

The Glory of God Revealed
Isaiah 40:1-5 & Hebrews 1:1-3
12/12/21

Glory is one of those special words we use but don't think much about. Have you ever noticed how much of a Christmas word it is? Many of our favorite Christmas carols use the word. Most often in reference to the angels' song to the shepherds, **Glory to God in the highest & on earth peace among men with whom He is pleased** (Lk 2:14). Think of some of the carols sing.

Who can forget, even if we don't know what it means, the chorus from *Angels We Have Heard on High: Gloria, in excelsis Deo*, simply meaning, *glory in the highest to God*.

Hark! The Herald Angels Sing includes the phrase, *Glory to the newborn King*.

O Come All Ye Faithful says, *Glory to God, all glory in the highest, & then, Jesus, to Thee be all glory given*.

Joy to the World refers to the *glories of His righteousness*.

We can't help but sing about *glory* during Advent. This time of year is about the revelation of God's glory in the gift of His Son to the world. But I wonder if we understand what we're truly singing about. I want to take a look at God's glory because it's important for our understanding of what we're celebrating during this season. Let's begin with some facts: The English word **glory**, in its various forms, is used hundreds of times in Scripture. Generally, it's used in 2 different, but related, ways. 1st, glory is used as an attribute or characteristic of something, specifically of God. For example, God's glory filled the temple or His glory appeared to the Israelites in the cloud by day & fire by night. This is the usual sense of the term. Listen to 2 Chr 7:1-3 when the temple was built:

Now when Solomon had finished praying, fire came down from heaven & consumed the burnt offering & the sacrifices, & the glory of the LORD filled the house. The priests could not enter into the house of the LORD because the glory of the LORD filled the LORD'S house. All the sons of Israel, seeing the fire come down & the glory of the LORD upon the house, bowed down on the pavement with their faces to the ground, & they worshiped & gave praise to the LORD, *saying*, "Truly He is good, truly His lovingkindness is everlasting."

The OT frequently speaks of God's glory in this way, but the same word can also be used to describe a quality of a person or nation. For example, **The glory of young men is their strength, & the honor of old men is their gray hair** (Prov 20:29). Dealing with God's glory, it often has to do with light. It's shining, bedazzling light. It's also heavy, something that has weight. & finally, glory is visible, it's something you can see because it's meant to be seen. The Hebrew word means

heaviness or *weightiness*. Something that was glorious or possessed glory was something of substance. Glory was that which had such substance that it left an impression. God's glory was His presence. When God showed up He left an impression. Things didn't stay the same. Even though God couldn't be seen by the naked eye & He was never to be represented with physical idols, His presence still had *weight* or **glory**. The Greek word means: 1) The condition of being bright or shining, splendor, radiance. 2) A state of being magnificent, having greatness or splendor. 3) Honor or recognition of status or performance. We can define God's **glory** as the manifested, visible presence of God, often displayed in dazzling magnificence; it's His character, His attributes expressed; His weight & inestimable worth. Put simply, *the glory of God refers first & foremost to the sheer weight of the reality of His presence.*¹ It's His visible weighty presence. Listen to the intimate connection of **glory** & *weight* in 2 Cor 4:17. **For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison.** **Glory** is more than just a visible manifestation in that God Himself is glory. Handel's *Messiah* zeroes in on the true meaning of Christmas. I was going to sing it for you, but, fortunately for you, decided not to. The phrase I want to begin with is simply this: *& the glory, the glory of the Lord, shall be revealed, shall be revealed.* This is taken from Isaiah 40:5, **& the glory of the Lord shall be revealed (5)**. Turn there with me. God's glory is an important theme, but how does it relate to Jesus' birth? Simply put, God's glory is the Christmas message. Jesus' birth was the revelation of **the glory of the Lord**. The whole concept of God's glory surrounds the Christmas scene. At His birth the angels shouted, **glory to God in the highest** (Lk 2:14). When the shepherds were met by the angel they were instantly aware that the glory of the Lord shone all around them & they were scared to death (Lk 2:9). God's glory permeated the whole event. God's glory is the Christmas story.

A little background before we get into it. Isaiah falls into 3 parts. Chpts 1-35 are of dark doom & judgment. In them God speaks of wrath, condemnation, judgment, & vengeance. Here & there the gloom & darkness is pierced with a beam of light of God's mercy & a gleam of grace as God's judgment is always tempered with His love. But it's pretty much 35 chapters of extreme judgment.

