

The Glory of God

We are very conscious that the glory of God is vast - all too vast for our complete understanding or for the small limits of these little messages, but as it is so bound up with our hope, so interwoven in the Prison Epistles, we are encouraged to set down what the Scriptures record concerning it, praying always the Holy Spirit may give opened eyes and understanding.

What is glory? We think the reader would be hard put to it to give a clear definition of the word. In the Greek, the root meaning of *doxa* (glory) and its derivatives is TESTING. This can be seen in 1 Peter 1:7, 'the TRIAL (DOKimion) of your faith, being much more precious than of gold ... though it be TRIED (DOKimazomenou) with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and GLORY (DOXan)*'.

The glory of God seems to be linked with RIGHTEOUSNESS or absolute rightness and perfection. It is that test when applied to man, which shows him to be the frail creature that he is, coming utterly short of it (Rom. 3:23). It is the great standard of God Himself, all His ways and all His purposes can be measured by it and never will they be found to deviate a fraction. Therefore it is fitting that the symbol of glory should be LIGHT - just as the symbol of what falls short of its standard i.e. sin - is darkness. God is absolutely right; He is the God of glory and so we read, 'God is Light, and in Him is no darkness at all' (1 John 1:5).

Now, just as the Lord Jesus Christ sums up all that God is (John 14:9), so in Him we find the glory of the Godhead concentrated. He is the King of Glory (Psa. 24:8-10) the Lord of Glory (1 Cor. 2:8) the Brightness of the Glory (Heb. 1:3). The last reference seems to be an allusion to the holiest of all in the earthly tabernacle. There, the blazing shekinah light covered the cherubim and mercy seat, the symbol of Jehovah's presence with His people, and in the Lord Jesus is this glory vested.

We find Him linking glory with the completion of the Divine will concerning righteousness. 'I have GLORIFIED Thee on the earth: I have FINISHED the work which Thou gavest Me to do' (John 17:4). The completion of God's will is connected with and manifests His glory.

We note next that the glory of God is connected with DWELLING with His people. This could only be upon the basis of redemption. 'Let them make Me a sanctuary that I may DWELL among them' (Exod. 25:8) and when completed, the Tabernacle, or Tent, was filled with Jehovah's glory (Exod. 40:34). Likewise with the Temple when Israel were come into the land (2 Chron. 5:14 and 7:1-3). This is a picture in miniature of the purpose of the ages brought to its conclusion as far as the earth is concerned - when sin, the barrier to glory - is finally removed completely and God's original purpose in connection with glory can proceed unhindered (Rev. 21:3,10,11).

Previously God had likened the heavens to a tent (tabernacle) for His dwelling (Isa. 40:22), and this too shows forth His glory (Psa. 19:1).

Coming to the Lord's earthly life, we have one glimpse given us of the glory of God shining through the human body of the Lord Jesus Christ, and that is at the Transfiguration - 'His raiment became shining, exceeding white as snow; so as no fuller on earth can white them' (Mark 9:3). Peter refers to this in his second epistle when he says the Lord here received honour and glory from God the Father. Just as the robes of Aaron the High Priest, were for 'glory and honour' (LXX), so at the Transfiguration we have the consecration of the Great High Priest, and glory is definitely associated with His priestly work. 'He shall bear the glory ... and shall be a priest upon His throne' (Zech. 6:13). If the glory of God is linked with righteousness, then sin is a definite attack on His glory and we can understand it being associated with His work as High Priest and putting away of sin by the sacrifice of Himself.

We now come to the Second Advent. Matthew 16:27 tells us the Lord is coming in His Father's glory. Luke 9:26 couples with this His own glory and that of the angels. What majesty is here! Revelation 19:11-16 describes in detail this overwhelming scene. No wonder the man of sin is consumed with the brightness of His coming (2 Thess. 2:8). And if this is the effect on a supernatural being, what about poor puny mortal man

* We have put the root of the original words in capitals to show they are allied.

outside of Christ, how can he hope to face this tremendous thing, in and of himself, as a sinner? Yet, in his state of innocence, the Creator crowned him with glory and honour (Psa. 8:5). This Psalm looks at the first and the last Adam. It would seem God intended all the human race to bear His glory - but sin has temporarily spoiled that purpose.

