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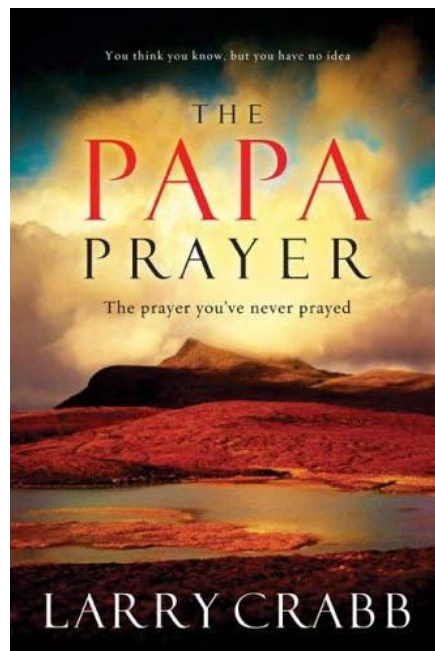
WHO DO YOU THINK YOU'RE TALKING TO?

[“A” – ATTEND TO HOW YOU'RE THINKING OF GOD]

WEEKLY SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSON

MAY 11, 2008

LESSON #3 FROM THE **MASTER WORKS** SERIES STUDY OF:



"WHO DO YOU THINK YOU'RE TALKING TO?"

["A" – ATTEND TO HOW YOU'RE THINKING OF GOD]

Can you solve these riddles? "I have no eyes. I have no legs. But I help move the earth. Who am I?" (A worm) "I can run but never walk. I have a mouth but never talk. I have a bed but never sleep. Who am I?" (A river.) If you wrote such a riddle about yourself or about God, what would it say? How would you describe yourself? How would you describe God? And that's where we start today as we are in Week Three of our study from Larry Crabb's study of *The PAPA Prayer*.

Last week we looked at the first "P" in the acrostic *PAPA* in our study of a new way to pray. What does the first "P" stand for? [PRESENT YOURSELF TO GOD] Remember we talked about finding your "red dot," like when you're at the mall and don't know where the shops are, but you see the mall directory and the red dot telling you right where you are. It's the same with God, start with where you are—your "red dot"—and present yourself to God just like you are.

Today, we look at the second letter, "A," in *PAPA*. Do you recall what it stands for? [[ATTEND TO WHO YOU THINK YOU'RE TALKING TO WHEN YOU PRAY AND THEN CORRECT WHATEVER MISREPRESENTATION BECOMES CLEAR](#)] So, let's start with the question from Day One: "*What picture of God comes to mind when you pray?*" Who do you assume He is? What's He like? As Larry Crabb reminded us, we're not talking about a picture or idea you may choose and capture in your mind. No, but what conception of God is already in you that perhaps, beneath your awareness, rumbles around when you talk to God? What is I asked you right now to write a paragraph about who God is or to explain God. What would you write?

I recently heard about a teacher in California who asked her third grade class to explain God and write a report as a homework assignment. I want you to listen to what was written by an 8-

year-old, Danny Dutton of Chula Vista, CA, for his third-grade homework assignment.

EXPLAIN GOD

One of God's main jobs is making people. He makes them to replace the ones that die, so there will be enough people to take care of things on earth. He doesn't make grown-ups, just babies. I think because they are smaller and easier to make. That way He doesn't have to take up His valuable time teaching them to talk and walk. He can just leaves that to mothers and fathers.

God's second most important job is listening to prayers. An awful lot of this goes on, since some people, like preachers and things, pray at times beside bedtime. God doesn't have time to listen to the radio or TV because of this.

God sees everything and hears everything and is everywhere which keeps Him pretty busy. So you shouldn't go wasting His time by going over your Mom and Dad's head asking for something they said you couldn't have.

Atheists are people who don't believe in God. I don't think there are any in Chula Vista. At least there aren't any who come to our church.

Jesus is God's Son. He used to do all the hard work like walking on water and performing miracles and people finally got tired of Him preaching to them and they crucified Him. But He was good and kind, like His Father and He told His Father that they didn't know what they were doing and to forgive them and God said "O.K." His Dad (God) appreciated everything that He had done and all His hard work on earth so He told Him He didn't have to go out on the road anymore. He could stay in heaven. So He did. And now He helps His Dad out by listening to prayers and seeing things which are important for God to take care of and which ones He can take care of Himself without having to bother God. Like a secretary, only more important.

You can pray anytime you want and they are sure to help you because they got it worked out so one of them is on duty all the time. You should always go to church on Sunday because it makes God happy, and if there's anybody you want to make happy, it's God. Don't skip church to do something you think will be more fun like going to the beach. This is wrong. And besides the sun doesn't come out at the beach until noon anyway.

