

Hostage to Lesser Glory

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[0 : 00] There's this cabin in West Virginia where we go sometimes when we can get away as a family. And this cabin happens to face west and has this view across the Shenandoah River Valley.

And that makes for some really interesting experiences. One of our favorite things to do is to watch sunsets. And especially in the summer, the sun sets directly out from our cabin.

And so when it's time for sunset, every evening, no matter what we're doing, we will drop everything and go out on the deck and almost hold our breaths and watch as the sun slowly sets behind the Allegheny Mountains.

And a lot of times we love to count it down until we can no longer see the sun. So that's a little liturgy that we enjoy when we're out there. But for me personally, as much as I love sunsets, by far my most favorite sort of natural experience out there is when we get to see a thunderstorm.

Because we're looking west, a lot of times storms will start way far away and distant. And then they sweep across the valley floor toward us. And they can get bigger and bigger and bigger until these dark purple clouds are literally blotting out the sky.

[1 : 11] And they can be as beautiful as they are terrifying. You see these dark or even black clouds above. And then these white translucent curtains of rain that are sweeping across the trees and the hills, enveloping everything in their path.

And then you begin to hear the distant rolls of thunder that get louder and louder and louder. And then the wind starts blowing and howling and it starts thrashing the trees.

And then you begin to see streaks of lightning. And sometimes you can see streaks of lightning firing down all across the valley. They look like streaks of fire. And so sometimes we'll turn off all the lights and we'll sit in the window and we'll just watch these storms come until they're literally shaking the cabin that we're in.

And there's something awe-inspiring about seeing a thunderstorm like that. There's something, a kind of glory, a kind of a sense of awe and majesty that you experience when you see a storm like that up close.

And so it's no wonder that in Psalm 29 when David is looking for a metaphor to try to capture the glory of God in an image, he chooses the image of this ferocious thunderstorm.

[2 : 33] And that's the image that we see here in this psalm. And this psalm is really all about God's glory. And when we talk about God's glory, we're talking about God's majesty, God's awe-inspiring beauty, God's nature, which is beautiful but also terrifying and fearsome and uncontrollable.

And this theme of God's glory is extremely relevant for us, particularly at this cultural moment. It's something that I think we need to be reminded of. It may, in fact, arguably be the most important theme for us to grasp that there is.

And if we understand God's glory and if we understand something about what it means to worship a God of this kind of glory, it will help us make sense of our lives.

It will help us make sense of our hearts. It will help us make sense of the circumstances in which we find ourselves right now. And so we're going to look at Psalm 29, which tells us at least two things about glory.

So let's pray, and then we will get started. Lord, we thank you for your word. And this week in particular, we thank you for using David so long ago to pen these words.

[3 : 52] And we pray that you would, through the power of your spirit, open these words up to us, that they would cease to simply be ink on paper, and that they would become something that is alive and dynamic and spirit-filled.

And that through these written words, we would come to see your living word, Jesus Christ, face-to-face. And it's in his name that we pray. Amen. So Psalm 29 tells us two things about glory. And the first is this, and I'm going to borrow a phrase from Paul Tripp when he preached a sermon on this, which I really love this phrasing. He says that in this psalm, we see that we are hardwired

for glory, that human beings are hardwired for glory.

We are, in other words, glory-seeking creatures. There's a reason why we love experiences like sunsets or like thunderstorms. There's a reason why we crave these things.

And there's a reason why we're compelled to stop what we're doing and watch when something like this is happening. And it's because there is a kind of glory in these experiences. They give us a sense of awe.

[4 : 57] They give us a sense of something much bigger and more powerful than ourselves. They give us a sense of majesty. And it seems that human beings, we have something deep down that craves these experiences of awe and majesty.

I think it's the reason that we love live music. As much as we love music, there's something about going to a concert. And I bet if you took a minute, you could probably think back to the best concert you've ever been to.

And probably if you think back to why that concert was great, there was a sense of glory in it. There was a sense of awe and majesty in it.

There's a reason why so many people love sports and love to go see sports live whenever we can. When you see a player make an unexpectedly amazing play, or when an underdog team makes an unexpected surprise come from behind victory, these are experiences of glory.

And something inside us comes alive when we get to witness something like that happen. But it can also happen in smaller things like an unforgettable meal.

