God keeps them."

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That's why you don't fall apart—because God made you, God loves you and God keeps you. What God made, God loves, because it's inconceivable that God should make anything that He didn't love.

A fellow recently brought me a painting that he'd been working on quite a while, and showed it to me to see if I liked it. It's inconceivable that he didn't like his own picture. I liked it too, but it was because *he* liked it that he showed it to me. We like that which we make. And God loves that which He made. And because He made it, He loves it, and because He loves it, He keeps it.

People aren't going to lose anything they love if they can help it. A mother may lose her baby by death, but she won't do it if she can help it. A man may lose a property or his car or his job, but he won't if he can help it. And so God Almighty is in a position never to lose anything, because He's able not to lose it. He keeps it because He loves it and He loves it because He made it—or did He make it because He loves it?—I don't know.

I heard an Episcopalian rector preach a sermon on immortality. He gave one of the finest arguments for immortality that I've ever heard. "The Bible says that Abraham was a friend of God," said the rector. "Now, how would it be that a man should ever give up his friends? If a man is your friend, you wouldn't lose him if you could help it. And if he died you'd bring him back if you could. You would keep your friend if he was your friend.

"Well, God Almighty is able to keep His friend. So that's why we know that Abraham will rise again from the dead, because he is God's friend and God isn't going to allow His friend to lie around and rot forever. He's going to bring him out of the grave again. And that's why I believe in immortality. I believe that God made us and God loves what He made and is keeping what He loves."

So all things have their being in God. I want you to think of God the Maker—God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth. I want you to think of God the Lover—"God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son" ([John 3:16](#)). And I want you to think of God the Keeper, if you're a real Christian. If you're not a real Christian, if you've not been born anew and washed in the blood of the Lamb, this doesn't apply to you, and there isn't any use in my trying to make it apply. But if you're a true Christian this applies to you.



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### Why are We Not Happy?

As Lady Julian thought about this she said, "If this is all true, then why be we not all of great ease of heart and soul? Why aren't Christians the happiest, the most easeful people in all the wide world?" Then she answered her own question: "Because we seek to have our rest in things that are so little. This hazelnut into which is condensed all that is—we try to find our pleasure in those little things."

What is it that makes you happy? What cheers you up and gives your morale a lift? Is it your job? Is it the fact that you have good clothes? Is it that you've married well or have a fine position? Just what is it that brings you joy?

That's our trouble. We know that God is so vast that in comparison everything is just the size of a hazelnut. And yet we're not a happy people because we've got our minds set on things. We multiply things, and we increase things and we perfect things. We beautify things and put our confidence in things *and* God. We have our job and God; we have our husband and God; we have our strong body and God; we have our good job and God; we have our home and God. We have our ambition for the future and God, and so we put God as a plus sign after something else.

All the great souls of the world from David and Paul and Augustine and all the rest down through this present hour—every responsible writer who has ever been illuminated from the Scriptures by the Holy Spirit has said the same thing. And whether he came from one school of Christian thought or another, as long as he was orthodox and spiritual he said the same thing: Our problem is that we are putting our confidence in things and not in God. And Julian said, "God showed me that all things are only the size of the hazelnut. Why therefore should I put my confidence in things so little that God has to hold it together? Why should I trust things?"

We multiply, we increase, and still we're anxious and unsatisfied. Why? Because all that is beneath God will not satisfy us. God made you in His image and you're stuck with it. God did not make the chimpanzee in His image. He did not make the horse, that symphony in motion, in His image. God did not make that beautiful bird that the poet says "sings darkling... his nocturnal note" in His image. God made him beautiful, but He didn't make him in His image.



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God made only you in His image and you're stuck with it, sinner and Christian both. You're made in the image of God, and nothing short of God will satisfy you. And even if you happen to be one of those "nickle-in-the-slot, get saved, escape hell and take heaven" Christians (that poor little kindergarten view of heaven), remember one thing—even you will find over the years that you are not content with "things plus God." You'll have to have God minus all things.

You may ask me, "Don't *you* have things?" Sure I do. God knows that I don't have much, only a lot of books. I have a wife and some children and grandchildren and friends—I have all that.

