

The Glory of Christ (1)

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[0 : 0 0] This year, 2025, marks the 1700th anniversary of the production of what we call the Nicene Creed, the central confession of the faith of the faith of the faith of the Holy Spirit.

of all we believe. Never has there been a greater need for the clarity the Nicene Creed offers.

We live in a world of the breakdown of secular society and of great religious confusion where Christians, standing on the glorious statements of the Nicene Creed, have the only message worth proclaiming, hearing, and believing. Now, the Nicene Creed, as we might see later in the year, spends the majority of its time on the person and work of Jesus Christ, the Jesus who is God of God, light of light, begotten of the Father. At the same time as thinking through the Nicene Creed, I've been reading the mastery work of the 17th century English Puritan John Owen entitled Meditations and Discourses on the Glory of Christ. You know, you can't read this book except you begin to bask in Owen's careful and beautiful descriptions of the glory of Jesus.

You put the two together, the anniversary of the production of the Nicene Creed and my reading of John Owen's book, and I've decided to spend the next eight Sunday evenings on the theme of the glory of Christ. There's one more reason I do this. We live in a world which at times seems to be filled with bad news. Listen to what Owen says. I was very much drawn to this.

Our minds, he writes, are apt to be filled with a multitude of perplexing thoughts. Fears, cares, dangers, distresses, passions, and lusts make various impressions on our minds, filling them with disorder, with darkness and confusion. But where the soul is fixed in its thoughts and contemplations on the glory of Christ, it will be brought into and kept into a holy, serene, spiritual frame.

[2 : 5 6] How we need such serenity. Well, this evening, I want us to focus on the first of the areas in which we see the glory of Christ. Christ, our Lord and Savior, is the only representative of God to His church.

In other words, we see God nowhere else other than in Christ. In John 1 verse 18, we read these words, No one has ever seen God, the only God who is at the Father's side, He has made Him known.

Now, you will know the first 18 verses of John chapter 1 are an encyclopedia of the glory of our Lord, but seldom does it rise higher than this. Christ, the only God who is at the Father's side, He has made God known. Now, if at any point in tonight's sermon, you get lost, you're in very good company, I'm lost too. Some things are so mysterious that they exceed the capacity of the human mind to understand. At times like these, the best thing to do is to stand back and to follow John Owen's advice. Fix your thoughts and contemplations on the glory of Christ.

I want us to consider three brief things this evening from this verse. First, God not seen. Second, God makes Himself known. And third, God in God. My prayer for this whole series is that our hearts may be warmed, our minds stimulated, and our wills motivated, that we too may begin to enjoy the serenity and contentment of living for and serving this Christ, whose glory far outshines the sun.

First of all then, God not seen. God not seen. John begins verse 18 by saying, no one has ever seen God. By definition, it's impossible to see God because God is a spirit.

[5 : 34] Physical eyes cannot see spirit. Fish can't breathe out of water, and we cannot see that which is not physical. We are constitutionally incapable of seeing that which cannot be seen. People sometimes dismiss the idea of God by saying, well, I'll only believe in that which I can see with my own eyes. They're not thinking straight. If God is, then by definition, he cannot be seen. And it's impossible, therefore, to see him. What they're really saying is, I want to do what's impossible. And as rationalists, they should know that makes no logical sense.

But then we face a problem of how in the Old Testament, on several occasions, people claim to have seen God. For example, God walked with Adam in the Garden of Eden. Again, in Deuteronomy 5, 23, the people of Israel say, in this day we have seen God speak with man. Once more in Isaiah 6, the prophet Isaiah says, in the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord. Now, we're going to put this problem to the side. I promise we will come back to it later in our studies and show rather than how it contradicts what John says here, it adds to his argument. No one has ever seen God.

So, there's a constitutional, physical reason why a physical humanity like us cannot see the spiritual God. We are incapable. But there's another reason. Namely, God is so holy, sinful men and women like us can't see him. It would be like trying to look directly into the sun in the heat of the day.

If we were ever foolish enough to do such a thing, it would burn out our retinas. In the same way, because of our sin and God's holiness, we cannot see him as he is.

In Exodus 33 and verse 20, God says to Moses, man cannot see me and live. Over the centuries, God had represented himself in many signs and symbols. For example, the pillar of cloud and fire which went before the Israelites on the wilderness journeys. The cloud and the fire were real, but they were not God. Again, that oppressive cloud which filled the temple, which is sometimes called the Shekinah glory. The cloud was real, but it represented God. It was not God.

[8 : 24] Once more, the flames of the burning bush, which Moses saw on top of Mount Sinai, the bush was real, the flames were real, but they were not God. So, prior to what John says here in John 1.18, no one had ever seen God. He was beyond human ability to see. Now, we can see the sun, and we can see the stars, and we can see the sea, and we can see the sky, and we can see the plants and the animals.

We can see each other, but we cannot see God. This morning, we were reflecting on the infinite gap between the Creator and the creation from Psalm 8, and talking about worshiping the Maker and not what He's made. This is one reason why people worship idols made out of wood and stone, or they worship the idol of their house, or the idol of their money. They can see these things, but they cannot see God.

