

## How Great Thou Art

Welcome to **Week 2** of our Series; **Hymn'd Up**. Over the next six weeks we will be diving into some of the most popular hymnal songs and from those songs; we want to not only praise God through singing, but to also learn the background behind these songs and why they came about. If we are not careful, we can learn a song and never know the true meaning behind it. You can sing the words out of a hymnal, or on a monitor and they are just words. But, to know the reason why you are singing what you are singing makes all the difference in your worship.

This week we will be looking at the hymn, **“How Great Thou Art”**.

***A British minister, Stuart K. Hine, contributed heavily to the version of “How Great Thou Art” that we are familiar with today. However, the original text came from a Swedish preacher, Carl Boberg, who wrote his lyrics after a unique experience on the southeast coast of Sweden.***

***Boberg’s inspiration for “How Great Thou Art” came from a visit to a beautiful country estate on the southeast coast of Sweden. He got caught in a midday thunderstorm with awe-inspiring moments of flashing violence, followed by a clear brilliant sun. Soon afterward he heard the calm, sweet songs of the birds in nearby trees.”***

***The experience prompted Boberg to “fall to his knees in humble adoration of his mighty God.”***

The Hymn **“How Great Thou Art”** is a hymn developed out of humble adoration for a mighty God as Boberg reflected on the extent of God’s creation and power. **“How Great Thou Art”** is not a question. He is not asking, “How Great Is Our God?” “How Great Thou Art” is a proclamation. It is a confession of faith. The writer says,

***“Oh Lord, my God  
When I, in awesome wonder  
Consider all the worlds Thy hands have made  
I see the stars, I hear the rolling thunder  
Thy power throughout the universe displayed  
  
Then sings my soul, my Savior God to Thee  
How great Thou art, how great Thou art”***

So the question is not whether God is great? It is not a question of whether God is valuable. Instead, it is a confession of faith that challenges us to consider how great and valuable God is to you? Have you considered all the worlds His hands have made?

Even Job, who we reflected on last week with the Hymn, “**It is Well**”, had to pause and acknowledge the greatness of God when God showed up and began to question him. God asks him, were you there when I made the stars or the earth? Were you there when I created all things and provided for all things? God essentially asks him.... “Do you know how great I am and how good I am?” Here was Job’s reply

**Job 42:5–6 (NIV)** <sup>5</sup> My ears had heard of you but now my eyes have seen you. <sup>6</sup> Therefore I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes.”

Job’s consideration of the greatness of God led him to humble himself in worship and repentance before Him. This is what this hymn is about!

As we dive into the theological truths in this hymn, I want us to look at a particular Psalm of David and his humble reflection on the greatness of God. Turn with me to **Psalm 138**, and let’s read together.

**Psalm 138 (NIV)** <sup>1</sup> I will praise you, LORD, with all my heart; before the “gods” I will sing your praise. <sup>2</sup> I will bow down toward your holy temple and will praise your name for your unfailing love and your faithfulness, for you have so exalted your solemn decree that it surpasses your fame. <sup>3</sup> When I called, you answered me; you greatly emboldened me. <sup>4</sup> May all the kings of the earth praise you, LORD, when they hear what you have decreed. <sup>5</sup> May they sing of the ways of the LORD, for the glory of the LORD is great. <sup>6</sup> Though the LORD is exalted, he looks kindly on the lowly; though lofty, he sees them from afar. <sup>7</sup> Though I walk in the midst of trouble, you preserve my life. You stretch out your hand against the anger of my foes; with your right hand you save me. <sup>8</sup> The LORD will vindicate me; your love, LORD, endures forever— do not abandon the works of your hands.

Again, so the question is not whether God is great. The question is, **Have you taken time to consider how great He is?** How great is GOD to you? There are three truths in this Psalm, and this hymn, reminds us of regarding the greatness of God.

### **Reminder #1 - God is Great Enough to Worship**

**Psalm 138:1 (NIV)** <sup>1</sup> I will praise you, LORD, with all my heart; before the “gods” I will sing your praise.

In other words “In the presence of the gods I will make music to you” as if to say, I have no problem worshiping you in the presence of all other gods because they all pale in comparison with YAHWEH! Only YAHWEH is worthy of our praise! David is basically saying that because of the greatness of Yahweh all other gods are made nothing. He is not afraid of worshiping the one true God in the presence of all others. Notice David’s attitude is one of wholehearted worship and his wholehearted worship is offensive.

