

God's Glory & the Bible

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[0 : 00] Well, greetings St Paul's family. The staff team, you're probably aware of this already, are away at the moment on a retreat out in Bathurst. We are training, we are planning, we are praying for our life together here at St Paul's and we're praying for you this morning as you gather.

Although it is a little bit different today, I'm coming to you via the screen. We are continuing our series in the Bible. Our aim in this whole series is to build confidence in the Bible, in what the Bible is, what God says about it, so that we might grow in confidence and relationship with the God who gives us the Bible for our joy.

Now, last week in this series, we were in Psalm 19 and the topic was the necessity of the Bible. The Bible is necessary in order to know God correctly, to know ourselves correctly, to know the way of salvation and to navigate life well in God's world.

Although God, we saw there in Psalm 19, although God communicates in a general way his glory and his majesty through his created order in such a way that all of humanity is without excuse, he communicates specifically who he is, who we are and how we are to live through his perfect and powerful word.

He communicates specifically in that way to us. So the truest and the most vivid glimpse we get of the majesty and the glory of God is in his word, the Bible.

[1 : 42] Not by sitting on the edge of the Pacific Ocean and gazing into the abyss or even just staring at the glory of the French Alps, God's nature and created order.

So how can we get to this point where we are confident that this is in fact so, that God, all of his majesty and glory is revealed to us in his word in such a way that we find that it is sweet and our souls are refreshed.

Now to answer that question this morning, I want to intertwine, if you like, the Bible text we're looking at with the life and the work of John Calvin, someone who was a phenomenal student of God's word.

Why would I want to do that? Why am I bringing Calvin to you today? Well, B.B. Warfield, who was the last principal of Princeton Theological Seminary, and in fact one of the great theologians of the 19th and 20th centuries, said this of Calvin, No man ever had a profounder sense of God than he. That is a remarkable, remarkable commendation from someone as great as B.B. Warfield. So who was Calvin? And what happened to him that someone like Warfield would praise him so highly?

[3 : 17] Well, Calvin was born in France in 1509. When he was 14, his father sent him to study theology at the University of Paris.

When he was 19, his father had some issue with the Roman Catholic Church at that time, which Calvin himself was. And he told his son to leave the studying of theology and to study law himself instead.

And so as a dutiful son, that's exactly what he did. However, two years later, his father died and Calvin abandoned his studies of law and moved to the thing that he loved the most, and that was the classics.

He published his first book in 1532 at the age of 23. And it's during this time, somewhere around this time, he came into contact with the teachings of the Reformed faith.

He came into the Reformed faith. He came into contact with the Reformed faith. He came into contact with the Reformed faith. He came to understand the gospel of Jesus Christ for the first time. And so by 1533, at the age of 23, 24, something dramatic happened in Calvin's life and totally changed the whole course of his life.

[4 : 38] This is how he describes it in his own words. God, by a sudden conversion, subdued and brought my mind to a teachable frame.

Having thus received some taste and knowledge of true godliness, I was immediately inflamed with an intense desire to make progress.

To make progress in the things of the Christian faith. In fact, 24 years later, he died when he was 54.

24 years later, unchanged in his passions and goals, and one month before he died, he wrote in his will, That statement there describes Calvin's entire life.

In all things, he pursued the majesty and the glory of God. So what happened to him? He saw the supremacy and the majesty and the glory of God for the first time when he was 23.

[6 : 06] He couldn't see it, and then he did see it. And when he saw it, it captivated his life. So let's jump into seeing God's glory in the Bible.

First of all, I've got four points there you'll notice in your outline. Seeing God's glory in creation, in Jesus Christ, in the gospel, and in the scriptures. Let's just quickly jump through those things. So seeing God's glory in creation.

The Bible shows that God intends for us to have a well-grounded conviction that he is powerful, that he is wise, that he is a merciful creator and sustainer of the world by means of sight of his glory in and through creation.

That's where we were last week in Psalm 19. The heavens declare the glory of God. They reveal the glory of God.

They communicate God's glory. Notice, though, in Psalm 19, the heavens themselves are not the glory of God. The heavens are not God. They are pointing, they are a window to see the glory of God.

[7 : 20] We need eyes to see through the glory of nature in order to see the glory of the God who created all nature.

But it is possible to see the glory of creation, but not the glory of the God behind creation. We see that in Romans chapter 1.

But we also see God's glory in Jesus Christ. That is God's self-authenticating glory shines in Jesus Christ. That is, God expected people in Jesus' day, first century Palestine, to see the glory and the majesty of God in Jesus, and therefore knowing that he is himself the Son of God, even though he was as human as we are and looked just as ordinary as we do.

John chapter 1 verse 14 says, So many, many people in first century Palestine looked at God in human flesh, Jesus Christ himself, and they did not see God.

The glory of God in Christ was missed by a whole heap of people. And yet, the Son of God was really there for those who had eyes to see the glory.

[9 : 06] The problem was not that the glory of Jesus was not adequately revealing his divinity. The problem, according to Matthew 13 verse 13, was that those seeing, they do not see.