How accurate do you think that picture is? How could we get that picture more in focus? Turn to **ROMANS 10:17 (NKJV)** and follow along as I read these words of Paul: *¹⁷So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.*

I loved the example Larry Crabb gave this week from one of my favorite books by C. S. Lewis. In the fascinating book, *The Screwtape Letters*, senior demon Screwtape is counseling his protégé Wormwood on the ways of the “Enemy,” who from hell’s perspective, of course, is God. Screwtape explains that God doesn’t simply overpower human souls with His own will, but sets them off with communication of His presence which, though faint, seems great to them, with emotional sweetness, and easy conquest and temptation. But He never allows this state of affairs to last long. Sooner or later He withdraws, if not in fact, at least from his conscious experience. He leaves the creature to stand up on his own legs—to carry out from the will alone duties which have lost all relish. We Christians call that F-A-I-T-H!

So, if we want to better understand and know **WHO** God is, and that comes through faith—then what is faith? And what difference does faith make? We can find a great scriptural answer over in **HEBREWS 11:1-6 (NLT)**, if you’ll turn there and let’s read: *¹Faith is the confidence that what we hope for will actually happen; it gives us assurance about things we cannot see. ²Through their faith, the people in days of old earned a good reputation. ³ By faith we understand that the entire universe was formed at God’s command, that what we now see did not come from anything that can be seen. ⁴It was by faith that Abel*

brought a more acceptable offering to God than Cain did. Abel's offering gave evidence that he was a righteous man, and God showed his approval of his gifts. Although Abel is long dead, he still speaks to us by his example of faith. ⁵It was by faith that Enoch was taken up to heaven without dying—"he disappeared, because God took him." For before he was taken up, he was known as a person who pleased God. ⁶And it is impossible to please God without faith. Anyone who wants to come to him must believe that God exists and that he rewards those who sincerely seek him.

Augustine once posed the following experiment. Imagine God saying to you, *"I'll make you a deal if you wish. I'll give you anything and everything you ask: pleasure, power, honor, wealth, freedom, even peace of mind and a good conscience. Nothing will be a sin; nothing will be forbidden; and nothing will be impossible to you. You will never be bored and you will never die. Only ... you will **never** see my face."*

The first part of the proposition is appealing. Isn't there a part of us, a pleasure-loving part of us, that perks up at the thought of guiltless, endless delight? But then, just as we are about to raise our hands and volunteer, we hear the final phrase, *"You will never see my face."* And we pause. Never? Never know the image of God? Never ever behold the presence of Christ? At this point, tell me, doesn't the bargain begin to lose some of its appeal? Don't second thoughts begin to surface? And doesn't that test teach us something about our hearts? Doesn't the exercise reveal a deeper, better part of us that wants to see God?

For many it does. For others, however, Augustine's exercise doesn't raise interest as much as it raises a question. An awkward question, one some may be hesitant to ask for fear of sounding naïve or irreverent. That question is, *"What's the big deal?"* No disrespect intended. Of course, you want to see Jesus. But to see him *forever!*? Will he be **that** amazing? According to Paul, he will. Turn to **2 THESSALONIANS 1:10 (NCV)** and listen to his words: *¹⁰This will happen on the day when the Lord*

*Jesus comes to receive glory because of his holy people. And all the people who have believed will be **amazed** at Jesus...* Or your translation may say marveled at.

Amazed/Marveled at Jesus. Not amazed at angels or mansions or new bodies or new creations. Paul doesn't measure the joy of encountering the apostles or embracing our families or loved ones. If we will be amazed at these, which certainly we will, he does not say. What he does say is that we will be **amazed** at Jesus. What we have only seen in our thoughts, we will see with our eyes. What we've struggled to imagine, we will be free to behold. What we've seen in a glimpse, we will then see in full view. And, according to Paul, we will be amazed!

What will be so amazing? Of course, we have no way of answering that question from personal experience. But I can lead you to someone who can. One Sunday morning many Sundays ago, a man named John saw Jesus. You read this account this week in your Bible study. And what John saw, he recorded, and what he recorded has tantalized seekers of Christ for two thousand years.

To envision John, we should imagine an old man, probably in his eighties, with stooped shoulders and shuffling walk. The years have long past since he was a young disciple with Jesus in Galilee. That was 60 years earlier. His master has been crucified and most of his friends are dead. And now, the Roman government has exiled him to the Isle of Patmos. Let's imagine him on the beach. He has come to worship, not to complain. Amazing. I would have complained. He had first things and second things in their proper place. I think I might have mentioned my suffering was greater than that of his intended audience of churches and that my need for patient endurance was far greater than theirs. But he didn't. John worshiped.