[6 : 07] Think of maybe the best food you've ever eaten, the best meal experience you've ever had. There's a kind of glory in that. Or getting to see and hold a newborn baby for the first time.

That's an amazing, awe-filled experience. Hiking and finally reaching the peak of a very tall mountain. And that moment when you reach the top and you look out and you see the view laid out before you, there's a sense of glory in that.

There's a sense of glory and awe and majesty in sexual intimacy and in romance. That thrill, that thrill when you first start to fall in love, the way your heart speeds up.

There's a sense of glory in that. Even something like graduation, or if you're in sales, making a huge sale, or getting a promotion, or finishing a really hard, long project that you've been working on when you finally finish it.

In all of these experiences, we get to taste and get a little glimpse of glory. And these are what we might consider lesser glories.

[7 : 16] These are lesser glories. And lesser glories in life are meant to point us to the ultimate glory, which is God's glory. That's why we have these experiences and why we crave these experiences.

Psalms 19 tells us that God created this world to declare his glory. Isaiah 43 tells us that God created his people to declare his glory.

Ephesians 3 verse 20 says that all glory belongs to God. So the entire purpose of existence, the reason that you and I are even here, is to proclaim God's glory.

God's glory to make known. To make known God's excellence. So that when people look at this world, or when people look at us, they would say, isn't God amazing? And that's why we're here. And so when we see a beautiful sunset, or a raging storm, when we get to hold a newborn child, these experiences are meant to lead us to ascribe glory to God.

[8 : 16] They're meant to lead us to say, isn't God amazing? Isn't God creative? Isn't God powerful? Isn't God gracious? So we're hardwired for glory because that's the reason that we're here.

That's why God made us and why God made the world. But there's a problem. There's a problem with all of this. And we see this problem right here in verse 2 of this psalm.

It says, David writes, Ascribe to the Lord the glory due his name. And you say, well, what's the problem with that? That sounds exactly right. The problem is this.

Why would David have to tell us to do that? Why would David have to tell us to ascribe glory to the Lord? To ascribe to the Lord the glory that he is owed?

Why would that be something that's necessary to say? And the reason, and this leads us to the second point, the reason is that instead of being people who live for God's glory, which is why we're here, we have become hostages to lesser glories.

[9 : 26] Our hearts have been hijacked, so to speak. And now every human being is born into a hostage situation.

We are held hostage to lesser glories. Now, I want to explain what I mean by this. The God of the Bible, his covenant name is Yahweh.

So anytime in scripture you see a capital L-O-R-D, the Lord in all caps, what that's actually referring to in the Hebrew is Yahweh. So this is God's covenant name, his personal name.

So the God of the Bible, Yahweh, was utterly unique in the ancient Near East in that he revealed himself as the one true God who is over all people. He's not geographically limited.

He's over all people. And he is over all of the natural phenomena of the world. So as verse 10 says, the Lord, Yahweh, sits enthroned over the flood.

[10 : 24] He's the God who sits enthroned over the storm. He's the God who sits enthroned over the sun and the moon and the stars. And that's very important because if you look at other ancient Near Eastern religions, these natural phenomena, things like floods or the sun or the moon or thunderstorms or the ocean or even childbirth, people worshiped these phenomena as deities themselves.

People took these lesser glories and they said, well, here's a place, here's something that gives me a sense of awe and majesty and glory.

There must be something worth worshiping here. And so religions grew up around the worship of these various awe-inspiring, glory-filled events like sunsets or thunderstorms.

But God from the very beginning, when he revealed himself, revealed himself as being the God who is above all of these things, the God of the storm, the God of the sun or over the sun.

And the point that I want to make is that that's not just something that we see in ancient times and in ancient religions, the worship of these lesser glories. It's actually something that is a part of human nature and something that we see in ancient times, but we also see it every bit as much in modern times.

[11 : 45] So all human beings, in one way or another, have come to worship lesser glories. We've actually been taken hostage by lesser glories. Instead of glorifying God over all things, we worship the things that God has made, the things that are a part of this world.

So some people get fixated on entertainment and having the next best experience they can possibly have. Some people get fixated on food and drink, and it's all about pursuing the pleasure of food and drink.

Some people get fixated on sports. They don't just like sports or enjoy sports, but they become obsessed with sports, and then it becomes a part of their sense of identity and worth and value.

