

## God is Glorious

*I am the LORD; that is my name! I will not give my glory to another or my praise to idols. (Isaiah 42:8)*

*Ascribe to the LORD, O families of nations, ascribe to the LORD glory and strength, ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name. Bring an offering and come before him; worship the LORD in the splendour of his holiness. (1Chronicles 16:28-29)*

*The earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD as the waters cover the sea. (Habakkuk 2:14)*

A while ago Dianne and I happened to be in Norway. One evening as we were relaxing with our hosts, the phone rang. The gentleman answering the call suddenly became very animated and excited. He slammed the phone down and shouted to us, 'Quick, get outside! It's the Lights!' Immediately we sprang to our feet and headed out into the night. As I looked up into the sky I saw what can only be described as one of the most majestic, awesome, magnificent, beautiful sights my eyes have ever seen: the Northern Lights. I was enraptured by a sight that literally took my breath away. It was absolutely glorious! Words fail to truly depict what I saw that night. As glorious as it was, however, what I saw that night is merely a pointer to the One who created it, to the God of glory:

*The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands. (Psalm 19:1)*

### What is glory?

The Hebrew word for glory is *kabod*. It means 'heavy, weighty, to be laden down with wealth, power and great position'. It is an extremely rich word. The Greek word for glory is *doxa*; it has all the meanings of *kabod*, with the added meaning of 'highest honour'.

When we speak of God's glory we are describing his essential 'Godness'; he is uniquely glorious. He alone is magnificently majestic; his whole being shines out with a blinding, pure radiance.

**The glory of God is the tangible, demonstrable manifestation of his holy, divine majesty.**

God alone has this glorious way of being; it is what makes him who he is.

He refuses to share that glory with anybody else:

*Who among the gods is like you, O LORD? Who is like you – majestic in holiness, awesome in glory, working wonders? (Exodus 15:11)*

*I am the LORD; that is my name! I will not give my glory to another or my praise to idols. (Isaiah 42:8)*

The glory of God rightly provokes both awe and terror. On those occasions in the Bible when God appears in his glory, people often respond by falling on their faces in adoring worship and fear. They are completely overwhelmed by the manifested, glorious presence of Almighty God. Sometimes they are convinced they are going to die, because they have found themselves in the presence of such a holy and glorious God. On the night Jesus was born, for example:

*There were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. (Luke 2:8-9)*

The apostle John was probably Jesus' best friend. He was one of the inner circle of the disciples along with Peter and James. He was the disciple whom Jesus loved (John 13:23). But there came a time when familiarity had to give way to reverence and awe. When John was in prison on Patmos he encountered the risen and ascended Jesus in all his glory. This is how John described what he saw and his own response:

*His head and hair were white like wool, as white as snow, and his eyes were like blazing fire. His feet were like bronze glowing in a furnace, and his voice was like the sound of rushing waters. In his right hand he held seven stars, and out of his mouth came a sharp double-edged sword. His face was like the sun shining in all its brilliance. When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. (Revelation 1:14-17)*

This was the same Jesus whom John had leant against at the Last Supper. But now was not the time for that; here was Jesus in all his glory. What was John's response? He fell at Jesus' feet like a dead man.

We see the same responses in the Old Testament, where many times God appears in his glory. One well known example is found in the second book of Chronicles, where Solomon and the people gathered together to dedicate the Temple they had built for God. In chapter 6 of that book, Solomon prayed to God, as he humbled himself and asked God to presence himself in the house he had prepared for him. He knew that God is greater than any building, and that even the highest heavens cannot contain him. But Solomon asked God to graciously dwell in the Temple he had prepared for him. God responded:

*When Solomon finished praying, fire came down from heaven and consumed the burnt offering and the sacrifices, and the glory of the LORD filled the temple. The priests could not enter the temple of the LORD because the glory of the LORD filled it. When all the Israelites saw the fire coming down and the glory of the LORD above the temple, they knelt on the pavement with their faces to the ground, and they worshipped and gave thanks to the LORD, saying, 'He is good; his love endures forever.'* (2Chronicles 7:1-3)

