

## Study 5. The glory of Christ

(Hebrews 1:1-3; 2 Corinthians 4:1-6; John 1:1-18)

We have been made as glorious creatures. Somehow, we all know this, and the loss of glory is greivous to us. We understand the prayer of Moses, 'Show me your glory!'

Jesus Christ is 'the radiance of the glory of God' (Heb. 1:1-3). He is the outshining of all that God actually is, in his person, but then also, in his being the origin, carer and goal of the creation. In what must be the ultimate understatement of all time, the writer says, 'after he made purification for sin he sat down at the right hand of God'. The rest of his letter will tell us what this means, all of it, the outshining of the glory of God. For God, glory is not about mere display; it includes transforming our whole situation.

Declaring the gospel of the glory of Christ, declaring that he is Lord, brings us to centre stage in our study of glory and shame (2 Cor. 4:1-4). Here is where glory actually 'happens'.

All three places that speak directly about the glory of Christ also speak about creation. God first formed his creation by commanding light into existence, and now, he awakens us to life by the light of Christ in our hearts. Paul says we have seen the glory of God in the face of Christ. Effectively, Christ is the 'face' of God.

The glory of Christ is linked with his being 'the image of God'. If man is the image and glory of God (1 Cor. 11:7), here, in Christ, is what image and glory is all about. We have fallen short of the glory but Christ is, not just the *true* image and glory of God, but the *fountainhead* of our being the image and glory of God, and the *redemption* of all that was lost. In *Jesus Christ, as Lord*, that is, in his authority and victory over sin and death, we have seen the glory of God, in the face of Christ.

Corresponding to this revelation, of course, must be our allowing this glory to irradiate our whole life. Paul says there is no room for any subterfuge if we are to speak of Christ. He renounces all 'disgraceful' or 'shameful' ways of communication. Glory is now shining in a sinful world through the proclamation of the gospel and this must be free of anything shameful.

This glory speaks to each person as they really are, so speaking of Christ must commend itself to everyone's conscience. We cannot afford to have illusions about ourselves, or others, being good or deserving. Christ is the Saviour of sinners, so we must speak of this glory as Paul does here, with love and delight.

Then again, speaking of the glory of Christ is not esoteric, as though it could be only understood by a few. If people cannot understand the plain speech concerning Jesus Christ as the glory of God it is because Satan has blinded their minds. So readily has the glory been revealed! Paul says he is a slave of Jesus, to preach him as Lord, so believers will see the glory. He wants no agenda or his own or reward for himself, so Christ will be seen as he is.

John fills out what we have seen of the glory of Christ (John 1:1-18).

First, the glory of God was visible in the flesh of Christ. Previous outshinings of God had been in phenomena or acts of history. Now, it is seen in a human person. This has at least two implications. First, this is history—verifiable, tangible, confronting and immediate. Jesus makes this point when he rises from the dead. 'Touch me...' (Luke 24:39). John still wonders about this when he writes his letters (1 John 1:1-4). Second, our living in the flesh, the scene

and vehicle of our sin, pain and death, is forever changed. He came in the likeness of sinful flesh, but made it the vehicle of glory (6:51; 17:2), God revealed.

Second, the glory is of 'the Word'. God has always been speaking to us (cf. Heb. 1:1) but now we find that the Agent of his address to us is a person, face to face with him, as God, making the world, giving life, sustaining his creation and relating to his creatures. Now this person is in the world as life, and light for us (v. 4). (The apostle John must be thinking of the physical Jesus because he tells us John the Baptist came to bear witness to the light that was shining, that is, to Jesus.) In this Gospel, Jesus being light has to do with him shining in the darkness of sin. He is a moral light, or a moral glory, to expose darkness (3:19-21), but to show the way out of sin and to the Father (8:12; 9:5; 11:9f; 12:35f, 46). We have been saying that true human glory is to walk in God's glory and to reflect that in all our life. If that is so, this presence of the Word among us, as life, and light, is our opportunity for life.

Third, the glory we see in Jesus is the glory of Sonship. We behold the glory of the Word as the only Son from the Father (v. 14); he is dear to him (Gen. 22) and sends him to us as an act of extraordinary love (3:16). He is *the only begotten God* (the most likely reading) who *is at the Father's side* (v. 18). Because of this intimacy, and this equality with God (cf. 5:18), he can, not just display God, but expound him to us! The word *beget* does not suggest that God physically begets a Son because God is spirit and there is no marriage in heaven! Rather, the word signifies to generate, so that the Son is 'eternally begotten of the Father' (as the Nicene Creed says). In practical terms, this means the Son is the image and likeness of the Father, eternally, so that all we need to know about the eternal God is here to see.

Jesus speaks about the love of the Father for him, and for us, in his prayer. He knows the glory he has with the Father (17:5) and asks that we be able to share in it—the glory of being loved as he is loved (17:22-23). This is reflected in this reading: 'to as many as received him ... he gave the right to become children of God' (v. 12).

Fourth, the glory we see in the Son is *full of grace and truth*. This is the glory Moses asked to see at Sinai, the glory he heard proclaimed: 'the Lord...abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness...' (Ex. 34:6). But now, this glory is seen in flesh, and will be played out in the real world of flesh and blood so as to fulfil all the promises of God. To emphasize that God's glory is more than display, he says, of his fullness have we all received, grace upon grace (v. 16). The glory of the Lord has shone on us (Is. 60:1)! We must return to this in the next study.

How then, did this glory shine? John says that turning water into wine at a wedding reveals Christ's glory (2:11). Later signs, sometimes very public, are also a revelation of glory, but they do not necessarily gather a worshipping crowd. The glory being revealed is always a moral glory, making demands on those who observe it (John 3:19-21). Jesus says the crowds cannot receive this glory because they want the glory that comes from fellow creatures (John 5:44; 12:43). We note that Jesus is not just talking about his glory but the glory he will give to us!

Jesus says that the raising of Lazarus will be for God's glory and for his also (11:4). But then, Martha has trouble believing in a revelation of glory (11:40). Glory is a revelation of God, intervening in the midst of our sin and death. It does not belong in the realm of... 'Naturally!' If glory is being revealed in the flesh of Christ, our flesh recoils from it, preferring the 'safe' (but deadly) world we understand.

The world did not recognise the glory, nor did the people God had prepared to receive it. But then, some did, and some do, see the glory, and, we may say, the glory passes into them. They are given authority to be called God's children.