As we imagine him on the beach, the wind stirs the cattails and the waves slap the sand, and John sees nothing but water—an ocean that separates him from his home. But no amount of

water could separate him from Christ. All of a sudden while we worshiped, something happened. He had a vision on Patmos and his image of Christ was never the same. It couldn't have been.

Turn to **REVELATION 1:10-18 (NCV)** and follow along as we read his description of what happened on that Sunday: ¹⁰*On the Lord's day I was in the Spirit, and I heard a loud voice behind me that sounded like a trumpet.* ¹¹*The voice said, "Write what you see in a book and send it to the seven churches: to Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea."*

John is about to see Jesus. Of course, this isn't the first time to see his Savaior. You and I only read about the hands that fed the thousands. Not John. He saw them—knuckled fingers, callused palms. He saw them. You and I only read about the fee that found a path through the waves. Not John. John saw them—sandaled, ten-toes, and dirty. You and I only read about his eyes—his flashing eyes, his fiery eyes, his weeping eyes. Not so with John. John saw them. Gazing on the crowds, dancing with laughter, searching for souls. John had seen Jesus.

For three years he'd followed Christ. But then this encounter was far different from any in Galilee. The image was so vivid, the impression so powerful, John was knocked out cold. Verse 17, in The Jerusalem Bible translation, says it this way: *"When I saw him I fell in a dead faint at his feet."* Picking up with verse 12, John goes on this way: ¹²*I turned to see who was talking to me. When I turned, I saw seven golden lampstands* ¹³*and someone among the lampstands who was "like a Son of Man."* He was dressed in a long robe and had a gold band around his chest. ¹⁴*His head and hair were white like wool, as white as snow, and his eyes were like flames of fire.* ¹⁵*His feet were like bronze that glows hot in a furnace, and his voice was like the noise of flooding water.* ¹⁶*He held seven stars in his right hand, and a sharp double-edged sword came out of his mouth. He looked like the sun shining at its brightest time.* ¹⁷*When I saw him, I fell down at his feet like a dead man. He put his right hand on me*

and said, "Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last. ¹⁸I am the One who lives; I was dead, but look, I am alive forever and ever! And I hold the keys to death and to the place of the dead.

Everytime I spend time reading Revelation, I'm usually puzzled by what I read—and I'm not alone. The world of Revelation cannot be contained or explained, it can only be pondered as we seek discernment from the Holy Spirit. Here John gives us a vision to ponder, a vision of Christ that comes at you from all angles. Swords and bronze feet and white hair and sunlight. What are we to make of such an image?

I pray that as you read and studied these passages this week, the Holy Spirit opened your eyes to see new things. First of all, we need to keep in mind that what John wrote is not what he saw. You heard me right. What John wrote is not what he saw. What he wrote is like what he saw. But what he saw was so otherworldly that he had no words to describe it.

The only way I know to explain what I mean is with the example of what I experienced last week in watching my daughter Amy give birth to my new grandson, Banks. How could I possibly describe the miracle of that birth with words? Or, how could I describe the beauty of the sunrise over the water in the Inlet this week as I meditated on God's Word on my back deck overlooking the water? Breath-taking! There aren't words to tell you about it? So how do we describe things like that? The same way John tried to describe his vision of the Christ. He stumbled and came up with an armload of word pictures we know as metaphors.

Did you notice how often John used the word like? He describes his hair like wool, eyes like fire, feet like bronze, a voice like the noise of flooding water, and then says Jesus looked like the sun shining at its brightest time. The implication is clear. The human tongue is inadequate to describe Christ. So in a breathless effort to tell us what he saw, John gives us symbols. Symbols originally intended for and understood by members of seven churches in Asia. For us to comprehend God and the passage

here, we must understand the symbols as the original readers understood them.

John's strategy is not unusual or strange. We do the same thing—or try to as we describe a new birth or that magnificent sunrise over the water. But, a simpler example is seen in our newspaper quite regularly these days as you open to the editorial page and see a donkey talking to an elephant. You know what that means, right? This isn't a cartoon about a zoo, it's a cartoon about politics. But, on second thought, maybe it is about a zoo! But you know the symbolism behind the images. And in order to understand John's vision, we must do the same, and as we do we gain glimpses of what we will see when we see Christ. This tells us what God is **like**. Listen to these words of Jesus talking with his disciples in **JOHN 14:9 (NIV)**: *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'?"*

And doesn't he say the same thing to us, but with a different slant since we haven't actually, physically seen him? Turn to **1 PETER 1:8 (NIV)**, and listen to these words: *Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy.* What is it we love about God, even when we haven't seen him?

