

Glimpses of Glory God's Presence

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[0:00] Thanks, Ko. Good morning, church. It's great to see you here this morning, and for all those who are online, it's great that you could join us. So what's the biggest threat we face at the moment?

The fallout after a global pandemic? Inequality? Shifting geopolitical power? Climate change? How do you see your personal future? Perhaps you're not sure what career path to take after school, or you're facing growing health issues, or you're worried about how you'll manage in retirement.

For many people, the uncertain future looks gloomy. If there is a God, how can God allow all the suffering we see in the world? Where is God amidst all this mess and brokenness?

Where are you, God? At the time of the prophet Isaiah, the future looked gloomy. Where are you, God? Due to idolatrous living and syncretism with other nations, the ten tribes of the northern kingdom of Israel faced God's judgment.

[1:15] The result? Conquered by the Assyrian Empire, Isaiah, exiled into captivity. This same threat was real to the remaining southern kingdom. Isaiah was warning God's people that you're next if you don't abandon foreign gods and those allegiances you've made with foreign nations.

Repent, and in obedience, show compassion, seek justice, place your hope in the living God. So as we continue in our series from Isaiah, we come face to face with one true and living God, a holy God who has created us in his image, who knows us, who loves us, who knows what's best for us, and who doesn't keep us in the dark or abandon us in our gloom, but clearly communicates, reveals his presence, and grants us access into his presence.

In Isaiah, we see glimpses of God's glory and the promise of his presence. Today, I'm going to break this sermon into two parts, as I believe there's something we need to know about the Trinity that impacts how we understand God's presence.

These two parts are actually inextricably linked. I'll be focusing firstly on the mutual love-grace relationship within the Trinity, then glimpses of God's presence in Isaiah, bridging into the New Testament, where God makes his presence known.

Understanding the nature of the Trinity helps us to understand God was always planning to make his presence known. So in the face of polytheism, Isaiah 45, verse 5, makes it clear.

[3:00] I am the Lord, and there is no other. Apart from me, there is no God. We have one God, three persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, who dwell in unity within the diversity of the community, relating to one another in perfect, mutual love and grace.

In the unity of being, they love one another. The best illustration for the Trinity that I've come across was from a former principal of Moore College, Broughton Knox. He says this, Think of the unity and the diversity of the Trinity like the speaker of a message, the words of a message, and the breath on which the message is carried.

No breath, no message. No words likewise, no message. No speaker, same result. And yet they're perfectly distinct. Breath, words, and messenger, and yet perfectly united.

Father, Son, Holy Spirit, perfect in their purpose and in their work, in their relationship of love, they are perfectly and constantly other person-centered.

God relates to himself other person-centered because God is love. So the mutual love-grace relationship modeled in the Trinity is where an action or trait or character is right if and only if it promotes, creates, and maintains mutual love relationships between God and humans and humans and humans.

[4:43] And you remember, Jesus summarized all the law and there's actually 613 laws in the Old Testament into two. Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength and love

your neighbor as yourself.

Do unto others as you do unto yourself. It's choosing to love even our enemies. Jesus' call to love is premised in God's love and we know from the Greek that this is agape love.

It's a verb. It's an action. It's a doing word. It's to will the good of the other. There's another implication of this mutual love relationship of God.

It's the basic building block of the universe. Let that sink in. This mutual love relationship of God is the basic building block of the universe.

As God exists in community, in mutual love, then love is foundational to God and therefore foundational to the universe, to the fabric of life.

[5:45] Since we're in God's image created to be like God, you and I are created for relationships. Every fiber of our being is wired for love.

We kind of know this instinctively, but the Trinity explains to us why we're like this. Our vertical relationship with God and our horizontal relationships with each other are to be motivated by love. We were made for relationship with God and with one another. How are we seeing that working out in life? I'd have to say we're not, are we? The way we relate to each other is not always other person-centered.

We're sinful and we're selfish. I'm yet to meet anyone yet who was nailed loving the Lord their God with all their heart and strength and loving one another as they love themselves.

At our core, our hearts are sinful and St. Augustine reminds us of God's active love. This is what he says, if you were the only person on earth, Jesus still would have come and suffered and died for you.

[6:57] That's how great God's love is for us. Community, marriage or other relationships like friendships or even the need to fellowship at church are born out of the doctrine of the Trinity.

Being part of these groups is the way we are wired. The Trinity explains why our best moments are alive are when we selflessly give ourselves to our partner or to another or to charity or in service of others.

