

1 Kings 8:10-11

Don't Misunderestimate Glory

It is no secret that language evolves, and the meaning of words can change over time. In January 2008, Senator Barack Obama used the word “enormity” in a speech which meant “shockingly evil” or even “an immoral act” and turned it into a word that meant “largeness.” Now, we use the word in the latter sense. President Thomas Jefferson coined the term “belittle” while President Bush unintentionally seemed to make up words. My favorite would be, “misunderestimate.”

The meaning of words matters especially as it relates to the truths of Scripture and the nature of God. However, Christians often use words, inspired by the Bible, without clarity on its meanings. The word “glory” comes to mind and it lies at the center of the consecration of the temple. What does it really mean that God’s glory descended into the Temple?

The first meaning of “glory” is tied to **Essence**. One of the challenges of human language is its limitations when it comes to the indescribable. Scripture itself understands this struggle and provides ample ways of speaking of God. For the most part, we are limited to describing God’s attributes. God is love, sovereign, jealous, providential, creator, and just.

The Bible does, however, provide words that get closer to who God is. “Glory” is one of them. The word has two basic meanings. The first is “heavy” or “weighty.” When the priest Eli fell back on his chair and broke his neck, the text tells us he was “heavy” (1 Samuel 4:18). Likewise, Absalom’s hair is described as long and heavy (2 Samuel 14:26). Both examples use the word “glory.”

Scripture doesn’t want us to associate God with “heaviness,” as if he were an obese God like Eglon, the king of Moab. Rather, heaviness in the ancient world was associated with one’s reputation. It describes one’s honor. For example, Isaiah suggests God created us “for my glory” (Isaiah 43:7). Here, we think of God’s reputation. He is holy, righteous, jealous, honorable, eternal, divine, omnipotent, and good.

The second meaning of glory is “bright.” In Revelation 21:23, we discover the New Jerusalem will lack a sun because “the glory of God gives it light.” Likewise, “the glory of the Lord shone around” the angels who visited the shepherds at the nativity. The “brightness” of God’s glory is more than headlights on a rural street. Perhaps walking outside on a bright sunny day after watching a movie in a dark theater gets closer to what the Bible describes. God’s “brightness” hints at his beautiful, splendor, majesty, and awe.

Another meaning of “glory” is **Expression**. One of the beautiful aspects of God’s glory is that not only is it intrinsic, but it is also extrinsic. That is to say, God *is* glorious, but that he also shares his glory. He shares his glory in a variety of ways. The first is creation which both demonstrates and reflects his glory. “The heavens declare” writes Psalm 19:1, “the glory of God.” The God of beauty creates beauty. The creation of God reflects the glory of God.

God also expresses his glory in judgment. It is striking we often cry for justice but are shocked to discover that God is gloriously just. Isn’t it good when evil is punished, the righteous are rescued, and justice wins? In

Exodus 14:4, God declares he would harden Pharaoh's heart in judgment to "get glory over Pharaoh and all his host" (see also Ezekiel 28:22).

God also shares his glory in redemption. Salvation is not an entitlement, but the result of God's glorious grace being made known among sinners (see Romans 9:22-23). The same is applied to our sanctification. The growth of a believer reflects our glorious God. Jesus stated in John 15:8, "By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples."

Finally, glory is **Experienced**. If God is not only glorious in his being, but shares his glory with his creation, then our response to God's glory must be to return it. How do we do that? The first way is through our worship. Worship is to ascribe to God what he already is.

This is why the 1st Commandment is so important. Idolatry is to glorify what is not glorious. It is the chief of sins. The idols of America (food, sex, power, entertainment, money, and influence) are not glorious. We are called to glorify God with our worship (see Psalm 66:2; 115:1). This is how saints persevere through suffering, triumph over persecution, and conquer the world without raising a sword. We live to extol the God of our salvation. We return to him what he has shared with us.

Finally, we glorify God by our walk. When our walk does not match our worship, we sin. If the focus of our worship is the resurrected Savior, then so should our lives. We should glorify God in all that we do. Paul states in 1 Corinthians 10:31, "So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God." Our lives should be God-focused, not self-focused. This is contrary to the American creed. John Calvin wrote, "We never truly glory in God until we have utterly discarded our own glory." This applies to your place of employment, home, our choice of entertainment, and in our relationships.

Perhaps it is best to give Scripture the final word. Meditate on the final passage.

After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, ¹⁰ and crying out with a loud voice, "Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!" ¹¹ And all the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures, and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, ¹² saying, "Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever! Amen."

¹³ Then one of the elders addressed me, saying, "Who are these, clothed in white robes, and from where have they come?" ¹⁴ I said to him, "Sir, you know." And he said to me, "These are the ones coming out of the great tribulation. They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb."

¹⁵ "Therefore they are before the throne of God,
and serve him day and night in his temple;
and he who sits on the throne will shelter them with his presence.

¹⁶ They shall hunger no more, neither thirst anymore;
the sun shall not strike them,
nor any scorching heat.

¹⁷ For the Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd,
and he will guide them to springs of living water,
and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes." (Revelation 7:9-17)