

CHAPTER 1

TO GOD BE THE GLORY

The Story of Moses on God's Mountain



Who is he, this King of glory?
The Lord Almighty—he is the King of glory.

PSALM 24:10

How much does God weigh?

If David Wells is right, God is not tipping the scales the way he used to. In a book called *God in the Wasteland*, Wells describes a curious condition he calls “the weightlessness of God.” He writes:

It is one of the defining marks of Our Time that God is now weightless. I do not mean by this that he is ethereal but rather that he has become unimportant. He rests upon the world so inconsequentially as not to be noticeable. He has lost his saliency for human life. Those who assure the pollsters of their belief in God's existence may nonetheless consider him less interesting than television, his commands less authoritative than their appetites for affluence and influence, his judgment no more awe-inspiring than the evening news, and his truth less compelling than the advertisers' sweet fog of flattery and lies. That is weightlessness.¹

It is the weightlessness of God, more than anything else, that explains the failings of the evangelical church. It is because God

is so unimportant to us that our worship is so irreverent, our fellowship so loveless, our witness so timid, and our theology so shallow. We have become children of a lightweight God.

HOW TO GAIN WEIGHT

One of the best ways for our knowledge of God to regain some weight is by contemplating his attributes. The proper place to begin is with God's glory, for that is what "glory" means: the weightiness of God.

The Hebrew word for "glory" (*kavod*) comes from the Hebrew word for "heavy" (*kaved*). The word was often used to describe things that were heavy in the literal, physical sense. The Bible says the high priest Eli was "heavy" (1 Sam. 4:18). In other words, he was fat.

The word was also used more figuratively to describe anything substantial or impressive. The Bible says Abraham was "heavy," but it had nothing to do with his waistline. It meant that he was wealthy. "Abram had become very wealthy [literally, "heavy"] in livestock and in silver and gold" (Gen. 13:2).

Eventually, the Hebrew word for "heavy" was used to describe anyone who deserved honor or recognition. It was used for warriors, princes, merchants, and other men of position and influence. In modern English, we would call them "heavyweights."

The biggest heavyweight of all is Almighty God (not physically, of course, but spiritually). No one is more substantial than he is. No one has more influence. No one has a higher position or a weightier reputation. No one is more deserving of honor, recognition, and praise. However weightless he may seem in the postmodern church, God himself is heavy. In other words, he is glorious.

What is the glory of God? God's glory is so far beyond our comprehension that it is hard to put into words. Perhaps this

is why most books on the attributes of God leave glory off the list. It is not so much an attribute in itself as the sum of all God's attributes. Holiness, justice, goodness, power, truth—every one of the divine perfections adds to God's reputation, and hence to the weightiness of his glory.

God is glorious in what he *does*. He is glorious in creation. His divine attributes—his power and his wisdom—are revealed in everything he has made, from the smallest subatomic particle to the farthest galaxy.

The Creator God is so heavy that he has left his imprint on the universe like a work boot in wet cement. “The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands” (Ps. 19:1). In the same way that the skill of an artist is displayed in his artwork, the transcendence of God is displayed in his handiwork. “Be exalted, O God, above the heavens; let your glory be over all the earth” (Ps. 57:11). God is the glorious Creator.

God is also the glorious Redeemer. His glory is displayed in redemption as well as in creation. God brings glory to himself whenever he saves his people. This is the meaning of the Exodus. When the children of Israel were enslaved in the land of Egypt, God delivered them by mighty deeds of power. But first he explained to Moses why he was going to do it: “I will gain glory for myself through Pharaoh and all his army, and the Egyptians will know that I am the LORD” (Ex. 14:4). God enhances his reputation every time he saves his people. He is as glorious in redemption as he is in creation; he is glorious in everything he does.

God is also glorious in who he *is*. He is glorious in and of himself. Even if God had never made anything or saved anyone, he would still be glorious in his being. It is God's very nature to be heavy.

However, there would be no way for human beings to experience the glory of God's being unless somehow he revealed it. That is why God sometimes gives glimpses of his glory. The

Bible includes historical accounts of visible manifestations of God’s weightiness.