Some people get overly fixated on sexual gratification and novel sexual experiences because there's that rush that comes with the novelty. Some people get fixated on being beautiful or on being attractive or on gaining the affirmation of other people.

That's where they feel a sense of glory and worth. Some people get fixated on success. Some people get fixated on comfort and safety. Some people very overtly pursue and try to build their own glory in the world.

[13 : 05] And there have been entire cultures that were built around personal glory and seeking glory for yourself and your family. The Bible would call all of these kinds of glory lesser glories, right?

And so when we have these experiences that are meant to point us to God's glory, what we find is that our hearts instead want to hold onto and worship and ascribe glory to the experiences themselves.

And this is exactly what Paul's talking about in Romans chapter one, where he says our deepest problem, and he's talking about all human beings, our deepest problem as human beings is that we have, as he says, exchanged the glory of the immortal God for created things.

We've made this exchange where we worship and glorify the things that God made over God himself. As C.S. Lewis famously wrote in *The Weight of Glory*, we are half-hearted creatures, fooling around with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea.

We are far too easily pleased. So the problem is not that we have too much desire. The problem is that we're half-hearted. We're too easily pleased.

[14 : 31] We've settled for lesser glories and we've forsaken the source and the maker of all things glorious, God himself, the one to whom all glory should be ascribed.

And there are at least three major problems with this that might help make sense of life a little bit more. The first problem when we make this exchange is that we're never going to be satisfied by the lesser glories of this world.

We're never going to be satisfied by the lesser glories of this world. You can have the most amazing experience, the most amazing concert, the most amazing new relationship with somebody, the most amazing sexual experience, the most amazing food and drink, the most amazing vacation adventure.

You can have these amazing experiences, but very often once the experience is over, they leave us feeling not a sense of completeness and wholeness, but rather a sense of emptiness, a sense of longing.

When you have a mountaintop experience, often on the other side of that, there can be a kind of mild to moderate depression that sets in. And that can be really hard to deal with.

[15 : 44] A lot of times research shows us that what we'll do after an experience like that is to try to bring back the memories and reminisce about the experience to try to prolong that emotional high as much as we can.

But almost invariably, they leave us with a sense of emptiness because they're not meant to satisfy us completely. So that's the first problem. They'll never really satisfy the deepest parts of ourselves, these lesser glories.

The second problem that's kind of related to that is that sometimes we can actually become addicted to lesser glories. Heroin, people recovering from heroin addiction will often talk about that first high.

And that first high, when they first used heroin, that becomes the standard. And every time they use heroin after that, it's never as good. And so people will talk about spending all of their time, all of their money, all of their energy, everything chasing that high, chasing, trying to get back to that first high.

And they'll chase it all the way into the grave. Now that's a more extreme example, but the same kind of thing can happen in many different areas of life. We're always chasing after the dopamine rush of a new purchase or the next great meal or a new sexual encounter or a bigger sale or a more important job.

[17 : 04] And it can easily become this never ending chase where we're always going after the next thing, but it's never satisfying us. And this can, for some people, become quite addictive.

The third problem is I think the most significant and the one we need to pay attention to. Life will only ever make sense if you realize that all of this is actually about God's glory.

Your life will only ever really make sense once you realize that all of this exists and you exist for God's glory. If you are like most people and you assume that life is all about us being happy, the pursuit of happiness, and it's all about us being satisfied, and being fulfilled, then how do you make sense of something like a global pandemic?

If you believe in God, but you think God's primary role is to make sure that we're happy, to make sure that we're satisfied, to make sure that we have what we need. This is what the sociologist Christian Smith found when he researched religious belief in America, that a lot of people, including a lot of Christians, think that that's God's primary role in our lives is just to kind of make sure we have what we need and that we're happy at work.

If you believe that about life and if you believe that about God, how do you make sense of something like a global pandemic? How do you make sense of economic collapse? Right?

[18 : 32] It's going to be hard to make sense of these things. But if you believe the words of Isaiah 42, 8, where God says, I am the Lord, I am Yahweh, that is my name, my glory, I give to no other.

If you believe those words and if you recognize that God will relentlessly do whatever is necessary to strip away the things that compete for him, compete with him for glory, that he will relentlessly do whatever is necessary to strip those competitors away.

