



SIX SANE TRUTHS FOR A CRAZY WORLD PART 6: GOD IS GLORIOUS

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This is the last week in our series of six sane truths for a crazy world. I hope it has been an encouragement. If we took nothing else from the past few weeks, my prayer would be that we would walk away with a greater appreciation for God's character and how who he is makes all the difference in our lives.

We're ending on a high note today as we look at one last truth: God is glorious. He is spectacular. Does that seem like a strange way to wrap up this topic? My life is pretty unglorious. It's hard to see a connection point between my world and God's glory. Is there one? How does his glory intersect the craziness?

It feels less practical. I can pretty easily see how God's other character qualities help me survive an insane world, but his glory is a tough one. What do we do with it?

Have you seen pictures of the project that the artists Christo and Jeanne-Claude put together in New York's Central Park called The Gates? 7,532 orange fabric flags were hung along a trail that stretched as far as you could see.

I read a commentary by Anna Quindlen, who is a New Yorker, talking about what she thought of the whole display. Here's some of what she said:

Toddlers reached for the orange overhang from their strollers. Runners were roused from their habitual brown studies and looked around. The Great Lawn was a tapestry of tourists, languages tangling in the air like colored yarns in a work basket. In a city that has been somber for too long, "The Gates" made the people walking beneath its swaying curtains smile...Perhaps New York is left a little brighter, a little lighter, a little less bereaved. Left with the lesson that a grand gesture, plotted over time, can end, not with destruction, but with gladness. Our town has been a widow. For a few weeks she took off her weeds and put on a party dress.

As I read that, I thought, that's it right there. We need God's glory because we need something that will give us a reason to be joyful. There is so much hurt and ugliness in the world that we need to know there is more to life than what surrounds us, that God is big and beautiful and perfect and untainted by this mess. He is a cause for celebration in the middle of chaos.

David saw the value of focusing on God's glory in the hardships he encountered.

Psalm 27:4-5

*One thing I ask of the LORD,
this is what I seek:
that I may dwell in the house of the LORD
all the days of my life,
to gaze upon the beauty of the LORD
and to seek him in his temple.
For in the day of trouble
he will keep me safe in his dwelling;
he will hide me in the shelter of his tabernacle
and set me high upon a rock.*

Like David, when we're facing the day of trouble, we can seek out God's beauty, his glory for help. It is a worthwhile pursuit. It does have meaning for our crazy world.

What do we mean when we say God is glorious? I spoke once at another church once about God being a king. I asked the congregation a question at one point, and one man said he couldn't relate to the concept at all because we don't think that way in America. He ruined my point, but he was right. We don't have the pageantry or the pomp and circumstance that goes along with having a king or queen. We don't honor or bow down to people here the way they do in some other parts of the world. Glory is probably easier to understand when that's the form of government you know, because you see it in action.

Glorious isn't really part of our common vocabulary anymore. I can only think of two ways I have heard the word used when it wasn't referring to God, either in relationship to sunlight ("What a glorious day!") or something visual ("The colors at the tulip festival were glorious.")

Those are actually somewhat helpful uses, because they put glory in the context of what you can see. For our purposes this morning, let's define glory this way: *God's excellence on display.*

God is spectacular. He is perfect and majestic and bigger than our minds can grasp. When we catch sight of that – even for a moment – we are seeing God's glory. And his glory shows, his excellence is on display in many ways. The Bible talks about at least five. For the sake of memory, I've used the word Glory to help us identify the five ways.

G – God Himself

In the Psalm we just read, David talked about his desire to stare at God's beauty. David wanted nothing more than to admire God and soak in the gladness that comes from seeing his glory.

I don't usually think of God in those terms. I might talk about God deserving my praise because he's God, or thank him because he's good to me. But since I can't physically see God, it doesn't occur to me to think about the fact that he is overpoweringly beautiful.

Few people in the Bible had the privilege of a firsthand encounter with God's glory. We won't have time to look at all of them today, but I've listed some of them with verses in the program, and I would encourage you to do some Bible reading on your own this week to compare their experiences.

One of them that had such an encounter was a priest named Ezekiel. Here's part of what he recalled about that experience.

From Ezekiel 1

In the thirtieth year, in the fourth month on the fifth day, while I was among the exiles by the Kebar River, the heavens were opened and I saw visions of God...

I looked, and I saw a windstorm coming out of the north-an immense cloud with flashing lightning and surrounded by brilliant light. The center of the fire looked like glowing metal, and in the fire was what looked like four living creatures...

Spread out above the heads of the living creatures was what looked like an expanse, sparkling like ice, and awesome. Under the expanse their wings were stretched out one toward the other, and each had two wings covering its body. When the creatures moved, I heard the sound of their wings, like the roar of rushing waters, like the voice of the Almighty, like the tumult of an army. When they stood still, they lowered their wings. Then there came a voice from above the expanse over their heads as they stood with lowered wings.

