

The Glory of God

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[0 : 00] Now let's pray together. Lord God, we praise you, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, acknowledging your greatness and your glory.

Acknowledging, too, that we will only ever catch a brief glimpse of all you are in your absolute perfections. But Lord, we thank you for what we find in your word, teaching us that you are the eternal king, that you rule over all things and over all people, that you are our creator, that you are our sustainer, that you are moving all of history forward in your intended direction until the return of our Lord Jesus, until he comes in judgment and in final salvation and establishes the new heaven and the new earth for his people.

Lord, we thank you that you are the God who is mightier than the oceans. We have seen so much of the power of the weather in the storms that have gripped so much of Europe in recent days.

But we recognize you are mightier by far. Lord, we praise you that your word is unbreakable, that it is the word of the king and it is unchanging.

Lord, we thank you that you are the God who is perfect in holiness. Thank you that you never change, you never diminish in your perfection, that you remain always our holy, holy, holy God.

[1 : 51] And we thank you that from your glory and your power and your goodness, you are able to strengthen us. And so we pray once again that as you meet with us, that you would meet with us to do us good from your word.

That as we see something of your glory, that it would cause our hearts to worship. That it would cause our lives to be lived under your good rule.

So guide us in our time together. Guide us in our discussions later. And all for your glory we pray. Amen.

So, again, we are going to be thinking about another of our key doctrines. This time it's the glory of God to think about it in God's word and to think about its significance for everyday life.

We'll shortly be reading from Isaiah 40, a wonderful text to think about the glory of God. But before that, a couple of introductory questions.

[2 : 58] First of all, what do we mean when we're talking about the glory of God? Paul Tripp has a helpful definition for us. He says, God's glory is the greatness, beauty and perfection of all that he is.

So it's a helpful working definition for us. To speak of the glory of God is to make a declaration that God has majesty, that God is great.

And at the same time, that becomes for us an invitation. As we recognize the greatness of the one true God, that we would worship him. So God's glory, seeing God's glory, should lead us to worship.

We've already sung from Psalm 93, but we could mention Psalm 48, verse 1, which begins, great is the Lord and most worthy of praise. Psalm 93, which began, the Lord reigns.

He is robed in majesty. The Lord is robed in majesty and armed with strength. Psalm 95, verse 3, the Lord is the great God, great King above all gods.

[4 : 04] Psalm 145 testifies to the reality that one generation will say to the other, speak to the other of the glorious splendor of the majesty of God.

So the Bible is full and our Psalms are full of the greatness, the beauty, the perfection of God. That being the case, why do we need to see the glory of God is something that we'll think about this evening.

And one important reason why we need the glory of God is because within all of our hearts, there is what we might call a glory war. There is a battle for hearts and minds going on.

So one thing that is true for all of us as people is that we are hardwired or we are programmed to seek glory and to seek something that is glorious.

God made us that way, so ultimately that we would seek him and find him and recognize his supreme glory.

[5 : 06] But because of sin, so often we become glory thieves. Since Adam and Eve, there is that desire within us to be like God, to want to put ourself at the center, and so we rob God of glory.

But also we exchange the creator for created things, and we give glory to those created things. And we might see that when our fascination and obsession is taken up with, let's say, a sports team, or with art, or with a particular person rather than God.

But we were made that only seeing and responding to the glory of God would be what would truly satisfy us.

Because only God is eternal and infinite and unlimited in his greatness, perfection, and beauty. And so we can chase after these lesser things, and they may satisfy for a while, but they cannot satisfy ultimately.

But there is that battle going on in our hearts, and ultimately, only God's grace in the gospel is going to win that battle for us. Only as we see the glory of God in the person and work of the Lord Jesus are we going to be truly captivated by God and his glory above all lesser things.

[6 : 32] So that's one reason why we need the glory of God, because of that war that goes on in our hearts all the time. We also need it because sometimes in our thinking our God becomes too small.

The Bible is very clear that God is unlimited. He's eternal and infinite. He's almighty and perfect. But sometimes, in our own thinking, especially if we lose sight of God's revelation in the Bible, we lose that sense of the infinite gap that is between our great God and ourselves.

