

Reclaiming The Glory Of Christmas

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Preacher: Billy Nye

[0:00] Well, I don't know about you, but in our house, the Nye household has been pulling out some old favorite Christmas stories, both to watch and to read.

One of my favorites is called Mooseltoe. Moose and mistletoe. It's really funny. You'll have to read it.

It's one of my kids' favorites. My daughter absolutely adores the nutcracker tale. But probably my favorite is this one right here, The Grinch.

Anybody like this one? It's become a cultural classic. And if you don't know the story, which I'm sure is a minority of you, all the Who's down in Whoville liked Christmas a lot.

But the Grinch, who lived just north of Whoville, did not. And that's how the book starts. And the Grinch is this horribly mean character who decides that he is going to steal Christmas from the Who's.

[1:07] And the way he does it is he becomes the anti-Santa Claus. And he dons a Santa Claus hat and coat. And he invades their homes.

And instead of giving, he takes. And he sucks every Christmas tradition, decoration, food, everything out of their house.

Even the log for the fire. So that the crumbs that he leaves in their houses are much too small for all of their mouths. And it is a horrible thing to do.

He steals Christmas. And he loads it all up in his sleigh, pulled heroically by his little dog, Max. Who knows how he does it. And he takes it up 3,000 feet up to the top of Mount Crumpet to dump it.

And he is standing there. And it's balanced on the peak of Mount Crumpet. And he's ready to shove it over the side. And he says, poo-poo to the Who's. He was grinchously humming.

[2:08] They're finding out now that no Christmas is coming. They're just waking up. I know just what they'll do. Their mouths will hang open a minute or two. And then all the Who's down in Whoville will all cry, boo-hoo.

That's a noise, grinned the Grinch, that I simply must hear. So he paused. And the Grinch put a hand to his ear. And he did hear a sound rising over the snow.

It started in low. And then it started to grow. You've got to love Dr. Seuss. But the sound wasn't sad. Why?

This sound sounded merry. But it couldn't be so. But it was merry, very. He stared down at Whoville. The Grinch popped his eyes.

Then he shook. And what he saw was a shocking surprise. Every Who down in Whoville, the tall and the small, was singing.

[3:08] Without any presents at all. He hadn't stopped Christmas from coming. It came. Somehow or other, it came just the same. This is when I start to tear up.

Seriously, every time I read this to my kids, I'm like... And the Grinch, with his Grinch feet ice cold in the snow, stood puzzling and puzzling. How could it be so?

It came without ribbons. It came without tags. It came without packages, boxes, or bags. And he puzzled three hours till his puzzler was sore.

And then, the Grinch thought of something he hadn't before. Maybe Christmas, he thought, doesn't come from a store.

Maybe Christmas, perhaps, means a little bit more. A little bit more.

[4:10] If a Grinch came to your house and sucked all the Christmas traditions, all the festivities, the lights, the cookies, the decorations, the activities, the presents, the stockings, sucked them completely out of your house.

Is every physical evidence of Christmas completely gone? Would there be any Christmas left? Another way to ask this, my wife and I were talking about this the other day, what is the bare minimum, the lowest common denominator, that has to be there in order for Christmas to be Christmas?

Is there a center of gravity to the whole Christmas season that if you could take it out, Christmas would just implode or it would just be an empty shell?

You could almost ask the question this way, what is the glory of Christmas? What is the center of gravity that weighs it all down?

[5:33] What's the oomph of Christmas? When the Bible uses the word glory to describe something or someone, it's getting at the idea of oomph, weight, gravity, importance, fullness, excellence on display.

So what is the weight? What is the oomph? What is the excellence on display at Christmas? Well, I'd like to argue this morning that the glory of Christmas is this.

The glory of Christmas is that the fullness of God's glory came to dwell with us as one of us.

The glory of Christmas is that the fullness of God's glory came to dwell with us as one of us. Now, I don't want you to move past that too quickly.

Keep gazing at it. Look at that baby in the donkey's feeding trough. Get it in your mind's eye. He is the fullness of God who became a human being and did not cease from being God.

[6:59] Chew on that for a sec. It's the most weighty, the most wondrous, the most meaningful thing that has ever happened. God became man.

God and humanity united in one person. The God-man. And he's right there in the manger swaddled and weak.