On occasion God revealed himself in a cloud of dazzling, brilliant light. He led the people out of Egypt with a cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. The Bible calls this radiant, luminescent cloud “the glory of the Lord” (Ex. 16:10).

This is the glory-cloud—sometimes called the “shekinah” glory—that the prophet Ezekiel saw at the temple. “The glory of the LORD rose from above the cherubim and moved to the threshold of the temple. The cloud filled the temple, and the court was full of the radiance of the glory of the LORD” (Ezek. 10:4). What Ezekiel saw was a visible manifestation of the invisible attributes of God. “Glory,” wrote the Puritan Thomas Watson (d. 1686), “is the sparkling of the Deity.”²

THE GLORY OF GOD IN THE FACE OF MOSES

There is a story in the Bible about the sparkling of God’s deity. It is the story of Moses on God’s mountain.

God had invited Moses up to Mount Sinai for the world’s first summit meeting. He wanted to issue his policy statement on human behavior, sometimes called the Ten Commandments. But when Moses went back down the mountain and started telling people what to do, how would they know that he wasn’t just making it up as he went along? They needed some evidence that God was actually speaking to Moses.

In order to give the people a visible manifestation of his weightiness, God descended on the mountain in the bright cloud of his glory.

When Moses went up on the mountain, the cloud covered it, and the glory of the LORD settled on Mount Sinai. For six days the cloud covered the mountain, and on the seventh day the LORD called to Moses from within the cloud. To the Israelites the glory of the LORD looked like a consuming fire

on top of the mountain. Then Moses entered the cloud as he went on up the mountain. And he stayed on the mountain forty days and forty nights. (Ex. 24:15-18)

The glory of God burned like fire on the mountain. It was so incandescent that it filled the people with fear. They said, “This great fire will consume us, and we will die if we hear the voice of the LORD our God any longer” (Deut. 5:25). That gives a fairly good indication how heavy God is. Whenever mortal beings have felt even the slightest weight of his glory, they have seriously doubted whether they would live to tell about it.

Moses did live to tell about it, even though he made the most audacious (not to say foolhardy) demand anyone has ever made of God. Once he had received some assurance that God was going to stay with his people, he said, “Now show me your glory” (Ex. 33:18).

There is one sense in which Moses had already seen the glory of God. He had seen the pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night. He had been surrounded by the glory-cloud when the Lord descended upon the mountain. But Moses wanted more. He wanted to experience God more directly. He wanted to know God more intimately. He wanted to be wrapped up in the glory of God.

Moses had no idea what he was really asking. What he was asking was impossible, as God told him: “You cannot see my face, for no one may see me and live” (Ex. 33:20). In other words, it is impossible to see the invisible God as he is in himself. For mortal beings, there is something overwhelming, even destructive, about the weight of God’s glory.

God was gracious *not* to show Moses his glory, but there was one thing he said he would do. “Then the LORD said, ‘There is a place near me where you may stand on a rock. When my glory passes by, I will put you in a cleft in the rock and cover you with my hand until I have passed by. Then I

will remove my hand and you will see my back; but my face must not be seen” (Ex. 33:21-23).

That is what Moses saw, what God called the “back” of his glory. And that is *all* he saw. Yet there is more glory in God’s back than there is in the whole universe. Even the reverse side of his majesty was glorious beyond anything any human being had ever seen before. That is why Moses was so luminous when he went back down God’s mountain. “When Moses came down from Mount Sinai with the two tablets of the Testimony in his hands, he was not aware that his face was radiant because he had spoken with the LORD” (Ex. 34:29).

The glory of God was reflected in the face of Moses. This was the afterglow of his mountaintop experience. Some of the radiant resplendence of Almighty God was still shining in his countenance.

The people took one look at Moses, and they were afraid. Even when it is only reflected in the face of a human being, the glory of God demands fear and worship. “When Aaron and all the Israelites saw Moses, his face was radiant, and they were afraid to come near him” (Ex. 34:30).