In fact, wholehearted worship by nature is always offensive! The question is not whether God is greater than the other “gods”. It is whether He is greater than the other “gods” to you. For the Psalmist to call for a demotion of other god’s, He is not implying that there are “gods” which are greater. He is not implying another thing is higher. He is calling for the demotion of them within the heart of the people. “How Great Thou Art” is a hymn that proclaims the greatness of God. The question is not whether God is great, it is How Great is He to you?

**How is it that wholehearted worship is offensive?** Think about it! To worship wholeheartedly means that you must hold nothing back. You can not compartmentalize your worship or praise. Wholehearted worship is offensive because it offends the false gods that compete for our attention, and the idols we prop up in our own heart.

**Tim Keller** writes this about idols in his book **Counterfeit God’s**:

*An idol is anything more important to you than God. Anything that absorbs your heart and imagination more than God. Anything you seek to give you what only God can give. Anything that is so central and essential to your life, that should you lose it, your life would feel hardly worth living.”*

The “gods” competing for our time and attention are not limited to objects made of stone or metal. They are things we have made essential to our life. Here are a few examples of how we have idolized other things in our hearts:

**“Life only has meaning or I only have worth if...**

***I have power and influence over others.” (Idolatry of POWER)***

***I am loved and respected by \_\_\_\_\_.” (Idolatry of APPROVAL)***

***I have this kind of pleasure experience” (Idolatry of COMFORT & PLEASURE)***

***I am able to get mastery over my life in the area of \_\_\_\_\_.” (Idolatry of CONTROL)***

***I have a certain level of wealth, financial freedom, and very nice possessions.” (Idolatry of MATERIALISM)***

***I am adhering to my religion’s moral codes and accomplished in its activities.” (Idolatry of RELIGION)***

***Mr. or Ms. “Right” is in love with me.” (Idolatry of RELATIONSHIP)***

The psalmist proclaims the greatness of God in the presence of other god’s and we should too. This means that wholehearted worship doesn’t just choose God when it’s convenient, but especially when it’s hard. **If you can only worship God as long as you don’t look silly or get humiliated, you need to pull down that idol of Power and remember the greatness of your**

**God. If you can only follow God as long as you don't experience too many stress demands, you must pull down the idol of comfort and remember the greatness of your God.**

How Great is God to You?

*Illustration:* When RJ and Elayna were in Colombia, the Embera listen to bible stories, but will still go back to their witch doctors when they have an issue. They don't view "gods" as great or not, but rather as useful or not. So, if coming to church can help in some way they will come..but they have a hard time surrendering to Jesus in a way that makes Him God of all. They think God can bless them, but they still fear other "god's" curses.

I believe that many of us live this way. We follow Jesus and yet can't follow Him wholeheartedly because of the comfort, success, power, or relationship that we feel we might lose.

**What Idol do you need to demolish in order to show that God is great enough to worship? What god has the attention of your heart that needs to be offended so that you can wholeheartedly worship Jesus?**

**Reminder #1 - God is Great Enough to WORSHIP**

**Reminder #2 - God is Great Enough to TRUST**

**Psalm 138:2-3 (NIV) <sup>2</sup> I will bow down toward your holy temple and will praise your name for your unfailing love and your faithfulness, for you have so exalted your solemn decree that it surpasses your fame. <sup>3</sup>When I called, you answered me; you greatly emboldened me.**

God says that He has so exalted His solemn decree that it surpasses His fame. In other words, the integrity of God's word is bound up within His very character. It is to say that God can no more lie than He can cease being God.

**Numbers 23:19 (NIV) <sup>19</sup> God is not human, that he should lie, not a human being, that he should change his mind. Does he speak and then not act? Does he promise and not fulfill?**

When humans make a promise we can never guarantee it. Why? Because the fulfillment of our promises is always dependent on something outside of us. Even with the best intentions, we can't control whether we live or die. We can't control what people do. So, our word is never firm or truly dependable. God's word is always dependable because His promises do not depend on any other thing. God does not need any one's permission or help. If God makes a promise it is done. It is never a matter of IF with God, but WHEN.

For people, often our promises exceed our own capabilities. How often has a politician or leader made a promise of what they would do only to find out that they greatly under delivered. We oversell ourselves and underperform. This text says that God can never oversell himself. God

always overperforms. Even His promises don't capture the greatness of who He is because He is greater still!

God is boundless, but yet He chooses to bind himself to something. **He binds himself to His very promises to us.**

**Psalm 119:89 (NIV)** <sup>89</sup> Your word, LORD, is eternal; it stands firm in the heavens.

**Hebrews 6:17–18 (NLT)** 17 God also bound himself with an oath, so that those who received the promise could be perfectly sure that he would never change his mind. 18 So God has given both his promise and his oath. These two things are unchangeable because it is impossible for God to lie. Therefore, we who have fled to him for refuge can have great confidence as we hold to the hope that lies before us.