It doesn't excuse them, but it does explain why they do this. God has told us enough about Himself through all He has made so that humans are without excuse. Every human being intuitively knows that there is a God, but rather than worship Him, they consciously choose to worship things they can see and touch. However, nothing hides the truth John is proclaiming. No one has ever seen God.

God has told them things about Himself, but God has never shown them Himself. No one can ever say, no one could ever have said, well, this is what God looks like, because no one had ever seen Him.

It's all a mystery in the best sense of the word. So, God not seen. No one has seen God.

[10 : 26] Second, God makes Himself known. God makes Himself known. In what is a stunning announcement in this verse, John says, John says, the only God who is at the Father's side, He has made Him known.

The God who no one has ever seen has now been made known. He has been declared. This is the glory of Christ as the representative of God, that He has made God known to us. Everything we know about God, we know because Christ has made Him known to us. When we talk of God revealing Himself, we are primarily talking about the work of Christ as the revealer of God.

And this answer is partly the question we raised a little earlier. When the Old Testament speaks of people seeing God, Adam and Eve walked with God in the Garden of Eden. Moses saw the Lord. Isaiah saw the Lord. On each occasion, the Lord they saw was Christ. Anytime a person is spoken of in the Old Testament as having seen God. The God they see is the pre-incarnate Christ. And again, we're going to come back to this later in our series on the glory of Christ in a sermon we're going to call the glory of Christ in the Old Testament. John tells us here, Christ makes God known. He makes Him known.

The exact word John uses here is one with which some of you may be familiar. The word exegesis. Christ is the exegesis of God. The word exegesis means to explain something in detail, to explain something in detail. No one has ever seen God, but the glory of Christ consists in this.

He has come to explain God in detail to us. Later on in this gospel in John 14 verse 8, the apostle Philip says to Jesus, Lord, show us the Father and it's enough for us. Show us God.

[12 : 52] Jesus replies, have I been with you so long and still you do not know me, Philip? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. Whoever sees me sees God. By His words and by His works, Jesus explains who God is.

He declares God to us in detail. So, at every stage in the life of Jesus, we need to ask the question, what's Jesus teaching us about who God is and what God is like? So, here we have Jesus being met by a man who is begging him to cleanse him from his leprosy. We read that Jesus is moved with compassion and He reaches out to touch that man and says, I am willing to be clean. We learn from this that God draws close to the troubled and sick, that God hears their cries, that God is filled with compassion for them, that God reaches out to touch the untouchable, and that God is powerful to overcome all manner of human sickness. If you want to know who God is and what God is like, study the life of Jesus.

On another occasion, on the night of His betrayal by Judas Iscariot, Jesus takes off His outer garments and wraps a towel around His waist and fills a basin with water and He washes His disciples' feet.

See the humility of Jesus in action. He takes the place of a slave serving His unfaithful disciples and washing their dirty feet. What does this tell you about who God is and what God is like? Does it change your view of God at all? And yet on another occasion, Jesus is confronted by a man who is demon-possessed?

His name is Legion. This man is totally out of control. Jesus calmly talks to this man and then powerfully commands the demons to leave. What does this tell us about who God is and what God is like?

[15 : 15] He is the God who has power over the darkness of hell and has compassion on a man driven mad by these demons. In His purity, His power, His passion, His love, compassion and purity, righteousness, holiness, and humility, Jesus explains God to us in detail. Think again of how Jesus criticizes the Pharisees and religious leaders of His religious leaders of His day. He calls them whitewashed tombs, hypocrites.

Here then is the attitude of God toward all those who play the religious card, but genuine faith in Him is not in their hearts. Once more, remember how Jesus said to His exhausted disciples, come to Me, all you who are weary and heavily laden, and I will give you rest.

He reveals God as the one to whom we as weary and heavily burdened people may go to to find rest.

And you know, we could go anywhere in the Gospels into the life of Jesus and see the same pattern. What do the words and works of Jesus tell us about who God is and what God is like?

That's the question we need to ask of every episode in the life of Jesus. Every word of Jesus, every action of Jesus, they all reveal who God is.

[16 : 48] God has made Himself known in Jesus Christ. No one who has ever read the Gospels can now say they do not know who God is or what God is like, because Jesus has explained God in detail.

Because of Jesus, we know way more about God than Abraham did, or Moses did, or David did, or Isaiah did.

They lived in days before the birth of Jesus, so their knowledge of God was partial and complete. We are greatly privileged compared to these saints of old.

We have a far greater knowledge of who God is or what God is like than they ever could have dreamed of having. It's true. No one has ever seen God.

But we have seen Jesus Christ. And He has made God known to us. From a practical level, let me suggest the following application.

[17 : 52] Never be satisfied with making up your own ideas of who God is and what God is like. Because like is not, our ideas will be very far from the truth.

When you are reading of Jesus in the New Testament Gospels, ask yourself the question, what does this tell me about who God is and what God is like?

Build your picture of God from the words and the works of Jesus, not from philosophy or from your own ideas. Look to the cross on which Jesus died. And crucially, and we will come back to this later in our series.

Look to the cross on which Jesus died. For there we see the greatest exegesis, the greatest explanation of who God is.

