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Unfading Glory

Exodus 34:29-30, "And it came about when Moses was coming down from Mount Sinai (and the two tablets of the testimony were in Moses' hand as he was coming down from the mountain), that Moses did not know that the skin of his face shone because of his speaking with [God]. So when Aaron and all the sons of Israel saw Moses, behold, the skin of his face shone, and they were afraid to come near him."

If you read further you will discover that Moses called the frightened people back to declare the

word of the Lord to them. After this, we read this:

Exodus 34:33, "When Moses had finished speaking with them, he put a veil over his face."

What makes this account so amazing is that this passage occurred at the end of Moses' second forty day fast! Spurgeon wrote this of this text:

A fast of forty days does not improve the appearance of a man's countenance: he looks starved, wrinkled, old, haggard. Moses had fasted forty days twice at the least... Small attractiveness would naturally remain in a face which had endured so stern an ordeal; but the Lord whom he served made his face brilliant with an unusual lustre. (Spurgeon, pp. v. 36, p 253)

Can you imagine living during this time and beholding Moses? Gazing upon the glory of God on his face? Knowing that he had not eaten for forty days and yet his countenance shone with magnificence? What a sight to behold!

And yet as wonderful as it would have been to behold Moses, it ultimately would have been disappointing. For according to 2 Corinthians 3 the glory that radiated on Moses' face was a fading glory! It didn't last!

2 Corinthians 3:13b, "...[he] used to put a veil over his face that the sons of Israel might not look intently at the end of what was fading away."

How wonderful it is to know that heaven's glory is unfading! That means that all that we have seen thus far about the glory of heaven:

1. The restored fellowship we someday will enjoy with our brothers and sisters in Christ, Hebrews 12:23.
2. Our citizenship and inheritance, Philippians 3:20; 1 Peter 1:4.
3. Its security, Revelation 21:12-14, 21a.

All of it will be UNFADING and so UNENDING! As John Newton wrote:¹

When we've been there ten thousand years, bright shining as the sun, we've no less days to sing God's praise than when we've first begun. (Newton, p. 460)

So how is it that heaven is a place of unfading glory? The God of glory Himself dwells in heaven and in fact IS its glory makes for its unfading glory!

The God Who Dwells in Heaven

Revelation 22:3-5, “And there shall no longer be any curse; and the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and His bond-servants shall serve Him; and they shall see His face, and His name shall be on their foreheads. And there shall no longer be *any* night; and they shall not have need of the light of a lamp nor the light of the sun, because the Lord God shall illumine them; and they shall reign forever and ever.”

Whether you realize it or not, this speaks of the glory of heaven. We saw last time that the last two chapters of Revelation were given to explain the glory of heaven.

Revelation 21:10-11a, “And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me the holy city, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, having the glory of God...”

With this, John transitioned into a treatise on the glory of heaven, a treatment which again would close out this book. Consider with me the significance of seeing God’s face.

Revelation 22:4, “And they shall see His face...”

To appreciate the significance of this statement we need to consider its redemptive background. The book of Exodus gives us this context. In Exodus 32 we read of the Golden Calf, the broken tablets containing the Ten Commandments, the discipline of the people of God, and then their restoration. Then in Exodus 33 we read of the sojourning of the people of God to the Promised Land.

Exodus 33:1, “Then the Lord spoke to Moses, ‘Depart, go up from here, you and the people whom you have brought up from the land of Egypt, to the land of which I swore to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, saying, “To your descendants I will give it.”’”

