

The Purpose of Glory

Revelation 21:22-22:5

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I. Intro to the Glory Series

Good morning, everyone! I've been looking forward to this Sunday for a long time now. Not just because I'm speaking, but because of the series we're beginning. This Sunday is the first week of a new series on God's Glory: what is it, why does it matter, and what does it mean for me. Why study glory? This series is based on the conviction that seeing and savoring God's glory is absolutely fundamental for the Christian life. We all desperately need to see and understand the majesty of God. The other speakers in the series - Pastors Devon, Dale, Michael and Russ - will work together to build that case in the weeks ahead.

This morning we are beginning with the topic "The Purpose of Glory". We'll take a journey through the Bible building a framework for our thinking about God's glory and how it relates to us, and landing on the last two chapters of the Bible in Revelation 21-22. It'll be a little like reading a mystery novel when you can't wait to see how it ends, so you quickly skip through to get to the last chapter! Actually, the analogy of a mystery novel is appropriate...the Bible itself calls our topic this morning a "mystery": a mystery that was hidden, but has now been revealed more clearly (Col. 1:25ff, Eph. 1:9ff).

Tonight Pastor Devon will take us back to the beginning of the Bible to consider foundational "Pictures of Glory" God has placed in his creation. The question he'll be addressing is – "Where do we most clearly see God's glory in the original creation?"

First, a little background on the word "glory." The Hebrew (OT) words translated "glory" in our Bibles have a wide range of meaning: weight, reputation, honor, fame, strength. Greek words (NT) also have a range of meaning: renown, fame, splendor, brightness. Many uses in both the OT and NT have to do with appearance – splendor & beauty - often expressed as light shining.¹

- We think of a king in robes, a golden crown, sitting high on a throne in power. But it's more than just outward appearance – meaning, worth, fulfillment, pleasure – substantial things have glory.
- Think of the NCAA tournament – the theme song used to be "One Shining Moment" – anyone remember that? There's a glory to winning a national championship – defeating all opponents and standing alone at the top. This is a glory that is high and lifted up. This kind of glory is sometimes called "Transcendent" glory.
- Some kinds of glory are also more personal – holding a newborn son or daughter and admiring and marveling at a new little person God has brought into the world. This is also substantial, meaningful, and weighty – but in a personal and intimate way. This kind of glory is sometimes called "Imminent" glory – glory of nearness and relationship.

Things we think are glorious light up our lives. We long to be connected to something significant and worthwhile. We were designed to long for glory – to locate and treasure things and people worthy of our admiration. All of us – believers and unbelievers – are drawn to glory.

II. The Great Exchange

¹ THE ZONDERVAN PICTORIAL ENCYCLOPEDIA OF THE BIBLE, Entry on "Glory"

God is glorious, but people naturally ignore him – unless they want something from Him. What’s the problem? Why aren’t we drawn to God’s glory? Romans 1 explains what has happened in our hearts. From birth, all of us have turned away from God and exchanged God’s glory for the glory of created things. Created things are what we can touch, taste see, hear, and smell. Romans 1 tells us:

*For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. ²² Claiming to be wise, they became fools, ²³ **and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.** ²⁴ Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, ²⁵ **because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen.***

Every evil, sad, and painful thing that has ever happened to you or anyone else is the result of an evil we all share in. What is that evil, and how do we share in it? The Bible calls it an “exchange” – we give away something in order to get something else in return. But we have made a foolish trade! We’ve given away the pure, strong, magnificent glory of the eternal being that created us and in its place tried to build our lives around the fleeting, temporary, SECOND-HAND glory of things that are created.

III. God’s Glory in Created Things

Created things do have a glory... we have only to observe the world around us. Created things are wonderful, and enjoyable: A sunset painting the sky with a rich palette of colors, the rhythm and harmony of a catchy song, the comfort of having a good friend nearby, the luxuriousness of a brand new car with that “new car smell” – and these days we also have the glow of screens drawing us to their glory: phones, tablets, TVs; bringing us Pinterest glory, Facebook glory, WoW glory, Minecraft glory, CSI Miami glory, Candy Crush glory, and yes – even Grumpy Cat has a kind of glory, I guess.

All these things are glorious in their own unique ways, and we enjoy them! Especially the first few times we experience them... But if we stop there, we are missing the best part of life. We have actually given up the glory of our Creator for something that is created, temporary, and fading away. Worship of created things will always corrupt us – even if what we are worshipping is okay in and of itself. And worshipping created things also leaves us lonely and empty. Created things cannot satisfy, because we were not made to worship them.