¹ Thomas A. Rohm, www.barabbas.com/glory/

The 2nd portion, chpts 36-39, is really the heart of the prophecy. It's the historic setting in Israel that brought about the message of the book. In these chpts Isaiah describes the situation in his own time & why God must bring judgment. Basically, the 1st 39 chpts are all about judgment. But thankfully, it doesn't end there. For God's people there was coming another day & chpts 40-66 deal with that. It's looking forward & says comfort is coming. There's forgiveness & pardon in the future. It deals with salvation & introduces the Messiah, the suffering Servant of chpt 53. Look at how this section begins, after 39 chpts of judgment we read this, 40:1-2

Isaiah the prophet is being given a command by God to speak a word of **comfort** to the people of God. It's a strong word, too, because He says it twice. The word translated **comfort** means to cause to breathe again. It's an expression not just of consolation but of enduring power, revival, & relief.² Isaiah is told to **comfort** God's people. He's told to **speak kindly to Jerusalem**, literally, *speak to the heart of Jerusalem*. This is a message of **comfort** saying salvation is coming, iniquity is pardoned, & chastening is over. This is the message of hope & glory, the light at the end of the tunnel, the morning star or rising sun that signals the end of the blackness of night. Salvation is coming & originates with God. We can't save ourselves, there's nothing we can do to change this status of our warfare or rebellion against God. All we can do is make it worse by our continual sin, falling short of His glory (Rom 3:23). We can't change it. We can't reconcile ourselves to God by any good works or turning over of new leaves or trying harder. No, salvation is from the Lord. With that in mind, go to vs 3 where Isaiah takes us further into the arrival of the dawning of this new day. It begins with the voice of one who cries in the wilderness. 3

When we come to the NT we see this is a prophecy fulfilled by John the Baptist. I don't know if there was some immediate kind of fulfillment of this; something someone did to fulfill this in Isaiah's day before the NT times. But I do know that all 4 gospels take these words & apply them to John the Baptist. He's the one referred to here. The comfort, pardoning, & salvation, the dawning of the new day would be introduced by John the Baptist crying in the wilderness. He wasn't preparing a physical road, but a highway into people's lives. Matthew records,

² W.E. Vine, *Isaiah*, p 90

Now in those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the wilderness of Judea, saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." For this is the one referred to by Isaiah the prophet when he said, "THE VOICE OF ONE CRYING IN THE WILDERNESS, 'MAKE READY THE WAY OF THE LORD, MAKE HIS PATHS STRAIGHT!'" (Mt 3:1-3).

Is 40:4 continues & shows that every obstacle will be overcome. **4**

There will be no hindrances to stop the Lord as He comes to rescue His people. John the Baptist was preparing things for the arrival of the Savior of the world. That was his ministry & he did those things by preaching repentance, the confession of sin, & the baptism that spoke of a heart that was cleansed. He came proclaiming the arrival of salvation. Following John the Baptist... **5 Then the glory of the Lord will be revealed.** & ultimately... **All flesh will see it together.** This is true because **the mouth of the Lord has spoken.** How is this salvation to be brought about? Through the revelation of God's glory. All flesh, not just Israel, all humans will see the revelation of this glory. Vs 8 then tells us **the word of our God stands forever.** If God says it, that settles it. He says there's a day of salvation coming. John the Baptist will introduce it & he'll prepare the hearts of men. At that time, **the glory of God will be revealed.** What does that mean? What is this truth God gives us here? The **glory of the Lord** is simply the expression of God's Person. It's any manifestation of His character, any unveiling of His attributes. God's glory is to God what the sun's brightness is to the sun. The light of the sun may be said to be the visible expression of the sun. The light is the visible manifestation, the glory, of the sun. God's glory is the product of His presence, it's the revelation of Himself. Anytime God discloses Himself it's a manifestation of His glory in some way. How has God revealed His glory? 1st, He's displayed...

1. His Glory in His Creation We know that everything that exists is a display of His glory because all things are made by Him. The heavens declare what? **The glory of God** (Ps 19:1). Everything He ever made speaks of who He is. All of creation is a revelation of His glory, a disclosure to some degree of His person. From the smallest atom to the largest galaxies, throughout all of creation we see His glory. That's why creation was brought into existence &, basically, creation cooperates with that. The stars glorify God. There's never been a rebellion of the stars. They've never sinned against their Creator. The flowers don't rebel, they just do what flowers are supposed to do. The

animal world doesn't rebel or deny God His rightful place. God's glory is seen in His creation. But He's also shown...