But as soon as I set my hopes and comforts upon things and people I'll lose something out of my heart. It dare not be things and God, it dare not be people and God: it must be God and nothing else. Then whatever else God gives us, we can hold at arm's length and hold it dear for Jesus' sake. And we can love it for His sake, *but it is not necessary to our happiness*. If there's anything necessary to your eternal happiness but God, you're not yet the kind of Christian that you ought to be. For only God is the true rest.

God takes great pleasure in having a helpless soul come to Him simply and plainly and intimately. He takes pleasure in having us come to Him. This kind of Christianity doesn't draw big crowds. It draws only those who have their hearts set on God, who want God more than they want anything else in the world. These people want the spiritual experience that comes from knowing God for Himself. They could have everything stripped away from them and still have God.

These people are not vastly numerous in any given locality. This kind of Christianity doesn't draw big crowds, but it is likely to draw the hungriest ones, the thirstiest ones and some of the best ones. And so God takes great pleasure in having helpless people come to Him, simply and plainly and intimately. He wants us to come without all that great overloading of theology. He wants us to come as simply and as plainly as a little child. And if the Holy Spirit touches you, you'll come like that.

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### God's Enthusiasm

As I said in the last chapter, God is boundlessly enthusiastic. I'm glad somebody is, because I don't find very many Christians who are. If they are, they're not enthusiastic about the things that matter. If they're going to a movie, they can get all steamed up about that. If they're going on a moonlight cruise, they get all worked up over that. But if you just say, "Look, look, behold God, behold God!" you can't get much enthusiasm.

God is enthusiastic. He's enthusiastic for Himself in the Persons in the Godhead. The Persons of the Godhead are infinitely delighted with each other. The Father is infinitely delighted with the Son, and the Son is infinitely delighted with the other two Persons of the Godhead. He is delighted with His whole creation, and especially with men made in His image. Unbelief comes and throws a cloud over us and shuts out the light of God, and we don't believe that God is delighted, infinitely delighted with us.

And here's a little prayer that was made by Lady Julian:

O God, of Thy goodness give me Thyself, for Thou art enough for me, and I may ask nothing that is less and find any full honors to Thee. God give me Thyself!

We make out that a revival is everybody running around falling on everybody else's neck and saying, "Forgive me for thinking a bad thought about you. Forgive me for that nickel that I forgot to pay back." Or we say a revival consists of people getting very loud and noisy. Well, that might happen in a revival, but the only kind of revival that would be here when the worlds are on fire is the revival that begins by saying, "Oh God, give me Thyself! For nothing less than Thee will do."

### Hunger for God

"Anything less than God," Julian said, "ever me wanteth." I like that little expression. Translated into modern English it means, "It won't be enough." Julian said in effect, "Oh God, if I have all this hazelnut—everything from the proton to the remotest heavenly body, up and down the scale all the beautiful things of earth, the sky and sea, the diamonds of the mines, the timber of the forest, the charm of

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the landscape and the riches of the cities—if I have it all and have not Thee, ever me *wanteth*.” It won't be enough.

The problem with the world today is that everybody is saying “ever me wanteth” and doesn't know it. There's a little shrine inside you, a shrine so far in that nobody can know it but you. There is an innermost part, a deep, deep shrine, “a garden eastward in Eden” ([Genesis 2:8](#)). It lies in that great soul of yours—that soul that is bigger than the starry universe. There's a shrine there, a garden and a throne. And no matter what, you'll get a cry from that shrine: Ever me *wanteth*. *Oh God, I'm still hungry, I'm still hungry!*

Who commits suicide? Not the poor—the rich. Not the simple unknown fellow on the street—it's the movie actors and politicians and people who are widely known. As the song says it, “Take the world but give me Jesus.” We can have all the world and have not Jesus, and there will be a cry from deep within, “Ever me wanteth.”

This is the greatest calamity for a human soul: to be made in the image of God, with a spirit so big that it can contain the universe, and yet cry for more. Imagine a soul bigger than the heavens and the heaven of heavens yet empty of God. Imagine going through eternity crying, “Ever me wanteth, O God”—forever and ever! “O God, I'm hungry and I can't eat; I'm thirsty and I can't drink. Send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame!” (see [Luke 16:24](#)).

