

CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER

717 North Stapley Drive, Mesa, AZ 85203 Phone: 480-833-7500

Series:	Special Message		Pastor/Teacher
Text:	Exod. 33:18-23; Isa. 6:1-13; John 12:38-41		Gary L. W. Johnson
Date:	November 20, 2022 (a.m.)		

THE GLORY OF CHRIST (Part 1)

John Owen (1616-1683) is rightly called “The Prince of The Puritans.” Of all his great writings, the one that highlights his own passion was *Meditation and Discourses On The Glory of Christ in his Person, Office, and Grace with the differences between faith and sight; applied unto the use of them that believe.*¹ Sinclair Ferguson declares, “It is a great and beautiful book, essentially containing his final testimony to the grace of God in the gospel. Like some of his other work it began life in his own meditations, and then became the substance of addresses he gave to a *private congregation* during his last illness. On the final day of his life his ministerial friend William Payne called on him to let him know it was proceeding to publication. Owen’s response was as follows: *I am glad to hear that that performance is put to the press; but, O brother, Payne, the long looked for day is come at last, in which I shall see that glory in another manner than I have ever done yet, or was capable of doing in this world!*”²

- I. **THE GLORY OF THE LORD.** The Hebrew word for glory is *kābod*, which signifies *weighty* or *heavy* and is used in a figurative sense to stress that which is impressive and commands attention. The Greek word is *doxa* and stresses importance in terms of one’s actions or achievements. In the OT, the glory of God is intimately linked with the Lord’s self-revelation. There is much imagery: a blazing splendor and flaming holiness mark his presence (e.g., Ex. 16:10; 40:34, 35; 2 Ch. 7:1, 2). But neither raw power nor burning holiness adequately express God. Thus Exodus links God’s glory with an unveiling of his loving character. When Moses begged God to show him his glory, the Bible reports: “The Lord said, *I will cause all my goodness to pass in front of you, and I will proclaim my name, the Lord, in your presence. I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. But, he said, You cannot see my face, for no one may see me and live*” (33:19-20). In the same sense of unveiling, God says, “I will gain glory for myself” in the case of Pharaoh’s refusal to let Israel go (Ex. 14:4). God’s great redemptive power was displayed in the Exodus (Nu. 14:22), even as his creative power is displayed when “the heavens declare the glory of God” (Ps. 19:1). But “glory” implies more than a disclosure by God of who he is. It implies an invasion of the material universe, an expression of God’s active presence among his people. Thus, the OT consistently links the term “glory” with the presence of God among Israel in tabernacle and temple (e.g., Ex. 29:43; Eze. 43:4-5; Hag. 2:3). God’s objective glory is revealed by his coming to be present with us, his people, and to show us himself by his actions in our world. And what is our response to be? We are to “ascribe to the Lord glory” (1 Ch. 16:28; Ps. 29:1) and to “glory in his holy name” (1 Ch. 16:10). We are to worship him by recognizing his presence and praising him for those qualities that his actions for us unveil.³
- II. **EXODUS 33:18-23: GOD’S GLORY.** In this passage Moses requests that God would enable him to see the glory of God. “This request is almost without parallel in human history up to this point. He had been speaking in behalf of the people up to now, but at this point he asked for personal confirmation of God’s presence in his life. This request must have been something surpassing all former revelations of the glory of Jehovah (16:7, 10; 24:16-17). What he wanted was a revelation or an experience that even exceeded Jehovah’s talking with him face to face, on which occasions he

merely saw a *similitude of Jehovah* (Num. 12:8). What this visible representation of God was we are not told. Moses wanted a more unveiled view of the God with whom he was speaking. The request of Moses was answered by God in a unique way. It was, of course, impossible for Moses to get a glimpse of His glory which no other man had seen (vv. 21-23). So great was this vision that precautions had to be made to protect Moses. Scripture states that no man has ever seen the Lord's face (John 1:18; 6:46; 1 Tim. 1:17; 1 John 4:12). There is no discrepancy between this passage and New Testament statements. What really occurred on Mount Sinai between Moses and God on this occasion will never be fully known. Undoubtedly Moses saw things which the human tongue would be incapable of uttering. Perhaps his experience was somewhat like that of the Apostle Paul's when he was caught up to the third heaven and heard unspeakable words which were not lawful for man to utter (2 Cor. 12:4)."⁴