Above the expanse over their heads was what looked like a throne of sapphire, and high above on the throne was a figure like that of a man. I saw that from what appeared to be his waist up he looked like glowing metal, as if full of fire, and that from there down he looked like fire; and brilliant light surrounded him. Like the appearance of a rainbow in the clouds on a rainy day, so was the radiance around him.

This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the LORD. When I saw it, I fell facedown, and I heard the voice of one speaking.

Isn't that a phenomenal description? It's bursting with color and light, fire and rainbows. You leave it with a sense of God's awesome power and his incredible purity. At the same time, you leave with the feeling that Ezekiel isn't quite sure how to describe it. He uses a lot of "it looked like..." and "it appeared to be..." because he doesn't have a frame of reference for it.

In the science fiction movie Contact, Jodie Foster played a skeptical scientist whose entire world revolved around facts and numbers. She never let emotions cloud her judgment, and always tried to base her opinions on hard evidence and logic.

At one point in the story, though, she is selected to go on a mission into outer space to make contact with these aliens that have sent a space ship to earth. She has thought through ahead of time how she wants to observe them and study them once she arrives. She's even got a video camera with her to capture everything as it happens.

But when she gets to the distant planet, she's totally floored by what she discovers. It's the most beautiful place she's ever seen. She can't even take it in. And she made one simple comment about it: "They should have sent a poet."

God is not just a cold abstract idea, or even a just a warm grandfatherly figure. He's not only the logical source of all life, he's the stuff of poetry and music. He is the essence of true beauty. He is mesmerizing and breathtaking, and it takes artistic imagery to help us get a sense of his glory. In the other stories of people encountering God's glory, you'll find similar attempts to put words around the experience. They usually combine glass and ice and fire and jewels and light.

The bottom line is that he is stunning. Those who have seen him are utterly devastated by the sight it is so jaw-droppingly incredible.

In addition to the beauty that surrounds God's own person, we can look for his glory in other places as well. One of the most obvious places is in L – Light of Creation.

L – Light of creation

The first thing God created when he made the world was light. What a natural first step when you think about God as Ezekiel described him. He is light himself, so producing a sun and stars makes sense. And just like there's a bit of every artist in what they paint, there's a bit of God that can be seen through what he creates.

Psalm 19:1-4

*The heavens declare the glory of God;
the skies proclaim the work of his hands.
Day after day they pour forth speech;
night after night they display knowledge.
There is no speech or language
where their voice is not heard.
Their voice goes out into all the earth,
their words to the ends of the world.*

If you look up at night and can see a sky full of stars, it doesn't take long to be impressed by how big the universe is and how beautiful it is. It's as though all the stars are holes in

the sky that let the light of heaven through, because the sight of them draws you in to think about how they came to be and to see God's excellence on display.

And it isn't just the sun and stars that point us in that direction – all of God's creation works that way.

Romans 1:20

For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities-his eternal power and divine nature-have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse.

All of creation has lessons about God for us. Bible writers use ants and grasshoppers and lions and mountains and sea creatures to show us more about who we worship.

The danger of creation is that it will become our focus as an end in itself, that we will admire its glory without realizing that it is God's glory. We see a beautiful landscape and take a picture because it's so great, but do we think about God making it? We go to the Seattle Aquarium and are amazed by the sharks and sea urchins, but there's no sign anywhere that says "Brought to you by God."

Creation shows us the light of God's glory when we stop to recognize it. To top it off, God actually entered creation as Jesus, further showing his glory in what he has made. Christ put the crown on creation. And that brings us to our next place where we see God's glory, which is

O – On the cross

One of the most unusual ways God's excellence is on display is what happened on the cross. There's nothing glorious about being executed. Even the Bible talks about what a shameful way to die the cross is.

But the writer of the letter to the Hebrews said that Jesus scorned its shame. He turned shame on its head and made the cross into the centerpiece of God's glory, because it became the symbol of what extremes God was willing to go to in order to rescue us.

John 17:1-4

After Jesus said this, he looked toward heaven and prayed:

"Father, the time has come. Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you. For you granted him authority over all people that he might give eternal life to all those you have given him. Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent. I have brought you glory on earth by completing the work you gave me to do.

The work Jesus was sent to do was to make a way for us to share eternity with God. And he did it. He did the most difficult thing, going to death without fighting it, enduring pain he didn't deserve, willingly suffering consequences for crimes he didn't commit. It

sounds like hell, but somehow by walking through that he turned it into light from heaven.

