

God and His Glory

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[0 : 00] I want to start with the question that's at the top of your outline, and that is, what is your idea of glory, or what picture do you have in mind when I use the word glory?

So, anyone? One word answer, one phrase. It's more than one right answer. The sun in Teletubbies, yeah, okay. Daniel?

Something too bright to look at, yep. What else? People running on the what after they've won? Footy feel, yep. Like after scoring a goal or something, yes.

Now, for me, I think, it wasn't the sun at Teletubbies. For me, it's not so much the sun, but it's the sunrise on the beach. You know, that moment where that single source of light floods the entire vista at dawn, almost guarantees goosebumps for me.

Now, for others, it's the idea of perfection. Perhaps an amazing soccer goal, if you've been watching Euro 2020, or a perfect gymnastic routine, you know, where they nail it after the vote or something.

[1 : 08] Or maybe a brilliant rendition of a piano concerto, something like maybe Mozart's concerto or something like that. Others see it in terms of grandeur and pomp, like the Queen riding down Paul Moore with her golden chariot and everyone else falling in her train.

Now, let me ask you another question now. What is your picture, then, of the glory of God? Not so much just glory, but the glory of God.

And have you experienced it? Do you wish, for example, that you were on the mountain like Moses or at the commissioning of the tabernacle at the end of chapter 40?

Well, as we finish Exodus today, it's been a long journey, much like the Israelites themselves. But we've come now to a key moment in Israel's history, when God's presence descends on the tabernacle and His glory remains on it.

But first, let's just finish off our time at the mountain. So at the end of chapter 24, sorry, 34, in verse 29, we find that after the law is given, Moses was carrying these two huge stone tablets, isn't it, descending from Mount Sinai.

[2 : 29] But unbeknownst to him, his face was radiant because he had spoken to the Lord. It was luminous, probably not green like phosphorus, but bright anyway, bright and shiny.

And as a result, Aaron and the Israelites were afraid of him. But Moses calls them back when he realizes and says, No, no, come back because I need to give you the Lord's commands.

But upon finishing, he puts a veil over his face as a way of shielding this radiance from them. Now, I can't imagine what that would look like, but it must have been fearsome, terrifying, something reflecting God's holiness.

And yet, as we read, this is something that happens as a routine, quite commonly when Moses goes in to speak with the Lord. So verse 33, When Moses finished speaking to them, he put a veil over his face.

But whenever he entered the Lord's presence to speak with him, he removed the veil until he came out. And when he came out and told the Israelites what he had been commanded, they saw his face radiant.

[3 : 41] Then Moses would put the veil back over his face until he went in to speak to the Lord. So the veil is only put on when Moses finishes speaking. You notice that it's removed when God speaks to Moses, and also when Moses speaks to the people.

Only when he's finished speaking does he put on that veil. I think that conveys the importance of God's Word. That is, it's not to be obscured when it was being conveyed, from God to Moses, and then from Moses to the people.

And yet the radiance of his face so reflected God's glory and holiness that it had to be veiled. There is a sense of some awesome terror just by looking at it.

And I think it's a bit like when the people themselves, remember, were too afraid to approach Mount Sinai. Remember when God spoke to them, they said, Oh, no, no, Moses, you go and speak to God.

We're too afraid. You hear from God what he says to us, and then you tell it to us. We don't want to hear directly. There is something then about God's Word and its gravity.

[4 : 51] There's a weightiness about it all. And so the people rightly tremble when God speaks. They're afraid to take it lightly. And actually the meaning of the word glory in Hebrew doesn't just convey brightness and, you know, sort of brilliance and radiance.

There is a meaning of heaviness that goes with the word glory. The Word of God is weighty, even when given through a frail human such as Moses.

And so the people aren't simply to be terrified by it. They actually have to heed God's Word. And to ignore Moses was tantamount to ignoring God.

Well, one aspect of God's Word are the instructions for the tabernacle. And this is the point of Exodus 35 to 39 and 40.

Having been given a second chance, we now see Israel following God's instructions when it comes to building the temple or the tabernacle. And down to the very last detail.

[5 : 59] That's why we have so many chapters, so much description of it. It shows that under Moses' supervision, Israel built the tabernacle just as God instructed them.