We, as sinners, all come short of the glory of God, but Redemption, which undoes the effect of sin and cancels it, restores the Divine plan, for all the redeemed now can rejoice in HOPE of the glory of God (Rom. 5:2). God is now preparing a new seed, all of whom will in resurrection conform to the Image of the last Adam (Rom. 8:29), and reflect His glory. One cannot help noticing how closely connected is the great theme of God's glory with righteousness, sin and redemption.

Next, we notice this - that in Scripture symbolism, God's glory is continually linked with the cherubim. In Hebrews 9:5 they are termed the 'cherubim of glory'. Ezekiel's prophecy revolves around the theme of the cherubim, and the glory of God appears there vitally linked with them. In the early chapters it is seen leaving the temple and completely departing from the prophet's sight. Thus God withdraws the symbol of His presence from His people owing to their sin and apostasy. The reverse occurs at the end of the prophecy. We are given a wonderful description of the millennial temple and the glory of God comes back by the way of the east gate from which it departed (Ezek. 43:2-4).

The reader is asked to consider the following verses:

'The glory of the God of Israel was gone up from the cherub, whereupon he was ...' (Ezek. 9:3).

'Now the cherubims stood on the right side of the house ... then the glory of the LORD (Jehovah) went up from the cherub ...' (Ezek. 10:3-4).

'Then the glory of the LORD (Jehovah) departed from off the threshold of the house, and stood over the cherubims' (Ezek. 10:18).

This insistence in symbol of connecting the cherubim with Jehovah's glory tells us one thing: THE THEME OF THE CHERUBIM AND WHAT THEY STAND FOR IN GOD'S PLAN AND PURPOSE IS INDISSOLUBLY LINKED WITH HIS GLORY IN THAT SAME PLAN.

We now should ask ourselves what is the theme of the cherubim?

It would be impossible to deal with this exhaustively in this little leaflet. We append, therefore, a few notes which may be of service.

The first occurrence of cherubim is in Genesis 3:24, and they are placed at the east of the Garden of Eden to keep or guard the way of the tree of life. We have seen some of the references in the prophecy of Ezekiel. They are found again in the book of the Revelation where the A.V. wrongly translates them 'beasts'. It should be 'living ones'. Revelation 4:6-8 give their description, and with these agrees Ezekiel 1:10. They are composite beings consisting of man, lion, ox, and eagle. The lion is the representative of the wild beasts - the ox of tame beasts and the eagle of birds ... THIS WAS THE SPHERE OF DOMINION GIVEN TO ADAM (Psa. 8:6-8; Gen. 1:26). The meaning of the cherubim now is surely clear.

They stand for man and his lost dominion. When Adam, as a sinner, was turned out of the Garden he could look back and see the cherubim protecting the way of the tree of life. He would see HIMSELF and the dominion he had just lost, and having received the promise of the Seed of the woman who should bruise the serpent's head, the theme of the cherubim would naturally fill him with HOPE. He saw the tree of life (immortality) guarded until the last Adam should come and undo the work of the serpent and sin, and then he, in resurrection, would enter into his dominion, and all the true seed, being linked with the Kinsman-Redeemer, would have the right to the tree of life. (Rev. 22:2,14).

But as a sinner - 'lest he put forth his hand and take also of the tree of life and eat and LIVE FOR EVER' - he is placed out of the reach of immortality. It is most apparent that one thing above all God will not tolerate is an immortal sinner, for this would nullify the great purpose of the ages in bringing all things to completion and perfection.