Back to our verses from Revelation as we look at some word pictures so we'll know what we will see when we see Christ. We'll see the perfect priest. Verse 13 says, *"He was dressed in a long robe and had a gold band around his chest."* The first readers of this message knew the significance of the robe and band. Jesus is wearing the clothing of a priest. A priest presents people to God and God to people.

Look at verse 14. He is also pure and purifying: *"His head and hair were white like wool, as white as snow, and his eyes were like flames of fire."* What would a person look like if he'd never

sinned? If no worry wrinkled his brow and no anger shadowed his eyes. No bitterness, no selfishness. If a person had never sinned, how would he appear? We'll know when we see Jesus. What John saw that Sunday on Patmos was absolutely spotless. He was reminded of the virgin wool of sheep and the untouched snow of winter.

And John was also reminded of fire. Others saw the burning bush, the burning altar, the fiery furnace, or the fiery chariots, but John saw the fiery eyes. And in those eyes he saw a purging blaze which will burn the bacteria of sin and purify the soul. Whew! Already we see a priest; white-haired, snow-pure, and white-hot.

When we see Jesus, we will see absolute strength. Verse 15: *"His feet were like bronze that glows hot in a furnace."* John's audience knew the value of this metal. Listen to what Eugene Peterson says about this: *"Bronze is a combination of iron and copper. Iron is strong but it rusts. Copper won't rust but it's pliable. Combine the two in bronze and the best quality of each is preserved, the strength of the iron and the endurance of the copper. The rule of Christ is set on this base: the foundation of his power is tested by fire."*

Now, John describes what he heard—not just what he had seen. He shares the sound of Christ's voice. Not the words, but the sound, the tone, the timbre. The sound of a voice can be more important than the words of a voice. I can say, *"I love you"* to Beverly, but if I do it with a growl or nonchalance, she will not feel loved. Ever wonder how you would feel if Jesus spoke to you? John felt like he was near a waterfall: *"His voice was like the noise of a flooding water."* (v.15) The sound of a rushing river is not a timid, soft one. It is the backdrop against all other sounds. Even when nature sleeps, the river speaks. Has anyone here ever been the Niagara Falls—down close where all you hear is the noise of the falls? Deafening, isn't it? You can't even hear yourself speak. The same is true of Christ. In heaven his voice is always heard—over everything else.

In his right hand are the seven stars, verse 16. We later read the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches in verse 20. The right hand in Scripture is the picture of readiness. Remember, Joseph was blessed with Jacob's right hand (Gen 48:18), the Red Sea was divided when God stretched out his right hand (Exo 15:12), the right hand of God sustains us (Ps.18:35), and Jesus is at the right hand of God interceding (Rom 8:34). The right hand is a picture of action. And what does John see in the right hand of Christ? The angels of the churches. Jesus has them ready to send them to protect his people.

How reassuring. The son of Man has one priority: the protection of his church. He holds them in the palm of his right hand. And he directs them with the sword of his word. Verse 16 goes on to say, *"And a sharp double-edged sword came out of his mouth."*

The sound of his voice soothes the soul, but the truth of his voice pierces the soul. In **HEBREWS 4:12-13**, we read: *"God's word is alive and working and is sharper than a double-edged sword. It cuts all the way into us, where the soul and spirit are joined, to the center of our joints and bones. And it judges the thoughts and feelings in our hearts. Nothing in all the world can be hidden from God."*

No more charades. No more games. No more half-truths. Heaven is an honest land. It is a land where the shadows are banished by the face of Christ. Verse 16 reminds us that *"his face was like the sun shining in all its brilliance."*

So what are we to do with this picture? How are we to assimilate these images? These tell us who Jesus is and, in turn, who God is. The Perfect Priest. The Only Pure One. The Source of Strength. The Sound of Love. The Everlasting Light. When John saw Christ, he fell at his feet as though dead (v.17). When we see Jesus as He really is, today, right now, we don't casually pray: *"Oh, by the way Lord, could you arrange a nice sunny day next weekend for my vacation."* Nor do we fervently pray with a spirit of

entitlement: *"Jesus my marriage brings me pain. Please change things so I can feel better."*

Instead we're silenced. We dare not speak until we're spoken to. And in verses 17 & 18, we read: *And then the risen Christ placed his right hand on John and spoke. "Don't be afraid. I'm alive and because I'm alive, you're alive. Advance My kingdom until I return with great power to finish the job."*

We're to do the same. **ATTEND** to your experience of God. Then we're to change it, deliberately, every time you pray, to match the image of Revelation 1.

Let's pray.

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