We bring him, as it were, down to our level. Or, on the other hand, we might apply our limits to God. You know, our wisdom is not perfect.

Our understanding is not perfect. Our love is not perfect. So we imagine God being like that. Or we can think of God as being personal, and he is, but we fail to see how majestic and other he is, emphasizing one over the other.

And the result when we do that is we begin to lose a sense of worship. And if we lose sight of the greatness and glory of God, it can be very easy then for us to become discouraged, for us to begin to have doubts, for us to begin to wonder, well, can Christ's kingdom really prosper?

[7 : 57] Can God move in power again? Think about our city or think about our nation? And so we're going to come shortly to Isaiah chapter 40, and that was the reality for the folks that were hearing that word from God.

And because they were exiles, and they were discouraged, and they were fearful. But I imagine that we can relate to that in our own time. Two vital steps that we want to take to recover a right sense of God's glory then is on the one hand to remove any thought of limits when it comes to thinking about God.

And secondly, and this is where we see it a lot in Isaiah 40, is to compare God with those powers and those forces that we typically think of as great, recognizing that God is greater than.

So with that in view, let's turn in our Bibles to the book of Isaiah and chapter 40, and we'll read the whole chapter, and then we will think about it together.

And the words are on the screen if you don't have a copy of the Bible yourself. Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and proclaim to her that her hard service has been completed, that her sin has been paid for, that she has received from the Lord's hand double for all her sins.

[9 : 20] A voice of one calling, in the wilderness prepare the way for the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be raised up, every mountain and hill made low, the rough ground shall become level, the rugged places a plain, and the glory of the Lord will be revealed, and all people will see it together, for the mouth of the Lord has spoken.

A voice says, cry out. And I said, what shall I cry? All people are like grass, and all their faithfulness is like the flowers of the field. The grass withers and the flowers fall, because the breath of the Lord blows on them.

Surely the people are grass. The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of our God endures forever. You who bring good news to Zion, go up on a high mountain.

You who bring good news to Jerusalem, lift up your voice with a shout. Lift it up. Do not be afraid. Say to the towns of Judah, here is your God.

See, the sovereign Lord comes with power, and he rules with a mighty arm. See, his reward is with him, and his recompense accompanies him. He tends his flock like a shepherd.

[10 : 34] He gathers the lambs in his arms, and carries them close to his heart. He gently leads those that have young. Who has measured the waters in the hollow of his hand, or with the breadth of his hand marked off the heavens?

Who has held the dust of the earth in a basket, or weighed the mountains on the scales, and the hills in a balance? Who can fathom the spirit of the Lord, or instruct the Lord as his counselor?

Whom did the Lord consult to enlighten him, and who taught him the right way? Who was it that taught him knowledge, or showed him the path of understanding? Surely the nations are like a drop in a bucket.

They are regarded as dust on the scales. He weighs the islands as though they were fine dust. Lebanon is not sufficient for altar fires, nor its animals enough for burnt offerings. Before him all the nations are as nothing.

They are regarded by him as worthless, and less than nothing. With whom then will you compare God? To what image will you liken him? As for an idol, a metal worker casts it, and a goldsmith overlays it with gold, and fashions silver chains for it.

[11 : 39] A person too poor to present such an offering, selects wood that will not rot. They look for a skilled worker, to set up an idol that will not topple. Do you not know? Have you not heard?

Has it not been told you from the beginning? Have you not understood since the earth was founded? He sits enthroned above the circle of the earth, and its people are like grasshoppers. He stretches out the heavens like a canopy, and spreads them out like a tent to live in.

He brings princes to naught, and reduces the rulers of this world to nothing. No sooner are they planted, no sooner are they sown, no sooner do they take root in the ground, than he blows on them and they wither, and a whirlwind sweeps them away like chaff.

To whom will you compare me? Or who is my equal, says the Holy One? Lift up your eyes and look to the heavens who created all these. He who brings out the starry host one by one, and calls forth each of them by name, because of his great power and mighty strength, not one of them is missing.

Why do you complain, Jacob? Why do you say, Israel, my way is hidden from the Lord? My cause is disregarded by my God? Do you not know?