Immortality can now only be granted to man when the problem of sin is settled and can be found only in the Lord Jesus Christ and is brought to men through the gospel and there alone (1 Tim. 6:16; 2 Tim. 1:10). Note the word 'immortality' here is literally 'incorruption'. Incorruption and immortality are definitely linked together in 1 Corinthians 15:53,54.

But we have to point out in connection with the cherubim that Genesis 3:24 is not the first reference in time of the word 'cherub'. Ezekiel's prophecy reveals the cherubim and THE CHERUB. By this we refer to chapter 28, where, under the title of the King of Tyre, one is addressed who cannot be an ordinary mortal man. The prophecy of Daniel refers to supernatural beings who are connected with the earth and are given earthly titles. The angelic messenger who came to Daniel was withstood twenty one days by the 'prince of the kingdom of Persia' - surely no ordinary being; (Dan. 10:13) he was Satan's vice-regent over the earthly kingdom.

So in Ezekiel, we have the description of one who can only be Lucifer - son of the morning - Satan in his UNFALLEN state (Ezek. 28:15). This marvellous personage, God declared to be His standard of perfection and beauty (28:12). Although this passage is exceedingly difficult to interpret, one thing stands out namely, that he was connected with praise (28:13) and glory (28:14). Now note his title, 'Thou art the anointed CHERUB that covereth (or protecteth); I have set thee so' (28:14). The word 'anointed' is 'Christ'. What a volume of truth is wrapped up here!

This cherub was linked with the glory of God and the Garden of Eden (28:13) and from this he fell. The next link in the chain of God's purpose is MAN and he is created and crowned with GLORY and HONOUR (Psa. 8), and put in Eden. We can thus understand the enmity of the serpent to the man and the woman in their perfect state and sphere. Man now falls and completely comes short of that glory and dominion originally his, and the cherubim pick up this theme and point forward to the Lord Jesus Christ as the great Antitype. So we are given four accounts of the Lord's earthly life; Matthew - the King (lion), Mark - the Servant (ox), Luke - the Man and John - God (eagle). When we come to the Book of the Revelation the question of dominion earthwards is finally settled and hence the cherubim (the 'living ones') figure largely. They occur eighteen times and are definitely connected with God's purpose EARTHWARDS and the removing, step by step, through the judgments of the seals, trumpets and vials, of all barriers to the dominion of the great King-Priest (Rev. 1 and 19:11-16). The lover of the Word is asked to note specially Ezekiel 6; 15:7; and 19:1-4.

Moreover, the 'living ones' are not seen in the Book of the Revelation apart from the twenty four elders. These heavenly beings are connected with RULE, for they have crowns and are seated on thrones (Rev. 4:4), and PRIESTLY WORK, for they offer 'golden vials (bowls) full of odours, which are the prayers of the saints' (5:8). David's twenty four courses of priests were most evidently appointed by the Holy Spirit as the earthly type of these - see 1 Chronicles 28:13; 19-21. Consequently, they are not only priests but governors - 1 Chronicles 24:5. The twenty four elders are the priestly leaders and governors of Heaven's worship.

Thus we find the theme of the glory of God linked with the cherubim - dominion earthwards - and the cherubim linked with the twenty four elders - dominion heavenwards. The elders are clothed in WHITE raiment (righteousness, Rev. 4:4 and 19:8). There are more references to 'white' in the Revelation than in the rest of the New Testament for here it is that sin (darkness) the great negation of glory, is finally dealt with.

Lastly, we wish to note that glory is not only an attribute of God and indissolubly linked with the purpose of the ages, but is used in a special way in Paul's Prison Epistles as a PLACE. In these epistles is revealed the great climax of Divine revelation consequent upon Israel's failure at Acts 28; THE SECRET hid in God from all past ages and generations (Eph. 3:9 and Col. 1:26).