They took God's Word seriously, in other words, at least in this respect. In fact, when we look at verses like chapter 36 and verse 2, we catch a glimpse, actually, of how earnest they were to keep the Word.

So verse 2, chapter 36, it says, Then Moses summoned Bezaliel and Ohaliab and every skilled person to whom the Lord had given ability and who was willing to come and do the work.

They received from Moses all the offerings the Israelites had brought to carry out the work. And the people continued to bring freewill offerings morning after morning.

So all the skilled workers who were doing all the work left what they were doing and said to Moses, The people are bringing more than enough to do the work the Lord commanded to be done. Then Moses gave an order and sent this word throughout the camp.

[6 : 59] No man or woman is to make anything else as an offering for the sanctuary. And so the people were restrained from bringing more because what they already had was more than enough to do all the work.

It's a bit like, I think, I don't know whether we announced it at 5 o'clock, but we announced that we were to bring warm clothing to bring down to St. Mark's Fitzroy to help those who are in need.

Well, we've just heard word from St. Mark's that they have more than enough. So stop, all right? So if you were thinking of bringing, stop. We'll let you know if there's more that's needed. And so it's a bit like this, isn't it?

They kept bringing until there was too much and they had to be told to stop. And so although we didn't have a good impression of them two weeks ago with the golden calf, here we see that they have some redeeming features, don't they?

Maybe they were just being contrite. Perhaps it was just with those people that weren't taking part in the golden calf. But whatever it is, it just shows us how humans are, whether as individuals or as groups.

[8 : 06] We're not all bad or all good, are we? We're often a mixed bag, capable of good things like generosity, but also of sinful behavior like idolatry.

Now, we don't have a lot of time to look into all these chapters in detail, but I've drawn up this little table in the outline to show you how the building of the tabernacle maps closely to the instructions that were given earlier in chapters 26, 25, 26, 31.

The order is slightly different. So whereas the instructions were given thematically earlier on, here the building is described in the way it occurred. So in chapter 35, verse 1 to 3, we have again the Sabbath regulations, which I think this is now the fourth or fifth time that it's being given.

But thereafter, it's all related to the tabernacle. So firstly, the appointment of Bezalel and Ohaliab with the skilled workers, just as God had instructed, which we read earlier.

Then the gathering of materials in order for the work to begin until they discovered they had more than was required. Then from chapter 36 and verse 8, we have the building or the construction itself.

[9 : 20] First, the structures of the tabernacle itself are being described. Then in chapter 37, we have the furniture that is inside the tent. So items like the ark, the lampstand, the table, the altar of the incense, those are being built.

Then chapter 38, it moves on to the items outside of the tent, like the bronze altar and the wash basin. After that, we move to the courtyard itself, the thing that surrounds the tabernacle. And finally, we have a section which lists out the amounts of materials used, particularly for the gold, bronze, and silver. Now, this is probably the favorite section of you accountants in our midst. But it's a way, I think, of accounting, isn't it? Of how much was spent, how much it cost, and perhaps even an inventory, so that if they ever needed to come back again and rebuild some of the stuff, they knew how much material was being used.

And then in chapter 39, once the physical structures are in place, attention then turns to the garments for the priests. And when all is done, Moses inspects the work, and we read in verse 42 of chapter 39, the Israelites had done all the work just as the Lord had commanded Moses.

[10 : 39] Moses inspected the work and saw that they had done it just as the Lord had commanded. So Moses blessed them. And if you were to read all the other chapters in detail, you'll hear this constant refrain that they did just as the Lord had instructed or commanded or given them the instructions.

And as a result of that, Moses blesses them for doing so, for obeying God's word. And then in chapter 40, Moses proceeds to set it up and then to anoint Aaron and his sons to the priesthood. And then finally in verse 33, it's all said and done. And we have there the verses that Moses finished the work. And so with this conclusion, Exodus now then has this glorious final finale, if you like.

Not so much the unveiling of the tabernacle, but God himself coming down and filling the tabernacle. So verse 34, which Nathan read a while ago, then the cloud covered the tent of meeting and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle.

Moses could not enter the tent of meeting because the cloud had settled on it and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle. In all the travels of the Israelites, whenever the cloud lifted from above the tabernacle, they would set out.