2. His Glory in His Shekinah We see throughout Scripture that whenever God wanted to reveal Himself to certain people, He often did so through a brilliant, mysterious light called the *Shekinah*, meaning to *dwell or reside with*. God would reveal His glory so that He'd be recognized as the glorious God that He is. Moses, having seen God's glory in creation, wanted more. In Ex 33 he says to God, **show me Your glory** (18). It wasn't as if he'd never seen any of it. It was that he wanted to see more of it. The LXX translates this without a word for *glory* or *honor*. Instead they use the pronoun, *yourself*, meaning, *Show me the real You*. God tells Moses, *I'll reveal My glory, but*, He adds a qualification in vs 20, **You cannot see My face, for no man can see Me and live!** So God hid Moses in the cleft of a rock, covered him with His hand, & passed by. Then He removed His hand & Moses saw only His back. This would seem to indicate that God's glory is too awesome & powerful to be seen completely by man. God let's Moses see a little of His attributes manifest in light & glory. & what was Moses' response? **Moses made haste to bow low toward the earth and worship** (34:8). That's the right response. God displayed His shekinah glory in a variety of ways. To the wandering nation of Israel, it was by a cloud by day & a pillar of fire by night. In Lv 9:6 Moses told the people that the glory of the Lord would appear to them, & it did. In the wilderness God was feeding Israel with manna & as the manna came the glory of the Lord was seen (Ex 16:9). At Mt Sinai when Moses went up to commune with God the glory of the Lord covered the Mt & Moses so the people couldn't see either (Ex 24:15). We find in Ex 40, at the completion of the Tabernacle the glory of the Lord filled the tent of the congregation. In Lv 9 when the priesthood was initiated & defined, the glory of God was seen. In Num 14:10, when the people reached Kadesh-Barnea &, instead of entering into the Promised Land by faith, they complained & rebelled & murmured, the glory of the Lord appeared. Later on, after God had established the priesthood, 3 men decided to take upon themselves the priestly functions & defiled the priesthood. The Bible says the ground opened up & swallowed them & the glory of the Lord appeared (Num 16:19). In that same chapter, when the people rebelled against Moses & Aaron, the glory of the Lord was revealed & it threatened

to consume them. A few centuries later, in 1 Kgs when Solomon's temple was completed we read, **When the priests came from the holy place, the cloud filled the house of the LORD, so that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud, for the glory of the LORD filled the house of the LORD (8:10-11).** Then when they offered the 1st offering in 2 Chron 7, which we read earlier, the glory of the Lord was seen & the people fell & worshipped (1-3). & so, God not only revealed His glory in creation, but also revealed His glory in special ways, in the inexpressible shekinah. If you're like me, as I read of these things they all have a certain amount of mystery. No matter how many times you go over it & think it through there's a certain amount of mystery connected with His glory. A cloud, a pillar of fire, blazing light. It's hard for us to understand this. There's only one place in the OT where we get a description of God's glory. Ezekiel 1, under the Holy Spirit's inspiration, gives us the only description of what it was to see God's glory. He writes,

As I looked, behold, a storm wind was coming from the north, a great cloud with fire flashing forth continually & a bright light around it, & in its midst something like glowing metal in the midst of the fire. Within it there were figures resembling four living beings. & this was their appearance: they had human form. Each of them had four faces & four wings (4-6).

Got a picture of this in your mind? It continues,

Their legs were straight & their feet were like a calf's hoof, & they gleamed like burnished bronze. Under their wings on their four sides *were* human hands. As for the faces & wings of the four of them, their wings touched one another; *their faces* did not turn when they moved, each went straight forward. 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 & the face of a bull on the left, & all four had the face of an eagle. Such were their faces. Their wings were spread out above; each had two touching another *being*, & two covering their bodies. & each went straight forward; wherever the spirit was about to go, they would go, without turning as they went. In the midst of the living beings there was something that looked like burning coals of fire, like torches darting back & forth among the living beings. The fire was bright, & lightning was flashing from the fire. & the living beings ran to & fro like bolts of lightning (7-14).

Have you got it? It's clear isn't it? I'll read more.

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. The appearance of the wheels & their workmanship *was* like sparkling beryl, & all four of them had the same form, their appearance & workmanship *being* as if one wheel were within another. Whenever they moved, they moved in any of their four directions without turning as they moved. As for their rims they were lofty & awesome, & the rims of all four of them were full of eyes round about. Whenever the living beings moved, the wheels moved with them. & whenever the living beings rose from the earth, the wheels rose *also*. Wherever the spirit was about to go, they would go in that direction. & the wheels rose close beside them; for the spirit of the living beings *was* in the wheels (15-20).

