

Wednesday Night BIBLE STUDY



Wednesday, July 22, 2020 – First Baptist Church Buda
Midweek Prayer Meeting & Bible Study

PSALMS, HYMNS AND SPIRITUAL SONGS “A Bible Study Drawn from Old and New Songs of Faith” *Ephesians 5:18-19*

Music has a rich history in the story of God’s people beginning with the songs of the Old Testament called Psalms, and the rise and spread of Christianity around the globe with the great teaching hymns of faith. And even today, though music has sometimes been a point of contention and division centering on styles and methods of worship, many of the spiritual songs of our day are rich and power lyrics and sounds of worship that exalt our God and feed the souls of men. The Apostle Paul instructs us in Ephesians 5:18-19 to, *“¹⁸...be filled with the Spirit, ¹⁹ speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord.”* – Ephesians 5:18-19 We are actually commanded in God’s Word to dive head long into the music of faith... to be *“singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord”* with all kind of expression of music (psalms, hymns and spiritual songs). What many miss in great hymns and songs of faith is the rich Biblical tradition and teaching embedded is many of those songs The Bible study will attempt to dig into some of those select songs of faith and the powerful Biblical truths and lessons those songs that generations have loved to sing may have for us. Perhaps this will change our worship as we begin to sing these lyrics with deeper appreciation and understanding for what they are actually proclaiming. We have looked at the great old hymn, “Farther Along,” then we looked at the subject of assurance of salvation by looking at the hymn *“Blessed Assurance, Jesus is Mine”*. Then last week we took at that great hymn that some have called the Baptist Fight Song, *“Victory in Jesus.”* Let’s look at another great hymn of faith, one that some may consider to have a more somber feel to it, that speaks really to loss in life and how to deal with it.

HOW GREAT THOU ART – HYMN #10

“The Greatness of God”

Psalms 8 / Selected Scriptures

While recovering from a serious mining accident in Oklahoma, Vernon Spencer began playing music at a local bar called the Bucket of Blood. He enjoyed the work so much he hopped on a train to Hollywood in 1931, hoping to make it big. Tim Spencer became his stage name, and he joined Roy Rogers and the Sons of the Pioneers to become one of the most popular groups in America in that day. Tim was married to a devout Christian woman named Velma, who prayed earnestly for him, especially while he was on the road. He needed all the prayer he could get, because his lifestyle quickly began to erode under the pressures of being on the road and celebrity. His live became epitomized by the title of one of his hits song in that day: “Cigarettes, Whiskey, and Wild Wild Women.” Then one day in a hotel in Hazelton, Pennsylvania, Tim opened a letter from his

wife. Included was a verse of Scripture. Picking up a nearby Gideon Bible, Tim read the passage and realized how far he had drifted and that he needed a change in his life. In prayer he yielded his life to the Lordship of Christ. Later Tim Spencer would go on to established a Gospel Music publishing company called “Manna Music,” and a few years later his college-age son, Hal, brought him a song from a student missionary conference. Tim contacted the author of the words, Stuart Hine, and published the song. It became one of the most beloved hymns of the twentieth century. And that’s how the author of “Cigarettes, Whiskey, and Wild Wild Women” became the publisher who helped introduce the world to “How Great Thou Art.” But that only tells a part of the history of this song. The songs beginning are interesting

From a 19th century Swiss poet to Ukrainian missionaries to a singing cowboy, this is the improbable story of one of the world’s best-known hymns. If you’ve heard two hymns in your life, chances are you’ve heard “How Great Thou Art”... definitely a favorite to many. In terms of popularity, it’s generally considered second only to “Amazing Grace”. Covered by everyone from Elvis to Carrie Underwood, the beloved hymn didn’t start its life as a song. It began as a poem, a Swedish poem at that. In 1885, Carl Boberg, a Swedish editor and future politician, was walking home in the bayside town of Mönsterås, located on Sweden’s south-eastern coast. A thunderhead appeared on the horizon. Lightning flashed. Thunderclaps shook the air, sending Boberg running for shelter.

When the storm began to relent, he rushed home. He opened his windows to let in the fresh bay air, and the vision of tranquility that greeted him stirred something deep in his soul. The sky had cleared. Thrushes sang, and in the distance, the resonant knell of church bells sounded. With the juxtaposition between the roaring thunderstorm and such country calm as background, Boberg sat down and wrote “O Store Gud”—a poem that was originally written to simply be published in his own newspaper and read by local patrons, but through a winding series of events would become one of the greatest Christian Hymns of all time, “How Great Thou Art.”

