

The God of Glory

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[0 : 00] Good morning, everyone. Why don't we bow our heads and pray together as we come to think about God's Word to us today. Our gracious Father, we thank you for your Word.

And Lord, thank you that your Word teaches us that that Word is truth. And even more than that, Father, your truth can set people like us free.

And so we pray now, Lord, that in this quiet hour you would send your Holy Spirit. Lord, you would visit us that we might see your glory and be changed into your likeness.

And we pray these things in Jesus' name and to his glory. Amen. Psalm 29 and verse 1.

Ascribe to the Lord, O mighty ones. Ascribe to the Lord glory and strength. Ascribe to the Lord the glory due to his name. I mostly believe that there's a lot in a name, as Clive was saying at the beginning of the service.

[1 : 19] Except that earlier this week I was in London, sitting on the tube, dropping off, praying the prayer of travelers who sleep.

Lord, don't let me drool. When somebody approached me and said to me, are you Rupert Murdoch? I'm like, oh, come on, man, he's 92, you know.

Mostly there is something in a name. And today we're talking about the God of glory. Strictly speaking, I guess it's not a name, it's more an adjective that describes who God is.

And it's when you start to think about that, you begin to see how the limitations of language affect that task. All language has its limitations.

I think it's worth retelling the story of Michael Bourne, the former Bishop of Chester. Who, with his wife Myrtle, was invited to South Korea to give some lectures.

[2 : 37] And on his first lecture he stood up. And of course his South Koreans, not quite up to snuff. So he needed a simultaneous translator. He stood up and without thinking said, My wife and I are tickled to death to be here.

Translator looked at him a bit nonplussed. Said something in South Korean and the whole assembly took in a huge inward gasp. It was only at the end of his lecture he discovered that what the translator had actually said was, I scratched my wife so hard she died.

Language does have its limitations. And throughout this course of teaching, which I hope you will agree with me, I can say this, as this is my first go I think, has been very rewarding.

Does, however, face a fundamental problem. How do you describe God? Or to put it in more philosophical terms, how can we, who are infinite, try and articulate he who is infinite?

How do we do that? You find those who were inspired by the Holy Spirit to write the Bible struggling to find words that would describe the holiness, the awesomeness, the mightiness of God.

[4 : 16] In Ezekiel chapter 1, we read this really strange stuff. Ezekiel said, I looked and I saw a wondrous windstorm coming out of the north, an immense cloud with flashing lightning and surrounded by brilliant lights.

Incidentally, it is interesting, isn't it? How often God reveals himself through extreme weather events. The center of the fire looked like glowing metal.

And in the fire was what looked like four living creatures. In appearance, their form was that of a man. But each of them had four faces and four wings. Their legs were straight, their feet were like those of a calf, and gleamed with burnished bronze.

I mean, I could go on. It goes on for a bit like this. But I mean, my basic response to that is, what? What? Is that really what God looks like?

Half man, half cattle? Goes on to say that he travels on wheels? Of course. Of course. It's symbolic. It's trying to use language which is infinite to reach that which is infinite.

[5 : 29] And it's a struggle. And you begin to see the limitations of that. Back in the 17th century, were a group of people, some of them clergy, who became poets as well as ministers.

They were called the metaphysical poets. And they were called that because they were trying to use poetry to describe realities that are hard to get your head around.

People like John Donne and George Herbert. And then I found this lovely poem by Henry Vaughan called The Retreat. He may be saying, sitting there feeling very nonpluss.

You know, what's all that about? What it's about is somebody reflecting on the innocence of youth and how we lose that and how we might get back to it.

And then there's another word. A word that I imagine, if you are a regular church girl, you've heard that is used to describe glory.

[7 : 07] It's the word Shekinah. And it means, basically, it's applied to God's glory in relation to the light that seems to come from God every time he reveals himself.

You get that, and we'll get it when our readings, when Christmas comes around, in Luke chapter 4, I think it is, or chapter 2, I beg your pardon, where we're told that the angels were sitting there, binding their flocks, minding their own business, when the angel of the Lord appeared.

This is verse 9 of chapter 2. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified.

The word Shekinah, interestingly, Hebrew word, is never mentioned in the Bible. But rabbis picked on it to describe the glory of God.

Amazing, isn't it, when God reveals himself, an epiphany, when God reveals himself, how often two things happen. Firstly, there seems to be bright light, and secondly, people tend to be knocked down, or fall down in wonder, at what they see.

[8 : 30] Glory is a word that we use, isn't it, like we use lots of religious language, but do we realize, do we realize, what the word actually might mean, what it might look like?