[12 : 49] Have you not heard? The Lord is the everlasting God, the creator of the ends of the earth. He will not grow tired or weary, and his understanding no one can fathom.

He gives strength to the weary, and increases the power of the weak. Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall. But those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength.

They will soar on wings like eagles. They will run and not grow weary. They will walk and not be faint. Amen.

Wonderful chapter. We're going to begin by thinking about six necessary comparisons as we want to see the glory of God.

So here is Isaiah, and he's led by the Spirit, and he's speaking to these discouraged and anxious people of God. And he gives these beautiful words of comfort. Comfort to be found in the glory of God and knowing the God of glory.

[13 : 53] And the emphasis is on the fact that God has no limits and God has no rivals when it comes to his glory. So six points of comparison or contrast.

First in verses six to eight, the glory of the word of God compared to us as people. What does Isaiah, led by the Spirit, say about people?

All people are like grass. The grass withers and the flowers fall because the breath of the Lord blows on them. It's the emphasis there.

We are frail. We are fragile. As people, we are constantly changing. In some ways, we are growing and developing.

In other ways, we are experiencing loss and we are decreasing. And ultimately, what we discover there in verse seven is that our breath is given by God. Our breath is taken by God.

[14 : 54] Our lives are in the hands of God. But while we are constantly changing and we are marked by fragility, verse eight, but the word of our God endures forever.

His word never changes. His is the one word that is never in need of an upgrade, an update, or any form of correction. So in the word of God, we have a glorious stability for our changing lives and in our changing world.

So the word of God compared to people. The next comparison to think about so we can see the glory of God is related to the tasks of God.

Verses 12 to 14. He goes to these huge things of creation who has measured the waters in the hollow of his hand.

So there's the oceans pictured as if they were just in the palm of God's hands or with the breadth of his hand marked off the heavens. We think about the sky and all its vastness as if God measured them so easily with just the breadth of his hand, weighing the mountains on the scales.

[16 : 14] Compared with the God of glory, all of these acts of creation are small, as wonderful as they are.

We may very well find ourselves being amazed by the discoveries that there are within the natural world, amazed by the latest documentary from David Attenborough.

But even as we listen to those documentaries and we see those scenes, we recognize that as people there is still so much that we have not explored, there is so much that remains unknown, and beyond all that is the stark reality that we did not create, but God did.

And in verses 13 and 14, in a sense there's a challenge. Who else could do this? Who else could measure the oceans in the palm of his hand? Who else has measured the dust of the earth in a basket?

Who is big enough? Who is wise enough? Who is creative enough to make all of this? And of course the answer is no one. And so the people of God are invited in verse 9, and we'll come back again and again to recognize and to say, here is our God.

[17 : 34] He is a God of glory, and we can see it in his great tasks. And we see it also in contrast with the nations. Think again about Israel's national story.

Think about their position geographically, always being threatened by larger empires, more powerful nations all around, sometimes threatened, sometimes taken into captivity as they have been in their recent history.

And we can imagine them looking across their borders, often with anxiety and fear, and God says, remember, surely the nations are like a drop in a bucket.

They're regarded as dust on the scales. Those enemies that you are so fearful of, verse 17, before him, before the God of glory, all the nations are as nothing.

They're regarded by him as worthless and less than nothing. Think about that when we watch the news. The focus on the news just now, I guess, is on the force of Russia and the threat from Russia.

[18 : 39] Or perhaps if you read from items from the persecuted church, you get your stories of mission, and you learn about the governments of Afghanistan and North Korea and Iran and their determination to try and squeeze out Christianity within their country.

We are invited to read Isaiah 40 and to remember that those nations, and indeed our nation, is not in control, but God is. Those nations are not setting the course of world history.

Our glorious God is. And so the answer to Israel's fear, the answer to our fear, is to behold our God and see him in comparison to the nations.

We can move then to verses 21 and 22. Think about God in comparison with the world. And we recognize we live in a wonderful world.

It's a vast world. There are over seven billion people living in the world. There's incredible variety and complexity in our habitats and weather systems and geology. Compared to us, we are dwarfed by the world, but God dwarfs his world.