The Trinity explains why good relationships are done by giving and God models this by giving us his only son. If we ponder the Trinity enough, it propels us in whatever relationship we're in to be other person-centered, to give, to forgive, to be kind, to fight the selfishness within.

In the end, the Trinity is the model and the motivator of all our mutual love and grace relationships with each other. The doctrine of the Trinity is profound.

It is unique amongst all the religions of the world. It's the glory of Christianity. It shapes everything beautifully. All we are to do is to be informed by God's love.

[8:17] Now, because God is Trinity in a perfectly loving and satisfying unity of relationship, then God is totally independent and without need. God is so content and perfect that His life cannot be enhanced.

Which is, although God doesn't need us, He loves us. And this is a line from a song, Hillsong, What a Beautiful Name, The Name of Jesus.

I'm not sure if you're familiar with it. Any response? People know the song? Yep. Excuse me. But this lyric actually causes some controversy. So I'm going to explain the confusion.

This is the line, He didn't want heaven without us. So Jesus, you brought heaven down. Our sin was great, your love was greater. What can separate us now?

So it's the He didn't want heaven without us line because God is perfectly content. He doesn't need us. This is about God revealing His presence and the outworking of His love for us.

[9:24] But it has led some to believe that God's needy or desperate for our attention. But it actually means that when God creates the world, makes His presence known and redeems the world, it's not because He's trying to fill a void within Himself.

Rather, the creation and our existence comes as a pure, one-way, overflowing gift from God, which means we exist as God's loving gift in the creation.

That you and I are born out of love and love is the key ingredient in life. Because of our triune God's mutual love, grace, relationship, and nature, it's impossible for God to not make His presence known.

God, our Maker, refuses to leave us alone like the situation in Isaiah 8 where people are consulting, going for guidance at the wrong places, consulting the dead.

He doesn't leave us in our distress, in the darkness and fearful gloom, broken and wondering, where are you, God? God shows up.

[10 : 34] Glimpses of His presence are made known in Isaiah. Isaiah 9, 1-3. Nevertheless, there will be no more gloom for those who were in distress. In the past, He humbled the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, which are the northernmost kingdoms of the northern kingdom.

They were the first to fall. But in the future, He will honour Galilee of the nations. Someone's going to come out of Galilee. By the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, the people walking in darkness have seen a great light.

On those living in the land of deep Narcos, a light has dawned. You have enlarged the nation and increased their joy. They rejoice before you.

Now this flies in the face of deism. Deism is the belief that yes, there is a created God, but because there's so much brokenness in the world, so much chaos and tyranny and destruction and persecution, God clearly mustn't care or rarely intervenes.

And when God does intervene, you must have done something really amazing so He's going to really, really bless you because you've done an amazing job. Or He's going to intervene because He's a cosmic cop and He's going to smite you because you've done something really bad.

[11 : 47] But that's not the God of the Scriptures. God's not like this. God makes His presence known. In fact, none of us should have an excuse. Remember in Romans chapter 1, we read, for since the creation of the world, God's invisible qualities, His eternal power and divine nature have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made so that people are without excuse.

That's what Ash was saying to us a moment ago. Our God, our great God is glorious. We look around and we go, whoa, this creation is amazing. Most faith traditions acknowledge there is some deity or higher being beyond all this and behind all this as well.

But without knowing our triune, holy, creator God, the only option we have is to guess or make it up. God then is made in our image, a larger, almost stronger, bigger, more omnipotent version of ourselves and they seek guidance from this entity or these entities if there's many of them and there's no doubt that they might have some kind of spiritual experience.

As devout people attempt to connect with the presence of the divine whether through meditation or pilgrimages or rituals or prayers or chanting or consuming substances like the Native American Indians use the peyote or consulting mediums, consulting the dead like in Isaiah's day the Israelites were doing this.

People across the spectrum of all faith traditions from tribal animism, pantheism, polytheism, paganism to even other Semitic faiths can no doubt testify to some spiritual presence but here's the test.

[13 : 42] I'll get you to click now when you have just gone off. Great, thanks. Dear friends, do not believe every spirit but test the spirits to see whether they are from God because many false prophets have gone out into the world.

This is how you can recognize the spirit of God. Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus Christ is not from God.

This is the spirit of the Antichrist. Isaiah warns against consulting other gods or the dead for advice. Rather he says go to the living God.

In the gloom, suffering and despair, Isaiah's message of hope is a bridge between the Old Testament and New Testaments. 700 years before Jesus, God promises his presence in Isaiah. Jesus is the peace that completes the puzzle. God promises his presence clearly, specifically, so there can be no doubt or confusion. Isaiah receives a glimpse of Jesus.

