

The glory of God's grace

Ephesians 2:1-10

We have been exploring the whole subject of the glory of God recently. I stated in the first sermon that in my experience, when we understand what God is like, it changes us. It changes our outlook on life, it changes our relationships. When we perceive God's glory, their universe gets bigger, our understanding of God gets bigger, and we get smaller, and so do all the problems and pressures of life.

Experiencing God's glory has a profound effect on God's people. And knowledge and experience of the glory of God isn't reserved for people who achieve a spiritual level, it's for all who know and love Jesus. I put this slide up at the time.

WE CAN EXPERIENCE THE GLORY OF GOD

We can experience the glory of God. It isn't a secret, in fact it's write large. It's written in creation, it's written in the Bible, and it's recorded in God's actions in Christ. In the first of these three, we looked at God's glory in creation and we found that our God is awesome in the scale of what He had created. Glory is about radiance, excellence. And we see that reflected in ourselves when we say with the psalmist "I am fearfully and wonderfully made".

Creation is something we can see and feel and through it we can understand our creator God. But there is another way we can look at God's glory. God wants us to understand is that His glory isn't just reflected in what He's made but in what He's like. The Hebrew word for glory is about weight or substance. Glory is what God is like. What God wants us to understand is that His glory isn't just reflected in what He's made but in what He's like.

His glory is also in his moral perfection. All the things we get wrong in life He always gets amazingly right! In all His relationships we see His perfection. He is the example for our relationships too – how we relate to one another and to God. And if we are made in the image of God, then our moral actions therefore should reflect what He is like.

Which brings us to the third of our ways in which we understand God's glory and that's in His grace.

THE HUMAN RACE: THE DEPRESSING TRUTH

Chapter 2 of Ephesians opens with a depressing truth about the human race but a glorious one for those who have accepted Christ. Having studied the creative glory and moral perfection of God, the harsh reality is that human beings just don't naturally reflect any of His moral glory even though they are fearfully and wonderfully made. Let's hear the words of Paul.

2:1 In the past you were spiritually dead because of your disobedience and sins. 2 At that time you followed the world's evil way; you obeyed the ruler of the spiritual powers in space, the spirit who now controls the people who

disobey God. 3 Actually all of us were like them and lived according to our natural desires, doing whatever suited the wishes of our own bodies and minds. In our natural condition we, like everyone else, were destined to suffer God's anger.

Rather than reflecting God's glory, people are dead; spiritually dead. That is the natural state of all human beings, because we are all sinners; disobedient to God. As Paul says in Romans 3:23: *For all have sinned and come short of God's glory.* If we look at the words of Paul in Ephesians, our natural state is the antithesis of what God's glory actually is.

Our current natural state isn't our created state because God created us in His image – but it is our fallen state. Here's what Paul says about it.

Followed another rather than the Creator

You followed the world's evil way; you obeyed the ruler of the spiritual powers in space, the spirit who now controls the people who disobey God.

People are not under the rule of their creator. That's obvious in our society. But that doesn't mean they are under their own control. The worse thing is that our society is controlled by beings that people neither see or recognise and are less aware of than even they are of God. But they are totally controlled by satan.

We live in a society where conspiracy theories abound. Many of them are just plain nonsense – but they are all fuelled by the fact that those who govern often use a cloak of secrecy. In one sense that's necessary to keep military secrets, or to protect citizens from terrorists or criminals. But we also know sadly that politicians, businessmen, many professionals and public servants also use secrecy to cover up their own illegal activities. There have been so many scandals in recent years haven't there?

Sadly these fuel conspiracy theories even on the most innocuous of subjects and the saddest thing is that these scandals tarnish the name of the good guys – the people that act with integrity.

The work of satan is just like this. Most people are unaware of his presence but they all see the results of the mess he makes of people's lives and whole societies – and he even makes sure God's name is tarnished in the process – and what he goes for is anything that shows God's glory so people can't see what God is really like and be drawn to Him.

Lived to suit our own desires

Actually all of us were like them and lived according to our natural desires, doing whatever suited the wishes of our own bodies and minds.

Before we start to blame all the world's problems on the evil one, all he does is exploit our own selfish desires. Fundamentally sin is about doing what I want, getting my way whether or not that disobeys God or harms others. That again is the reverse of God's moral glory.

And the consequence of all this. *In our natural condition we, like everyone else, were destined to suffer God's anger.*

EVERYONE IS UNDER GOD'S WRATH

It's the part of the Good News we like telling people least – it isn't good news for those that don't know Jesus – they are destined to suffer God's anger and eternal separation – hell.