Today, we're thinking about the glory of God, and the opening verse of Psalm 29 crashes on the sand like a wave, with a bold and triumphant call to praise the God of strength and glory.

Verse 2, Ascribe to the Lord the glory due to his name. Ascribe to the Lord, almighty ones. Ascribe to the Lord glory and strength.

The Hebrew word for glory is not Shekina, it is kavod. And it means, at least it means in certain circumstances, importance, weight, deference, or heaviness.

But primarily kavod is translated as glory, respect, honour, and majesty. See, there is something about God which is intrinsically glorious.

[9 : 52] That's what the Bible is trying to describe in certain occasions with that bizarre language. If you wanted an example of some more bizarre language, go to the back of the book and start to read the book of Revelation.

But God is not only intrinsically glorious, He is also somebody who seeks that we would recognise that glory.

That's what the Psalm says to us, isn't it? Ascribe to the Lord. That's what we're being called to do. Ascribe to the Lord glory.

There is something that's intrinsic about God's glory, and there is also something which is extrinsic. So this word glory, what does it mean for us?

How will we ever appropriate it in our worship and in our lives? I want to say three things about that to you right now.

[11 : 00] The first thing is, and I hope this is becoming clear already, God is essentially glory. It's a strange word for us because we tended to use that word in modern parlance more to describe victory and warfare and that kind of stuff.

But this is about the very nature of God. God is glory. The Psalm makes that very clear, doesn't it? In echoes of the creation narrative in Genesis chapter 1, where it is God's voice that calls order from chaos.

The voice of the Lord is over the waters. The God of glory thunders. The Lord thunders over the mighty waters. The voice of the Lord is powerful. The voice of the Lord is majestic.

The voice of the Lord breaks the cedars. The Lord breaks in pieces the cedars of Lebanon. And so on. One amazing idea that is.

That the glory of God is in His nature and we can see it in His nature. I know most of us now, rightly so, see extreme weather events as threatening and difficult.

[12:18] But the fundamental message of this is that God's glory is visible through the creation. And the call is not therefore to worship the creation, which of a lot of environmental theories today depends upon.

No, we're called to worship the Creator who made the heavens and the earth and all that therein is. Someone say amen. Amen. God is glory.

Secondly, our praise is in part our response to God's glory. glory. I can't remember what music Julian chose for us today, but he could easily have chosen that wonderful hymn, To God be the glory.

Great things He hath done, so loved He the world that He gave us His Son, who yielded His life, our redemption to win, and opened the life gate that all may go in.

Listen, if that verse of that song doesn't make your scalp prickle, maybe you need just to take a step back and ask yourself the question, do I get it?

[13:33] Have I ever had a glimpse of the glory of God? Our praise is in part our response to God's glory. God's glory.

Thankfully, this is a bright church. That's why it makes it difficult to see the screen sometimes. But the brightness of God, were it to come here, would be blinding.

It very lightly would knock us to the floor. It would be so amazing. And so in this life, most of us only capture glimpses of that. Don't shout out, but have you seen the glory?

Do you know it? Do you know that the God whom we worship today is glory? Do you know that today He will inhabit our praises when our praises recognize that glory and give voice to it?

And the third thing I want to say, it is given to those who trust Christ one day to share in that glory. In John's gospel, one of the most amazing things about that gospel is that God's glory is made manifest in the suffering of Jesus.

[14:59] Let me say that again. God's glory is made manifest in the sufferings of Jesus.

In fact, there is a verse in 2 Corinthians chapter 4 and verse 15 where Paul says, look, don't worry about your momentary afflictions because they won't even rank to the glory which will be revealed in you, in which you will share.

Imagine that. The book of Revelation says, when John looks up and he sees there are people in heaven whose robes are white because they've been washed in the blood of the Lamb.

Imagine that. It won't just be Arabs. We'll all wear a white robe in heaven. It will be yours and you will share in that glory of God.

One of the issues with defining glory is that what comes with it is the promise of God's presence.

[16:18] Theologians talk about the theophanies. That's where God reveals himself in physical ways to human beings. I don't think that's necessary for all of us but it is important to some of us and important to the church that God has revealed himself in such a way.

Theophanies are assurance that God is with us. Remember, according to Matthew, Jesus' kind of closing speech at the end of the gospel, Jesus says, Lo, I am with you always.

Not I'm going to be with you when you're feeling good, but I'm going to be with you when life's not so good for you. I'm not just going to be with you when you're in church, but I'm going to be with you when you're at work.