[14 : 52] Therefore, the Lord himself will give you a sign. The virgin will be with child, will give birth to a son and they'll call him Emmanuel, God with us.

We see a glimpse of Jesus' kingdom and rule for to us a child is born and this is the one that we get a lot at Christmas time. To us a son is given and the government will be on his shoulders and he'll be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

I don't know if you've ever had counseling before or you've ever been to a counselor but this counselor gives the best advice. This is the one to go to for guidance. He's the mighty God.

I don't know if you know the state of Israel at the moment but they haven't been at peace. The Middle East, it's a mess. He's the prince of peace. At the time of Isaiah, the threat of the Syrians,

they weren't at peace.

His rule will last forever. You can think of all the prophets and the judges and the kings, they didn't get it right. This kingdom will reign forever and it will be upheld and let's keep reading it because it says clearly, of the greatness of his government, best government ever, and the peace, there'll be no end.

[16:09] He'll reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing it and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever and it's our work? No. The zeal of the Lord will accomplish this.

This is all God's work. Just back on the council a bit, just I read recently that there are, Italy, right, is sort of the home of Roman Catholicism and there'd be a lot of priests in Italy.

There are more mediums in Italy than Roman Catholic priests. What is happening there? They're consulting the dead rather than living God.

When God makes his presence known, this person who turns up, the eyes of the blind shall be opened and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. Then shall the lame leap for joy and the tongue of the mute sing.

A glimpse of God's love. Surely he's borne our griefs and carried our sorrows. He's pierced for our sins. The punishment that brought us peace was upon him and by his wounds we are healed.

[17:20] He poured out his life unto death and bore the sin of the world and glimpses of resurrection into new life. After he, Jesus, has suffered, he will see the light of life and be satisfied.

By his knowledge, my righteous servant will justify many and he will bear their iniquities. Therefore, I will give him a portion among the great. Our God makes himself known, revealing his triune presence.

Father, Son, Holy Spirit. Creation testifies to God and Jesus completes the bridge from Isaiah. God's Holy Spirit opens our hearts and minds.

This is special revelation. So we can know God through his word. All scripture is God breathed. And we can know God when we know Jesus.

In the beginning was the word and the word was with God and the word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him, all things were made. Without him, nothing was made that has been made.

[18:25] In him was life and the life was the light of all humankind. Remember that Isaiah said the light comes in. He is the light. He's showing up. The light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it.

That light from Galilee promised in Isaiah 9. In John 8, Jesus makes it explicitly clear. I am the light of the world. John the Baptist catches a glimpse of Jesus and he sought confirmation.

He sends his disciples and Jesus says, go back and tell him and he quotes Isaiah 35. Tell him that the blind see, the lame walk, those of leprosy are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised and the good news is proclaimed to the poor.

Philip gets a glimpse and Jesus ultimately says to him, after he says, Lord, show us the Father and he's like, my presence, I'm here. Don't you know me, Philip? Even after I've been among you such a long time, anyone who has seen me has seen the Father.

Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me or at least believe on the evidence of the works themselves. All these miracles I've been doing. And then we have that mountaintop moment.

[19:37] I was going to read a section of Lord of the Rings for those Lord of the Rings fans out there. They can't do Jesus in one person. They have Gandalf who works miracles and they have Aragorn who is a king of men so they're truly God, truly man and they're transfigured.

I've got some great quotes there but I think it's a niche market so I just ditched them but get them off me later if you want. They're just as, not as powerful as this.

But they're pretty good. After six days Jesus took with him Peter, James and John the brother of James and led them up high mountain up the high mountain by themselves.

There he was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun and his clothes became white as the light. The Christian band Third Day have a song that reflects some of this moment as Jesus gave his followers a glimpse of his divine presence and here are some of the lyrics.

It's a bit so perfectly with this topic. I caught a glimpse of your splendor in the corner of my eye the most beautiful thing I've ever seen. It was like a flash of lightning reflected off the sky and I know I'll

never be the same again.

[20 : 56] Show me your glory send down your presence I want to see your face. Show me your glory majesty shines about you I can't go on without you Lord.

When I climb down the mountain and I get back to my life I won't settle for ordinary things I'm going to follow you forever and for all my days I won't rest till I see you again.

The chorus goes on again show me your glory. I'm not sure if you can remember the exact moment you became a Christian when you caught a glimpse of God's presence the scale and reality of history and where you stand with the Lord of history with God sure promises not to fail.