Ok, I admit, it doesn't get any clearer. It just keeps going on like this. Isaiah's vision continues...

Now above the expanse that was over their heads there was something resembling a throne, like lapis lazuli in appearance; & on that which resembled a throne, high up, *was* a figure with the appearance of a man. Then I noticed from the appearance of His loins & upward something like glowing metal that looked like fire all around within it, & from the appearance of His loins & downward I saw something like fire; & *there was* a radiance around Him. As the appearance of the rainbow in the clouds on a rainy day, so *was* the appearance of the surrounding radiance surrounded Him. The appearance of the brilliant light all around Him was like that of a rainbow in a cloud 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 (26-28).

You say, *Help! I don't get it!* Don't worry, *I don't either!* I think that's the point. Ezekiel did the best he could do. He's trying to describe the indescribable. He's trying to tell us something that's impossible to communicate. He saw the glory of the Lord. That's what it says in vs 28. **Such *was* the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the LORD.** He gives us his best shot, but he just can't describe it, it's too mysterious. But he gave it a good effort. & how does he respond to it? **When I saw it, I fell on my face** (28c). Later in chpts 8-11, he saw the glory of the Lord again but this time it was departing from the temple. By the time we get to 11:22-23, we read, **Then the cherubim lifted up their wings with the wheels beside them, and the glory of the God of Israel hovered over them. The glory of the LORD went up from the midst of the city and stood over the mountain which is east of the city.** That's the Mount of Olives, & that's the end of the vision.³ The glory of God departs slowly, haltingly, as if reluctant to leave.⁴ 1st it passes from the Most Holy Place to the threshold of the temple (10:4), then from the threshold to the divine chariot over the cherubim (10:18). From there the glory moves to the east gate of the temple courtyard (10:19). Finally, the glory moves on to the Mt of Olives, east of Jerusalem, outside the city. What a tragic passage. God's glory, His presence, has left the city. Ezekiel saw God's glory but it's still mysterious. Habakkuk says that there's coming a day when **the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea (2:14).** But until that day, we're dealing with limited understanding. We just can't understand. Ezekiel couldn't describe it. The more he goes on the more tangled it gets. Creation revealed the glory of God. Beyond that, the Shekinah, the visible glory revealed His glory. But even with those there was mystery. If all we had was that, our

³ D. A. Carson, "When the Glory of the Lord Withdraws," in *D. A. Carson Sermon Library*, Ezekiel 10–11.

⁴ Greenberg, *Ezekiel 1-20*, p 191

understanding of God's glory would still be shrouded with confusion. & yet God wants us to know Him in all His glory & understand His self-revelation. How can we ever know Him if that's all the revelation we have? Fortunately, Isaiah comes along & says, the glory of the Lord shall be what? **Revealed** (Is 40:5). This coming revelation of His glory is what brings our salvation. We've all fallen short of what? The glory of God (Rom 3:23). Because we have, we need it revealed to us. We see that in Isaiah 40. This passage comes with comfort to the people of God. Salvation is coming for them, but it comes through the glory of the Lord being revealed, & it's in the glory of the Lord being revealed through the Person & work of Jesus Christ that you & I our saved. Before we get there, turn to Heb 1.

3. His Glory in His Word This is another text that deals with the true Christmas story. **God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions & in many ways** (1). God spoke. That's the subject & the verb. **God ... spoke**. What is God doing when He speaks? He's revealing Himself. He did it at different times & in different ways. He revealed Himself primarily to the **fathers**, the patriarchs, the ancestors of the nation of Israel, the godly men of the past. He spoke by the **prophets**, those who brought the message from God. Think with me & let's try to pull together what we've seen so far. God didn't remain silent. He didn't remain invisible. He didn't leave Himself unknown. He has shown Himself in the light of His glory in creation & in His Shekinah. But even more marvelously, beyond His creation & beyond His Shekinah, He's revealed Himself in the Word of God revealed to the **prophets**. The greatest revelation in time past isn't that of creation. It isn't even the mysterious Shekinah, instead it's the understanding of God's Word in the OT. That's the Word spoken by the prophets. In Amos 3 we have that word affirmed to us: **Surely the Lord God does nothing unless He reveals His secret counsel to His servants the prophets. A lion has roared! Who will not fear? The Lord God has spoken!** (7-8). **God does nothing ... unless He speaks**, right? God has revealed Himself through the prophets in the writings of the OT. Creation & Shekinah are limited. The written Word gives content to the glory of creation & of the Shekinah glory. It begins to fill in the outline. We might even borrow the words of Job when he contemplates the God who reveals Himself in creation. What does he say? **Behold, these are the fringes of His ways; & how**