[12 : 04] But if the cloud did not live, they did not set out until the day it lifted. So the cloud of the Lord was over the tabernacle by day and fire was in the cloud by night in the sight of all the Israelites during all their travels.

You get the sense here of God settling, then lifting, settling. So every time it settles, they stay. Every time it lifts, they go. But here we see finally that God makes good on his promise.

Over the last couple of weeks, we've been hearing him working out whether he will or he won't. But now finally, we discover that God promised that he would go with them and indeed, he will go with them.

He does go with them. The cloud covering the tent was his presence. And God, it says here, was with them during all their travels.

The last few words. So it starts with in all the travels of the Israelites and then it ends with during all their travels. And so the people knew God's presence throughout their travels.

[13 : 12] His presence in the cloud by day and by night in the fire. And because God's presence and glory was going to dwell in the tabernacle, it was so important for the tabernacle then to be built precisely according to God's specifications.

That's why I think we have all those chapters in 35 to 39 writing down in detail exactly what they did. And in some ways, this tabernacle, in this description here at the end, is an echo of Mount Sinai, isn't it?

There are strong similarities between when God's come down in a cloud on Mount Sinai and here again in the tabernacle. And both these two events have then also strong allusions back to the Garden of Eden when God chose for His presence to dwell with His people, with Adam and Eve. And so every time God chooses for His presence to dwell, we see something that reflects His perfection and glory in the tabernacle at Mount Sinai and all the way back to the Garden of Eden.

And this then is a significant point in Israel's history because now, even though this is a temporary dwelling, they have created or they have made something in which God's glory and presence could dwell and remain with them and go with them.

[14:43] Now I've covered these last few chapters rather quickly, but I do encourage you to go read through it again yourself. But what I want to focus on tonight by way of conclusion is again to reflect on what all this means for us as a Christian, as Christians, as a church in the New Testament.

So consider this as a final revision, if you like, as we finish Exodus. And again, here are some questions for you to answer. You can shout out. So the first question, are you ready?

Yes? Listening up to now. Well, we've learned over the last few weeks all about the tabernacle, haven't we? And so the question is, in the New Testament, who is the fulfillment of the tabernacle? And in unison, everyone says? Jesus. Okay, well done. Full marks. Okay, don't go to the next slide just yet, Emma. All right. Now, next question.

Can anyone shout out to me some verses? And it's not the second reading from tonight, okay? Just so you know. Can anyone shout out some verses where this is referred to as Jesus as the tabernacle?

[15:49] Anyone? Hebrews, yeah. Not the one I was looking for. Who said that? Louder a bit.

John 1. John 1, thank you, Ben. So yes, John 1, and I referred to it at the very start of the series. It says, John 1, 14, that the Word became flesh and tabernacled or made His dwelling among us. And in fact, in John 2, Jesus declared, didn't He, when He was at the temple, destroy this temple and I will raise it again in three days. And John then says the disciple realized that He was not talking about the temple, but of His own body.

And so here we have very clearly from John that Jesus is the fulfillment or is the tabernacle. But of course, if you go back to John 1, verse 14 again, Jesus was also filled with God's glory.

As it says there, we have seen His glory, the glory of the one and only Son who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. Except here, we find that with Jesus, God's glory wasn't displayed as a brilliant light or fire, but rather in His character, full of grace and truth.

[17:04] That's God's glory in Jesus. And that's the same, isn't it, as last week when we looked at God's character in Exodus chapter 34, where we find that He says, He's the Lord, the Lord, gracious and compassionate, slow to anger, abounding in love.

Same things, isn't it? Grace and truth, gracious and compassionate, both reflecting God's character and Jesus' character, and both pointing to their glory.

Now, the other thing, of course, and I made mention to John's, Jesus' high priestly prayer in John 17, but at the start of that letter, in John chapter 17, verse 1, we also hear this, where it says, Father, the hour has come.

Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you. For you granted Him authority over all people, that He might give eternal life to all those who you have given Him. Now, this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.

I have brought you glory on earth by finishing the work you gave me to do. And now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began.

[18:26] And so here's one more aspect of it, and that is, Jesus displays God's glory chiefly by finishing His work through His death on the cross.

And so for us today, to see and experience God's glory, that comes through believing in the person and work of His Son, Jesus Christ.

And so you remember at the start when I asked whether you've seen and experienced God's glory?