All of their glories fade into the background. It's staggering. It jars you if you let it. That's the glory of Christmas.

It's the glory of history. But why? Why would the fullness of God's glory come to dwell with us as one of us?

What I'd like to do with the rest of our time together is I want to explore that question by sketching out the story of glory in the Bible.

[8:14] We're going to do it in three chapters. Chapter one is reflection and residence. Chapter two replacement and removal. Chapter three re-entry and renewal.

You don't have to remember that. We're going to tackle them one at a time. I'll be in a couple different passages but we're going to start at Genesis chapter one. So if you would turn there with me. It's pretty easy to find. Very beginning of the Bible.

Genesis chapter one. Let's explore this first chapter in our story of glory. Reflection and residence. reflection and residence.

One of the things that I've had the privilege of doing for the most majority of my adult life is teaching teenagers. And I've either been a teacher or a pastor and there's a reason it's a privilege is because teenagers although they're really good at hiding it are almost as curious as my preschoolers.

They ask good questions. Really good questions. As long as they can overcome the uncoolness of asking questions. And one of the consistent questions that I face as a Bible teacher or as a pastor for teenagers is why did God make everything anyway?

[9:35] What made him want to do this? Was he lonely? Was he bored? It's a great question. It's a fantastic question. Now I'm not going to read the whole creation account but what I want to do to begin to answer this question is begin to look at how good everything is and then that will lead us into the whole idea of reflection.

So let's look at the beginning of the creation account. Verse 3 God makes something. Let there be light he says and there was light and God saw that the light was good.

So what he does is he speaks, creates something and steps back and assesses his creation and then he gives it his quality control seal of approval and he says good.

It's good. The whole of creation from the cosmos to koala bears is soaked in goodness and not just impersonal goodness.

No it's a reflection of the goodness of their creator. creator. The whole created order is an overflow. It's a reflection of the goodness of the creator.

[10:48] It's just a sample of his creativity, of his beauty, his strength, his majesty, not to mention his sense of humor. I mean who else would come up with the idea of a three-toed sloth that moves like .2 miles an hour?

Or a flamingo with ginormous legs? psalm 19 sums it up the best. The heavens declare the glory of God. The sky above proclaims his handiwork.

The universe is 24-7 busy shouting out the glory of the creator, reflecting his glory.

glory. It's a spectacle. It's a lavish tribute to his glory. But wait, there's more. Skip on down to verse 26 and 27 of Genesis 1.

Verses 26 and 27. Then God said, let us make man in our image after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.

[12:04] So God created man in his own image. In the image of God, he created him. Male and female, he created them.

So here he makes humans in his image. When you look at a mirror, you see yourself. But what you see is not you.

It's a reflection of you. When God looks at humans, he sees a reflection, a mirror image of his glory. Sit and ponder that one for a sec. Every person that you see, every person sitting in this room, is actively reflecting the image of the glory of the creator.

And we are not God, but we image him. We reflect his glory in a way that sloths and whales and koala bears, they can't.

[13:05] They do exhibit his glory in many other ways, but not in the full way that we do. So we are like walking, talking mirrors. And we are designed to be glory reflectors, par excellence, scattering beams of his goodness and his wisdom like human disco balls, magnifying, making known his glory to all of creation and to each other.

But what good is a mirror unless you're near it for it to reflect you? And now, we've got the idea of reflection down.

Let's get to this idea of residence in this first chapter. It's incredible. Go to the beginning of chapter 2 in Genesis. Let's flip the page or look across the page.

Chapter 2. Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, all the host of them. And on the seventh day, God finished his works that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all the work that he had done.

So God blessed the seventh day and made it holy because on it God rested from all his work that he had done in creation. Now, I'm pretty sure we're all agreed that God resting doesn't mean he sat and took a breather.

[14:28] He's God. He doesn't get tired. What does it mean? Well, it means a couple of things, but one of the most exciting things that it points to is this.

Genesis was written at a time when all the other pagan cultures around Israel worshipped lots of different gods and they built temples for them.

And the way that these ancient pagan cultures described their gods living in their society, separate temples, it would say they rested in them. And so that rest language is pointing to an idea of a temple, of a divine residence.

What's so cool about this is that this is saying that God has just made an entire universe temple for him to reside in with his glory reflectors, his image bearers, us, so that we would be near him, residing with him, with his great glory, reflecting and enjoying and delighting in him forever.