I wonder if the flames of hell aren't kindled from deep in that shrine where, dry and cracked and parched, the soul of man cries, “O God, *ever me wanteth*. I've had everything: religion, position, money, a spouse and children, clothes, a good home; but it's a little hazelnut—it's nothing. O God, I've missed that which I wanted the most!”

Down at the bottom, that's the problem. That's the problem in Russia, in Washington, everywhere—ever, ever they want, though they have everything. You know the old story of Alexander, who conquered the world and wept because there was no more world to conquer. Man has gone to the North Pole and to the South Pole and now turns his greedy eyes on the moon and the planets. They have and get, they get and have.

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The richest nation in the world is America. We think we're in a recession, but still cars are coming out longer and bigger and looking more like juke boxes than ever. And there's more money in more bank accounts. They may make deductions from your paycheck, but after they've taken out everything you can think of, still the average fellow has more money than he used to.

Back when I was a young fellow, a man used to raise ten kids on a dollar a day and do a good job. Now we've got everything, absolutely everything.

And yet what country in the world is the most troubled, has more breakdowns, more insanity, more murders, more triangles, more mental hospitals, more psychiatrists and couches?

### **God Must Be First**

It's rather a cynical thought, an ironic thought, that the richest nation in the world manages to have the most divorces, the most suicides and the most juvenile delinquency. It proves again that no matter how much you give a man, if he misses God he cries, "Ever me wanteth," and goes out to do some crime. If you give him everything and then add God to it, you have wronged him, and he has wronged his own soul. For God wants to be first and wants to be all.

Money won't do it. If you take the kingdom of God and His righteousness, God will add money to you—as much as you need. If you take the kingdom of God and His righteousness, God may send your way learning and art and music and other legitimate earthly loves. God may send it all to you and let you have it. But it is always with the understanding that He can take it away again and you won't grumble. You still have God, and God is all.

Isaiah wrote: "Thy sun shall no more go down; neither shall thy moon withdraw itself: for the LORD shall be thine everlasting light, and the days of thy mourning shall be ended" ([Isaiah 60:20](#)). The silk weaver of Germany, Gerhard Tersteegen, wrote a kind of wild paraphrase on this:

O Fast and Gone,  
How great is God,  
How small am I,

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A mote in the illimitable sky,  
And lets the glory deep and wide and high  
Of heaven's unclouded sun,  
Ne'er to forget myself forevermore,  
Lost, swallowed up in love's immensity.  
The sea that knows no sounding and no shore,  
God only there, not I,  
Nor nearer than I am to myself can be  
Art Thou to me.  
So have I lost myself in finding Thee.  
The boundless heaven of Thine eternal love  
Around me and beneath me and above  
In glory of that golden day,  
The former things are passed away,  
Aye, passed away.

We've almost lost our ability to kneel barefoot before such a burning bush as this. When the Church has restored to her again the kind of spirit that can understand what Isaiah meant and Tersteegen meant when he paraphrased Isaiah, then we will have revival—the kind of revival the Quakers and the Methodists had, and the kind they had at Pentecost.

So have I lost myself in finding Thee,  
Have lost myself forever, O Thou Son,  
The boundless heaven of Thine eternal love  
Around me and beneath me and above.

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This is God!

Now remember the text again: "Hid with Christ in God" ([Colossians 3:3](#)). If you gain the whole world and find not God in your own soul, what have you got? It's worth nothing to you. Let's search; let's pray; let's get still; let's get quiet. Let's learn the wonder of silence. Let's learn the beauty, the secret of seeking after God. With our Bible open before us and our knees bent, all alone in humility and penitence, let us cry, "Only God, only God and God alone! Take the world but give me Jesus!" Will you do that? We need it in the Church. We all need it. May God grant it in Jesus Christ our Lord.

*Now, Father, wilt you bless all who receive this message? Wilt you grant, we pray, that we may forget the things that are behind and press forward toward the things that are ahead? Wilt Thou grant that we may see all that is as only the size of a hazelnut and ourselves in God as vast, so vast that we encompass the worlds and are utterly empty without Thee? Fill us, O God, fill us with Thyself, for without Thee ever we will be wanting. Fill us with Thyself for Jesus Christ's sake. Amen.*