



“THE ETERNALNESS OF GOD”
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Psalm 90:1-6, 13-17

It’s a Psalm of Moses. It’s one of the very few in the Book of Psalms that is attributed to the author of the law, the bringer of the covenant. It’s a Psalm that speaks praise to God and at the same time begs mercy and humility and cries out to God.

Forty years ago this week on Tuesday Time Magazine ran an article that set the theological world on its ear. They asked the question that had been kicked around in few classrooms in some seminaries across the country. In October 25, 1965, Time Magazine ran an article in which the cover story asked the question, Is God Dead? Turned the world upside down. People began to debate and to argue, to write theses and to come out of the woodwork and present their point, both sides. God is dead. No, no God is very much alive. Religion is dead. No, no religion is very much alive, but doesn’t make any sense. And it went back and forth.

It was an interesting question because it was posed, not by Time Magazine, but rather by a United, well actually at that time, a Methodist professor in a school called Candler School of Theology in Emory University, a professor of theology. He was a Methodist but a self-proclaimed atheist. I have not figured that one out yet, how you can be a Methodist and an atheist. But he proclaimed himself an atheist and taught theology at Candler School of Theology in Emory in Atlanta. His point was that religion has taken God out of God and therefore God is irrelevant. If you were to ask him today, were he still alive, what he meant by that I think he would have changed his statement slightly. That religion has deemed God to be irrelevant because religion has become too liberal. Religion has become too scientific, too enlightened if you will.

But the irony of this is that this article that Time Magazine wrote wasn’t the beginning of this, nor was this professor the beginning of this argument and this debate about the life or death of God. No, as a matter of fact, it had been offered and argued about eighty to ninety years before this in Germany and in various places across Europe. Jean’Paul Sarte was one of the major proponents of the God is Dead Movement. He was a philosopher, if you will, and Friedrich Nietzsche was the other philosopher who was important in this debate and there was one other guy, a Danish guy, named Soren Kierkegaard. Now Kierkegaard was not so much in the God is Dead part as he was into existentialism.

Now I just threw you a whole bunch of stuff. Don’t worry about it. What it basically means is that we had for four hundred years to that point been talking about the enlightenment. That is how reason and rational thought and the scientific method can begin to understand and unlock the mysteries of our world. The philosophy of this scientific method and this enlightenment theory is that we are thinking human beings and we have the capacity to solve problems, problems that have plagued us for a long time, for centuries. For five hundred years science had become the thought of the day, the way of dealing with the issues of life. We have come a long way in those five hundred years. We’ve healed various diseases and cured them, wiped them off the face of the earth through the scientific method. We have developed manufacturing capabilities that astound us even yet today. A lot of us take it for granted, but it is still astounding, it’s fascinating how we can make something so small. What’s the newest thing that Apple came out with, the Nano. The Nano is a little bitty iPod, holds 10,000 songs all on microchips. If that’s not astounding, I don’t know what is. Just a little bitty, nothing bigger than a credit card, a calculator but it also has a TV screen on it, too. Just in case you weren’t thrilled enough with that.

We have done things that we can't even begin to explain. We've sent ships to Mars and probes to other planets and out past Pluto, discovered a tenth planet. Things that have happened in our scientific worldview has dramatically changed our understanding of how things work and who we are in the midst of it. But this isn't anything new. We've been doing this for five hundred years, step by step.

Friedrich Nietzsche was talking about the evolution of humanity and as a result in his existential mindset, that is to say that the only thing that matters right now is right now, the here and now in our life span. Existentialism talks about where we are right now and all that we need is right before us and it's how well we use what is before us that will make our life good or evil, or good or bad, or complete or incomplete. Now that's an overly simplistic definition of existentialism but it really does exist within this time frame of our life. Anything beyond that is irrelevant.

Nietzsche argued that human beings have gotten to the point now where we're thinking so dramatically more than we ever did before and we are able to solve problems and riddles and issues of science and technology that we have never thought about before and in our so doing we are evolving. Nietzsche argued that there was a point in which humanity could become greater than it is now to the point where we would become super human, where we would begin to develop our worlds. We would understand the world around us and we would begin to manipulate it in different ways. I'm not so sure that Nietzsche wasn't completely wrong there. I think we have gotten to that point where we have manipulated our world. We know everything there is to know about our world, or almost, we're getting there. We've conquered space. We've conquered medical science. We've conquered this. We've conquered that. We've got it down pat. That's what the world wants us to believe.

But Nietzsche went a step further than that and said that we don't need God. God is for those who are superstitious. And there's a great deal of folks who back in the 1960's kind of went along with that. They said you're right. Maybe God is irrelevant now because we have done all these things and we've figured out ways to solve the problems of the world. But there's one small problem with that.

I have been asked at least once, sometimes twice a week, for the last several weeks pushing on several months, from somebody or another in the congregation or out on the street when they find out who I am and what I, and they approach me very tentatively and they kind of ask me, "do you think this it?" and I'd have to say, "what are you talking about?" and they would say "well you know back in December there was this huge under sea earthquake that made the tsunami come about and wiped out tens of thousands of people and left hundreds of thousands homeless. And then we had this hurricane took place and just totally devastated a whole city and a whole area of our Gulf Coast and then there was another one right after and another one right after that and now we've got another one down in the Gulf and then there was this earthquake that took place over in Pakistan and now there is this volcano that went down in Guatemala and don't you think that maybe this might be?" And I would say "no." They'd say, "Why? How can you be sure?" And I say. "Because I know who God is." And they would say, "What?"

To know who God is, is to know that these things happen. It doesn't make them easier or more understandable. It doesn't make them more palatable. It doesn't make them any less of a cause for suffering for those who are enduring it. But they happen. But because I know who God is and more importantly, God knows who we are, we can endure.

This Psalm of Moses was a statement of faith in the midst of a people who were changing their entire life and their entire lifestyle, leaving the bonds and bondage of slavery, wandering through a wilderness, headed toward someplace they couldn't yet fathom, Moses wrote a word of hope. "Oh Lord you have been our dwelling place in all generations. You were there before the

mountains ever came up out of the ground. You were there before the earth or the world was formed. You were there and you are here with us now.” And that sense of hope, that sense of assurance, that sense of faithfulness is what kept Moses from going crazy for forty years in the wilderness. More than that, that sense of hope and faith and assurance is what kept Paul going and what kept Peter going and what kept all of the others going, the famous theologians throughout the years. It would be what would keep a young German priest, a Lutheran pastor sitting in a Nazi prison cell, going even through his own death. This God that has been here, this God that was here before here was here knows us intimately and loves us. I don’t think Nietzsche quite fully understood that. Nietzsche was more into the philosophical stuff. Moses was into the relationship.

What differentiates us as believers from the rest of the world who are unbelievers is that we know who God is and more importantly God knows who we are. As Isaiah said, “Before I was even born while I was still in the womb you knew me, you called me by name and you claimed me.” That’s our mission. That’s our purpose. That’s our identity because we are in relationship with God, a God who was before all time and who is now and walks with us and who will be after.

I think Time Magazine stopped short because they asked, “Is God Dead?” We know the answer to that. No, God is very much alive and well and walking with us side by side every step of the way in every breath we take and every word we speak and every way that we help one another. That’s the hope that we have and the hope in which we live. As Paul would write, “God loves us so much that there is nothing in this world that will be able to separate us from that great love, nothing.” That’s the eternalness of God from everlasting to everlasting. You are God. That’s our hope. God’s not dead. God’s very much alive even forty years later. In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen!