# Great is the Glory of the Lord

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Date: 29 December 2002

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[0:00] You. And my new march is still working. And we're still feeling those wonderful Christmas emotions of joy and peace, of family time. That can be a very intense Christmas emotion.

But all those wonderful things that come from this time together, getting presents and being together and celebrating, you get a wonderful glow, there are wonderful emotions at this time of year.
Hope you're still feeling wonderful. As many of you know, my family have been away in Germany due to the death of my mother-in-law last week. And the result of that for me has been that I've been spending a lot more time praying than is usual for me.
Praying because I just felt I had to in some way be there for my family. And prayer was the only way I could feel that I was still caring for them and still upholding them in this difficult time.
And there's been a funny kind of spin-off as a result of this praying. And it's that spin-off of feeling closer to God. Isn't that funny? You know, just pray a bit more and you feel that closeness to God, that closeness and that freshness that can be so easily lost in the busyness of life.
[1:15] I wonder if you're feeling closer to God as a result of Christmas. Are you standing in a greater awe of the glory of the Lord as a result of celebrating Christmas?

Because, you know, during some of the worship over Christmas itself, I found as we were singing those wonderful songs and hymns of Christmas, like the one we just sang, Oh, come all ye faithful. Or Hark the Herald. All that beautiful music we've had over the last week or so. I found that in my heart I was just saying, Lord, I thank you for what you have done. I had a greater sense of awe and majesty at the glorious thing that God has done at that first Christmas.
The reality of what God did for us in being born as a human being. Of making His glory known to us in Jesus. I just wanted to praise the Lord.
Great is the glory of the Lord. But, you know, in that I realized that much of the time I'm actually a conceptual Christian or a virtual Christian.
[2:23] By that I mean I assent to the Christian faith in my mind. I have submitted my life to Jesus Christ. But most of the time I go around with my head separated from my heart.

And what I send to in my head about Christianity, I don't always engage with in my heart. I think I keep my heart closed. I keep my heart closed most of the time to this great love of God made available to us in Jesus.
I close my being off to the glory of the Lord, which He has made available to us in Christ Jesus. I keep myself close to the awesome reality, the glory of the person, the fact behind the Christian faith.
Because our Christian faith is not just head knowledge, and it is not just emotions. It is about accessing the glory of God made known to us in Jesus Christ.
Well, now, the writer of our psalm, Psalm 138, had no problem. He was open and focused on God in a very profound way.
[3:34] And I want to just look at the first two verses of this psalm now, because I think it gives us some pointers of a life lived focused on the glory of God.

And they say, I'm just going to look at verses 1 and 2. By the time I'd written on verses 1 and 2, I'd written half an hour, so I thought that was enough. But I promise I won't preach for half an hour. Verses 1 and 2.
I give Thee thanks, O Lord, with my whole heart. Before the gods I sing Thy praise. I bow down toward Thy holy temple and give thanks to Thy name for Thy steadfast love and faithfulness.
For Thou hast exalted above everything Thy name and Thy word. He starts here with thanks and praise. I will give You thanks, O Lord, with my whole heart.

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These are the words of praise and thanksgiving. They come right from the heart of David. They are wholehearted. And they come from being centered on the reality of God.
[4:36] Do you know, I think one of the great omissions of God's people is that we fall short on praise and thanksgiving. We forget to give thanks. And you know, when we turn not just our minds, but the whole of ourselves in praise of God, our Creator, God, our Father, then what we are doing is we're not just doing something out of duty.

We are getting our lives into perspective. We're getting ourselves lined up. I will give thanks to You, O Lord, my God, with my whole heart.
That's the order in which we've got to live our lives. I will give thanks to You, O Lord, with my whole heart. It's all of us that has to be centered on God.
And that's what the festival of Christmas is really all about. We are praising God. We are giving thanks to God for the wonderful, the real, the true thing He did in sending Jesus to take human form and live amongst us.
And yet, you know, we spend a lot of our lives and a lot of our Christian lives worrying about ourselves. And that's understandable. We have a lot of things to worry about.
[5:55] We worry about things like what people think of us. We worry about our health. We worry about our family and our relationships. We worry about our incomes and our pension plans.