God created the universe and he was so that brings us back to the great question I keep hearing from teenagers. Why did God make everything? I think we can summarize it by saying God created the universe not only to be a theater of reflecting his glory but also as a temple in which his glory could reside and be with his image bearers for his glory, which is, by the way, our great delight.

[16:13] That's God's plan. But tragically, as I'm sure that you know all too well, that's not how the story of glory continues. So we're ready for chapter two.

Replacement and removal. Replacement and removal. We're going to be in Romans chapter one, so sorry for making you launch all the way across your Bible.

So back, let's go to the New Testament, Romans chapter one. Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John are the four gospels, then go to Acts, and then Romans is right after that.

I'll let you have a second to get there. One of the most condemning lines in all of scripture is found in Romans chapter one.

And if you found it, we're going to be in verses 21 through 23. We'll start in verse 21. Romans chapter one, verse 21.

[17:14] As I read, listen for glory language and image language. For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened.

Claiming to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles.

Part of the perverseness of sin is that we would take his precious glory that we were designed to soak in and reflect and delight in and replace it.

Replace it with a lesser glory. Sin is exchanging the glory of the undying eternal God for images of time-bound mortal creatures.

Now, Paul here is describing idolatry. Idolatry is the fundamental sin in the Bible. It is the unnaturally natural tendency of the human heart to get a glimpse of God's glory in some created thing that was meant to reflect him and point us to him and say, hmm, there is something good.

[18:52] It is created by God to reflect God's glory and to inspire me to delight in him. But you know what? I think I will take it, turn it into God instead, find my all in all in it and not in the one who made it.

It is a classic example of this in Exodus 32. You don't have to turn there. Let's tell you the story. God's people, Israel, had already beheld his glory, not only in the incredible rescue from slavery in Egypt, but also they're right at the base of Mount Sinai and God's visual glory is on display right there on the mountain in the form of a thunderstorm.

They've heard his voice speak. They've been following his glory cloud until it led him to the mountain. No other people in history have seen so many visual glory fireworks as these people, but right here at the base of a mountain where God is visually displaying his spectacular glory, they take a bunch of gold, they melt it into a image of a domestic animal, they call it God, and they worship it.

Worshiping something that is even less than a copy of a copy when the original is right there in front of you. I mean, there are just no words for the sheer audacity and stupidity of this kind of glory replacing idolatry.

And yet, this is us. This is me. This is you. We replace the glory of God with created things that were only meant to reflect him and point us to him.

[20:37] We exchange the eternal pleasure of his glorious presence for short-lived thrills of pleasure, power, wealth, status, recognition, entertainment, fill in the blank.

And in so doing, not only do we replace his glory, but we ridicule it and we rob God of his glory. We ridicule it by reducing his infinite goodness to a petty thing and exchanging and exalting his creation over him.

And worst of all, we rob him of his glory by seeking to exalt ourselves over him. We crowd him out of his rightful place, demanding recognition and ultimately worship for ourselves.

If we were designed to be mirrors reflecting the glory of God, then we have become mirrors that bent in on ourselves, seeking to reflect ourselves, seeking to delight in ourselves.

The problem is that mirrors that do that get shattered. And that's what happens to us. There is a natural consequence to this too. We've looked at the replacement.

[22:02] Now let's look at the removal. We get removed from his glorious presence, which by the way is our only good and our greatest good.

If you flip back to Genesis for just a moment, I'd like to show you something. The nice thing is it's all the way back to the beginning. Genesis chapter 3. Adam and Eve have just done some glory replacing.

They've replaced God's glory with the glory of self. They have replaced his rule with their own self-rule. And they've declared themselves independent from God.

And then his glory draws near. Look at verse 8 of chapter 3. Genesis 3 verse 8. And they heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day.

And the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden. Their greatest delight, the very joy that they were made for, draws near and they run.

[23:13] They remove themselves from his presence. They hide in fear and shame. And this leads us to verse 23 of the same chapter.

Therefore the Lord God sent them out of the garden of Eden to work the ground from which he is taken. God finishes and formalizes the removal process.

Adam and Eve began it. And then God finishes it up. He sent them out from his presence. He blocked them off from his glory.

Which they themselves have already done. And if you keep on reading Genesis, the evil and the perversion that results from this removal from his glory is shocking.

