

Series: 1 Timothy 2025

Sermon: "God's glory! God's glory!"

Text: 1 Timothy 1:17; 3:16; 6:15-16

RGJR/FBCCS 7-26-25 **UNEDITED**

- I'm still in what I call "*sermon series launch limbo*" for my next series of messages. I've got a meeting scheduled with the very busy FBC elders to decide about the sermon plan on my heart.
- While we continue to live a bit unsettled as a church, at least unsettled by modern, American, Sunday-centric church standards, meaning essentially, we still don't possess our own building—I have consistently had an ancient church on my mind and in my heart.
- God didn't give us checklists for the organizational and practical matters of what a church should do. He didn't tell us what size building or how many parking spaces and nursery beds a *real* church ought to have in a *real* church building.
- He didn't even tell us exactly what the order of service should be at 10:30 when we gather every week on Sunday (or Saturday). There is very little to go on in Scripture concerning such practical matters.
- Instead, God gave us ***principles, values, ways to think*** & then to be that could be expressed in a multitude of ways, *practically* speaking.
- One way God gave us these, which has captured my attention, is the story of the *Ephesian* church. I still can't let it go. That church is in the book of ***Acts***. There is then an ***epistle*** from Paul that they received. There are two letters sent as ***directives to Timothy*** and as ***apostolic correctives*** to that church. Then, finally, there is a ***stern warning*** to that church in Ephesus directly from the resurrected, ascended Lord Jesus himself in ***Revelation 2***.
- It seems clear to me that what FBC needs most now is to know and to remain true to our biblical values and to the Cosmic mission of redemption to which we have been called TOGETHER. This is how a ***church*** (small "c") glorifies God—with or without owning a building—at least if what Paul says to the *Ephesian* church still applies to us.

- So, I am considering launching into a series of messages on the next part of the *Ephesian Church* story found in **1 Timothy**. I am holding off on that launch until I can meet with the FBC elders early in August and decide. That next part of the Ephesian story is, after all, very strong apostolic correction and correction is never comfortable.
- But meanwhile, you have come to worship today and part of our worship has traditionally included a biblically based sermon. I hope I would not waste your time and disappoint you with anything less than that for the next two weeks.
- I have two **big-idea sermons** drawn from prepping to preach **1 Timothy** that I think are absolutely wonderful, *if I do say so myself*. Of course, they are *wonderful* because they are revealed by God in his Book not because they are *my* ideas or my sermons!
- This first *sermon-truth* today *amazes* me. The second sermon, Lord willing for next week, still *perplexes* me as to how to carry it out.
- So, let's do some Bible Study together this AM. I don't often emphasize how my **sermon-sausage** is made. However, this is a sermon about how God can show even a slow thinking sometimes-fool great truths through persistent Bible study. It is a sermon that is also about the **process** of understanding God's Word better. There will be a conclusion or application that we all already know but might need to hear it emphatically again right now in FBC.
- Last *Saturday*, after a *very* busy week and day, I got to attend a three-hour, non-professional musical play my granddaughter "*Princess Chickenpitz*," was in. I saw a bunch of you there as well. To be honest, I was not looking forward to trying to stay awake for three hours listening to teenagers and children sing difficult Broadway songs.

- Fortunately, it was at the ENT center so the seating and AC were comfortable. Unfortunately, that comfort presented another challenge to staying awake.
- The lengthy play was the well-known ***Fiddler on the Roof***. In the end, the kids did a good a job. I stayed awake and I also ***stayed thinking***.
- You see, I had a problem with 1 Timothy on just part of my mind. There is a small, beautiful section at the end of chapter 3, a section on *Jesus and godliness*, that I just still could not resolve as to why God put it there at that point. It seemed to me as if it didn't fit there—as if it interrupted the flow of the letter. Boy was I wrong!
- So, back to 3 hours of ***Fiddler on the Roof*** at the ENT center last Saturday evening...
- What is the song *Tevye* sings while usually making one of his now famous often copied dance moves AND is also the song that then becomes a ***refrain*** repeated at important points in that play? We can sing it with just the repetition of one word...***Tradition! Tradition!***
- During those 3 hours, my insight was not even about the concept of "*tradition*." My insight was about how the author made his point, which was about *changing traditions*, ***by repeating that refrain***. Sometimes the repetition seemed to interrupt the flow. I realized, that was on purpose. It was done to remind the audience of what the play was really about—to remind them of what was important as all the details rolled on for 2 ½ hours—3 if you counted intermission.
- *The light bulb came on*. I've seen that in many places in Scripture. I find something that feels out of place and maybe even repeated and I recognize it is there because God wants to pull our focus back to His main point. God wants us to see that all the details come back to something bigger that is what matters—a truth about Him—a whole life-governing value—something to which we should relate to all the