Even at its best, fixating on the dim reflections of God’s glory in created things is like sitting in a junk yard on a beautiful spring day. All around us is the wide world – green and ready to be explored under a sunny blue sky. But we are hunched over in the dust, clutching a rusty hubcap. It’s so tarnished it hardly even reflects any more, but we’re locked in on the dim and cloudy reflection of the sky above. We can’t look up, can’t look away – totally blind to anything else. This bit of brightness and color in the rust is mesmerizing. We’re missing out, but we don’t even know it. And while we clutch our shiny objects, the years of our lives slip away and our souls corrode like the object we have chosen to worship. We fall far, far short of the glory of God.

Many things in our world are glorious... but the glory that they have does not come from them. They are not the source of the glory we enjoy in them. Even human beings (who create many wonderful things) are not the source of the glory. Listen to Psalm 19:1-6:

*The heavens declare **the glory of God**, and the sky above proclaims **his handiwork**.*

² Day to day pours out speech, and night to night reveals knowledge. ³ There is no speech, nor are

there words, whose voice is not heard. ⁴ Their voice goes out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world. In them he has set a tent for the sun, ⁵ which comes out like a bridegroom leaving his chamber, and, like a strong man, runs its course with joy. ⁶ Its rising is from the end of the heavens, and its circuit to the end of them, and there is nothing hidden from its heat.

Notice in this Psalm that the glory proclaimed by the heavens and sky is no less than God's glory! The key example of glory in this Psalm is the sun... It rises "like a bridegroom leaving his chamber" (interestingly not the bride), like a strong man it runs its course with joy – blazing with intense light, so bright you can't look at it directly. We take for granted the sun is up there, but think about it – how often do you actually look at it? If you've ever tried to look directly at the sun on a clear day you probably remember the experience. It can actually damage your eyes permanently. Every single day, we see the sun move from one end of heaven to the other in our sky. Remember this example of the sun as a picture of God's glory – we will see it again.

IV. God's Glory and Israel

I originally planned to read some texts on God's glory and how it related to Israel. I ended up reducing it to just a summary.... For a rich look at how God revealed his Glory to Israel and especially in a close personal relationship with Moses, I encourage you to read the conversation between God and Moses in Exodus 33-34. This passage gives a powerful definition of God's glory in terms of His character. It defines God's glory as His goodness: highlighting His mercy, patience, compassion and forgiveness of sins; but also His certain and terrifying judgment of sin. As I read through the sections of Exodus leading up to this conversation, I was struck with the constant tension of His glory being both a blessing and a curse to the nation of Israel. God covenanted with Israel to be their God, giving them His glory as a possession. His glory meant life, salvation, and mercy in that He saved them from slavery in Egypt and led them into the Promised Land. But God's glory also meant frequent punishment for their sin as they rebelled against Him. The way the Israelites related to God's glory is similar to the way we do outside of Christ. We were made to need His glory, but His glory is dangerous to us because we are sinners. True Israelites longed for a rest from this tension.

V. God's Glory Perfected in Christ

As much as the sun in the sky and other created things declare God's glory, and as much as we can see God's glory in His relationship with Israel – these were and are only signposts pointing to something better. Remember all the meanings of the word "glory" we covered at the beginning? There was one we left out. In the NT the word "glory" is chiefly used to describe the way God's character shines out of the person of Jesus Christ.² Listen to John 1:

*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ² He was in the beginning with God. ³ All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. ⁴ **In him was life, and the life was the light of men.** ⁵ The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. ¹⁴ And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and **we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.***

Hebrews 1 expands on this theme:

² THE ZONDERVAN PICTORIAL ENCYCLOPEDIA OF THE BIBLE, Entry on "Glory"

*God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, 2 in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world. 3 And **He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature**, and upholds all things by the word of His power. When He had made purification of sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high...*

When Jesus was on earth, His glory was not obvious to everyone. To most people, Jesus appeared to be a normal man walking around – not God. For 33 years, God’s glory was compressed into a human being. His glory was a glory that you could miss. That hiding of his glory was actually part of his worthiness.