III. ***THE GLORY OF CHRIST (Isaiah 6; John 12:38-41)***. Exod. 33 states very clearly that God's glory is unique to him and it is also something that is unfathomable. Why? To begin with, we, the creature, would have to be God to comprehend God in all his glory. But of course, if we were to become divine to comprehend him who alone is divinity, then God himself would cease to be divine. Listen to Augustine's wisdom: "We are speaking of God. Is it any wonder if you do not comprehend? *For if you comprehend, it is not God you comprehend.* Let it be a pious confession of ignorance rather than a rash profession of knowledge. To attain some slight knowledge of God is a great blessing; to comprehend him, however, is totally impossible." Thomas Aquinas says something similar: "No created mind can attain the perfect sort of understanding of God's essence that is intrinsically possible." Aquinas then makes a statement that will be echoed by all theologians after him: "The infinite cannot be contained in the finite. God exists infinitely and nothing finite can grasp him infinitely." Aquinas concludes, "It is impossible for a created mind to understand God infinitely; it is impossible, therefore, to comprehend him.: Even the names for God in Scripture – Elohim, El Shaddai, Sabaoth, Yahweh – are not meant to reveal the divine essence in *all its fullness*. They certainly do reveal God *truly*, just never *exhaustively*. Never was this God's intention. "He cannot fully impart himself to creatures." To do so would be to compromise his very own existence. In the past, God's essence has been referred to as his "quiddity." Quiddity constitutes "the essential nature of something." God's quiddity is unlike our quiddity. Infinite as he is, his quiddity is ineffable. "Ineffable" means something is "incapable of being expressed in words." To say that God's quiddity is ineffable is to say that God's essence is indescribable. It is so infinite, so supreme, so glorious, that its majesty, its beauty, and its perfection transcend our feeble human words. Like God told Moses, if we were to directly encounter God in his very essence, we would surely die. Since God's quiddity is ineffable, we would be right to say it is no-man's-land.⁵ The Apostle John declared that the Individual Isaiah saw was none other than the person of Jesus. This is only one of the ways that John affirms the deity of Christ. As Warfield has observed: "We ought not to pass finally from this passage without fairly facing the apparent contrast which is drawn in it between Jesus Christ as the Sent of God and the God who sent Him, described here as *the only true God*, that is to say, Him to whom alone belongs the reality of the idea of God. From this contrast it has often been rashly inferred that Jesus Christ is here by implication affirmed not to be God; at least not in the highest and truest sense. This, however, it is obvious, would throw the declarations in this Gospel of the relation of Christ to the Father into the greatest confusion. He who has explained that He and the Father are One, and that to have seen Him is to have seen the Father, and who commended the confession of Him by His follower as *his Lord and his God*, can scarcely be supposed here so pointedly to deny Himself incidentally to be the God He so frequently affirms Himself to be. It is quite clear, indeed, that the relation of our Lord to the Father is not represented by John, whether in his own person or in the words he reports from the lips of Jesus, as a perfectly simple one. Its complexity is already apparent in the puzzling opening words of the Gospel, where the evangelist is not content to declare Him merely to have been from eternity with God or merely to have been from eternity God, but unites the two statements as if only by their union could the whole truth be enunciated."⁶

ENDNOTES

¹This is found in volume one in *The Works of John Owen* (The Banner of Truth Trust, 1991). This has been published in paperback, *The Glory of Christ: Abridged and Made Easy To Read* by R. J. K. Law (The Banner of Truth Trust, 1994) and more recently *The Glory of Christ: His Office and Grace*, with introduction by Sinclair Ferguson (Christian Focus Publication, 2004). All of these are in our church library.

²Ferguson, from the introduction, p. 16.

³L. O. Richards, *Expository Dictionary of Bible Words* (Zondervan, 1985), p. 330. The glory of God is his splendor. This is carried over into such Latin expressions, *gloria Dei*, or glory of God. The scholastics include *gloria* among the divine attributes, usually in close association with *maiestas*, or majesty. Both terms, *gloria* and *maiestas*, indicate the infinite eminence of God, as manifest in the biblical language of the inaccessible light in which God dwells and the inapproachability of the “face of God.” *Gloria* indicates, specifically, the brightness or resplendence of God in his perfection and infinite eminence. This brightness and resplendence, moreover, belong to the divine essence and all its attribute, with the result that the *gloria Dei* and *maiestas Dei* are the divine essence itself, God as the absolute resplendence and the ultimate greatness. Cf. R. A. Muller, *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms* (Baker, 1985), p. 129.

⁴J. J. Davis, *Moses and The Gods of Egypt: Studies In Exodus* (BMH Books, 1998), p. 304.

⁵M. Barrett, *None Greater: The Undomesticated Attributes of God* (Baker, 2019), p. 23.

⁶B. B. Warfield, *The Lord of Glory* (rpt. Baker, 1974), p. 186.