God created the heavens and the earth and they were good. He's morally perfect. We, the human race have messed it up – not by accident but by design – by having what we want and ignoring the maker's instructions.

Actually deep down, most people who aren't Christians but who believe in God know that – but somehow hope that God will let them off the hook if their good deeds outweigh the bad. Yet countless people think that they can somehow please God through works.

That's just nonsense folk religion stuff. It isn't true. It's a lie of the devil. All have sinned and come short of the glory of God. The most sobering truth each man and woman needs to understand is that God is angry, really angry with the sin of the human race.

JONATHAN EDWARDS

One of the most significant books of the 18th Century was by American preacher and theologian, Jonathan Edwards. It simply explained this truth. God isn't kidding about being angry with the human race – you and I and everyone.

But the truly glorious thing about our Creator God is that even though He is angry with our sin, His justice is tempered with mercy.

BUT GOD WHO IS RICH IN MERCY

That's what we read. But God. He is a God who is rich in mercy. Rather than write us off as a bad deal, God has instead shown us His grace. This is where God is most glorious because He is gracious to the human race. He loves us and shows us His grace – His unmerited favour. Now that's Good News, real good news!

Rather than all the futile nonsense about doing religious or good things to pacify God, buy Him off and earn eternal life, God is prepared to give us eternal life. Yes, that is really the core of the Good News, the Gospel, the Christian message. The God who is perfect, is righteous, who is angry at our wrongdoing is prepared to freely forgive us and give us eternal life. Let me read the verse:

VERSE

For it is by God's grace that you have been saved through faith. It is not the result of your own efforts, but God's gift, so that no one can boast about it.

What a verse! How can we be put right today. Through faith. By accepting God's gift of forgiveness. If you've never done that, the invitation is extended to you to by faith, accept that gift today.

HOW DID GOD DO IT?

But how can a God who is angry at people's wrongdoing be prepared to forgive them and pour out the blessings on them that are described in chapter 1. This is where God's glory is most wondrously revealed.

4 But God's mercy is so abundant, and his love for us is so great, 5 that while we were spiritually dead in our disobedience he brought us to life with Christ. It is by God's grace that you have been saved. 6 In our union with Christ Jesus he raised us up with him to rule with him in the heavenly world. 7 He did this to demonstrate for all time to come the extraordinary greatness of his grace in the love he showed us in Christ Jesus.

The truly amazing thing about God's grace is that because of His love, He was prepared to pay an enormous price for us – by becoming a human being and dying on a cross. The communion table this morning is the reminder we have been given of the price that Jesus paid for our sins – His broken body and shed blood.

But these verses remind us that the table is about life, not death. We were spiritually dead in our sins, but we have been made alive in Christ. In Jesus we see the glory of God. This is how we understand that God is truly like.

John 1:14 The Word became a human being and, full of grace and truth, lived among us. We saw his glory, the glory which he received as the Father's only Son.

Jesus reflects the glory of God – power, character, but most of all His grace reflecting the love of God (*Col 1:19 For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, 20 and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.*)

And He is glorified because of His finished work. Isn't God amazing. We started with bad news. Unpalatable news about God's wrath – His anger. But God. He has paid a high price because He is gracious, and offers us life, hope and forgiveness in Jesus. All we have to do is accept it by faith. Challenge.

Communion this morning is an affirmation of what Jesus has done for us. But there's more about God's glory in this passage in Ephesians 2.

HIS GLORY IS OUR GLORY

In our union with Christ Jesus he raised us up with him to rule with him in the heavenly world.

Through Jesus we have gained access by faith into this grace – we have hope of the glory of God. Another picture of God's glory we have looked at over the past weeks is His radiance which is so reflected in creation. That is going to be our glory too – not because of what we are, but who Jesus is making us.

OUR RESPONSE?

God has made us what we are, and in our union with Christ Jesus he has created us for a life of good deeds, which he has already prepared for us to do.

This is a situation that demands our response as we understand just how glorious God is as we look what He has done for us in Christ. Our response is in verse 10. I talked last week and earlier about the fact that we cannot find eternal life by our own deeds. We just can't. We will always fall short of God's glory.

Peace with God is achieved through faith in Jesus Christ and through that faith in Him we get that glory and will be in it eternally. Not of works so that no-one can boast.

I've been criticised in the past for "easy believism". If God gives us eternal life freely, why should we be bothered to make any effort to do anything good. We" if anyone could ever think that then they haven't understood what God is like and what an amazing thing God has done for us in Christ. No longer are we motivated by earning God's approval, but we should be motivated by gratitude and love to want to do what He wants of us – and that as I said last week is to do His will. That isn't always easy, but the Holy Spirit is with us and empowers us to do it.

TITLE

Prayer

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