And it's heartbreaking. But I don't think we need to read Genesis to know that, do we? You and I know that pretty well. We're very well aware of our unnaturally natural tendency to replace God's glory and to rob him of his glory.

[24:25] To remove ourselves far from him. Each one of us knows pretty well that sense of shame and I want to hide and get out of here. I don't want to be exposed.

We are those curved in mirrors. Those mirrors bent in on ourselves. And we're shattered and we're broken. But the story of glory continues.

And there's a light of hope that dawns. Chapter 3. Re-entry and renewal. Re-entry and renewal.

Have you ever been reading a story or watching a movie and then all of a sudden an old character that you thought was written out of the story suddenly re-enters after an absence?

I'm thinking like Gandalf from Lord of the Rings. If you haven't, I'm totally going to spoil it for you. I'm sorry. He falls into the abyss. You think he's gone.

[25:25] And then he comes back. He re-enters the story and hope dawns again. Well, the same thing happens with God's glory in the story of glory. God has been at work since the garden.

He's been initiating relationship by grace with a guy named Abraham. He's given, he's made a people out of his descendants and he's called the people to himself.

Even rescued them from Egypt. And then his glory shows up again in the book of Exodus. Would you turn to Exodus 24 for me? Exodus 24.

Referenced it earlier with the story of the golden calf, but God's glory shows up on a mountain and God's people are beholding it. And it makes you realize his glory is re-entering.

There's hope still. Only this time his glory is veiled. And it's a little scary. So look at verses 15 through 18 in chapter 24.

[26:32] This gives us just a taste of what God's people get to see. Verse 15. Moses went up on the mountain and the cloud covered the mountain.

The cloud is God's glory made manifest. The glory of the Lord dwelt on Mount Sinai and the cloud covered it six days. And on the seventh day he called to Moses out of the midst of the cloud.

Now the appearance of the glory of the Lord was like a devouring fire on the top of the mountain in the sight of the people of Israel. Moses entered the cloud and went up on the mountain.

And Moses was on the mountain 40 days and 49. And so and there's another part of Exodus where people are like Moses you got to handle this. We can't bear being so close to this glory.

It's frightening to us. And for a glory replacing and glory robbing people the pure glory of God would be kind of frightening. So Moses goes up as a mediator. He's a middle man.

[27:34] He's a priest who can relate to God on behalf of the people. He can also relate to the people on behalf of God. And God wants to reside with his people so they can see his glory and be satisfied with his glory.

His glory is reentered but it has to be veiled. It can't be unveiled. They would die. And also there has to be a mediator. Someone to go back and forth.

And so to summarize the rest of the story of Exodus his people can't go up to be where he is because of their sins so he comes down and comes to be where they are.

He gives Moses these really fancy instructions to build a tent called a tabernacle so that his glory can reside with his people and yet be veiled. Veiled in a tent.

And the glory has to have priests mediators who can relate to God on behalf of the people and relate to the people on behalf of God. But even though it's veiled and it needs a mediator the glory has reentered.

[28:38] Hope. There's movement. The plot's going. And once his people get to the land that he has for them the land is pictured in the Bible as a place where it's kind of a recapitulation of Eden of the garden so that God's glory and God's people can be together again.

As long as his glory is veiled in a temple and there's mediators priests and they obey his word and they follow him. Israel failed miserably.

They vomit. Ultimately in the book of Ezekiel he gets a vision of the glory of God departing out of the temple and standing outside the city of Jerusalem in judgment and Israel gets demolished by the Babylonians and God's people are banished.

They've been removed from God's presence once again. But then in Ezekiel 43 there's this promise that God's glory is going to come back.

He's going to come back and reenter a new temple. And it's going to bring renewal to the human heart to be able to be in God's presence and live and reflect his presence once again.

[30:00] Well time passes a new temple is built but nothing like Ezekiel's vision comes to pass. And God's people are wondering when will God's glory come to reside with us again?