Though hearing, they do not hear or understand. So that's God's glory is revealed in creation. It is revealed in Jesus Christ. Thirdly, it's revealed in the gospel itself.

God's self-authenticating glory shines in the gospel. And that brings us to the text for this morning, 2 Corinthians chapter 4. And verse 4 says this, The God of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers so they cannot see the light of the gospel that displays the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.

The gospel, the word gospel is here. It's a story of how God came to save sinners. And the gospel shines a supernatural light to the eyes of the heart.

It's called there the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ. The light of the gospel shatters our blindness in verse 6.

[10 : 22] God says, So in verse 4, What Paul is saying there in those two verses is the way that we come to know that the Christian gospel, as recorded in the Christian Bible, is in fact God's word, that it is God's truth, is by seeing the glory of God in it, in the face of Christ.

That's what he's saying there. This glory of the gospel shines throughout all of the Bible because it all points to Jesus. But most brightly in the gospel of the Son of God crucified for the sake of sinners.

And part of what makes the glory of God in the scriptures so unusual and yet so spectacular is the way that God's glory is described.

It is the way God's majesty and his supremacy and his complete otherness is expressed through his total meekness, through his mercy, through his grace.

God magnifies his glory. We see a magnified, spectacular God as we see a God who descends to save us.

[12:21] That is glory like our world does not know. He magnifies his magnificence, his supremacy, his glory by making himself the supreme treasure of our hearts, even at great cost to himself.

God satisfies us. God serves us in the gospel. And in the very act of doing that, he reveals and magnifies his magnificence.

This is the light of God's glory that shines through the whole Bible and it comes to its most beautiful radiance in the person and the work of Jesus Christ, dying and rising for his creatures, the very ones who have rejected him.

Fourthly, we see the glory of God in the Bible. God's self-authenticating glory shines in the Bible itself.

God confirms that the world is his by revealing his glory through it. God confirms that Jesus Christ is the son of God by revealing his glory through him.

[13:50] And that the gospel is the gospel of God by revealing his glory through it. And so the whole Bible authenticates itself by shining with the majestic and meek glory of the God who inspired it.

That is the only way that we can know that the Bible is the word of God is because in their true meaning, we see the self-authenticating glory of God.

But there's a problem here and it's a massive problem. It's an insurmountable roadblock. It is something that we as human beings cannot fix, we cannot get over, we cannot see.

By nature, we are told here in 2 Corinthians 4 that we are blind to the glory of God. We cannot see the glory of God any more than a blind person can see the heavens themselves.

Romans 1, in fact, says we're not just blind, innocently walking around blind, but Romans 1 says that we actually suppress the glory of God.

[15:09] We suppress the truth of God. We are not just innocent people stuck in blindness hoping to see.

John chapter 3 tells us we love the darkness. We want to be in the darkness. We want to be blind. Paul says, in 1 Corinthians 2, verse 14, the person without the spirit doesn't accept the things that come from the spirit of God, but considers them foolishness and cannot understand them because they are discerned only through the spirit.

The only hope for any person to see the glory of God in the Bible and have a well-grounded confidence that it is, in fact, God's word is for God himself to take away our blindness, for God himself to perform a miracle, to take away the blindness that we are born with, the blindness that we delight in, for himself to remove it.

And Paul says that that's exactly what God does. This is the miracle of new birth, even though he doesn't use that language specifically here in 2 Corinthians 4.

[16:37] This is the miracle of new birth. God comes to us and he speaks a word of new creation, just like he did at the beginning with the created order when he said, let there be light.

And it was so. No further actions required. And it was so. And so he does the same in the human heart. 2 Corinthians 4 verse 6, God, who said, let light shine out of darkness, made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of God's glory displayed in the face of Christ.

And when God flicks that switch in our hearts that moves us from darkness to light, a moment that we're not even looking for it, we don't think we need it, we're not asking for it, and God chooses to do it, in that moment we know that Christ is real.

You know that the gospel is real. You know that the scriptures are true. And it's because God said, let there be light in that heart. it's then that we see God's glory and you know that this is God.

You see lights and it's the first time you realise that in fact my whole life has been plunged into darkness. What the Apostle Paul declares here that John Calvin experienced and later wrote about and what you have experienced as a Christian and where I started in fact my first message here when I said I was sitting in a shed in Katoomba and all of a sudden it's like someone lit a candle in my heart to help me see.

[18:32] That experience is what theologians call the inward witness of the Holy Spirit. Why do Christians believe that the Bible is the word of God in which God reveals to us the reality of his presence the reality of his glory the reality of the universe the reality of our sin the reality of

redemption through the Lord Jesus Christ why do we believe that that is true?