[19 : 49] So verse 22, our God sits enthroned above the circle of the earth and its people are like grasshoppers. What you find in this section is the ease with which God creates.

He stretches out the heavens like a canopy and spreads them out like a tent to live in. Here is the unlimited glory of God.

Here is the ease with which he created this vast universe. And here is a picture of his rule as king over his creation. I read an interview this week with Alistair McGrath, who writes a lot on science and faith.

And maybe you've heard him in sort of debates with atheists. And he does a lot on helping people to see that you can be a scientist and have faith.

And he speaks about the wonder of the natural world as a gateway to faith. That as Christians, we should be looking at the world around us and it should be leading us to worship.

[21 : 02] He had that wonderful thought that they're thinking about the most beautiful thing that we can imagine, whether that's the beauty of the Alps or the beauty of the Great Barrier Reef, whatever it might be, that glory is real, but it's tiny compared to the infinitely greater grandeur and glory of our God.

And so the natural world becomes a gateway to worship when we remember here is our God in contrast with the world that he made. Moving from there, in verse 23 and 24, there is this comparison between God and the great rulers of the world.

God brings princes to naught and reduces the rulers of this world to nothing. And again, there's that image of planting and taking root and then he blows on them and they wither and a whirlwind sweeps them away like chaff.

History is full of the stories of powerful rulers, some achieving fame, some achieving infamy. There have always been great leaders in every generation, in every century, in every nation, but the common theme, according to Isaiah 40, is that God reduces them all in the end to nothing.

But the achievements of the great and the good, the achievements of the evil dictators did not spare them from death. And again, it's helpful for us to remember that while there will always be princes and presidents and dictators and dot-com billionaires and there'll be powerful people in the world, they don't determine ultimately how the world goes.

[22 : 40] only the eternal, unlimited, glorious God does that. Proverbs 21, verse 1, the king's heart is like a stream of water in God's hand.

He directs as he pleases. He is greater than the greatest men and women who have ever lived. And then the last comparison, and it's maybe, I think, for many where we find ourselves when we think about the glory of God in the natural world.

He goes to the stars. To whom will you compare me or who is my equal, says the Holy One. Lift up your eyes and look to the heavens. Who created all these?

He who brings out the starry host one by one and calls them forth each by name because of his great power and mighty strength not one of them is missing. Nothing, on the one hand, can make us feel smaller than standing under a canopy of stars.

But perhaps nothing too reminds us of the glory of God than that same night sky. Even the language of galaxies and light years serves to put us in our place as people.

[23 : 55] Our galaxy, the Milky Way, were we to leave to this very moment to try and get to the center of our galaxy, it would take us 25,000 light years.

And a light year is moving at the speed of 186,000 miles per second. Scientists tell us we can see on average 6,000 stars with the naked eye as we look up if the night is clear.

For each one of those 6,000 stars there is for each of them 20 million that we cannot see. There is glory but it's tiny compared to the glory of God.

God who brings out the stars, who sets them on their course. God who names them including the trillions that we will never see and his power keeps them shining. So again, our telescopes function as powerful tools for worship as they encourage us to see behold our God, the God of glory.

So when we look and when we see the God of glory what happens? Is it we get a new lens through which to view life?

[25 : 11] So we watch our news or we read our newspapers and where perhaps our natural tendency is towards anxiety or sadness. We're invited to turn those stories and those situations and those nations to God in prayer and to remind ourselves of the God who sits enthroned in glory who is working out his purposes even when we struggle to see how that can be.

It changes how we look at the natural world whether that's sunsets or whether that's the flurry of snowflakes. They are opportunities for our praise.

Opportunities for us to have conversations about God as creator about the reality of intelligent design. reflecting on the glory of God and the fact that he is unlimited should give us comfort as we consider our uncertain future each day because it's not uncertain to God and so there's an invitation to learn to rest and to trust into who he is and to his governing and caring for us.

To see the glory of God I think is to change our prayer lives as well. In the one hand we will praise as much as perhaps we say please. We'll just want to worship but also as we understand who is our God it's going to encourage us to ask more boldly in our prayers.

