

### How Great Thou Art

Good morning! It is nice to see you all today. Today we begin a new series entitled Hymns. I know that is an unusual title for a series. Let me tell you how I came up with this series. Originally I had another series in mind, but if you remember the last time I spoke to you one of the points I told was to check with other spiritually mature believers and when I ran the title of the series past my wife she asked me a few questions about it and made me wonder if it was the best series to use. So last Sunday I was sitting in church God started speaking to me and telling me that I should probably change my series. He didn't tell me what to change it to at that time but on my train ride home God revealed to me what I was to speak about. I was sitting on the train listening to my iPod and I started looking through my albums and I came to an album I hadn't listened to in awhile. The name of that album was *Hymns Ancient and Modern*. As I began to listen to some of the songs, God started telling me that this was the series that I should do. If you know me at all, then you know that hymns and I have a long history. I grew up in a church with hymns and as I got older I started to really dislike hymns. But then later in life I started to respect the deepness of some of the hymns. So, each of the next 4 messages is inspired by a hymn.

In 1715 King Louis XIV of France died after a reign of 72 years. He had called himself the Great and was the monarch that made the famous statement that "I am the State." His court was the most magnificent court in Europe and his funeral was equally spectacular. As his body lay in state in a golden coffin orders were given that the cathedral should be dimly lit with only a special candle set above his coffin to dramatize his greatness. At the memorial 1000s waited in hushed silence. Then bishop Massilon began to speak. Slowly reaching down he snuffed out the candle and said, "Only God is great."

The hymn How Great Thou Art is a very popular hymn. There was a survey done a few years back and this particular hymn ranked #2 in popularity only behind Amazing Grace. It is said that even Elvis Presley loved this hymn and it was his favorite to sing. However, How Great Thou Art was not written to be a song. In 1886 a Swedish pastor Carl Boberg wrote a poem never thinking it would become the song that we know as How Great Thou Art. But as it happens someone took the poem and put it to music and started singing it in church. Eventually the song was translated into German and then later it was taken to Russia and translated into Russian. In 1933 an English missionary named Stuart Hine heard the song being sung in the Ukraine and he was so moved within his spirit and inspired that he translated the Russian into English. It is his translation that we now know as How Great Thou Art.

Psalm 48:1 says this, "Great is the Lord and greatly to be praised in the city of our God! His Holy mountain." Today I want to talk to you about the Greatness of God. As I thought about this message I asked myself this question. Where do you begin to talk about the greatness of God? The greatness of God is unlike anything we know. There are so many places that a person could start talking about God's greatness so where do I begin? Well usually the best place to begin is in the beginning. So that is where we are going to start today.

#### Point 1: God's greatness in creation

Genesis 1:1 "In the beginning God created the Heavens and the earth." When was the last time that you stopped to admire the greatness of Creation? Have you taken the time to look at this world and see how great God is for everything he has done in it? Now I know that I fail to do this as much as I should. But when you stop to think about it, God has created some pretty amazing things. Nature shows what a brilliant artist God is. Now I know that people say Michelangelo, Monet, and Picasso are the world's

greatest artists. Their paintings sell for millions of dollars so there must be some truth to their greatness as artists. But when we compare that to the art that God has created, it pales in comparison. Every day we get a sunrise and a sunset and the beauty of sunrise and sunsets makes all the other art seem dull. You know our house we have a flat roof on our house and we can go up and watch the sunset out over the city. When we do that we can see beautiful colors that remind us how great God is. The other day we were in the park and the men were planting new flowers. The flowers had all kinds of colors, red blue pink all coming to make a beautiful picture. Right now we are in the season where leaves are changing and you can look out on the mountain and you can see the red leaves, the orange leaves, and the yellow leaves all coming on God's canvas. We have a saying in English that says, "Take the time to stop and smell the roses. " We need to stop and smell the beauty of God's creation.

Nature isn't the only way that God is great. The animal kingdom shows us just how creative God is. Now I have 3 kids so I have spent a number of hours at zoos. I like to go to the zoo too. We look at animals and we can see just how creative God really is. I will tell you what the animal kingdom also shows us that God has a great sense of humor. One of my favorite animals at the zoo is the okapi. How many of you have ever seen an okapi? The Okapi has the head of a horse, the neck and body of a giraffe, and the back end of a zebra. For the longest time people didn't even believe it existed. It was a mythical creature. They called it the unicorn of Africa. So if you have never seen one, I have a picture for you to look at. (picture of okapi) It is a pretty unique looking animal but not as unique as this next animal. This next animal reminds me of a grandpa who has been sitting in a bathtub too long. That animal is the blob fish. Let me show you a picture of a blob fish. (picture of blob fish) You look at this picture and tell me that God does not have a sense of humor. God has this great creative streak in Him. And that creativeness is seen the most in humans. When God created the earth and all the things in it, He looked down from Heaven and said that it was good. But after he created man He looked down and said that it was VERY good. And as I look out over the crowd today, I see people of every size and shape each the same in certain ways but everyone unique in their own way. And yet we are all created in God's image. What I want is for us to sit back in awesome wonder and consider God's creation. And when we really take the time to appreciate creation, we will want to shout out just how great God is.