We worry about our pension plans. You should hear the other fathers at the playground. We worry about them. And we worry about the future. We worry about getting the right presents for Christmas.
And we worry about the bills that come through the door afterwards. There's a lot of things we have on our minds, a lot of things about ourselves. And while, you know, it's completely understandable that we worry about things, but what it means is that we're not getting ourselves in perspective.
We're not getting our lives in perspective. We're not getting our focus lined up where it needs to be so that our hearts, rather than being utterly focused on the glory of the Lord and what He wants to give us, we are overtaken by the needs all around us and the needs of our lives.
And so we do not live our lives free. Free to be with God. Free to worship God. Free from worry. For when our whole lives are consumed with God and worshiping Him, praise and thanksgiving of God, with the glory of the Lord, then all the other compartments of our lives get put into their right perspective.
[7:22] It's not that God doesn't care about the things of our lives. Quite the opposite. God cares deeply about our lives. But we need to get our focus not on the things around us, but on the glory of the Lord made known to us in Jesus Christ.

I will give you thanks, O Lord, with my whole heart. That's got to be the primary focus of our lives. It makes a huge difference to how you live your life every day.
We've got to give our thanks and praise and focus that right on God. But the second thing you'll notice here is confidence. The writer of the psalm is confident. Before the gods, I sing thy praise. These are very confident words. Because like our own time, David lived in a period when many different gods, many different religions or religious systems and cults, they all jostled alongside each other.
And one of the big problems for Israel is their confidence in the Lord. And sometimes they weakened and fell into the temptation to worship other gods, to compromise in their faith.
[8:36] But you see, when you are confident in God, when you are confident in your relationship with the Lord, in your faith, then really there's no other response than to sing His praises.

And other religions and religious systems are all around us. They do come along. They challenge our faith in Jesus Christ. You know, you don't really believe that Jesus died and rose again.
We don't believe in that kind of thing anymore. You know. We don't believe that that baby was actually the Son of God. He was a symbol of God's love. Right? We don't believe that salvation comes through the death and resurrection of Jesus.
Jesus. Sometimes we get tempted by the voices around us. We start shifting uneasily in our faith. And other times we get aggressive with those who disagree with us.
We think they're so wrong. We get aggressive and angry because we see our faith being challenged. And there are many competing gods, competing religions, competing gospels all around us.

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[9:43] There is controversy. Do people deny the supremacy of Jesus Christ? Well, then let us praise Him with confidence. Do people reject or change the gospel?

Well, let us proclaim it with clarity and confidence. Charles Spurgeon, writing over two centuries ago, said this, Had half the time spent in councils and controversies been given to praising the Lord, the church would have been far sounder and stronger than she is at this day.
You could be writing right now. And, you know, the best thing the church can do is go on personally worshiping the Lord with unwavering zeal, giving our hearts in praise to Christ Jesus, our King.
Are you confident in your faith in Jesus Christ? because one thing I've noticed in people is that when you attend to growing in your faith, to learning more about your faith, spending time with other Christians, then your confidence in the faith grows.
Your confidence in your relationship with Jesus Christ grows. And you are able to withstand the challenges that come to your faith. Because some people do get blown off course because they are not centered on their faith in Jesus Christ.
[11:10] They are not firmly established. So, you know, if you are someone who feels not firmly established in your faith, you do what you have to do to be established.

Go to discovering Christ. Go to central focus. Get in a Bible study. Do a one-to-one. Go to women at ten. Whatever you need to do. Because it makes a difference to how you live your life.
A qualitative difference to your life. You can have certainty in your faith if you wanted. Be confident in your faith in Jesus Christ.
Sing His praises. Proclaim Him whatever the situation. Before the gods, I will sing your praise. But then he goes on and talks about worship in verse 2.
I bow down toward thy holy temple and give thanks to thy name. It's worship. You see, we've got to be a worshiping people.
[12:13] The true hearted believer needs to be a person who worships God through Jesus Christ. And have your worship centered on Him alone. It's not the other way around.