commands and other material around it. It is to be the **foundation**—the **motivation**—the **controlling factor** for the meaning in that text.

- Here is another just example of this in a big way. Some years ago, while studying the **5 Mosaic books** of the OT, I ran across some big fat, often poorly edited, thus repetitive books by a theologian named **John Sailhamer**. His insight along these lines changed the way I viewed the **Pentateuch**. It changed, as he reinforced my sense that God wasn't having Moses write about Laws so that people could work hard and be good people on their own and be acceptable to Him. The message of the Pentateuch was, in fact, just the opposite of that. It was about an absolutely necessary coming provision of God's grace for those who could never be made **righteous** by Law.
- Where explicitly was God's necessary empowering grace in all these OT writings—where was the *Ephesians* 2:8-9 grace statement of the OT?
- I had been raised to believe the OT focus was just on the Law and that we too ought to try to obey commandments to be righteous—but never was the OT about being by righteous and accepted by God by grace through faith.
- I'll now rattle off some references too quickly for you to remember them but you would need to discover this or at least validate this mere example for yourself by careful study anyway. The references are in my sermon manuscript online if you want them.
- At least 5 times from **Genesis to Deuteronomy**, Moses sort of **interrupts** what is basically historical **narrative** descriptions with **poetic** forms of writing. Some of the five are even called "**songs**." To my surprise even the NIV recognizes each of these segments as different and shows so by indenting them as poetry or music.

- The **1st** is in **Genesis 3:14-19** when God curses the woman, the man and the serpent after their self-willed choices to sin and try to do life on their own but also promises a victorious Serpent-killer to come.
- The **2nd** is in **Genesis 49:2-27** When Jacob blesses his sons as Israel and promises a Redeeming Ruling Lion to come from Judah.
- The **3rd** is in **Exodus 15: 1-19** when Miriam and Moses suddenly break out in song after crossing the Red Sea and the destruction of the Egyptian armies pursuing them also singing of Covenantal leader who will provide a everlasting dwelling place for his people.
- The **4th** is in **Numbers chapters 23 and 24** where the tone changes from the rest of the narrative language and, of all people, out of the mouth of **Balaam** the disloyal prophet, come two poetic oracles that promise a powerful conquering King to come for His people.
- The **5th** and last example is in **Deuteronomy 32** where, once again, seemingly out of the blue, Moses decides to **sing** his farewell message to the next generation Israelites who he says will fail again to keep the Law but he also promises an Atoning Deliverer will come.
- Again, you'll need to validate this pattern with your own careful study of God's Word but I tend to agree with **Sailhamer**. Let me read you a well-written summary of what I agree with written by someone, I know nothing about, named **Jason Dulle**, in a review of one of Sailhamer's big thick books he writes: **Sailhamer argues that the structure of the Pentateuch reveals the meaning of the Pentateuch. While most of us think the purpose of the Pentateuch is to record the Law of Moses for Israel, Sailhamer argues convincingly that this is not Moses' primary intention.... Sailhamer argues that the structure of the Pentateuch reveals that its primary purpose was to confront its readers with their inability to keep the Law, and the need to live a life of faith while they wait for the**

promised seed: the future king from Judah (Gen 15:6; Ex 19:9; Num 14:11; 20:12). The golden calf incident lies at the heart of the Pentateuch, exposing the heart of Israel's problem: their heart. That's why the Pentateuch ends with an acknowledgment that something needs to be done with the human heart for people to be able to keep God's covenant (DT 30:6).

