

Today I ask you a very simple question. What does God look like? Admittedly it is a simple question that begs a bit of a complex answer. Unfortunately, no one has ever snapped a picture of God. Moses never pulled out the Polaroid when he met with God face to face in tent of meeting. Isaiah couldn't even stand up long enough to pull out his digital camera when God appeared to call him into the ministry. We simply don't know what God looks like. Ask children to draw God and they will draw everything from a rainbow to the world to old gray bearded man. This furthers the point that we really have no idea what he looks like. So, each of our minds are left to create a picture of God. And how do we create that picture? Generally, we take what we believe about God, and then make that into a picture. Our minds develop our thoughts into images and then we can begin to visualize what we think God looks like.

As I mentioned the images of what God might look like that fill humanity's minds are as diverse as the people in which those images reside. However, there are two pictures that seem to capture much of the idea of how people throughout time have pictured God. If you look at your bulletin today, on the left is the first picture of how many people think of and picture God. God is and old, grandpa looking figure. I mean look at the smile on his face. Perhaps, in our world, this is the God most people acknowledge. People loves a God who is a generally loving, fluffy, easy going guy who smiles upon us at all times of the day. Maybe you have heard people say things like, "How can God be against homosexuality, I thought he loved everyone." Yes, for much of our country, they want to acknowledge a God, but they want a God without rules, only a smile. They want a God who blesses, but never would curse. They want a God, who like a good grandpa figures sends gifts at the right times of the year, and always approves

of however we choose to live. Because after all, surely a loving God can't expect everyone to believe the same things, surely he can't expect everyone to live the same way. And surely even if people don't go with his suggestions for how to live life, he would never punish anyone. Loving gods just don't do those things. Anger, punishment, and hell just aren't fitting concepts for a loving God. Many people want a grandpa God.

As I mentioned there is a second image of God which is also very prevalent. It is pictured on the right side of your bulletin. Many people know nothing but a fearful, wrathful God. They feel like tiny scared people under the hand of God. Muhammad Ali once said that he carried a match with him everywhere he went, so that when he was tempted to do something wrong, he could place the lighted match under his hand to remind him of the consequences of such an action. No doubt, most of the Muslim world lives under fear of a wrathful God who knows nothing of mercy. But it is not just Muslims who think this way. Many people in our world have no relationship with God at all because they think that God would strike them dead if they ever met him. They think their lives are so beyond repair that hiding from God seems like the best choice for them. So, they grab their fig leaves and run around the earth hoping God never calls out their name to call them accountable. The picture of God that such people have is the God that Jonathon Edwards painted in his famous sermon when he said, "The wrath of God burns against them, their damnation does not slumber; the pit is prepared, the fire is made ready, the furnace is now hot, ready to receive them; the flames do now rage and glow. The glittering sword is whet, and held over them, and the pit hath opened its mouth under them." Yes for many people god is just a wrathful judge dangling people over the fires of

hell. Many believe that in is an awful thing to be a sinner in the hands of an angry God. But yet they assume that is the only option they have.

So which is right? Are we children in the laps of a loving, feel-good Grandpa God, or are we sinners in the hand of an angry God? Which picture best tells of our God?

Perhaps there is another option. Today we allow our Old Testament lesson for the day paint some broad strokes that we might picture God correctly. For while not many of us here probably want to claim each picture of God presented so far , at times we do allow those pictures to be placed in our lives. We assume that for us regular church members, God can never get angry at us, that he always smiles at us, because he are his people. We assume that his smile remains even when we are not living like children of God. And yet on the other hand, when we think of those other people who live their lives nothing like what God commands, we are ready to hand them over to God to dangle over the fires of hell. Those kinds of people deserve the angry God; they have it coming.

The book of Lamentations is a series of poems that speak about the desolation that came upon the city of Jerusalem in 586. In that year the city was laid waste along with the temple. But of course the laments aren't only for the city, but mostly from and for the people of Israel. This book gives awful pictures of mothers eating their children, and people starving everywhere. This book is a diary of sorts listing all the awful things that have happened. And who is to blame for all of this awful stuff? The author makes no bones about it, God himself is to blame. Well, I should qualify that statement. The author knew two things: one, that God had brought this destruction. It was his work. Secondly though, they knew that is had come as a result of their sins. The destruction all around them was the visible sign of God displeasure at the way his people had deserted

him, the way they had not followed his ways. When you read most of this book, it sure seems as if maybe the picture of an Angry God is right! After all Jonathon Edwards words seem about right when you read Lamentations 2:4 which reads, “He has bent His bow like an enemy; He has set His right hand like an adversary And slain all that were pleasant to the eye; In the tent of the daughter of Zion He has poured out His wrath like fire.” Indeed Lamentations does have something to teach us. In fact, Lamentation teaches us two important truths that at times we forget. One, God hates Sin. It disgusts Him. And secondly, God does at times turn us from our sin with a disciplining hand. As the proverb says, “God disciplines those he loves.” Just like a father pulling a child out of the street and scolding him, so also our Father scolds us when we travel down the paths of destruction rather than the paths of righteousness.

But is that the whole picture? Is our God just an Angry God? Of course not!. Our texts tells us more about our God. It tells us that “it is because of God’s mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not. <sup>23</sup> *They are new every morning: great is thy faithfulness.*” God is not just a divine lawmaker waiting to crush humanity under his hand. He is a forgiving and gracious God. Perhaps the most important verse in our text is the last one. It says that “he doth not afflict willingly nor grieve the children of men.” Actually, if you read the text in the Hebrew it says that God does not afflict or grieve humanity from his heart. While at times God uses a heavy hand to make sure that we do not continue down the road to hell, it is always so that we will return to him and his grace. God takes no pleasure in punishing his children, just as any good parent takes no pleasure in punishing their children. As our text says, he doesn’t do it “from his heart.” What does he do from the heart? He is merciful, he is gracious, he is forgiving.

These are the characteristics by which God is defined. His discipline is only pulled out of him by constant disobedience. His love and Mercy, his forgiveness are the things always with him, the things he passes out all the time. As our text says, he has a multitude of mercies.

So what does God look like? He is much too just and concerned about our sin to be the loving, constantly approving grandfather. But yet to think of him as an angry wrathful God misses the whole nature of God himself since he is a loving God which takes no delight in punishing anyone.

So what does he look like? If you want to know what God looks like, look at the cross. There we see God. There God put on a face. On the cross, we see how seriously God takes sin, so seriously that his own son had to die to take care of the guilt of the whole world. He takes sin so seriously that on Good Friday, he couldn't even stand the sight of his own son covered in our sins, but rather forsook him. But in that same cross, we see God's true grace-filled nature. All of that shame of the cross he suffered that he might be merciful, that he might be gracious, that he might be forgiving to all of us who didn't deserve it. What does God look like? He looks like Jesus. For, he is Jesus. Amen.