Sometimes our prayers are too small because our God is too small. Our God and his grace are not small and so we are invited to pray boldly and with confidence. And when we consider the glory of God it should also be shifting our priorities.

[26 : 58] Why are we here? What's life all about? Sometimes we lose sight of our primary calling to glorify the God of glory. So there's a question for us to ask ourselves regularly how can I see and enjoy the glory of God?

How can I give God glory in this moment? So there's those six necessary comparisons.

But we're going to look briefly at three necessary corrections that we find in our text as well. So Isaiah again inspired by the Holy Spirit is using the smallness of human language trying to put the hugeness of God's glory to us so that we can catch a glimpse of it and he does that for good reason.

There are three questions well there's more than three questions but we're going to look at three questions in our text to show us why over and over again the people of God are being invited to behold their God and to see his glory.

The first question by way of correction we find in verse 18 and verse 25. To whom will you compare me or who is my equal says the Holy One.

[28 : 16] God is God doing through Isaiah there? He's speaking to that human tendency that we have either to apply our weaknesses and our limits to our thinking about God or looking at verse 18 to make lesser things equal to him in the establishing of idols in our hearts and in our lives.

And so we need that question with whom then will you compare God so that we would recognize truly that God is incomparable, that God truly is unlimited, that his love for his people is steadfast and constant, that we don't judge God's love by the measure of our fluctuating love, that his wisdom is complete and absolute, past, present, future, there is nothing hidden from God, that his power is absolute, that he has no rivals, there is no one who's going to come along and set God's plan off course, and that his ways, all his ways, are good.

Luther once wrote to Erasmus to say, your thoughts of God are too human, and Isaiah 40 is written to warn us against that.

Isaiah 40 should have that purpose of renewing our mind to see God's glory so that we wouldn't compare him with anything within his creation.

Second question to think about, verse 27, why do you complain, Jacob? Why do you say, my way is hidden from the Lord?

[30 : 15] My cause is disregarded by my God. So the circumstances of God's people are causing them to doubt, causing them to think, well, either God can't see, God can't know, God can't care, he's forgotten us.

Maybe those are questions and feelings that we relate to in our own personal lives, maybe we look at our national condition and we think, has God simply forgotten us?

And the response of Isaiah 40 is again to draw the minds of those hearers and those readers towards the glory of the Lord, the person O God, the powerful God, the covenant making, covenant keeping God, the one who will not and cannot abandon his people, to a saviour who will never abandon his sheep.

We need to understand that while our circumstances can cause us to fear, there is that bedrock certainty that our way is never hidden, that God is working his purposes out.

for us, in the time that we find ourselves, we go to the cross to recognise that and to take heart in that, and we understand there, Jesus, the perfect sinless Son of God, went to the cross and felt that sense of being abandoned and forsaken by his Father as he became our sin bearer, carrying our sin and guilt.

[31 : 53] why? So that as he faces the punishment that we deserve, we will never be condemned, we will never be forsaken. Our sin is paid so there is nothing that can separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus.

So even if we feel it, there is a truth that we need to know that our way is never hidden from our glorious God.

Third question that helps to correct our thinking. Verse 28, do you not know, have you not heard, the Lord is the everlasting God, the creator of the ends of the earth.

He will not grow tired or weary, and his understanding no one can fathom. Of course the idea of God being everlasting, God being eternal, is hard for us to process and we'll never get our minds around it, but we need to hold our grip on that reality that God is everlasting.

Especially to think for ourselves as the people of God about his everlasting love. The everlasting God has everlasting love for his children.

[33 : 20] God's love for us is eternal, it has no beginning, it has no end. When we are trusting in the Lord Jesus Christ as our saviour, we have always and we will always enjoy the glorious love of God.

Our creator, the all-powerful one, the all-wise one, is there as our loving God to give us strength, to renew our strength.

And so we need to remind ourselves, and Isaiah 40 is so helpful of this, we need to remind ourselves of the majesty of God, the beauty of God, the perfection of our God.