- Each one of those 5 poetic or musical contexts of Scripture that seem to interrupt the flow of narrative form—each one of them has something to do with God's coming ***gracious*** provision of one who will graciously be able to deal with the real human heart problem.
- What does this ***illustrate***? I'm reading through the Pentateuch and what do I read in the stories—sin—sin—sin—law—law—law—law—sin—sin—sin—law—law—law. So, I might conclude, if I didn't know the NT, that Moses is writing about Law as an answer to human sin.
- So, Moses does what Tevye did. He interrupts with changes in form that sing out loudly—not ***Tradition! Tradition!*** But rather **God's gracious provision! God's gracious provision!**
- So, what do *Tevye* and *Moses' example* and their songs have to do with a short, seemingly out-of-place passage in **1 Timothy 3:16**? **I'm glad you asked!**
- However, before I settle your now very hungry curiosity, I should take you to one other OT context that is relevant. This time it is not because of its ***literary form interrupting*** like the examples I just cited but because of its ***theology***. It is in **Exodus 33: 12** and following.
- God has told Moses to lead the Israelites. Moses is struggling with the details of that calling. The ***golden calf*** incident has exposed that the peoples' hearts are still, to some degree, idolatrous rather than hearts fully trusting God to be their gracious guide and deliverer.

- I don't have time to read the whole passage but Moses is being *gutsy* pressing God to show his presence with him to prove to the people that he is their God appointed leader. Pick up Moses brave requests of God in **Exodus 33:17**...¹⁷ **And the LORD said to Moses, "I will do the very thing you have asked, because I am pleased with you and I know you by name."** ¹⁸ **Then Moses said, "Now show me your glory."** ¹⁹ **And the LORD said, "I will cause all my goodness to pass in front of you, and I will proclaim my name, the LORD, in your presence. I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion."** ²⁰ **But,"** he said, **"you cannot see my face, for no one may see me and live."** ²¹ **Then the LORD said, "There is a place near me where you may stand on a rock."** ²² **When my glory passes by, I will put you in a cleft in the rock and cover you with my hand until I have passed by."** ²³ **Then I will remove my hand and you will see my back; but my face must not be seen."**

- God the Father does not have a body. This event could be about a preincarnate appearance of the Son of God. I think it more likely that we should interpret the word "**back**" not as "**backside**" but rather as "**what follows**" me or "**comes behind**" me. In other words, Moses would see the **after effects** of God's glory having passed by. For you exegetes, we can argue about that conclusion some other time.
- For now, I only want to point out that Paul knows this passage as he writes to Timothy. Paul knows that God graciously does divine contortions for humans out of His grace and love to reveal himself to humans in ways that won't kill them by His consuming glory.
- Still, even now, we "saved" humans cannot look at the glorious infinite, eternal, God unveiled and live. Therefore, God graciously reveals himself to humans in perfectly true, but still incomplete ways so they can know him as fully as is possible now—trust him fully---and he can graciously deal with the heart-problem in all of them.

- Now, I'm not focused on the rhetorical form as in the Fiddler's "**Tradition! Tradition!**" I am focused on what God wants to emphasize with the form as in the OT precursor message of **God's Provision! God's Provision!**
- **Three disruptive passages** in **1 Timothy**—three passages that God had Paul write that stick out and shout "here is what matters!"—here is the context for all the rest of this all—the details!
- **1st is 1 Timothy 1:17** where Paul interjects a *doxology* that, just a bit noticeably, breaks into the flow. It still fits easily but it is a change.
¹⁷ Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory for ever and ever. Amen.
- Ah! Moses' and Tevye's method of pointing out the point is here in Paul. The church of Ephesus has a King. That king is **eternal**. That king is **immortal**. That king is like no other—certainly that king is beyond all humans.
- However, **that king is also invisible**. The Ephesian church can't see that king with their physical eyes.
- Paul pauses here to remind Timothy and then, through his teaching, reminds the Ephesian church that the main idea here is not a list of all the details to do to be good. No, all of the details are important but they come back to this one, shouted-out point.
- They exist TOGETHER by grace as a church to **honor and glorify** God, whom, by-the-way, they can't see with earthly eyes.
- Now, look next at the beautiful passage that I couldn't quite fit in until Tevye pointed this out to me by his repeated, emphatic song.
- In **3:16** as Paul finishes talking about "*deacons*" and then says this is about how the Ephesians ought to live TOGETHER as God's **household** and as the **church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of the truth**... Paul interjects a bit of poetic language just