In light of Israel’s track record heretofore, there is no way the nation was going to follow Moses to the Promised Land without some form of rebellion (in fact, it was pretty much guaranteed in Exodus 33:3). Accordingly, Moses made a very specific request of God:

Exodus 33:18, 20, “Then Moses said, ‘I pray Thee, show me Thy glory!’ [N.B., throughout Redemptive history many of God’s servants have been encouraged in their ministry by gazing upon the glory of God. It was that which impelled Isaiah to a 50 year ministry of trial and difficulty (Is. 6)... it was that which impelled Ezekiel (Ez. 1)... Peter beheld it in the boat which prompted him to go out to Christ on the water (Mt. 14:28)... Paul gazed upon it on the road to Damascus which led to a life of self-sacrifice and service (Acts 9:3-9)... John beheld it on the Island of Patmos which no doubt enabled him to endure such a trial so late in his life (Rev.). Accordingly, facing the difficult road that lay ahead of him, Moses asked God to show him His glory!...]... ²⁰ But [God] said, ‘You cannot see My face, for no man can see Me and live!’” - why is that? Why can’t we see God’s face and live? The passage before us gives the answer as it unites the concept of God’s “face” with the concept of His “glory.”

Look at the text again. Then Moses said,

“I pray Thee, show me Thy glory!”... But He said, “You cannot see My face [the two are parallel], for no man can see Me and live!”

In other words, understand a little about God’s glory, and you will understand why “No man can see God’s face and live.” Accordingly, we have to review what is meant by God’s glory. The word *glory* in the Hebrew Bible is the same word as the word for *weight* (כָּבֵד [kābēd]). Accordingly to discuss the glory of God is to discuss the weightiness of His being.

First of all, what it DOESN’T mean is that “glory” denotes a mystical, misty emanation. When we think of heaven and God’s glory, oft-times we think of bright lights in a foggy, misty surrounding. That is not what is meant by glory in the Bible! Rather glory represents the weightiness of something. It is a measurement of something’s effect on another.² For example most of us have seen video of Elvis Presley in concert with women fainting in his presence. Elvis’ glory was such that women fainted at his presence. This is the way the Bible uses the word *glory*.

Corrie ten Boom was an incredible woman in her day. I have no doubt that her selflessness (her genuine longing for the salvation of the people who killed her family) would make most of us feel ashamed of our selfishness or the things that burden us. If that were the case, we would say that Corrie ten Boom’s selfless life was glorious.

When one considers the office of the President we are moved to respect and honor. It doesn’t matter whether we have a bad economy or bad decisions by the President, we still respect the office of President because of its glory.

All these examples illustrate what the Bible means when it speaks of the glory of God. When we speak of the glory of God we speak of the weightiness of His character and His impact on this world and us! His weightiness includes

- His grace.
- His promises.
- His words of comfort.
- His threatening’s and judgments.

From this perspective, *glory* in itself is NOT an attribute of God. Rather, when used in reference to God, it is a description of the effects of one or more of God’s attributes.

- In Isaiah 6:3 “glory” refers particularly to God’s holiness, “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of His glory.”
- In Exodus 33:18-19a “glory” refers to the goodness of God, “Then Moses said, ‘I pray

Thee, show me Thy glory!' And He said, 'I Myself will make all My goodness pass before you...'"

And so, to say that God is glorious in His:

- FAITHFULNESS, is to say that, unlike the idol, God will never let you down; He is able to be trusted.
- MIGHT, is to say that, unlike man, nothing is too difficult for God.
- LOVE, is to say that His love is efficacious- it saves!

And thus, when we read that "no man can see God's glory and live" we understand the enormity of this statement. If beholding an actor or singer can make me feel faint, what would happen if I gazed upon the "Great I Am!"? The selflessness of Corrie ten Boon is to feel ashamed, what would happen if I gazed upon the "goodness" of God? The honor of the Presidential office leads to a response of respect/reverence, what would happen if I gazed upon the "King of kings and Lord of lords" before whom "the nations are a drop in a bucket!"?

Think of it! What would be the effect of beholding NOT the essence of God, as someday we shall behold Him in heaven, BUT *merely* a theophany (an appearance of God manifested at our level so that we don't die)? Notice the effect on Isaiah.

Isaiah 6:5, "Then I said, 'Woe is me, for I am ruined! Because I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts.'"