As we fight against that sin in our lives where we would make God small, or we would take glory from God because we give it to other things, it's that powerful antidote against idolatry and against discouragement and fear.

We need to see who our God is. two necessary comforts as we close, the two bookends to this wonderful chapter.

[34 : 43] And we'll get there in a minute, but before we go there, just to remind ourselves, in verses 10 and 11, we have this surprising and wonderful image.

See, the sovereign Lord comes with power and he rules with a mighty arm. So here's the God of glory, the God who is king, the God with all power, and what does he do?

He tends his flock like a shepherd. He gathers the lambs in his arms and carries them close to his heart. We're used to the idea of all-powerful.

We don't tend to think that those who are all-powerful are also fully loving. Perhaps we're used to loving someone, but we lack power to help them.

But here is the God of glory and he is powerful ruler and he is tender shepherd saviour at the same time. And out of that loving kindness he's given us this beautiful chapter.

[35 : 42] A wonderfully encouraging comforting chapter. And let's look at the bookends just as we finish our time. Verse one. Comfort, comfort my people, says your God.

There is comfort in knowing the God of glory. Here is God and he's coming to his dispirited people and he's revealing his glory to them.

And he is reminding them and comforting them with the reality of his redemption. That he has come to renew their strength, to give strength to their faith.

Verse five. The glory of the Lord will be revealed. And here is where we are invited to rest. To rest in this God of infinite glory who holds the church in his hands.

We are precious to him. He loves us and he loves us always. And so the glory of God is intended to comfort us.

[36 : 57] It's intended to give our faith backbone. As we live on the margins like the people in Isaiah's day, as we can perhaps feel forgotten, as we can easily be discouraged, we need to find comfort from knowing the God of glory.

That's one bookend. The other bookend, verse 31, those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. Our hope, where does it come from?

Our hope rests in the glory of God, in the God of glory. Unlike us, God is unlimited in his power, in his wisdom, and in his love.

And in our God there is this promise of strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow because this is our God. The God who moved heaven and earth to save his people in the sending of his son will ensure that he gives us the strength that we need to soar and to run and to walk all the way to eternal glory with him.

One final word, to go back to verse five where we read and the glory of the Lord will be revealed and all people will see it together. When is God's glory most fully revealed?

[38 : 15] The gospel writers tell us this passage is fulfilled in the coming of Jesus. Luke chapter three. It's the testimony of John.

We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only, full of grace and truth. The glory of the Lord is revealed in a new way in the coming of the Lord Jesus.

Jonathan Edwards, that Puritan theologian, wrote a little treatise on why did God create the world. And his wonderful and kind of startling observation is that God created the world that Jesus Christ his son would have an outlet for all the love in his heart.

That he would have the opportunity to pour out his love on his church. And that makes sense when you think about how is the climax of God's glory revealed?

world. It's revealed in Jesus, the perfect sinless son of God dying on the cross to complete God's plan of salvation, to bring his people into that eternal fellowship of love.

[39 : 30] So that in the coming of Jesus, in the ministry of Jesus, God's glory goes further and shines brighter than it ever has done before. The glory of God is revealed in Jesus.

And so with Isaiah and the people of his day, we're invited once again to behold our God. So let me pray about that and then we'll sing and then after that we'll have a chance for those of us who are able to stay to discuss together the glory of God.

So let's pray together. Lord, we thank you for this part of your word. and we thank you for the way it reminds us that you are a God without limits and a God without rivals, that you are a God of great glory, that you are the God of almighty power, but at the same time the God of tender, loving care.

We thank you for the way your glory is revealed in the natural world. We thank you that your glory is revealed in your word. And we thank you that your glory was revealed in the coming of the Lord Jesus our Savior.

Thank you for your glorious love demonstrated to us in his sacrificial self-giving death on the cross.

[41 : 01] And Lord, we pray that you would help us to keep your glory in view, hope and confidence and comfort.

We recognize all too easily that our hearts are pulled away from you, that we are captivated by lesser things.

So Lord, please renew our hearts and our minds as we consider your far greater glory. we pray in Jesus' name. Amen. So we will close singing together the hymn Behold Our God and let's stand together to sing.

Amen.