When is he going to reenter and it's going to be the same as it was? When will he renew us so that we can behold his glory like we were meant to? That's getting us ready for the glory of Christmas. If you turn to John chapter 1 If we look at John 1 Matthew, Mark, Luke, John in the New Testament fourth book in If we look at the gospel of John the first five verses he describes this person named the word in the beginning was the word and the word was with God and the word was God He was in the beginning with God the ultimate glory reflector All things were made through him and without him was not anything made that was made in him was life and the life was the light of men the light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it so we get a glimpse of hope there's a person out there who is God and yet he's distinct from God and all things were made through him he is God's perfect self-reflection he's the ultimate mirror because he is God and check out what verse 14 says about him this is the glory of Christmas and the word became flesh and the word became flesh

God's perfect mirror the ultimate image of God the ultimate glory reflecting mirror became flesh God's glory is laying on a feeding trough he's visible we can see his glory look at the rest of the verse verse 14 the word became flesh flesh and dwelt among us the word in the original language is literally to pitch your tent God God's fullness of glory has come to pitch his tent among us just as God's glory resided with his people in a veiled tent in the wilderness now God has pitched his tent to reside among us once again but not as a place as a person in a temple of flesh and bone just like the

Christmas hymn that we sang Hark the Herald veiled in flesh the Godhead see hail incarnate deity and the next phrase we have seen it we have seen his glory glory as of the only son from the father full of grace and truth God's glory has re-entered the story pursuing his cracked mirrors pursuing his broken image bearers he arrived and he came to renew us and if we see not in the way that John the apostle saw he got to see with physical eyes but plenty of people saw Jesus with physical eyes and didn't see the way that really counts which is seeing and trusting and believing and understanding by faith if we see this child the glory of God as the one who is God's ultimate mirror came to restore God's broken mirror

[34:22] God's broken glory reflectors then it renews us and the fullest display is in John chapter 12 feel free to skip over there real quick in John chapter 12 Jesus just enters Jerusalem for the last time he's there ultimately to die and the way that God talks about Jesus' glory in the

book of John is not in terms of the mount of transfiguration where his clothes are shining and his face is beaming but it's in terms of this look at verse 23 of John chapter 12 this is the glory of the son of God the hour has come Jesus said for the son of man to be glorified truly truly

I say to you unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies it remains alone but if it dies it bears much fruit skip down to verse 27 now my soul is troubled and what shall I say father save me from this hour but for this purpose I have come to this hour father glorify your name and then a voice came from heaven I have glorified it and I will glorify it again so what is the glory of Christ what is the fullest display of God's glory that we get to behold at Christmas time is that this baby who is the glory of God came to glorify God by dying on a cross the place it's this beautiful good news where he took on the doomed fate of glory replacers and glory robbers like us as the perfect glory reflector as our substitute and this is what renews us Paul says in 2nd

Corinthians that as we behold this stunning glory of this good news we are changed we are transformed in 2nd Corinthians he says this is the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ who is the image of God beholding this glory we get to be transformed into his same image from one degree of glory to another when the Grinch beheld the glory of Christmas when he realized that Christmas isn't from a store but it's something a little bit more his heart grew three sizes that day he was transformed beholding the glory of Christmas Christmas and that is God's intent for us to behold his glory dwelling among us residing with us to renew us and one day he'll return with unshielded glory and we will behold him face to face we will reflect his glory like disco balls what we once hid from which once would have destroyed us will then give us eternal delight and his glory will reside with us forever

Revelation 21 is just astounding go home and give it a read it's the new residence that we will have with him and listen to this and I saw no temple in that city no need for veiled glory there for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb whereas before the universe was a temple of God's glory now the new Jerusalem he is the temple and the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it for the glory of God gives it light and its lamp is the Lamb full renewal all because of that glorious reentry this is the glory of Christmas feast on it church is this the glory of your Christmas we are distracted people maybe you came in pretty distracted and you can't see this we are weak people maybe you came in feeling pretty weak and empty and exhausted by life we are broken people we are shattered by sin God's glory is able to renew us whether broken distracted or weak lift your eyes to the glory of Christmas let's pray father thank you for the immense mercy that you have shown giving us new birth into a living hope of your glory your glory veiled in flesh in the son of God who came to restore broken glory reflectors like us

[40:11] God I pray that this truth would sink down deep into our hearts and that we would like the Grinch be changed father I pray particularly that you would help our distracted eyes to fixate on the glory of Jesus help those father who are weak to attach themselves by faith and then be made strong to the glory of Jesus father I pray for those who are broken shattered by sin pray that they would find renewal in the glory of Jesus we thank you God for your goodness and kindness to us in Jesus name amen