After being published in the local newspaper the poem really fell flat and didn’t garner any particular attention, but an unknown Swede read the poem “O Store Gud” – “O Mighty God” and set the tune of a Swedish folk song, whose name has also been lost to history. When Boberg found out about it, he quickly re-published the poem once again in his own newspaper in 1891, this time with the musical notation added, and the poem/song began to gather more interest. In the late 1800s several versions were published, but it wasn’t until the early 1900s that “O Store Gud,” which translates literally to “O Mighty God,” hopped the Swedish border.

In the first decade of the 20th century the song was translated into German. A handful of years later a Russian version appeared. The first English language version wouldn’t be penned until 1925. But this English iteration, translated by the Swedish-American E. Gustav Johnson, is a far cry from the song we know today. It took another quarter century, a British missionary, and a new translation before the song developed into its now recognizable form.

In the early 1930s, Stuart K. Hine, an English missionary, first heard the Russian version of “O Store Gud” while in the Ukraine. For years he and his wife sang the song with locals before he finally sat down and translated it into English. Translation is of course more art than science, and Hine took some liberties, most particularly with the title, which in 1949 he rechristened “How Great Thou Art.”

Hine published his English translation alongside the Russian version in *Grace and Peace*, a magazine that he published and was circulated to missionaries in over 15 countries. The story of

“How Great Thou Art” might have ended here, in relative obscurity, were it not for a British-American theologian traveling to India, a singing cowboy, and a popular American evangelist on a self-described crusade.

When J. Edwin Orr, a British-American theologian and evangelist, travelled to India in 1954, music was the farthest thing from his mind. He was there to preach. But while there he heard an English version of “How Great Thou Art” sung by a Naga choir from the state of Assam in north-eastern India. He was so impressed by the song he brought it back to America and had it performed at a conference for college students where he was speaking.

In attendance at that fateful conference were the children of Tim Spencer, a singing cowboy and actor who had found fame singing in the Sons of the Pioneers alongside Bob Nolan and Roy Rogers. At that time, Spencer owned Mana Music, Inc, a publisher of Christian music. He quickly arranged to buy the rights to the song and then did what all good publishers do—he started pushing the song.

As late as 1954, “How Great Thou Art” remained all but unknown in the U.S., but with Mana Music’s backing the song eventually landed in the hands of George Beverly Shea, famed soloist in Billy Graham’s travelling crusade. Graham reportedly loved the song and quickly made it his evangelical crusade’s signature song. Given Graham’s reach, Shea all but introduced the song to the nation. He sang it live on radio, before stadiums filled with thousands of people—and during nationally televised events like the 1957 Madison Square Garden Crusade, which ran for 16 weeks and was viewed by an estimated 96 million people.

Then came Elvis. Though Shea and other popular artists like Tennessee Ernie Ford and Loretta Lynn recorded versions before him, Elvis’s recordings—his more restrained studio version from 1967 and his slightly looser live version from 1974, both of which earned him Grammys—are generally considered the canonical versions against which all others are compared. That said, many people today think first of Carrie Underwood’s chart-topping rendition from 2011.

Regardless of your favorite recording, when we reflect upon the various chance encounters and serendipitous occurrences that combined to birth “How Great Thou Art” and bring it to prominence, it’s hard not to be awed by the sheer improbability of it all; fate, dumb luck, God’s grace, call it what you will, the path from “O Store Gud” to “How Great Thou Art” is nothing if not unlikely.

(originally “works”)

¹O Lord my God, when I in awesome wonder consider all the **worlds Thy Hands hath made,
I see the stars, I hear the mighty thunder, Thy pow’r throughout the universe displayed,**

**²When through the woods and forest glades I wander I hear the birds sing sweetly in the trees,
When I look down from lofty mountain grandeur and hear the brook and feel the gentle breeze,**

**³And when I think that God, His Son not sparing, sent Him to die, I scarce can take it in;
That on the cross, my burden gladly bearing, He bled and died to take way my sin.**

**⁴When Christ shall come, with shouts of acclamation, and take me home, what joy shall fill my heart!
Then I shall bow in humble adoration and there proclaim, “My God, how great Thou art!”**

**Then sings my soul, my Savior God, to Thee, How great Thou art! How great Thou art!
Then sings my soul, my Savior God, to Thee, How great Thou art! How great Thou art!**

QUESTIONS TO PONDER:

(1) *The writer of the hymn lists several things that cause him to be awed by how great God is. List as many of these as you can and cite why/in what way that things might cause you to be filled with wonder and awed and God’s greatness?*

Example: singing birds / God give them voice

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

(2) *What causes you to be overcome/overwhelmed/awed by the majesty or grandeur of God? Name some things and tell us why?*