Note the effect upon Ezekiel:

Ezekiel 1:28b, "...And when I saw *it*, I fell on my face..."

Notice the effect upon Moses:

Exodus 34:8, "And Moses made haste to bow low toward the earth and worship."

See the effect upon the Apostle John:

Revelation 22:8, "And I, John, am the one who heard and saw these things. And when I heard and saw, I fell down to worship at the feet of the angel who showed me these things."

With all of this as the background, notice the glory of Heaven, "And they shall see His face..." (Rev. 22:4)! To "see God's face" is to bear in our person the weight of God's character, the revelation of who He is!

Wait a minute! I thought that no man can see God's face and live?! They can't in this life! But in the life to come, God will purify and transform us such that we will have the capacity to

1. Feel the weight of the full effects of His nature, and yet not die!
2. Gaze upon His face and live!

Matthew 5:8, “Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God.”

The Greek verb translated “see” (ὁράω [*horaō*]) denotes a future, continuous reality! In heaven we always will behold God! In His glory would permeate all things such that there will be no need for the sun (Revelation 21:23)! Truly, in heaven we shall behold the glory of God in its fullness! And all of this brings us the face of God.

The “Face” We Someday Shall Always See

When we stand in heaven and gaze upon the face of God, what will we behold? That is a great question which some of the biblical writers attempted to answer. One of the most dramatic descriptions of heaven in all of Scripture comes from the prophet Ezekiel. He was transported in a vision to the very heart of heaven, and he describes in vivid detail what God and His throne looks like. Ezekiel began describing God’s throne:

Ezekiel 1:4-28, “4 And as I looked [sitting in exile], behold, a storm wind was coming from the north [Ezekiel’s vision began with the brutal approach of a desert-tornado; this was the platform in which Ezekiel beheld the glory of God], a great cloud with fire flashing forth continually and a bright light around it, and in its midst something like glowing metal in the midst of the fire. [Sometime in the midst of the storm, Ezekiel was transported in a vision to behold the Storm of God’s glory! Notice he begins by describing four creatures/the cherubim that held up the chariot-platform on which God’s throne rested...] 5 And within it there were figures resembling four living beings. And this was their appearance: they had human form. 6 Each of them had four faces and four wings. 7 And their legs were straight and their feet were like a calf’s hoof, and they gleamed like burnished bronze. 8 Under their wings on their four sides *were* human hands. As for the faces and wings of the four of them, 9 their wings touched one another; their *faces* did not turn when they moved, each went straight forward. 10 As for the form of their faces, *each* had the face of a man, all four had the face of a lion on the right and the face of a bull on the left, and all four had the face of an eagle. 11 Such were their faces. Their wings were spread out above; each had two touching another *being*, and two covering their bodies. 12 And each went straight forward; wherever the spirit was about to go, they would go, without turning as they went. 13 In the midst of the living beings there was something that looked like burning coals of fire, like torches darting back and forth among the living beings. The fire was bright, and lightning was flashing from the fire. 14 And the living beings ran to and fro like bolts of lightning [IOW, the cherubim moved as a group such that the chariot-throne moved smoothly wherever the Spirit of God directed it]. 15 Now as I looked at the living beings, behold, there was one wheel on the earth beside the living beings, for *each of*