Christianity is not about God focusing on me. It's about me focusing on the living God. We've got to be centered on Him and bow down before Him and worship Him.
I must say, I realize that I do a great deal of worshiping of myself. Three times a week when I go to the YMCA and work out, there's some real active worship going on there, I can tell you. And the other is when I go to Starbucks and pour myself liquid offerings.
I did that this morning between the services because I needed a little pepping up. And I was astonished because there's a huge congregation at Starbucks all worshiping themselves. But you see, that's the order in which we need to live our lives.
First, we've got to be people of worship, worshiping Jesus Christ, getting Him first in our lives, then everything else follows. But you see, we very often focus on ourselves and our needs, our wants, and what we think God is going to do about them.
[13:25] We focus on our needs as a church and what we want God to do for us here and now. When I worked in the church in Wales, for us in our congregation, that meant focusing on the fact that our roof desperately needed repair and that the woman's auxiliary bake sale only brought in 40 pounds and 35 pence.

And you see, what we're doing is we focus in on the here and now and on my needs right now. And what I want God to do right now is if this is the most pressing thing on God's mind, when what we need to do is bow down before our Lord Jesus Christ because God's perspective is eternal.
And as I say, it's not that God does not care about our needs here and now. He cares deeply about them. But the order is we've got to be people, first of all, who get our worship lives straight and that we worship first and foremost our God.
We must not spend our lives with our eyes cast down. We've got to cast our eyes on Jesus. I will bow down towards your holy temple. For Israel, the temple, was the center of worship.
That was the place where God was worshipped. For Christians, that center is now Jesus Christ. Jesus, the newborn king, the crucified savior, the risen, ascended, and glorified Lord.
[14:45] It is Jesus who reveals God's glory to us. We must have our lives, our hearts, our worship focused on him. That makes a difference to how you live your lives.

love and faithfulness. But then he goes on and talks about God's love and his truth. I bow down towards thy holy temple and give thanks to thy name for thy steadfast love and thy faithfulness.

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Love and faithfulness. Another translation is love and truth. God is faithful and true. He is always there. See, the writer is writing here with such confidence because he has a different kind of take on what it means for God to be faithful, God's truth, than that of our own age.
You see, he sees God as true, as unchanging, as everlasting, as all-powerful. For him, God never changed.
God's principles never changed. His expectations of people never changed. For him, God was objective. God was out there, a person, a being.
[15:55] A truth who is the source of truth and love for human beings. So for him, there is this one source of truth. Therefore, he is utterly worthy of our praise and worship.

And for us as Christians, that truth was made flesh, was made real, made human in Jesus Christ. In the Gospel of John, in his famous prologue, he says, the Word of God came and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth.
That's talking about Jesus. And what that means is that Jesus is a person full of God, full of grace and truth.
His being and character are God, even though he is fully human. He is the Son of God. therefore, he is true.
Everything he says is of the truth. You can trust him. He offers you a salvation that is reliable, that is true. And he shows to us the glory of God.
[17:07] You see what certainty that brings to life? For the Christian view of truth is that it is objective, it is out there, and it is expressed in Jesus Christ. So what we have to do is align our lives underneath the truth.

Do you see what an attractive package that is that God is offering us? He offers us certainty in our lives. He offers us, he offers to be a focus of strength and truth in our lives.
He offers to give you a true salvation. And that's very different from the concept of truth that goes around in our society.
In our society, truth is subjective. It's in here. Which means that my spirituality is mine and yours is yours. People put together their own religious systems that work for them.
That may involve being part of a church or not. That may involve signing on to some religious tenants or not. I accept what is true for me and I leave what is behind, what is distasteful to me.
[18:16] Morality is a personal matter. I establish my own personal moral system. What's right for me is fine. What's right for you is okay, providing no one gets hurt. So you make up your truth yourself.