faint a word we hear of Him! But His mighty thunder, who can understand (26:14). God murmurs in His creation. He whispers in His shekinah. But He speaks in His Word. In the OT He spoke. Not in a whisper, but in a full voice. But even that was full of mystery. Daniel was one of the godliest men of the OT. He knew what it was to obey God & live for Him. He had revelations from God like few others. Given all those things that God gave him, Daniel still said, **I heard but I could not understand (12:8).** That's how it is. Even with the OT, with God speaking in a full voice, there's still mystery. That's why 1 Pt 1:10-12 says that the OT prophets searched what they wrote to see what person or what manner of time it referred to. But it wasn't revealed to them, Peter says, but to us. The completion didn't come until the new covenant. With all that the OT saints had, there was still mystery. The fullness was still missing. They didn't get the fullest, truest, most complete picture of what God was really like. Creation helped, Shekinah helped, the Word helped, but there was an incompleteness in it all until, as we read in Hebs 1:2a, **in these last days God has spoken to us in His Son.**

4. His Glory in His Son After God's glory deserted Jerusalem it didn't return until the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem (Lk 2:9; Jn 1:14). With Jesus' birth, God is shouting! If He murmurs in His creation & whispers in His Shekinah & speaks through the prophets in the OT, He shouts in His Son. You can't mistake it. Jesus Christ is God incarnate. When Jesus came into the world, He was the glory of God in a human body. Jesus was born to reveal in the flesh God's great weight, worth, beauty, & glory. You see all of God manifest in Him, His judgment, love, wisdom, power, all His attributes. It's all there as we watch Him walk through this world, doing His work & living His life. The fullness of God was seen as never before in Jesus Christ. God's glory is revealed in Jesus. Just as God's glory filled the tabernacle, so God's' glory filled Jesus. In Jesus, God has come to take up residence among His people once again, in a way even more intimate than when He dwelt in the midst of the wilderness in the Tabernacle⁵ & later in the Temple. The glory of the Lord has been revealed with the birth of the Babe of Bethlehem. The Christmas story is that God's glory has been revealed. Isaiah's prophecy has been fulfilled. Something happened when Jesus was born that was so powerful, so

⁵ Andreas Kostenberger, *The Glory of God*

marvelous, so awesome that the only word that fits is *glory*. Those who visited Jesus didn't just see a Baby in a manger. They saw glory. Something weighty, something with substance was taking place. A God thing was happening & it was glorious! Here lies the real understanding of Christmas: it is God's glory! If you want to know who God is & what He's like, you have to look no further than Jesus. He came to this earth to lay down His life as a sacrifice. His finished work included a cross. It may sound unbelievable, foolish, & surprising, but it's God's glory that we're talking about. We'll get into this more next week, but in Him, in Jesus, God has revealed His glory so we might come to know God Himself. Most people miss the significance of Christmas. God revealed His glory! They miss the glory of the Lord revealed. I trust & pray we won't. As the psalmist & the prophet Isaiah have said, **Blessed be His glorious name forever; & may the whole earth be filled with His glory.... Arise & shine; for your light has come, & the glory of the Lord has risen upon you (Ps 72:19; Is 60:1).** This is the glory of Christmas: The invisible God made Himself visible. God has made Himself known. He took the form of a Man & showed us what God is like. He made the glory of God visible. Everything that's created was created for the glory of God. The reason He chose Israel as a nation was for the glory of His name. The reason He made a covenant with His people was for His glory. The reason He sent Jesus to be the mediator between God & man was for His glory. The reason He redeemed a people for Himself, the reason why salvation is offered to you, is for God's glory. Christmas, Jesus' arrival, is God's glory being revealed.

I don't know what's going on in your life. I don't know what's going on in your heart. But I do know this: You need to see God's glory revealed in Jesus & His gospel. You need to see God's glory in Christ who died on the cross in your place for your sins. You need to see God's glory as Jesus was raised from the dead. You need to call on the name of the Lord that your sins may be forgiven. See Him & know Him who is the glory of the Lord revealed.