Philippians 2 puts it beautifully:

5 Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, 6 who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, 7 but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. 8 And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

Jesus humbled himself to be a servant, he lived in obedience to God as we were supposed to live, he loved others and put their needs before himself. And at the culmination of His life He took our sins upon himself and surrendered to His enemies to be sacrificed in our place. Remember the term “Imminent” glory from earlier? This is the defining example of God’s imminent glory. This was glory of God’s nearness and personal love for us. In Jesus, God’s mercy and God’s justice came together in perfect harmony so that He could draw near to us without us being destroyed because of our sin. To unbelievers, Jesus was just a carpenter from Nazareth. But those who believed in Him were able to see God’s glory in human flesh – “the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.” They were able to see God’s divine nature lived out perfectly and gloriously before their eyes. Philippians 2 continues:

9 Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, 10 so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, 11 and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Jesus died on the cross, but he didn’t stay dead. God raised him from the dead and Jesus ascended back into heaven, taking His seat on the throne. Today Jesus’ glory is still veiled to those who do not believe. But a day is coming when no one will be able to deny it any longer. “Every knee will bow... and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” Using the other term we defined at the beginning, this is Christ’s transcendent glory. Jesus will be revealed as King of Kings and Lord of Lords – high and lifted up. When will that happen?

We have one last stop this morning, in Revelation 21-22. Here at the very end of the Bible, we see where all this is going. God is going to create a new heavens and new earth to replace the broken one we live in. Jesus will reign over this new creation openly and visibly, and every knee will bow to Him. God will do this when Jesus returns to judge the world and rescue those who are waiting for Him.

VI. God’s Glory as the Culmination of History

In Revelation 21, the apostle John sees the new heavens and new earth that is coming. At various times through the Bible, we have gotten a preview of God’s plan for remaking the world. God’s big-picture plan is not to fix this world, but to destroy and remake it. All believers from throughout history will live and reign with Christ in the new heavens and new earth. However, there aren’t many details in the Bible of what our lives will be like in the new heavens and new earth. This has led some to speculate - resulting the cartoon pictures you may have seen of people with wings, bobbing on clouds while playing

harp. Other people wonder if heaven will only be endless choir practice. Imagining along these lines misses the point. The Bible doesn't try to tell us all that our lives then will involve - it does, however, tell us what we need to know about the new world that is coming.

Rev. 21 tells us that the new heaven and new earth will be full of glory. The church will be beautiful – fully transformed into a perfect bride, radiant with the Glory of God and eager to be married to Christ (vs. 9-11). The glory of the kings of the earth and all nations will be brought into it – it won't be an empty place, it will be filled with the variety and riches of the nations! The wealth and skill and sons and daughters of God from every nation on earth (vs. 24-26, Isa. 60). But the most important thing about this new world will not be a huge and magnificent city, the wealth of nations, swapping stories with people who lived thousands of years ago, streets of gold, or mansions prepared for us.

In vs 3 we hear an announcement from the throne: “Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God Himself will be with them as their God.” Hear that repeated phrase - “with them.” This is what is captured in Jesus' name “Immanuel” – God with Us. God himself will be there... not just Words from God, not just the Spirit in our hearts, not even just the form of Jesus as he appeared on earth 2000 years ago. We will see Him “as He is”, in all His multi-faceted beauty! We will see our God in person - our Savior, our King, our Warrior, our Comforter, our Refuge, our Deliverer, our Righteousness, our Healer, our Dad.

Let's pick up reading in vs. 22:

*22 And I saw **no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb.** 23 **And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and its lamp is the Lamb.** 24 *By its light will the nations walk, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it, 25 and its gates will never be shut by day—and there will be no night there. 26 They will bring into it the glory and the honor of the nations. 27 But nothing unclean will ever enter it, nor anyone who does what is detestable or false, but only those who are written in the Lamb's book of life* 22:1 *Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb 2 through the middle of the street of the city; also, on either side of the river, the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. 3 **No longer will there be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him. 4 **They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. 5 And night will be no more. They will need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever.******

Notice:

Vs. 22 – There will be no temple in the city – no special place to be in God's presence, because God is actually there. His children will finally be home with Him...

Vs. 23 – There will be no need of sun or moon – the glory of God has illumined the city, and the Lamb is its lamp. Vs. 25 – Because of this, there will be no night there. This is repeated again in 22:5.

Vs. 3 – There will no longer be any curse – why not? God and the Lamb will be there. The curse at the garden was the removal of men from God's glory and presence.

Vs. 4 – God's servants will see his face, and they will be marked as his.

In the new heavens and new earth our appreciation of God's “Transcendent” glory and “Imminent” glory will merge together. He will sit on the throne... but He will also wipe away every tear from our eyes. His glory will replace the sun as our source of light... but oh, brothers and sisters - we will see His

face too! We will finally enjoy Him fully... We will push deeper and deeper into the glory of who God is. When the sun that proclaims God's glory now is actually replaced by God's glory in the new heavens and earth, it will signal the completion of all that the glory of this creation points to. When we speak with Jesus face-to-face it will be the culmination of all that we and other believers throughout history have tasted of in our walk with God. The glory of God and of the Lamb will fill the world tangibly, visibly and unmistakably. What will we be doing into eternity? We will just have to wait and find out for most of it. But it will be an adventure worth taking, because we will be with our Savior – and the whole earth will be filled with His glory.