as he saw Moses do... ¹⁶ **Beyond all question, the mystery of godliness is great: He appeared in a body, was vindicated by the Spirit, was seen by angels, was preached among the nations, was believed on in the world, was taken up in glory.**

- Why is this verse here? Well, because this letter is not ultimately a checklist for selection of *deacons*. It is a letter that tells the church what they are ultimately to be about.
- What is **godliness**? What does God look like? Well what godliness looks like is **mysterious** because we humans can't see God and live. However, for a time we *were* privileged to see **God in the flesh** as God graciously bent down and became a servant we *could* see.
- But then, what happened? God in the flesh was taken back up, once again into the blinding glory of God and was once again out of the sight of our earthly eyes.
- Why is this passage that doesn't fit put here? Because it is the point of the epistle repeated again for the 2nd time. The controlling subject here is **God's glory being manifested in some gracious way that doesn't immediately slay humans.**
- Finally, the 3rd and final change of pace—the 3rd "Interruption" if you will. It's near the end of the letter in the **2nd half of 6:15 and then verse 16...** **God, the blessed and only Ruler, the King of kings and Lord of lords, ¹⁶ who alone is immortal and who lives in unapproachable light, whom no one has seen or can see. To him be honor and might forever. Amen.**
- See what has been on Paul's mind and has been his motivation and thus his theme for this whole letter? **It is the glory of God.** Humans cannot approach it unless God graciously provides the way.
- So all the stuff in 1 Timothy about doctrine and Law **and** men praying with holy hands for leaders they don't like **and** women dressing

modestly and being submissive **and** elders and deacons and maybe deaconesses **and** paying teaching elders **and** not accusing an elder of anything lightly without careful witness **and** respecting slave masters **and** drinking or not drinking wine **and** how rich people should use money—all those details are important but they are important only as they are connected to the central purpose—the theme that Paul has interrupted with and shouted out 3 times... **"Glory to God! Glory to God! Glory to God!"**

- A church will lose its first love and its true purpose if it begins to do things—even good things—with any other purpose than for **glory to God! We already knew that application, didn't we?**
- But, did you catch that repeated truth along with this one that we all already knew? God is unapproachable light in his full glory. We humans can't see God's glory and survive—it is still a mystery to us.
- So, God's glory must graciously remain veiled for sinful humans to live. God graciously veils it by acts such as putting Moses safely in a cave back in Exodus. He graciously veils it by coming to earth in lowly human flesh as the Lord Jesus Christ.
- But now that visible Jesus has **ascended** and the world can no longer see him with their eyes. They can no longer see the revelation of the glory of God even as veiled in flesh.
- So how will the world see even this veiled glory now? That is exactly the right question Ephesian church!!—the right question FBC!! The way God shows his veiled glory now is in Jesus' church both small c and big C church.
- So here is the deal...When the church of Jesus fails to live truly for God's glory as its motivation for what it is and does—when it fails to be **today's veiled display of mysterious godliness**—when it no longer looks like God in a gracious way that God allows himself to be

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seen truly but yet imperfectly—it is time to turn out the lights—or blow out the lamp as Jesus says in Revelation.

- ***God's Glory! God's Glory!...God's Glory! God's Glory!...God's Glory! God's Glory!*** That is the point of 1 Timothy & the point of the church.