

The hope of glory

2 Corinthians 3:7-18

I want to start this morning with reading you a Psalm. I was going to do something musical for it as this particular psalm has inspired quite a few hymns. But as I read it I found nothing deals with the whole depth and breadth of it than just reading it.

Psalm 19

- 1 The heavens declare the glory of God;
the skies proclaim the work of his hands.*
 - 2 Day after day they pour forth speech;
night after night they reveal knowledge.*
 - 3 They have no speech, they use no words;
no sound is heard from them.*
 - 4 Yet their voice goes out into all the earth,
their words to the ends of the world.*
- In the heavens God has pitched a tent for the sun.*
- 5 It is like a bridegroom coming out of his chamber,
like a champion rejoicing to run his course.*
 - 6 It rises at one end of the heavens
and makes its circuit to the other;
nothing is deprived of its warmth.*
 - 7 The law of the LORD is perfect,
refreshing the soul.*
- The statutes of the LORD are trustworthy,
making wise the simple.*
- 8 The precepts of the LORD are right,
giving joy to the heart.*
- The commands of the LORD are radiant,
giving light to the eyes.*
- 9 The fear of the LORD is pure,
enduring forever.*
- The decrees of the LORD are firm,
and all of them are righteous.*
- 10 They are more precious than gold,
than much pure gold;
they are sweeter than honey,
than honey from the honeycomb.*
 - 11 By them your servant is warned;
in keeping them there is great reward.*
 - 12 But who can discern their own errors?
Forgive my hidden faults.*
 - 13 Keep your servant also from willful sins;
may they not rule over me.*
- Then I will be blameless,
innocent of great transgression.*
- 14 May these words of my mouth and this meditation of my heart
be pleasing in your sight,
LORD, my Rock and my Redeemer.*

The heavens declare the glory of God. In the next few weeks we are going to look at the glory of God. Why? Because 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, their understanding of God gets bigger, and we get smaller, and so do all the problems and pressures of life.

How do we perceive God's glory? *The heavens declare the glory of God.* There is much about the glory of God in Paul's second letter to the Corinthians. But what is the glory of God? The Greek used for glory in 2 Corinthians is doxa which means glory or radiance. It's where we get the word doxology from – a prayer or statement glorifying God. That said, most commentators and theologians regard the glory of God as being a much fuller idea than just physical radiance. William Loader: *The language of "glory" was visual imagery for divine presence, best pictured as a glow of light. This was a common image for representing closeness to God or heaven. Glory when applied to God goes beyond His appearance. Another commentator (Got Questions): The glory of God is the beauty of His spirit. It is not an aesthetic beauty or a material beauty, but it is the beauty that emanates from His character, from all that He is.*

The Hebrew word is more revealing. "Glory" is kabod; it basically means weight. In science it would be the mass of an object of matter. It is the substance of a person or thing. For God, it is who He is, His character and power. We know for example that God is love,; love is God's character and power. God's glory manifests and reveals His love. Moses asked God to see His glory. This was God's reply, *"I will make all My goodness pass before you, and I will proclaim the name of the Lord before you. I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion"* (Exodus 33:19). Hold on to that thought; I'll come back to it.

Founders Journal: *What is the glory of God? The original meaning of glory has to do with weightiness. The glory of God summarizes the seriousness, the perfection, and the infinite significance of all of the attributes of God. It sums up who He is, in the awesome brightness and weightiness of all His perfections.*

Segun Johnson *"The glory of God is the appearance or the revelation of God's being, or God's presence or God's nature to man"* *"God's glory is extraordinary or supernatural: something that you see and you say this can only be God because it goes beyond the ordinary or the natural. It is God's active presence that we see and call glory."*

And to look upon the whole of God's glory is an awesome thing. It's not just experiencing appearance but being exposed to everything He is and that's something that's so profound, awesome, mind-blowing and the rest that it goes beyond the human ability to cope with it. It has a profound effect on those who experience it. Moses had to go around with His face veiled after his encounter with God because of the effect that seeing even a little bit of the glory of God had on him.

That doesn't mean that God won't allow us to experience His glory at all. Quite the reverse, it is something He intends for us. There are Bible incidents where people experienced the glory of God. It's just that in each case, the experience was just a bit of God's glory, not God in all His splendour. It was all they could cope with. More would be just overload. So who experienced the glory of God in the Bible?