### **Proceed with caution**

The glory of God provokes both awe and terror. That does not mean, however, that it drives us away from God's presence. The glory of God has something about it – I call it God's 'Godness' – that attracts us towards him like a divine magnet. We were created to fellowship with the God of Glory, not to hide from him as Adam did after he had sinned. The glory of God tells us we can approach God, but should do so with reverent caution. When the Bible tells us we can come with absolute confidence into God's presence as his children because of the blood of Jesus (Hebrews 10:19), we must never come flippantly or with casual familiarity. We can come with faith and expectation; we can approach him with full assurance of his welcoming arms. But we never come as equals to him; we come in reverence and awe. God is still a consuming fire (Hebrews 12:29).

He is the God of incomparable majesty and glory. The God of glory has divine rights:

*Who are you, O man, to answer back to God...Has the potter no right over the clay?*  
(Romans 9:20-21)

### **The glory within**

I have said that God never shares his glory with any other creature (Isaiah 42:8). Now look at this passage of scripture:

*For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.* (Romans 8:29-30)

How can we also be glorified, if God will not share his glory with any other creature? The clue is in the first part of the passage: God predestined us 'to be conformed to the image of his Son'. Jesus is the radiance of the glory of God and we were predestined to be just like him:

*The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven.* (Hebrews 1:3)

The truly incredible thing is that in Jesus Christ the glory of God took on human form. Jesus was fully God and fully man. That is the miracle of the Incarnation; the God of glory became one of us in the Person of his Son:

*The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. (John 1:14)*

For thirty three years the glory of God walked this earth in the Person of Jesus Christ. Amazing! But people did not cringe from him in abject fear; they were drawn to him, attracted to his life, transformed by his words, healed by his hands. They looked into his eyes and saw love and acceptance; they encountered the God of glory living among them. His death and resurrection turns sinners into saints, into righteous men and women. We were justified – made right with God. But God’s purpose was not only to justify us; as Romans 8:30 says he now glorifies us: he fills us with the life of the Glorious Son through the Holy Spirit – the Spirit of glory:

*If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you. (1Peter4:14)*

The God of glory now lives within us in all his glory. We, as God’s redeemed sons, are like our older brother, Jesus (Hebrews 2:10-12), because the Holy Spirit now dwells within us. This is what Paul takes up in 2Corinthians 3. It would be good for you to read it now before I explain it. Paul refers to the incident in Exodus 34 when Moses came down from Sinai, having spent time in the presence of God, receiving the Law. Moses did not realise that, because he had been with God, his face was shining with a glorious radiance. The effect on the Israelites was remarkable:

*When Aaron and all the Israelites saw Moses, his face was radiant, and they were afraid to come near him. (Exodus 34:30)*

### **External and internal glory**

Consequently, Moses put a veil over his face so the people would not be frightened. Gradually, the radiance faded; but whenever Moses went back into God’s presence he would remove the veil and his face would shine again with the glory of God. So Moses reflected the glory of God externally – from without. In 2Corinthians 3, Paul contrasts this experience of Moses with that of believers who have the Holy Spirit within us. He says we have a glory ‘which lasts’ (verse 11). Then he says:

(Extracted from *Discovering God*, by Roger Aubrey, Xulon Press, 2008)

*And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit. (2Corinthians 3:18)*

Whereas Moses reflected the glory of God externally, we radiate the glory of God internally – from within. God not only demonstrates his glory through the creation; it is not only the heavens that declare the glory of God. When people encounter us who are believers they encounter none less than the God of glory. They encounter Jesus, the radiance of the glory of God, in us. God shows off his glorious Son through his glorified sons. We are just like Jesus. We are not Jesus, but we are like him and being constantly made more like him through the work of the Holy Spirit in us. When our hands are laid on sick people, they are the hands of Jesus. The words that leave our lips are the words of Jesus. The attitudes we adopt are the attitudes of Jesus. Our thoughts are the thoughts of Jesus. Our love is the love of Jesus. That is how God receives glory: he has a family of justified and glorified sons through whom his glorified Son lives in the Person of the glorious Holy Spirit. In that way the earth is filled with:

*....the knowledge of the glory of the LORD as the waters cover the sea. (Habakkuk 2:14)*