I'm not just going to be with you when you're well, but I'm going to be with you when you're sick. I'm not just going to be with you when you have a great marriage, but he's with you when you're bereaved.

oh my imagine that blessed Lord is with me is with me even with me when I go into the dark places that I know are not good for me yea though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death wrote David in Psalm 23 I will fear no evil why?

[17:58] because said David thou art with me listen to me I want you to get this message can you repeat after me now no matter what you're feeling right now no matter what your life is like right now say this thou art with me together thou art with me and pray for the grace to believe that friends because it will make a real difference to life not just when it's good but when it's bad and John 15 Jesus says this remain in me abide in me it says in the old translations as I recall as I abide in you no branch can bear fruit by itself it must remain in the vine neither can you bear fruit unless you abide in me I am the vine you are the branches if you abide in me and I in you you will bear much fruit apart from me you can do nothing you know one of the saddest realities about the church in the 21st century and maybe through all the centuries of the church is that it's inhabited by fruitless

Christians wonder you're a Christian your family relationship with God won't be called into question on the day of judgment but what will be called into question is what did you do with what I gave you what will you say you say well

Lord you know I warmed the not the pews the business class seats of church you know I came quite a bit and you know I've tried to do my best and how good will your best need to be Jesus says if we abide in him if we recognize his presence within us then that is the foundational building block to being fruitful disciples we need to practice leaning on his presence second thing I just want to say about this is what can I want to ask this question I always like people to go home from church with something to take home with them to think about you up for that?

apparently not just kidding three things one mind the gap as Russell very articulately told us last week that when we come to worship God when we come to praise him when we come to celebrate his glory together God's not looking at our outward appearance he's looking at our inward appearance what's going on in your heart just now you see there's a gap isn't there a gap between the kind of things we ascribe in worship and actually what's going on in our hearts mind the gap and maybe today you need to seek repentance you need to say sorry to God for that gap the second thing is I want you to look harder for God at work in his world which he loves so much he sent his son to die that we could be forgiven keep your eyes open there's something called common grace common grace is not the kind of grace that saves you but it explains why people who are not religious not Christian not Hindu not Buddhist not anything it explains why some of them do good things and you may have noticed this but we Christians don't have the monopoly on doing good there are plenty of other people who do good and sometimes has it crossed your mind it's crossed my mind and I've slapped my own wrist sometimes I think

I see people who have no religious affiliation whatsoever doing more good than the people who do and that puzzles me does it puzzle you so we need to close that gap and we need to look harder for God at work the more you keep your eyes open the more you will see and the more you see of that common grace or indeed the grace exercised by your Christian brothers and sisters the more likely you are to catch a glimpse of his glory and the last thing I want to say is this it's been implicit in everything I've said and that is can you try and remember a bit more that phrase encapsulated by David in Psalm 23 thou art with me when I'm frightened when I feel life is hopeless when I feel desperate and when I feel good thou art with me listen to me there's nothing more that I could want for you that today maybe this week in God's time we catch a glimpse of that glory and it flattens us so that we can stand up and stand firm for him who as we recalled in this service of Holy Communion loves you loves you enough to send his son Jesus to die on the cross that your sin may be forgiven you may be completely oblivious to the wrong in your life you may be thinking well hang on you know what if I read the Ten Commandments

I probably score eight out of ten and I'll settle for that at university no sin is when I choose to go my way rather than God's way friends open your eyes open your ears open your hearts and you will see afresh the God of glory let's pray our gracious Lord we are so grateful that though we find it very difficult to find words to express your quintessential being Lord we have this word glory a word which speaks to us of your might of your mightiness of your splendor and majesty and Lord of your presence and Lord

[25 : 54] I pray for people in church this morning who know there's a credibility gap between the kind of hymns we sing and the way we live our lives Father I want to pray for those people who are frightened people who feel desperate people who feel without hope Lord please say to them now thou art with me Lord right now we could cut your presence in this place with a knife but Lord we don't want to go home thinking about just what went on here today but we do want to go on thinking about what happened here so Lord I pray come Holy Spirit Lord help us now this week whenever in your time oh Lord to catch a glimpse of your glory that we may know who you are because you know each of us personally come down oh love divine fill thou this soul of mine and visit it with thine own ardor glowing oh comfort to draw near within my heart appear and kindle it thy holy flame bestowing

Lord we pray that right now you would do your work amongst us and we pray it in the name of Jesus and the people who agreed and the people who wanted it said together in a loud voice Amen Amen