VII. Closing Thoughts

Believers in the darkness: Maybe it's been a long time since you've had any real hope. We are in the shadowlands... It's still night. We have some good dreams, but we also have some nightmares. We can't see clearly. We're easily distracted by the dim reflections of glory around us. We're often just confused and lost. Our suffering takes many forms: we fight against sin and its affects (in ourselves and others), addictions, chronic pain, children that rebel, losing a child, infertility, financial struggles, loneliness, fear, depression, mundane responsibilities, physical weakness and sickness, disabilities, persecution for our faith. But a day is coming when God will wipe away every tear from our eyes. Don't lose heart... God will swallow up death for all time (Isa. 25:8-9). Though we may not understand now how this can be, it will be worth it when we see Jesus. "There's a day that's drawing near, when the darkness breaks to light. And the shadows disappear, and my faith shall be my sight." Fix your eyes on the Savior, and the home He is preparing for us. "For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison." (2 Cor. 4:17)

Maybe this morning, though, believers, the thought of heaven doesn't seem very attractive to you. Could it be that you've been so dazzled and taken up with things of this world that you have little heart for God? Maybe He's been showing you signs, even this morning that your heart is far from him. What does the glory of God mean for you? ...At least this: Don't make peace with sin in your heart. Don't settle for the glory of the created things, because there is one you can enjoy now that is infinitely better! He is worthy, worthy, worthy of everything you are – and He is going to win the battle against darkness. Jesus is worth fighting for! There is nothing that compares to Him. Romans 13:12 says "The night is nearly over, the day is almost here. So let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light." God has made every provision for us to be transformed from darkness to light right now, in this life. Confess your idolatrous worship of things other than God, confess your weakness and ask for God's help. Cling to your Savior. Recommit yourself to the battle for joy in Christ. Find brothers and sisters whom you can walk with and learn from. God doesn't call you away from worshipping created things because He wants to spoil your fun. He wants to give you something much, much better: His Glory!

To those who aren't believers, or who don't know – please, listen to these words from Jesus:

John 12:35 – So Jesus said to them [the crowd], "For a little while longer the Light is among you. Walk while you have the Light, so that darkness will not overtake you; he who walks in the darkness does not know where he goes. While you have the Light, believe in the Light, so that you may become sons of Light."

Friends, you have no guarantee that you will ever have another chance to believe in Jesus. You could be driving home from church today, and another car could do something stupid and slam into you. In a moment, the lights go out for the last time. And you would be lost... lost, lost, lost never to be found again. All chance of salvation snatched away in an instant. Why would you wait to believe in the Light? Right now is a moment of salvation. God's offer is coming to you, personally – calling you to reject your

sin, repent of it and embrace God's gift of salvation through Jesus. Why would you wait? What glory imposters are you holding on to that are worth your soul? You are missing out on the best glory now, and you have no hope for the future. Your body will die, but your soul will live forever – either in heaven in the presence of God, or in hell suffering under His wrath. There is nothing more important than getting right with God.

“For a little while longer the Light is among you. Walk while you have the Light, so that darkness will not overtake you; he who walks in the darkness does not know where he goes. While you have the Light, believe in the Light, so that you may become sons of Light.”

In closing, let's bring our eyes and hearts back to the new heavens and new earth with the words of an old hymn I dearly love:

The sands of time are sinking, the dawn of Heaven breaks;
The summer morn I've sighed for—the fair, sweet morn awakes:
Dark, dark hath been the midnight, but dayspring is at hand,
And glory, glory dwelleth in Immanuel's land.

O Christ, He is the fountain, the deep, sweet well of love!
The streams of earth I've tasted more deep I'll drink above:
There to an ocean fullness His mercy doth expand,
And glory, glory dwelleth in Immanuel's land.

The King there in His beauty, without a veil is seen:
It were a well spent journey, though seven deaths lay between:
The Lamb with His fair army, doth on Mount Zion stand,
And glory—glory dwelleth in Immanuel's land.

The Bride eyes not her garment, but her dear Bridegroom's face;
I will not gaze at glory but on my King of grace.
Not at the crown He giveth but on His pierced hand;
The Lamb is all the glory of Immanuel's land.