the four of them [so the chariot-throne had four wheels which made contact with the earth]. 16 The appearance of the wheels and their workmanship *was* like sparkling beryl [a green stone], and all four of them had the same form, their appearance and workmanship *being* as if one wheel were within another. 17 Whenever they moved, they moved in any of their four directions, without turning as they moved [each wheel consisted of two wheels, most likely solid discs, which bisected each other at right angles, thus allowing movement in any of four directions without being turned]. 18 As for their rims they were lofty and awesome, and the rims of all four of them were full of eyes round about. 19 And whenever the living beings moved, the wheels moved with them. And whenever the living beings rose from the earth, the wheels rose *also*. 20 Wherever the spirit was about to go, they would go in that direction. And the wheels rose close beside them; for the spirit of the living beings *was* in the wheels. 21 Whenever those went, these went; and whenever those stood still, these stood still. And whenever those rose from the earth, the wheels rose close beside them; for the spirit of the living beings *was* in the wheels. 22 Now over the heads of the living beings *there was* something like an expanse [the Hebrew literally reads, ‘made firm by beating or stamping’ and so most likely refers to a hammered piece of metal whose appearance was...], like the awesome gleam of crystal [Heb., “ice”], extended over their heads. 23 And under the expanse their wings *were stretched out* straight, one toward the other; each one also had two wings covering their bodies on the one side and on the other. 24 I also heard the sound of their wings like the sound of abundant waters as they went, like the voice of the Almighty, a sound of tumult like the sound of an army camp; whenever they stood still, they dropped their wings [so when the chariot-throne moved, it was noisy!]. 25 And there came a voice from above the expanse that was over their heads; whenever they stood still, they dropped their wings. [Ezekiel now turned his focus on the Lord who sat on the throne resting on the platform which the four cherubim held up...] 26 Now above the expanse that was over their heads there was something resembling a throne, like lapis lazuli in appearance [“lapis lazuli” (sapphire) was one of the most precious stones known to the ancient world;]; and on that which resembled a throne, high up, *was* a figure with the appearance of a man. 27 Then I noticed from the appearance of His loins and upward something like glowing metal that looked like fire all around within it, and from the appearance of His loins and downward I saw something like fire; and *there was* a radiance around Him. 28 As the appearance of the rainbow in the clouds on a rainy day, so *was* the appearance of the surrounding radiance. Such *was* the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord. And when I saw *it*, I fell on my face and heard a voice speaking.”

Daniel continued the description of God when he wrote this:

Daniel 7:9-10, “I kept looking until thrones were set up, and the Ancient of Days took *His* seat; His vesture *was* like white snow, and the hair of His head like pure wool. His throne *was* ablaze with flames, its wheels *were* a burning fire. A river of fire was flowing and coming out from before Him; thousands upon thousands were attending Him, and myriads upon myriads were standing before Him; the court sat, and the books

were opened.”

And picking up where Daniel and Ezekiel left off, John wrote this:

Revelation 4:1-3, 5-6, “After these things I looked, and behold, a door standing open in heaven, and the first voice which I had heard, like the sound of a trumpet speaking with me, said, ‘Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after these things.’ Immediately I was in the Spirit; and behold, a throne was standing in heaven, and One sitting on the throne. And He who was sitting was like a jasper stone [a translucent crystalline green quartz] and a sardius [a blood-red stone] in appearance; and there was a rainbow around the throne, like an emerald in appearance... 5 And from the throne proceed flashes of lightning and sounds and peals of thunder. And there were seven lamps of fire burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God [elsewhere we know that there is only one Spirit of God, 1 Cor. 12:4; Eph. 4:4. So why “seven Spirits” here? The lamps referenced here, in Rev. 2-3 and Ex. 25:31-37 are actually seven candles of a single lamp stand. The picture is that the ONE Spirit of God is operative in ALL places, in ALL God’s churches, at ALL times]; and before the throne there was, as it were, a sea of glass like crystal; and in the center and around the throne, four living creatures full of eyes in front and behind.”

The picture painted by these passages on the whole is indescribable and quite difficult to explain much less imagine. Tozer, speaking of the passage in Ezekiel, wrote this:³...