#### Point 2: God's great knowledge

The second thing that I want to talk about is the greatness of His knowledge. Do you ever take the time to sit back and reflect on the greatness of God's knowledge? Luke 12:6-7 tells us something about God's knowledge. "Are not 5 sparrows sold for 2 pennies? And not one of them is forgotten before God. Why even the hairs on your head are all numbered. Fear not you are of more value than many sparrows." Sparrows are a pretty insignificant bird. They aren't one the most colorful birds like a Flamingo or Peacock. They aren't a big bird like an ostrich. They are not majestic like eagles. The verses here tell us that 5 of them are sold for 2 pennies. But God remembers each and every one of them. As insignificant as they are, God doesn't forget them. How He does that I don't know because sometimes I even forget what I had for breakfast. This verse also tells us that God knows the number of hairs on our head. I know some of us here today have more hair than others. But I wanted to know how many hairs the average person has so wanting to know the answer I went to the internet. The internet knows everything. So I figured somebody had done the research and they did. The average person has 100,000 hairs on their head. Light haired people have more. Dark haired people have a little less and red haired people have the least. Yet God knows how many hairs each person here has today. Even those of us who have lost some of our hair, God knows how many hairs you have and you make it a lot easier on Him too. That is pretty impressive.

Jeremiah 1:5 tells us this, "Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations." Now here God is telling Jeremiah that He knew him before he was even thought of. I think that we can apply that to our own lives. God knew us before we were born. He knew each and every person on this planet before they were even born. You know there are over 7 billion people living on this planet right now? And God knows each one of them and knew each of them before they were even born. Combine that with every person that has ever lived on this planet. That's a lot of people. There are maybe 100 people here today and to be honest I don't know everyone's name that is here. And yet God can remember 7 billion names.

When was the last time you took the time to look at the stars? I know that is hard to do in the city. Here is what the bible says about the stars.

Psalms 147:4, "He determines the numbers of the stars. He gives to all of them their names."  
Isaiah 40:25-26, "To whom then will you compare me, that I should be like him? Says the Holy One. Lift up your eyes on high and see: who created these? He who brings out their host by number, calling them by name, by the greatness of his might, and because he is strong in power not one is missing."

These verses tell us that God has given each star a name and he calls it every night. And not a single star is ever lost without God knowing it. Scholars tell us that there were about 5000 stars visible in ancient Israel. That is pretty impressive that God can remember 5000 stars. But you know that modern astronomers estimate there to be 400 billion stars in our galaxy alone. And that there are 125 billion galaxies in the universe and they estimate that the total number of stars in the known universe to be 10 billion trillion. And the Bible tells us that God does not forget a single one of these stars. 10 billion trillions stars and every night God calls their name. And if stop right here God's creative power and his knowledge alone would be worth of our praise and admiration.

Point 3: God's Great grace and love

I could talk all day about how great God is. You know his greatness is unending. And for all the greatness that there is there is one area that I believe is His greatest greatness and that is His grace and love.

Romans 3:23 says, "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."  
And Romans 6:23 says this, "For the wages of sin is death but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." We are all sinners. We all fall short of the glory of God. Every person in this room today has fallen short of God's glory and because of that sin God says we deserve death, spiritual death. We deserve to be eternally separated from God. And there isn't anything that we can do of our own power to erase the penalty of our sin. There is no amount of good things we do that can outweigh the bad things we do. We can't say well I did 7 bad things today so tomorrow I need to do 8 good things because eventually we forget how many bad things we have done. And the bad outnumbered the good usually. But God in his love for us as humans had a plan. He had a plan that would pay the penalty for our sin. That plan began with a baby. We are coming up into the Christmas season where we celebrate the birth of Jesus. Jesus willingly gives up His place at the Father's right hand to become a baby. A baby that would grow up to one day be the Savior of the world. Think about the sacrifice Jesus made in coming to earth. For eternity he had been sitting at the Father's right hand, but because of the love God has for us he gave all of that up so that he could become one of us.

John 3:16 says, "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life." You see God loved the world so much that He gave his son as a sacrifice so that we could live eternally. Jesus told us that there is no greater love than this that we lay our

life down for someone else. And you know he did that for us. There are very few people in the world that I would lay my life down for and those are people that I love. I can't imagine offering my life as a sacrifice for someone that has wronged me. But that is what Jesus did. He laid his life down for us. No one forced him to stretch his arms out on that cross. He willingly laid his arms down to take on the burden of our sin. Have you considered the greatness of God's sacrifice? The bible tells us that God loved us even when we were still in our sin. He first loved us. We didn't choose him he chose us. He chose people who were dead in their sins because he loved them so much that he was even willing to sacrifice His own son. I want to read you verse three from the song How Great Thou Art.

“And 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 away my sin. Then sings my soul, my savior God, to thee, How great thou art. How great thou art. “

If there is one thing that you get out of today's message I want you to get this, God loves you so much that he sent his son to be the ultimate sacrifice. God wants you to be His child so badly that he gave up his one and only son so that you and I could be called his children. You see when we accept Christ as our Savior; we are adopted into God's family. We become His sons and daughters.

Christians, I want to challenge you today to marvel at the greatness of God. Look at his creation with new eyes and realize just how great it is. Step back and admire his infinite knowledge. Praise him that he knows your name. But most importantly, rejoice that you are forgiven. Rejoice that your name is written in the book of life and rejoice that you have found is great grace and great love. And if you are here today and have not yet discovered the joy in knowing Jesus and you have yet to discover the greatness of his love and grace I want to encourage you to discover it today. After the service there will be people in the back of the hall standing by the sign that says Lift. Those people would love to share with you how you can know the joy of God's grace and love. God is waiting to welcome you into His family. Let today be the day that you discover how great God is. Let's pray.