Exodus 33:17 The LORD said to Moses, *"I will do just as you have asked, because I know you very well and I am pleased with you."* 18 Then Moses requested, *"Please, let me see*

the dazzling light of your presence." 19 The LORD answered, "I will make all my splendour pass before you and in your presence I will pronounce my sacred name. I am the LORD, and I show compassion and pity on those I choose. 20 I will not let you see my face, because no one can see me and stay alive, 21 but here is a place beside me where you can stand on a rock. 22 When the dazzling light of my presence passes by, I will put you in an opening in the rock and cover you with my hand until I have passed by. 23 Then I will take my hand away, and you will see my back but not my face.

Who else saw the glory of God? There were Peter James and John who saw Jesus transfigured, changed so that they experienced all the glory that was His. Paul himself was given a vision of being caught up into the third heaven and he got to see amazing things and then forbidden to tell anyone about them! (2 Cor 12). God wants us to have a greater understanding, experience and be the reflection of His glory.

So physical manifestation – a brightness – is one outworking of God's glory. So, the heavens declare the glory of God. They do, but there is another source of understanding the awesomeness of God which our commentators alluded to and Moses understood. It's mentioned in Psalm 19. The glory of God comes through His holy law – it's here in the Word of God. For Moses it was the Law that was handed to him on the mountain.

When we look at the heavens we see the power of God displayed. But when we look at God's word and start to understand it and take it in we find two more things that give us the length, breadth and weight of God's glory.

First we see the moral splendour of God. We understand what perfection is. Actually in letters like 2 Corinthians we also understand as we read it that we fall so short of God's moral perfection too.

But there is a second aspect to this, we also understand we deal with a God who says *"I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion."* The glory of God is not just expressed in moral purity, but in his grace and compassion to people; to us. And who are anything but morally pure in ourselves. Grace is the glory of God in action.

And of course grace and therefore God is revealed in Jesus Christ. As Paul says: *9 If the ministry that condemns men is glorious, how much more glorious is the ministry that brings righteousness!* The covenant we have come into through faith in Christ, the new covenant, reveals God's glory because it reveals His grace.

So, in itself, the new covenant is even more of a reflection of God's glory than the old one which had an amazing effect on Moses: *7 Now if the ministry that brought death, which was engraved in letters on stone, came with glory, so that the Israelites could not look steadily at the face of Moses because of its glory, fading though it was, 8 will not the ministry of the Spirit be even more glorious? 9 If the ministry that condemns men is glorious, how much more glorious is the ministry that brings righteousness! 10 For what was glorious has no glory now in comparison with the surpassing glory. 11 And if what was fading away came with glory, how much greater is the glory of that which lasts!*

Will not the ministry of the Spirit be even more glorious? In other words, the work of the Spirit in us should have such a profound effect on us that it should shine through us. The glory that was shining through Moses eventually faded, but the glory we should experience in Christ should be something that doesn't fade, because it's so much better, because it is

the glory that comes from the Holy Spirit Himself – and that should last. And it should be seen in our faces and in our lives. And it should dazzle. It should impress. It should change people. Everything around and associated with God's people should reflect that glory. It should be in our worship, in our prayer, in our lives together. All should reveal the Spirit's presence and power – and be an expression of the glory of God. People should know He is with us and desire for that glory themselves.

The problem is that so often God's people are anything but the reflection of God's glory. Church doesn't reflect that glory. We don't show anything of the nature of the Holy Spirit in us. Why? I could give us all a lecture on our shortcomings, but actually, none of the people that saw God's glory in the Bible were great paragons of virtue.

I think the problem is more basic and so obvious that it isn't if you see what I mean. How often have we ever asked God to show us some of His glory? We know that one day we're going to see the lot but the whole suggestion of this passage is that God wants us to experience His glory and for the Holy Spirit to shine through us: *17 Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. 18 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.*

Experiencing and reflecting God's glory should be a normal and natural part of being a Christian because we all have the Spirit of God. Having that glory veiled from us is part of the life of an unbeliever: like the Jews Paul refers to. So if we're not experiencing God's glory and not reflecting it, then have we asked? How did Moses get to see God's glory? He asked. Yes, asked. Understanding and experiencing God's glory isn't something that God rations as He pleases or gives in a mysterious way to one person and not another. It is part of the normal life of the believer. It is our expectation. It's for everyone. Just ask.

We ask, we get. God has given us His Spirit and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. Freedom to be who God wants us to be. To share in His glory and reflect His glory. It's a case of asking and desiring to be transformed into His likeness. It's as simple as that. So let's encourage one another, pray for one another, pray with one another that we might experience the glory of God more and more, that we may reflect that glory by His Spirit and be transformed into the likeness of Christ.