When the prophet Ezekiel saw heaven opened and beheld visions of God, he found himself looking at that which he had no language to describe. What he was seeing was wholly different from anything he had ever known before, so he fell back upon the language of resemblance. ‘As for the likeness of the living creatures, their appearance was like burning coals of fire’...

strange as this language is, it still does not create the impression of unreality. One gathers that the whole scene is very real but entirely alien to anything men know on earth. So, in order to convey an idea of what he sees, the prophet must employ such words as ‘likeness,’ ‘appearance,’ ‘as it were,’ and ‘the likeness of the appearance.’ Even the throne becomes ‘the appearance of a throne’ and He that sits upon it, though like a man, is so *unlike* one that He can be described only as ‘the likeness of the appearance of a man.’ (Tozer, 2009, p. 15)

Man’s language is not adequate to describe the glory of God, nor His face! However, that is not to say that these passages do not have importance to us! Notice, from these texts we conclude God is awesome and ultimately indescribable in this state. While God has revealed some of His attributes, statements that can be said to be true about God, such that we can know Him today, nevertheless God is unlike us and we err when we bring our transcendent Lord down to our level and act as if He is something like ourselves! Dr. John MacArthur, speaking of the passage in Ezekiel, wrote this:⁴...

This is not a secret message to be decoded; it is a large picture designed to display the sovereignty, majesty, and glory of God and the incredible beauty, symmetry, and perfection of heaven. (MacArthur, 1998, p. 81)

And so when you think of Heaven and its glory, that which must come to your mind is that heaven is a place of utmost majesty and awe. God dwells there in the splendor of His glory and might! He is worthy of all worship, honor, and praise! It is amazing, but when the prophet Isaiah, Moses, Ezekiel, the apostle John stood in the presence of God, each fell to the ground and worshipped (Isaiah 6; Exodus 34; Revelation 4:10; 19:10; 22:8)!

Truly you must see that the glory of Heaven is a weight that presses upon us today and calls us to worship and adore! It is that which must drive us in life!

A Place of Indescribable Satisfaction

According to Revelation 22:4, the Being described in Ezekiel and Revelation is a God that we someday shall behold. And who is this God? Is He is NOT

1. The object of every Christian's desire?
2. The source of ALL our joy and gladness?
3. The Christian's hope?

Asaph's wrote:

Psalm 73:25, "Whom have I in heaven *but Thee*? And besides Thee, I desire nothing on earth."

Notice Paul's passion in life:

Philippians 3:8a, 10, "More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord... that I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings..."

Truly the greatest desire of the child of God is to behold their God (John 14:8), know Him (John 17:3), and fellowship with Him (Philippians 3:9). Heaven is nothing less than that time when we shall be granted these privileges and more! Heaven is the time when Psalm 42 will be a reality.

Psalm 42:1-2, "As the deer pants for the water brooks, so my soul pants for Thee, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God; when shall I come and appear before God?"

To which we can say with Job:

Job 19:26-27, “Even after my skin is destroyed, yet from my flesh I shall see God; whom I myself shall behold, and whom my eyes shall see and not another. My heart faints within me.”

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End Notes

¹ Red Trinity Hymnal #460.

² In 1 Corinthians 15:40-41, ultimately speaking of our resurrected bodies, Paul wrote, “There are also heavenly bodies and earthly bodies, but the glory of the heavenly is one, and the glory of the earthly is another. There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars; for star differs from star in glory.” “Glory” in this passage clearly is a measurement of the effect of something on another. For example, the sun’s glory is seen in that it heats the earth, brightens our land, feeds plants, and makes life on this earth “livable.” The moon’s glory is seen in that it can serve as a light in darkness and can affect tidal waves and the weather. A star’s glory is less than the sun and the moon not because it merely is not as bright as the sun and moon, but because it has less of an effect on our lives!

³ *The Knowledge of The Holy*, page 15.

⁴ *The Glory of Heaven*, page 81.

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Feel free to visit Bethel Presbyterian Church when in Broomfield, Colorado. Bethel Presbyterian Church meets at Broomfield High School, Eagle (10th Street) and Main, Broomfield, Colorado. The telephone number of the church is 303-469-6912. The worship services are at 9:30 a.m. and 6:00 p.m. each Sunday. Bethel Presbyterian Church is a member of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

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About the Preacher

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