(3) *The hymn writer speaks of sitting and “wondering/pondering”, or “wandering/strolling” about, of just “thinking/considering.” What Christian disciple or practice might he be alluding to with these thoughts? How important is this for a believer? Do you think that as Christians that we take the time to do this today? If not why not? Name or list some things that may keep us from doing these things and what things may help us refocus or re-capture that sense of wonder and awe*

Example: we get too busy... slow down

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

¹O LORD, our Lord, how excellent is Your name in all the earth, Who have set Your glory above the heavens! ²Out of the mouth of babes and nursing infants You have ordained strength, because of Your enemies, that You may silence the enemy and the avenger. ³When I consider Your heavens, the work of Your fingers, the moon and the stars, which You have ordained, ⁴what is man that You are mindful of him, and the son of man that You visit him? ⁵For You have made him a little lower than the angels, and You have crowned him with glory and honor. ⁶You have made him to have dominion over the works of Your hands; You have put all things under his feet, ⁷All sheep and oxen—even the beasts of the field, ⁸the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea that pass through the paths of the seas. ⁹O LORD, our Lord, how excellent is Your name in all the earth!” –Psalm 8:1-9 (NKJV)

Psalms 8:3-4 says, “When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained; What is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him?” I have done exactly what David was doing in the above verses. I have looked up at the sky and considered the vastness of the heavens. In David's day, it must have seemed impossible to try to count the stars, but now we have made great strides in our telescopic technologies. I was reading of the attempt made in 2003 by some astronomers in Australia.

Consider what they found:

The Australian astronomers used some of the world's most powerful instruments to measure the brightness of all the galaxies in one sector of the cosmos - and then calculated how many stars they must have contained. From that measurement, they proceeded to work out a figure for the whole of

the visible Universe, which they believe is much more accurate than previous estimates. That figure - presented to the International Astronomical Union conference in Sydney - is the kind that really can be called astronomical:

- **70 sextillion, or seven followed by 22 zeroes... 70,000,000,000,000,000,000**
- **That is more than the total number of grains of sand in all the Earth's beaches and deserts - But that is only the stars in the visible Universe within range of our telescopes.**
- **Let me try to help put this in perspective. If we took only one quintillion of the stars and simply count them [from 0 to quintillion] one count per second, day and night, this will take 32 billion years! That is how long it will take to just "count" them.**
- **We can appreciate the vastness of our universe if we imagine going on a journey through space at the speed of light... that is 671 million miles per hour.**
- **When we leave the planet Earth towards the sun, at the speed of light, in only 8 minutes we reach the sun, which is 93 million miles away.**
- **If we wanted to leave our galaxy (the Milky Way) it would take us more than 50,000 years!**
- **'Are we there yet?' It would take 2 million years to reach the next galaxy and 10 billion years to get to the outer edge of the universe.**

But all of this was spoken into existence by God when He created this world. **Genesis 1:1** says it, **"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth."** God is great, but how can we understand His greatness? I believe with all my heart that you and I could never truly fathom the greatness of God. We only know what God, in His greatness, has chosen to reveal to us. And we only know it because He has chosen to reveal it to us. The greatness of God is truly so unsearchable and beyond reaching. If you could probe and explore the greatness of this infinitely holy, infinitely sovereign, infinitely powerful God for an entire life time and then on into eternity, when you got to the far reaches of in unending eternity you would not even be at the beginning of truly grasping the greatness of God. I believe that! The greatness of God that we can grasp in this life, God has pulled back the curtain to show us a glimpse... and that suffices us to know "How Great Thou Art!" God has chosen to reveal His greatness to us in this life, I believe in at least these three primary ways:

3 Chief Ways God Reveals His Greatness To Us:

- (1) **Through Creation** – **Romans 1:20** says, **"²⁰ For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse."**
- (2) **Through His Word** – Of course, all through God's Word, He is revealing Himself to us and we catch glimpse after glimpse of His greatness in His Word. **2 Timothy 3:16-17** says, **"¹⁶ All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, ¹⁷ that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work."** Scripture is "God-breathed" and is profitable for revealing who God is, how He works, His divine attributes... in other words His greatness.
- (3) **Through His Son** - The writer of Hebrews says in Hebrews 1:1-4, **"I God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, ² has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds; ³ who being the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by Himself purged our**

sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high,⁴ having become so much better than the angels, as He has by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they.”

No doubt God reveals Himself to be “great” and His greatness is unquestionable and unrivaled as revealed both in creation and in His Word, and in His incarnation as God in the flesh – Jesus. Here are three great New Testament passages that are a testament to the greatness of God.