This concerns God's secret purpose to take some of His redeemed children and place them where the Lord Jesus Christ is exalted at His right hand. The sphere is unique, and is found nowhere else in Scripture as a SPHERE OF BLESSING. It is described in six ways:

1. Heavenly places; or literally 'on-heavenlies' far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion (Eph. 1:20-23).
2. The right hand of God (Eph. 1:20 and Col. 3:1).
3. The Majesty on high (Heb. 1:3).
4. Far above ALL heavens (Eph. 4:10).
5. The holiest of all.
6. Glory-the last two being definitely linked together.

Philippians 4:19 and 1 Timothy 3:16 indicate that glory is a PLACE. The Old Testament describes it as being ABOVE the heavens (Psa. 8:1 and 113:4). When God wished to teach men what heaven was like, He gave them the Tabernacle (Heb. 9:23,24). Hebrews 9 describes its two parts; the sanctuary and the holiest of all (Greek *ton hagon*, Heb. 9:8 and 10:19). The English reader is possibly not aware that exactly the same words occur in the

original in Ephesians 1:18; 2:19 and Colossians 1:12, and had the A. V. translators rendered these passages as they have Hebrews 9:8 and 10:19, we should have had the following:

‘that ye may know ... what the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the HOLIEST OF ALL’.

‘Ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow-citizens of the HOLIEST OF ALL’ (there is no ‘with’ as A.V.).

‘... the Father who has made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the HOLIEST OF ALL in the light’.

May the Holy Spirit enable both writer and reader to grasp something of the tremendous fulness contained in these verses.

When one compares the last reference with 1 Timothy 6:14-16 ‘our Lord Jesus Christ ... Who only hath immortality, dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto; whom no man hath seen, nor can see’ - surely we can realise the great difference the Son’s redeeming grace has wrought! The believer, during the Acts period, had ACCESS, by prayer, into the holiest of all through the new and living way - but nowhere was it promised that he should one day DWELL there. That would have savoured of blasphemy to him. He could learn of a seated priest in that exalted sphere, but knew nothing of a seated church there with Him in the Glory!

Moses wished to see God’s glory but was told the truth of 1 Timothy 6:16. Isaiah caught a glimpse of it and cried, ‘I am undone, because I am a man of unclean lips’. Daniel, the man greatly beloved, had all his natural comeliness turned to corruption. The apostle John, confronting the Lord in resurrection glory, falls at His feet as dead. The same glory strikes down Saul of Tarsus on the road to Damascus and blinds him for three days. ‘Above the brightness of the sun’, he describes it (Acts 26:13). O the need then for bodies fashioned like the body of His glory! (Phil. 3:21).

One day that tremendous glory now hidden within the veil - will be manifested, and then shall we be manifested in glory with our glorious Head (Col. 3:4). May this blessed hope (Titus 2:13) ever be before us, and God grant that we ever realise what it means for grace to have placed our inheritance there in Him, at the right hand of the Father in the light of heavens’ holiest of all.

Here indeed is the permanent home of the Church, and not only this, it will be the permanent home of God, for He is now fashioning this Church to become ‘a holy Temple in the Lord’. Ephesians 2:21,22 continues ‘In whom ye are builded together FOR AN HABITATION (DWELLING PLACE) OF GOD through the Spirit’.

The Creation (Isa. 40:22) and the Tabernacle in the wilderness (Exod. 40:34) were only anticipations of this glorious dwelling place for God, and just as these were entered into by God and filled with His glory when completed, so the Body of Christ, when the last member has been gathered in, will merge into the holy Temple, and, in a richer sense, become ‘the Fulness of Him that filleth all in all’ (Eph. 1:23).

This Church will have found its permanent home in the heavenly holiest of all with the Lord Jesus Christ where He is now enthroned and He will have found His home in this Church of glory, now transformed into a holy Temple for His dwelling place.

Let us seek these precious things which are above where He is seated on the right hand of God and endeavour to reflect in full measure that glory here and now. Surely we can sing then with fulness of heart contemplating the work of Father, Son and Spirit to this end:

‘These, these prepare us for the sight
Of Majesty above;
The sons of ignorance and night
May dwell in the Eternal Light,
Through the Eternal Love’.

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