The answer is not because we're smart it's not because of our cultural environment that we're brought up in it's not because we can follow a logical chain of human reasoning about the historical reliability of scriptures that pushes me over the line and convince me it's true those things might be helpful the answer is that God himself has confirmed it through the Holy Spirit it is entirely an act of grace it is not by our own reasoning but a pure gift from God we do not the Christian does not hold a position of the Bible stubbornly and cling to it despite all the assaults on it what we discover is that in fact God is holding us through his word and at every point confirming to us it is his word so how do we pursue God's glory then what does it mean for us if it's purely an act of God what does it mean for us to pursue his glory well in his early 20s

John Calvin experienced the miracle of having the blind eyes of his heart opened by the Spirit of God to use his words and I'm not sure if he pulled this directly out of 2 Corinthians 4 but to use his word I at length perceived as if light had broken in on me and what he saw immediately and without any intervening chain of human reasoning were two things that would determine the entire rest of his life number one he saw the glory of God and number two he saw the glory of God in the word of God through the work of God's Spirit the Bible facilitated seeing the glory of God and the glory of God once seen vindicated the Bible as God's word he said that the highest proof of Scripture derives in general from the fact that God in person speaks through it and neither the Holy Spirit nor the Bible by themselves allow a person to see the glory of God the Holy Spirit can't do it by itself and the Bible can't do it by itself they have to work together the Spirit works through God's word to bring light into the darkness of our hearts so that we might see the glory of God that realization for Calvin completely changed his life geographically and vocationally in 1537 he took up in Geneva the role of professor of sacred scripture again still in his 20s in sacred scripture and within four months he was appointed as the pastor of St Peter's church the city council was not happy with Calvin at all and so they banished him roughly a year or something later in April 1538 Calvin thought in that moment that oh this is fantastic

God is relieving me from the crush of pastoral duties so that I could get back to studies you know get back into my study and just write stuff instead he ends up in Strasbourg where for three years he served as a pastor for 500 French refugees as well as teaching the New Testament in the university he also wrote his commentary on Romans in those three years and put out his second enlarged edition of the absolute bedrock foundational theological book of the institutes of Christian religion back in Geneva however is making the city council think that maybe they were a bit hasty on Calvin things were better when Calvin was there and so three years after him being banished the city council of Geneva reversed the ban on Calvin and held him up for the first time to be in fact a godly man he served there the church there until his death on

[24 : 01] May 27 1564 160 years ago last Monday he wrote tracts the institutes he wrote commentaries on all of the New Testament books except the book of Revelation plus he wrote commentaries on the first five books of the Bible he wrote commentaries on the psalm which I've used in looking at Psalm 19 last week he wrote commentaries on Isaiah and Joshua he gave biblical lectures throughout the course of the week in the university in Geneva and he preached 10 sermons every two weeks plus the leading of multiple Bible studies everything in his life everything in his life in his ministry was the exposition of scripture this was the ministry that was unleashed in him having seen the glory of God in scripture Calvin preached steadily through book after book after book of the

Bible he never wavered from this approach to preaching for almost 25 years of his ministry in the pulpit in Geneva to give you some idea of the scope of his preaching he began his series on the book of Acts on the 25th of August 1549 and ended it in March 1554 after Acts he went on to Thessalonians 46 sermons Corinthians 186 sermons pastoral epistles 86 sermons Galatians 43 sermons Ephesians 48 sermons until 1558 because he was sick in 1559 he began what his series called the harmony of the gospels and he had not yet finished it when he died in May 1564 it's a five year sermon series he preached 139 sermons on Job 200 on Deuteronomy 353 on Isaiah 123 on Genesis and so on and so on and so on and this was a specific self conscious to work in truth in fact on

Easter day 1538 after preaching he left the pulpit of St Peter's Church in Geneva because he was banished by the city council three years later in September the 3rd 1541 he climbs the stairs into the pulpit on the very next Sunday picks up on the very next verse that he left three years earlier

Calvin saw the majesty of God in his word he believed with all of his heart that the word of God was indeed the word of God and that all of it was inspired it was profitable it was radiant with the light of the glory of God the very thing that every single human being is designed to see we were created to glory to marvel in God's magnificence and glory for our joy and he said we see it unadulterated clearly in the scriptures through the work of the spirit now through this series

I've used various arguments to build confidence in Bible as God's word how can we really know the Bible is God's word and that it is right that it is good that it is sweet for our joy God is the one who enables us to see what is really there divine glory is really shining in and through nature divine glory really is in and shining through the person of Jesus Christ divine glory really is in and shining through the gospel of Jesus Christ divine glory is really shining in and through the God intent meaning of the God inspired Bible and what this means for us here at St. Paul's is really simple really simple for instance don't ever miss the preaching of God's word if you want to see glory glory it means that we will bend every effort to find that meaning and to see that glory we will take every opportunity make every effort every single effort we can to find the meaning and to see the glory we will not presume to see the glory in scripture where we have not seen the meaning of scripture and we will not be satisfied that we have seen the meaning of scripture as we ought to if we have not seen the glory of

God coming through it if we labor to know God and his word in this way our confidence in the scriptures will be well grounded and our joy in the glory of God will be great and will be able to live a life of Calvin I wish I had more time to express to you the adversity he went through in life and how steadfast and constant he was as he gazed on God's glory and endured everything so so my challenge to you this morning if you are not laboring to know the Bible you cannot see the glory of the God who has created you and therefore you cannot know the deep joy in life that he offers you your joy is at stake read your

[30 : 19] Bible and pray for the miracle God help me see help me see your majesty and your glory for my joy Amen