And when the church buys into that system, then we lose our voice of authority because we let go of the truth. A few months ago there was a flurry of correspondence in the letters to the editor of the Courier newspaper about the book of Revelation just when we were preaching through that book.
And in one letter someone stated that what they read in Revelation was just so repugnant to them they couldn't believe that the Christian God would do such things and so they rejected the book of Revelation as being Christian at all.
I think that's very bold and very courageous because that person had their own understanding of the nature of God and if it didn't fit in with the biblical witness well, that part of the biblical witness just had to go.
And a lot of people are like that. And I think that's okay. I think that's honest. I think that's fine. We need to be honest about what we believe in God, about God.
[19:28] There's no point signing on to the tenets of the Christian faith and if you don't really believe them. People are free to work out their religious and moral needs for themselves.

But the thing is this, if truth is something I make up, if it's personal to me, then really it's only true for me. And the focus of my truth is not God but myself.
And that means there is no universal truth. There is no universal standard and no universal salvation. And if you pick and choose what you want to believe about God, then is not the focus of your faith yourself rather than the God revealed to us in Jesus Christ?
I hear it all the time even in church circles. Well, the God I believe in couldn't possibly do a thing like that. Well, maybe. But then how can you be sure you're worshiping God? How can you have any certainty of your salvation?
See, I find that the whole concept of God in our society just keeps changing and changing and the truth of God is being attacked on all sides. What can we believe in anymore? Well, it's not like that

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for the writer of the psalm.
[20:43] His focus is on the truth that emanates from God, that resides in God and he will not be moved from it. And that is the kind of certainty that Christianity offers us.

Not the certainty of a slave but freedom from worry that comes when the sum of your worship is really just yourself. For the truth is that God never changes and is always there.
And that makes a difference to how you live your life. Your steadfast love and your faithfulness. Ah, yes, but it's not just that God is truth for God is also love.
And our lives are meant to be lived not just under the truth of God but in His love. And sometimes as Christians, you know, when we kind of mature in the faith and that heart response cools down a little bit.
Sometimes we get the truth part right in our minds but our hearts kind of go a bit cold and we forget about the love that God has on offer for every one of us. But for Christians, love is the character and nature of God.
[21:50] Yet we don't always live our lives as if God loved us. We don't always open our hearts to receive the love that God gives us. But surely Christmas is all about that love at its most powerful, its most costly, its most real for us.

Some people see love as so much the overriding character of God that they've forgotten the truth. They think God's love is so all-encompassing, all-embracing, that it embraces every person and every idea no matter what.
so much so that the salvation that Jesus Christ offers through His death and resurrection gets pushed aside. God loves and accepts everyone. God's love is lavish, it's wonderful.
And so for some, the birth and the death and resurrection of Jesus are just symbols of the love of God. But the result when we go down that road is we set up a God that replaces that of the Bible. No, the love of God is for everyone. The wonderful, gracious thing God did in sending Jesus Christ to reveal His glory to the human race is make His love available for every human being.
[23:02] But that love is not separate from His truth. And the love of God is seen in the very real actions of Jesus. His coming into the world, His ministry, His death, His resurrection to new life, His ascension into heaven.

And when you realize that in Jesus Christ, in Christmas, God is doing something so loving, you see just how real God's love is.
He is making His glory known to you and me. How can we do any less than turn the attention of our lives and our hearts away from ourselves and towards God?
Because God's love is not just some kind of blob that floats around the universe, embracing anybody who kind of crosses this path. No, God's love has been expressed definitively in Jesus Christ.
God's love is spoken by Jesus Christ. God's love is made available to us by Jesus Christ. That is the immense, all-powerful love that God has made it possible for us.
[24:12] Jesus is the temple. Jesus is the place of worship. Jesus is the place where God's love is made real because He is human and because He is true. You see, we are meant to live our lives free.

Freely centered on God. Free from worry about ourselves. Free from preoccupation about ourselves and our concerns. We are meant to live our lives in certainty.
Knowing that He who is true is also love. We are to have confidence in our God. We are to enjoy worshiping Him. Do you see how attractive a lifestyle choice it is that God offers us?
When we take our focus away from ourselves and what is going on around us and place it right where it belongs on Him. That makes a difference to your life. for great is the glory of the Lord and that glory has been made known to us in Christ Jesus our Lord.
Amen.

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