This text says we hold to this hope. But I want to show that the greatness of our God provides a different kind of hope.

When we use the phrase, "I Hope" what do we mean? Sometimes we associate our hopes with something we want, but don't really know for sure will happen. Will our team win? We hope...we may not expect them to, but we want them to. "I hope I get the job"- I have a desire, but there's no certainty that it will come to pass. "Our only hope is if a cure for this disease is found."- We have hope that if a cure comes we can be saved, but we have no confidence that the cure will come, or that it will do what we think it will do.

Biblical hope is deeper than that. It is not simply to desire something good in the future. It is the confidence and expectation that something good will come. Biblical hope is more than a longing, it is a certainty.

**"Biblical hope not only desires something good for the future — it expects it to happen."- John Piper**

Hope is based on two things: Desire and Expectation. You and I hope in things that we expect to fulfill our desires. The way you live reveals what you place your hope in. The things you chase reveal where your hope is. **Does your life reflect hope in God or in something else?**

Our God is so great that not only does He give us hope that desires something good, but it is a hope that is sure to happen.

**Reminder #1 - God is Great Enough to Worship**

**Reminder #2 - God is Great Enough to Trust**

### Reminder #3 - God is Great Enough to Save Us

Note the reasons why David praises this great God. He confesses the ways by which God has saved him and his people. He reflects on the goodness of God and remembers these things:

#### God hears the prayers of His people and answers

**Psalm 138:3 (NIV)**<sup>3</sup> When I called, you answered me; you greatly emboldened me.

God is not just looking down from a cloud uninvolved or involved in our lives. He hears and answers.

- Take a moment to reflect and remember all the ways that God has heard and answered your prayers.
- Take a moment to remember all the ways God has saved and protected you.
- Take a moment to remember that you didn't get here by your strength, but by His goodness.

Our lives are a testimony of God's greatness and goodness. God doesn't just change our situations, He will change us in the situation. David says, "He emboldened me". This means that God doesn't always remove the problem, but He gives you the courage to make it through the problem. God does more than rescue us from tough situations, he uses tough situations to make us better and to look more like Him!

#### God humbles the prideful and exalts the humble.

**Psalm 138:4–6 (NIV)**<sup>4</sup> May all the kings of the earth praise you, LORD, when they hear what you have decreed. <sup>5</sup> May they sing of the ways of the LORD, for the glory of the LORD is great. <sup>6</sup> Though the LORD is exalted, he looks kindly on the lowly; though lofty, he sees them from afar.

David reminds us that God is no respecter of persons. Even kings must worship. God is so great that he will take even the most lowly and rescue them when they call upon Him.

#### God preserves our lives.

**Psalm 138:7 (NIV)**<sup>7</sup> Though I walk in the midst of trouble, you preserve my life. You stretch out your hand against the anger of my foes; with your right hand you save me.

To preserve means that I could've died and not made it. To preserve means that forces were at work to destroy me. David says, "I should've been dead, but yet here I am!"

#### God made us and will not abandon us

**Psalm 138:8 (NIV)**<sup>8</sup> The LORD will vindicate me; your love, LORD, endures forever— do not abandon the works of your hands.

Even if you abandon God, He will not abandon you. Even if your eyes are off of him, his eyes are still on you! God has made us and is invested in our future.

How can we not worship when we remember how great our God is.

1. God is great enough to worship
2. God is great enough to trust
3. God is great enough to save us

### **Invitation:**

Ultimately the reason we know God is great enough to worship, trust, and save us is because God the Father, sent God the Son, Jesus, to rescue us.

God is boundless, but yet binds Himself to His promises for us. Even when that promise meant that God would have to become a man and die, He did.

God is great enough to be trusted not just because of the words we read on a page. But because the word became flesh.

The Questions: How Great is God to You boils down to this: How Great is Jesus to you?

*The hymn reveals this in verse 2:  
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*

Jesus is worthy of worship! Jesus is worthy of trust! Jesus is great enough to save!

How Great is Jesus to you? Is He worthy of wholehearted devotion?

What Idols (from above) do you need to lay down?

**If God is not worth your surrender, I am not sure what god you are worshipping, but it is not the true God.**

**If God has not changed your plans or direction in your life, I am not sure what god you are worshipping but it is not the true God.**

**If God has not convicted you or challenged you about your sin, I'm not sure what God you are worshipping but it's not the true God.**

**"If your god never disagrees with you, you might just be worshipping an idealized version of yourself." -Tim Keller**