3 Great New Testament Passage that Speak to the Greatness of God:

- (1) **Romans 11:33-36,** *“³³ Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out! ³⁴ “For who has known the mind of the LORD? Or who has become His counselor?” ³⁵ “Or who has first given to Him and it shall be repaid to him?” ³⁶ For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to whom be glory forever. Amen.”* What is so great about God according to these verses?
- (2) **Ephesians 1:15-19,** *“¹⁵ Therefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints, ¹⁶ do not cease to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers: ¹⁷ that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him, ¹⁸ the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, ¹⁹ and what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His mighty power.”* What stands out about the greatness of God in this passage?
- (3) **Ephesians 3:14-21,** *“¹⁴ For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, ¹⁵ from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, ¹⁶ that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man, ¹⁷ that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, ¹⁸ may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height—¹⁹ to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. ²⁰ Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, ²¹ to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.”* What does this passage tell us about the greatness of God?

So again, the Bible speaks and speaks often and fluently concerning the greatness of God. And yet, for our very practical daily experience what does the greatness of God mean for us and to us. How does the greatness of God intersect and impact my life. What does that mean for me today and tomorrow? Well, in the remainder of our time I want to just give you three reminder of the greatness of God that intersect and impact our life every day. These three things speak to the greatness of God.

THE GREATNESS OF GOD – THREE THINGS THAT REVEAL GOD’S GREATNESS

3 Areas in Which God is Great:

(1) He is great in His goodness

God is Good. Someone has said, “God is good all the time, all the time God is good!” We use the phrase, “God is good”. Of course He is good. He can’t be anything else.

Some facts about God's goodness:

- He is good because He is God
- He is not good because of what He does, but He is good because of who He is
- He is not good because He does good things for you
- He does good things for you because He is God
- He is good because He is God, but He is not God because He is good

"Oh, that men would give thanks to the Lord for His goodness, and for His wonderful works to the children of men!" –Psalm 107:8

God is good...all the time! God is not fickle...He doesn't have 'good days and bad days'. God is eternal...He is everlasting...He will not and cannot change! He is the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow. The God on the mountain is still God in the valley...The God of the day is still God in the night. Praise Him for His goodness!

(2) He is great in His grace

There is no measure to His grace. Two wonderful words are "grace" and "mercy." Although they are similar they have distinct meanings.

The difference between grace and mercy:

- (1) God's mercy is demonstrated by not giving us what we deserve.
- (2) God's grace is demonstrated by giving us what we do not deserve.

READ: Luke 15:11-24 Example of the Prodigal Son

He deserved to be turned away... he was a prideful choice to go his own way...and now he was suffering because of it. He deserved to be mocked and scorned for his foolish choice...but the father didn't give him what he deserved...that was mercy. When he drew near to the old home place, his father saw him...ran to him...and embraced him. He wasn't even worthy to be called a servant...but the father restored him as his son. The father called for the robe, the shoes, the ring, and a celebration. This is an illustration of God's mercy and grace.

His grace still amazes me. One of the most beloved hymns ever written is 'Amazing Grace'. It was penned by a former captain of a slave ship. His name, John Newton. Can you imagine that? A man who made his living buying and selling other human beings? His testimony is written in the words of that song... Amazing grace! (how sweet the sound) That sav'd a wretch like me! I once was lost, but now am found, Was blind, but now I see.

If you are saved this morning...it is ONLY by God's grace. Ephesians 2:8-9, *"For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God, not of works, lest any man should boast."* Salvation by grace is basic Bible doctrine. Many groups confuse grace and works. It is vital that we understand that God's grace is amazing because He saved us... not because we earn it or deserve it...but simply because of His grace! Praise God for His grace!

(3) He is great in His gift

The Apostle Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 9:15, "Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift! What are some of the great gifts that God bestows on us? Let me give you a few of them here. These are only three of the gifts He give to you and I... not an exhaustive list. He gives many

more than this, but these three are certainly a great taste of His great gifts poured out on us.

3 Gifts that Remind us that God is Great:

1. **That Gift is His Son, Jesus Christ** - John 3:16, *"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life."*
2. **That Gift is Eternal Life** - Romans 6:23, *"For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord."*
3. **That Gift means we have an inheritance** - Romans 8:16-17, *"The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together."*

SUMMARY

Why is God so great? Because He saw you and me in our sin, condemned to hell, and because He was not willing that any should perish; He sent His Son to become sin for us and to give His righteousness to all who will believe.

3 Areas of His Greatness:

- (1) **He is Great in His Goodness**
- (2) **He is Great in His Grace**
- (3) **He is Great in His Gift**