

Songs of Praise to God

1 TIMOTHY 1:17

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A little less than a year ago, the Pew Research Center published results of a survey of more than 4700 adults in the United States, where they found that roughly 9 in 10 believe in a “god” of some kind or another. As they break it down, though, they find that only a slight majority believe in the God of the Bible, defined as an “all-powerful, all-knowing, loving deity who determines most or all of what happens in their lives.” One in ten do not believe in God at all, and roughly one in three believe in a “spiritual force” or “higher power” of some kind. And what they have found is that this group is the demographic that is growing. Fewer people are believing in the God of the Bible, and more are believing in “something.” I posted a link to the research on the church’s Facebook page this past Friday. I would encourage you to check it out. They break it all down by age, and gender, and political party, and race, and level of education, and so on, and they make some interesting observations. But the most interesting observation to me is that our culture continues to change. As a society, we are believing in the God of the Bible less and less, and it is happening quickly.

But although this might be interesting (and perhaps a bit alarming), we are not here today to study the world around us. We are here to look at the word of God. We want the Word to shape us. We are not here to shape the word. This morning, then, as we have been singing and as we have been reading today, I want us to continue in our series of lessons from 1 Timothy by looking together very briefly at a single verse - 1 Timothy 1:17 (p. 1855).

By the way, we took the picture up here last Sunday afternoon after worship. After a good fellowship dinner, we got in the car and drove a narrow, winding road 17 miles up into the mountains, to a place known as Hurricane Ridge. Literally, we drove from sea level up over 5200 feet, into the snow, and this is where the road ended. I couldn’t find a good picture of God for this lesson, so I figured we could at least settle for a picture of something God made.

If you have been here for the past several weeks, you might remember that Paul writes this letter to Timothy, the young man who was preaching in the city of Ephesus. And as we’ve learned, Ephesus was known as being the home of the Greek and Roman goddess of fertility (Diana to Romans and Artemis to the Greeks). And I point this out as a reminder: We think about our own culture, and we need to realize that those in Ephesus who believed in the God of the Bible were vastly outnumbered; they did not have a 56% majority, as we do. In this context, and into this culture that completely rejected God as we know him, Paul wrote to the church, he

wrote to the preacher of the church, and this is Paul's summary of who God is. And it comes in a statement of praise (in 1 Timothy 1:17),

"Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen."

This morning, we have been reading from the word of God, and we have been singing songs of praise to God, all arranged around this passage.

I. And we started with an emphasis on God being our KING.

The Jewish people had a long history with various kings, leading up to the days of Herod, when those wise men came looking and said, ***"Where is He who has been born King of the Jews?"*** Jesus, then, was unique over all others in that he was born a King. Years later, as Jesus was interviewed by Pilate, Pilate said to him, ***"So, are you a king?"*** And Jesus answered, ***"You say correctly that I am a king. For this I have been born, and for this I have come into the world, to testify to the truth"*** (John 18:37). Jesus, then, is a king, the greatest of all kings. We think back to Psalm 95, where the author praises God,

***For the Lord is a great God
And a great King above all gods,
In whose hand are the depths of the earth,
The peaks of the mountains are His also.***

All of the other kings who have ever ruled have been imperfect - some were terrible, some tried to do good and failed - but God is different. He is the ***"great King above all gods."*** And so we praise him as our king. We honor him as royalty. We are subjects in his kingdom.

II. But Paul is just getting started, because he goes on to describe this King as being ETERNAL and immortal. **PPT**

These two go together, in a sense, with ETERNAL perhaps looking primarily to the past and IMMORTAL looking to the future. He is the king of all ages. He is the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. But the ETERNAL part of this, the backwards looking part of this, is referred to in the one Psalm written by Moses, where he says (in Psalm 90:2),

***Before the mountains were born
Or You gave birth to the earth and the world,
Even from everlasting to everlasting, You are God.***

God, therefore, has always been. Everything we see around us had a beginning. Even science agrees that this earth and everything we see around us had a beginning. God, though, is eternal. We think of that prophecy back in Isaiah 9:6 (the one Chris read for us earlier), where the child to be born would ***"...be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace."***

God is Eternal.