And you realize that God is doing this out of love for his people. You realize that that God desires his people to thrive and flourish. But the thing that we most need for our lives to flourish is for our lives to be centered around God's glory.

If you realize that, then your life is going to start to make a little more sense. Then you're going to start to be able to make sense not only of the good things that we would immediately recognize as blessings, but you will also begin to rethink the hardships in your life.

Because you'll realize that God's ultimate aim is his glory shining through us. And there's a lot of different ways that God can bring that about in our lives.

[19 : 52] So we're hardwired for God's glory, but our hearts have been hijacked. And so now we are held hostage to these lesser glories. Instead of pointing us to God's glory, they've become gods themselves in our hearts.

And so the last question we'll ask is, what hope is there for us? If you look at verse 11, the last line of the psalm, it says, may the Lord bless his people with peace.

Now, if you've read the psalm, that should be an odd verse to encounter for you. It's kind of an odd ending to the psalm. Because David has just described this God who is this ferocious, terrifying thunderstorm, a God who describes this God with flashes of lightning lighting up the sky with fire and wind tearing up trees by their roots and thunder so terrifying that it causes deer to go into, to prematurely give birth to their young.

And so this is very clearly a storm of destruction. And so the question is, how do you calm a storm like this and make peace possible? How do you bring a blessing of peace out of a storm this fierce? One day, years later, after David wrote this psalm, Jesus was with his disciples and they were on a fishing boat in the Sea of Galilee. And the Sea of Galilee is known for very ferocious storms coming up out of nowhere.

[21 : 22] And one such storm came while they were out fishing while Jesus was sleeping in the boat. And so the storm comes up, Jesus is asleep, the disciples are terrified, they think they're gonna die, so they shake Jesus awake and they say, save us, save us, we're all gonna die.

And so Jesus rises up and he simply says to the storm, peace, be still. And the storm ceases and all is peaceful.

And you realize when you read this account that only the God who sits enthroned above the storm, the God who sits enthroned above all of that chaos would have the power to do that kind of thing. And this is why Jesus Christ came, to calm the storm, to calm the storm and bring God's blessing to his people, God's blessing of peace.

But the storm that Jesus really came to bring peace to is not the storm on the Sea of Galilee, it's the storm of the wrath of God. And so the true storm that Jesus came for is the storm that manifests itself at Calvary as Jesus hangs on the cross.

[22 : 39] Scripture tells us that when Jesus was crucified, darkness fell across the land. The earth shook. The storm of God's wrath was being poured out on God's Son instead of human beings.

On that day, Jesus received what we deserved. Jesus took upon himself all of the wrath that was meant for us, for all of the ways that we have exchanged God's glory for these lesser glories. And then three days later when Jesus rose again, he came to his disciples and what did he say to them? Peace be with you. The storm has been calmed.

The storm has been, the storm has abated. And I am here to fulfill this prayer. The blessing of God's peace is now upon you. And so the gospel is this.

The gospel is really, here's how we see it playing out in this psalm. You are hardwired for glory. You're hardwired for God's glory. But all of us begin our lives as hostages to lesser glories.

[23 : 55] And you will never be satisfied. And your life will never really make sense until you realize that about yourself and the reason that you're here. And so Jesus Christ came to calm the storm of God's wrath in order to bring everlasting peace and to set us free.

And when His glory, when the glory of Jesus Christ, when that starts to become the center of your life, what you realize is that even the greatest experiences you have, it doesn't diminish those experiences, but it shows you what they're for.

And so even the greatest experiences we have, the most beautiful sunsets, or the best food, those things begin to do what God intended, which is they begin to point us, to point our hearts, to the ultimate source of glory, God Himself.

Let's pray. Lord, we thank You for Your Word and we thank You for Your glory. And we pray that whatever sits at the center of our lives, whatever lesser glories sit at the center of our lives, we pray that those would be displaced through the glory of the cross.

And we believe that that would not diminish our enjoyment of this world, but that it would magnify it, that it would enhance it, because it would show us what all of the joy and all of the glory in this world is for, Lord, and that our hearts, Lord, as we live our lives and have these great experiences that You bless us with, that our hearts would naturally turn toward You and that we would ascribe all of that glory to Your name where it belongs.

[25 : 34] And we pray this in Your Son's holy name. in your life through and have each Speak andoso and