Well, as a Christian, your answer is yes. Yes, you've seen God's glory because you know Jesus.

Yes, you've experienced God's glory because you've benefited from His work on the cross. And should anyone ask you how it might be possible to see God's glory, then that is our answer to them.

We find it in Jesus. We find it in the good news of salvation and forgiveness that comes from trusting in His death for us. Now, I know that many of us would love to see God's glory literally with our eyes physically, like in the cloud or the fire or the radiant face of Moses.

[19:40] But in our other reading from 2 Corinthians today, Paul said that what the people of Israel experienced was simply a shadow of what we have now.

It may be physically bright, but, you know, Paul says that their minds were made dull, wasn't it? The veil was put over Moses' face so that they could not fully comprehend what God was doing or

saying.

And it's only in Jesus that we truly appreciate the glory of God. Paul was comparing those two glories, wasn't he? The glory that brought condemnation.

It was glorious. It's transitory. It brought condemnation. It was glorious. But how much more? The glory through Jesus that brings righteousness. And we have that glory, don't we?

Because we know Jesus. But seeing that glory is not something that we do physically, but spiritually. It occurs by faith and not by sight.

[20 : 44] It requires that the Spirit opens our spiritual eyes so that we can truly appreciate who Jesus is and what He's done for us. And when we see that, when we see what Christ has done for us, then we see, don't we, God's glorious character of grace and truth.

Now the amazing thing for me was what Paul then moves on to because he concludes in 2 Corinthians 3, verse 17 by saying, Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.

And we all, we all, with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord's glory, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord's glory, are being transformed into His image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.

So we've moved on, haven't we, to just seeing God's glory to now being transformed into His image with ever-increasing glory.

What an amazing thought that we don't just see God's glory, we get to reflect God's glory as well. And given what we now know in Exodus, Paul says that as God's people, we are sort of like standing in Moses' shoes, aren't we?

[22 : 07] Except we don't have a veil over our face because we're looking into God's glory in the person of Jesus Christ. Now we don't have to be shielded, nor be terrified or blinded because of what Jesus had done.

And more than that, because of the Spirit in us and among us, as we look into Christ, we are being transformed into Jesus' image with ever-increasing glory.

This is glory without end. This is ever-increasing glory. More and more and then more again. That's what God's glory is doing in us now as we reflect Jesus.

So we may not have Moses' radiant face, although some of you have very cheerful faces, very radiant. But in our character and our conduct as we follow Jesus, we reflect His grace and truth to the world.

We reflect His glory, don't we? And you know, it may seem like such a mundane and simple thing, but as a church, that's what we're on about.

[23 : 14] As we gather, it doesn't seem very impressive, does it? Just going out about our routine of meeting together, reading the Bible, praying, encouraging each other, you know, living as Jesus' disciples, doing good works like Christ would have done.

But yet, as we live that, we are being transformed into the likeness of Christ in ever-increasing glory, just like Jesus.

glorious. It's not glamorous, but it's glorious. We're never going to light up, you know, channel 10 or channel 7, but it's glorious.

It's what God has designed us to be as His people, just by being faithful, isn't it, to His Word and to what He wants us to do.

And as we do that, we become witnesses of His glory, reflecting the image of His Son and drawing others to Him. So, we just need to be ourselves, really, as a church, don't we?

[24 : 18] We don't need to try and impress or be even wholly, wholly and morally perfect, those kind of things, but in and through how we live, how we love and treat one another, how we show grace and compassion, how we're thankful, even in spite of adversity, how we're steadfast in hope, how we lay down our lives and serve one another sacrificially.

All of those things bring glory to God. All of those things reflect Christ's glory. And as we do, the Spirit will open the eyes of those who see us and turn them so that they can also see and experience the glory of His Son, Jesus.

Let's pray. Father, thank You that You reveal Your glory in Your Son, Jesus, that we see in His life and work on the cross the glorious grace and truth that is Your character.

Help us, as we gaze on Him as our glorious Lord, to be transformed into His image and to reflect His glory to a world that longs for salvation from You. And yet, unless the Spirit opens their eyes,

availed from it.

Lord, we pray, open their eyes that they may see You and Your Son, the great gift of salvation that is to be found in Jesus Christ, their Lord and Savior. In His name we pray.

[25 : 43] Amen.