III. But he is also IMMORTAL, Paul says.

Some translations might refer to God being *“imperishable,”* and the idea is: God does not decay. He never dies. Of course, unless the Lord returns first, all of us in this room WILL decay. All of us will die. In fact, many of us are in the process of decaying right now! As we get older, we fall apart; our minds and bodies stop working. Sometimes it is a slow, gradual process, and sometimes it happens quickly and without warning. But all of us will decay. God, though, never dies or decays. He is *“immortal.”*

IV. Paul then goes on to describe God as being INVISIBLE.

Several weeks ago, Trae spoke on the woman at the well in John 4, and in that passage, Jesus said (in verse 24) that, *“God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.”* As a spiritual being, God is invisible. And that, of course, makes it hard for many people to believe. We want to see something before we believe in it, but God is invisible. Some people might make fun of us for having what they describe as an “invisible friend,” that we are only imagining God. But we need to remember that we believe in many things we cannot see - the wind, for example. I mentioned a few minutes ago that this place on the wall up here is known as “Hurricane Ridge.” I have camped partway up these mountains, and I can assure you: The wind on Hurricane Ridge is very real. In fact, on every hike we took out there, we were surprised by the number of downed trees - freshly splintered, as big around as I am tall, piles of sawdust where crews had cleared the trails. We didn’t actually “see” any wind last week, but the evidence for it is overwhelming. And the same is true of God: He is invisible, but the evidence is compelling.

V. And then, finally (as far as descriptions go), Paul describes Him as being the ONLY GOD.

And what I love about this is that Paul is contrasting the one true and living God to Diana or Artemis right there in Ephesus, and he is saying: There is no comparison! Artemis of the Ephesians is no god at all, because the God we worship is the *“only God.”* God is in a class all by himself. He is incomparable.

A time or two I’ve mentioned Jerrie Barber, a friend of mine who has been serving fulltime as an interim minister for a number of years now. He goes in when a church is between preachers, and he serves as something of a buffer and helps the church work through any issues they might have. He has a great website he describes as “New Shepherd Orientation,” with some very good advice for new elderships. By the way, I found out yesterday that his wife grew up in Cullman, Alabama (where Juanita’s brother is from). But I mention Jerrie, because (as I have mentioned before), Jerrie is a barefoot runner. He runs marathons. He runs marathons, barefoot! And did I mention that Jerri is a few months older than my parents? One thing that I’ve learned about marathons is that they usually have various “classes” or “divisions.” And I’m thinking that Jerrie probably does pretty well among other barefoot runners in their mid-70’s - because there aren’t any other barefoot runners in their mid-70’s! Jerrie is in a class all by himself. And isn’t that what Paul is saying here? God. There are no others. He alone can be described as deity. God is unique. There is no competitor. He is the *“only God.”*

Conclusion:

And all of us brings us to the end, where we have Paul’s reaction to God, and it comes in a statement of praise, *“To him be honor and glory forever and ever.”* He is the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God. How do we react to a God like this? How do we respond? The wise move is to acknowledge this quickly and to offer

ourselves in his service. The wise move is to surrender ourselves to him, to admit that he is God and we are not. Is there anything we're holding back from God? Is there any area where we are not allowing God to rule in our lives? If you are not able to say "**Amen**" with Paul, we would invite you to change that this morning.

This awesome God we've been singing about and singing to this morning sent his only Son into this world to die in our place. He came back from the dead, and before ascending back into heaven, he told his followers to make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit (Matthew 28:18-20). His mission is our mission, to seek and save the lost. We would love to see all people buried with Christ in baptism, for the forgiveness of sins. If we can help in any way, we invite you to let us know as we continue singing about this awesome God we serve. Let's stand and sing together...

To comment on this lesson: fourlakeschurch@gmail.com