Martin Luther famously said, the cross is the test of everything. Most people, when you ask them who they think God is, will either tell you, well, I don't really know.

[19 : 04] Or from our tradition and culture, will tell you that God is unloving, God is cruel, and God is full of anger. But the reality is really very different.

The Anglican Archbishop Michael Ramsey famously said, God is in Christ. God is in Christ, and in Him, God, there is no un-Christlikeness at all.

In God, there is no un-Christlikeness at all. That's who God is. In all of evangelism for Christ, let's make sure that the God we're talking about is the real God.

The God who's in Christ, and in whom there is no un-Christlikeness at all. And not a false God of our own imagination. Another application.

When we're going through hard times as Christians, let's remember who the God who sovereignly controls our lives is. He is not distant.

[20 : 12] He is not playing chess with us for His own dark purposes. He has made Himself known to us in Christ. Never once in all the Gospels do we see Christ crushing a bruised reed.

Never once do we see Him extinguishing a smouldering wick. Rather, He is the Christ of comfort, strength, and encouragement.

The Christ who loves because He represents the God who loves. We must not think harsh thoughts of God, especially at hard times.

Rather, as Alistair Begg famously says, Remember that although we cannot trace God's hand, we can trust God's heart.

Third and finally, God in God. I have an irritating habit. I have many, but this one's particularly irritating.

[21 : 15] When I'm watching my favourite TV shows, I Google the name of the actors to find out more about them. So Catherine and myself at the moment are watching Beyond Death and Paradise.

So I'm busy finding out about all the actors from Wikipedia. I can now tell you something about most of them. But I wouldn't presume to know them personally.

I've never met them, and the limited information I've got on them comes from Wikipedia on my phone. I'm not really qualified to tell you who they are or what they're really like.

What is it that qualifies Christ to be the only representative of God, more than Moses or Isaiah, these Old Testament holy men?

What is it about Jesus which qualifies Him to be the one through whom ultimately and finally God makes Himself known to us? Well, our text tells us two things.

[22 : 15] First of all, we read that Christ is at our Father's side. Christ is at the Father's side. More literally, He's in the Father's bosom.

That's not a phrase that we use today. But it meant something very different in Jesus' day. To be in someone's bosom meant to be in the closest of relationships with them.

To have one's head lying upon their chest. You just can't get closer than this. It's not just that Christ is at the side of God, but that metaphorically speaking, His head is resting on God's chest.

To go back to John chapter 1 verse 1, we read, In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God. Being in the Father's bosom is the equivalent of being with God.

In other words, no one knows God like Christ does. No one is in a closer relationship with Him.

[23 : 22] I'd like to think that I know Evan fairly well. I've known him for 20 years. I've seen him in a variety of situations. But I would never presume to say that I know Evan half as well as Allison does.

She's his wife. No one is in closer contact with Him than her. No one is closer. And in the same way, no one is closer to God than the Word made flesh, Jesus Christ.

In John chapter 14, we'll come to this later in the series, Jesus says, I am in the Father, and the Father is in me.

I am in the Father, and the Father is in me. This is another truth that sets Christianity apart from Judaism, Islam, or any of the other world religions.

At no stage was it ever said that Moses, Muhammad, or any of the founders of these religions had such close contact with God.

[24 : 28] The closeness of Jesus to God qualifies him to be God's representative. But then in a stunning announcement, John says, No one has ever seen God.

The only God who is at the Father's side has made him known. This is the ultimate glory of Christ as the revealer of God.

He is himself the only God. Who better to reveal who God is and what God is like than God himself.

Moses never claimed it for himself. Neither did David or Isaiah. But of Jesus, it is said here, He is the only God.

The ultimate glory of Christ as the revealer of God is that he is himself God. Which means that Jesus who reached out his hand as he was filled with compassion and touched that leper is God.

[25 : 40] The Jesus who gave legion back his life and sanity is God. The Jesus who wept at the graveside of his friend Lazarus is God.

Isn't this the most amazing thing? Those who say Jesus was just a good man or a prophet but nothing more are doing him the ultimate disservice for Jesus was infinitely more glorious.

He was God in the flesh, his glory veiled, but God still. A good man might tell us something about God but God has come in the flesh to tell us the truth about himself.

Everything we need to know about God has been revealed to us in the life of Jesus Christ. To go back to the beginning, fix your thoughts and contemplations on the glory of Christ.

He is the perfect representative of God. The great revealer of who God is and what God is like because he himself is God.

[26 : 59] As we close, let me reinforce the central application of this study. Whenever we're reading the Gospels, the life of Jesus, we must study carefully the words and the works of Jesus and ask ourselves, what do these words, what do these works tell me about God?

And in particular, study carefully the invitations of Christ. The invitations of Christ.

Come to me, all you who labor, toil, and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Come to me, God says, and bring all your burdens with you.

Come. Come now and take your burdens with you. I'll give you rest. These are the sincere words of the eternal God himself.

Come to me. I'll give you rest. Christ is glorious in that he is the perfect revealer of who God is and what God is like.

[28 : 20] Fix your thoughts and contemplations on his glory. Amen.