I know so many people say it was like something lit up inside them. Some have told me they cried tears of joy others have said they literally felt an overwhelming sense of peace while others have said it was like a burden lifted from their hearts.

Not everyone has an experience like this but we know life has changed and life will never be the same again. When you first become a Christian can you remember the enthusiasm you couldn't wait to tell people then you came down the mountain got back to work to a full inbox a messy home or family life you come back to bills and illness and a world that's just so broken.

[22 : 27] Life keeps going it can be sour deflating sobering lonely and gloomy and gloomy. What's life like for you now you've come down the mountain?

How is your faith? It's frustrating because we want to hold on to those mountaintop moments if we have them which can be a glimpse of what is to come but daily reality in a fallen world doesn't allow for it.

As life goes on we can be left wondering even as Christians where are you God? Forgetting that he carries us through those hard times we can find ourselves asking that question how can God know what I'm going through?

There's a response to this and I don't know the author of this poem and it's so it's anonymous the author but it's called The Long Silence. At the end of time billions of people were seated on a great plane before God's throne.

Most shrank back from the brilliant light before them but some groups near the front talked heatedly not with cringing shame but with belligerence. Can God judge us?

[23 : 40] How can he know about suffering? snapped a young woman. She ripped open a sleeve to reveal a tattooed number from a Nazi concentration camp. We endured terror beatings torture death.

In another group a boy lowered his collar. What about this? he demanded. Showing an ugly rope burn. Lynched for no crime but being black. In another crowd there was a pregnant schoolgirl with southern eyes.

Why should I suffer? she murmured. It wasn't my fault. Far across the plain were hundreds of such groups. Each had a complaint against God for the evil and suffering he had permitted in his world. How lucky God was to live in heaven where all was sweetness and light. Where there was no weeping or fear no hunger or hatred. What did God know of all that humanity had been forced to endure in this world?

For God leads a pretty sheltered life they said. So each of these groups sent forth a leader chosen because they had suffered the most. A Jew a slave a person from Hiroshima a horribly deformed arthritic an abused child.

[24 : 53] In the centre of the vast plain they consulted with each other. At last they were ready to present their case. It was rather clever. Before God could be qualified to be their judge he must endure what they had endured.

Their decision was that God should be sentenced to life on earth as a man. Let him be born a Jew. Let the legitimacy of his birth be doubted. Give him a work so difficult that even his family will think him out of his mind.

Let him be betrayed by his closest friends. Let him face false charges. Betried by a prejudiced jury and convicted by a cowardly judge. Let him be tortured.

At the last let him see what it means to be terribly alone. Then let him die so there can be no doubt that he died. Let there be a great host of witnesses to verify it.

As each leader announced their portion of the sentence loud murmurs of approval went up from the throng of people assembled. When the last had finished pronouncing the sentence there was a long silence.

[25:58] No one uttered a word. No one moved. For suddenly all knew that God had made his presence known. God never abandoned us in our distress darkness.

God or darkness. Because God loves us. God showed up. God served his sentence. It's arrogant to think that we can come into the presence of a holy God on our own efforts.

There are over 34 references in the Old Testament of dying if you come into the presence of God or look upon the Lord. Remember when Isaiah recognises his simple state before a holy God he cries out he's terrified woe is me I am ruined.

He recognises his simple state and there's nothing he can do. And yet God reaches out to him with a coal from the altar of sacrifice and touches his lips and purifies him.

In the same way Jesus death on the cross that sacrificial altar gives us access to the presence of God. God is Trinity relating in a community of mutual love and grace.

[27:14] God is love and God is gracious. God is a promise keeper and Isaiah is a bridge to Jesus who has made God's presence known. As we walk with God daily we experience his presence.

As God's Holy Spirit indwells within us comforting helping renewing convicting gifting mediating interceding and advocating and strengthening us in our walk.

God speaks to us today through his word. While life may seem gloomy at times there is a promise that one day at the resurrection we will come physically into God's presence where we will enjoy fellowship together forever.

This is all due to God's gracious work. The zeal of the Lord almighty will accomplish this. Isaiah 40 verse 31 reminds us those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength they will soar on wings like eagles they will run and not grow weary they will walk and not faint let's pray heavenly father lord we thank you that you have not kept us in the dark we thank you as we look around a glorious creation we can see your handiwork that that is not you that is just the glory of your design and your creativity that you have made us in your image and we have wandered far from you and Jesus the light of the world steps in Lord thank you that through Jesus we can come back into your presence and we can experience your presence now through your Holy Spirit Lord I just pray a really gloomy time that can really know your presence your peace and the healing that you offer in Jesus name Amen