If we truly want to see God's glory, there's no place to start but at the cross. Jesus said it in his prayer – that's the way we get to know God. We will not find a better example of God's excellence on display than we find there.

Something happens at the cross. The glory of God takes a leap there. Just like God's radiance rubbed off on Moses when he was in God's presence, Christ's glory spills into our lives at the cross. When we come to the point where we say, "Yes Jesus. I need your death on the cross to make things right between me and God. I want that eternal life you talked about," we receive that eternal life immediately. His Spirit moves in and begins to make changes.

As that happens, the glory of God himself enters our personal lives. That's why the next place I believe we see God's glory is

R – Right here

Paul wrote these words:

2 Corinthians 3:18

And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.

God's glory is right here. When Christians gather together, there is a tremendous opportunity to see God's excellence on display. It's not because any of us are so fabulous. It's because Jesus promised that when we get together in his name, he will be here too.

David wrote,

Psalms 26:8

*I love the house where you live, O LORD,
the place where your glory dwells.*

He was talking about the temple building. Today, the church – the people, not the building – are God's temple. That's where his glory dwells.

Where does it show up? You can see hints of it in the worship. Some mornings God's glory will just hit you as you're singing. You can see it in the way people's lives are being changed. You can see it in the answers to prayer God keeps giving and giving.

It's not that God isn't active out in the rest of society, because he is. It's just that when you bring a group of people together who are watching for his glory and ready to remind

each other of his glory, you're more likely to see it than when you're just out there on your own.

One final place to consider discovering God's glory is in what's

Y – Yet to be seen

Someday, when this life is over and we're with God, we will actually get to participate in his glory and share in it. That's what the Bible calls the "hope of glory." It's what we have to look forward to.

Paul told the Romans

Romans 8:18

I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.

We have a natural desire in us to want some glory for ourselves. We'd like to be recognized for who we are and the things we do. And so many times, we look for ways to manufacture a little bit of that for ourselves. All you have to do is look at any of the reality shows on TV to see the lengths people are willing to go to for a few minutes of fame.

It happens on a smaller scale too, whether we're seeking recognition at work or from a spouse.

Don't get me wrong – I believe it is important to acknowledge the efforts people make and the talents they've been given. But the hunger to be recognized runs deeper than that, and it's something we can never quite satisfy. So we take shortcuts and try to generate more of it for ourselves.

It's a misdirected desire. One day, God's glory will extend to us, and that will be so much better than any fame or spotlight we might enjoy here.

2 Corinthians 3:10

For what was glorious has no glory now in comparison with the surpassing glory.

I was in band from the time I was in 5th grade all the way through my senior year of high school. I defined the meaning of the term "band geek." I was band president. I was first chair in the trumpet section. I was in marching band, pep band and symphonic band. It was a huge part of my life.

By the end of high school, I was completely burnt out on band and had no desire to pursue trumpet in college. And the further I got away from it, the more I began to wonder, "What was that all about?" There's not a lot of room for trumpet playing by yourself. I wished that I had invested all that time and energy on something like piano or guitar that would be a little more useful today. Plus, on the rare occasions when I crack

open the case and get the valves oiled up, I find that I don't have the lip muscles I once did, so it's more work than it is worth to even attempt to play it now.

A couple weeks ago, Annika was wanting to dance to some music, so after I had listened to as much Plus One as I could take, I went and grabbed an old tape we have of an orchestra playing a piece by Aaron Copeland. If you know your Symphonies, it's the Hoe Down from Billy the Kid. If you don't, you'd know the song from the "Beef. It's What's for Dinner" commercials that used to be on.

That piece of music amazes me. I enter a different world when it is playing. It's like I'm listening with my whole body and not just my ears. My heart wants to sing and my feet want to tap. I want to air conduct. There's one spot in the music where the tympanies and the oboes and the trumpets and the xylophones and the strings are all building to this exciting peak and it's a total rush and all my senses wake up. When the song was over, I looked at Karin and said, "That's why you play in band. For a song like that."

God is our song. He's the reason we play. We forget what we're about. But when we catch a glimpse of his glory again, it makes our hearts want to sing. We were designed to take in his beauty and be caught up in his glory.

Some churches take kids through a catechism class, where they memorize questions and answers. The first question is often this: What is the chief end of man? What are we here for? And the answer they give is this: To glorify God and enjoy him forever.

God is to be enjoyed. Serving him is not all labor. He is glorious and worth appreciating. And someday we'll get to be in his presence forever.

Are you seeing God's glory around you?

Take the time this week to look up some stories about God's glory. Pray and worship him for who he is.

Have you made his glory your own at the cross?

That's the place to start. Invite him into your life and you'll begin to see him in new ways as he brings his glory in.

Are you reflecting God's glory?

What in your life displays God's excellence? How can you remind other people of God's glory?