The face of Moses teaches two things about God’s glory. First, it shows that human beings are capable of reflecting the glory of God. Only God is all-glorious in himself, yet we are made to reflect the light of his glory. What Moses looked like when he came down from God’s mountain is what human beings were *supposed* to look like all along. God made us a little lower than the heavenly beings, crowned with glory and honor (Ps. 8:5). This is not merely a figure of speech. Since we are made in God’s image, we are capable of shining with God’s glory, as Moses was.

Second, the face of Moses shows how glorious God must be by comparison. All Aaron saw was the reflection of the back of God’s glory in his own brother’s face. Yet what he saw was so glorious that he was afraid to look at it. It was too magnificent,

too glorious, too heavy. Moses had to reassure his brother that everything was okay.

Once Moses had repeated the commands God had given him on the mountain, he covered his face. Afterwards, “whenever he entered the LORD’s presence to speak with him, he removed the veil until he came out. And when he came out and told the Israelites what he had been commanded, they saw that his face was radiant. Then Moses would put the veil back over his face until he went in to speak with the LORD” (Ex. 34:34-35). The people had to be shielded from the brightness of God’s glory. Even its reflection was too much for them to bear.

THE GLORY OF GOD IN THE FACE OF CHRIST

The apostle Paul once wrote about the glory of God in the face of Moses. He explained that “the Israelites could not look steadily at the face of Moses because of its glory” (2 Cor. 3:7).

Then Paul went on to describe something even more glorious, something he had seen with his own eyes. It was something so resplendent that, by comparison, the face of Moses lost all its luster. Paul had gazed upon the face of Jesus Christ (Acts 9:3-6). Once he had seen Jesus, he said that “what was glorious has no glory now in comparison with the surpassing glory” (2 Cor. 3:10). By “surpassing glory,” he meant “the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ” (2 Cor. 4:6).

All the attributes of God are displayed in Jesus Christ. Jesus of Nazareth was a real man, but he was more than a man. He was God as well as man. Because of his divine nature, Jesus possesses every divine attribute, including God’s glory, which is the cumulative weight of all the rest of his attributes. “The Son is the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of his being” (Heb. 1:3a). The Son has the same infinite weight of being as the Father.

There are hints of Christ’s glory all through the Gospels.

He was born in glory. True, he was born into an ordinary family in an ordinary place. But there was nothing ordinary about his birth announcement! When the angels appeared to the shepherds, “the glory of the Lord shone around them” (Luke 2:9), and they heard the angels say, “Glory to God in the highest” (v. 14a).

As the Christ child grew to manhood, the glory of his deity was concealed by his humanity. But every now and then a ray of his splendor would shine forth. Jesus revealed his glory, the Bible says, when he turned the water into wine (John 2:11). He brought glory to God the Father by raising Lazarus from the dead (John 11:4). When he came to the end of his life, he was able to say to his Father, “I have brought you glory on earth by completing the work you gave me to do” (John 17:4).

There was even one occasion when Christ’s glory shone through in all its brilliance. It was when Peter, James, and John went up on God’s mountain, like Moses before them. “There he [Jesus] was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and his clothes became as white as the light” (Matt. 17:2). In fact, Moses was there, too, talking with Jesus (v. 3). Moses finally got to see what he had asked to see more than a thousand years before!

What Moses and the disciples saw was God’s Son in all God’s glory. Jesus was “switched on,” as if he had gone from parking lights to high beams, so that the disciples could witness his eternal glory. They were shown a visible manifestation of the weight of his divine being.

Then Jesus died. There was nothing glorious about his death. The crucifixion was an ugly, bloody, messy business, an agony of thorns, splinters, and nails. Christ died a cursed death on the cross.

But what Christ accomplished through his death was glorious. In a way, it was the most glorious thing he did. He took God’s punishment for our sin upon himself. Jesus did this in

such a way that he retained exclusive rights to the glory of our salvation. He paid the entire debt of our sin on the cross. We cannot claim any credit for any part of our forgiveness. Jesus paid it all so that all the glory would belong to God. He offered the sacrifice. He made the atonement. Therefore, to him and to him alone belongs all the glory.

Once Jesus had suffered for sin, he “was taken up in glory” (1 Tim. 3:16). There he reigns, with his majestic glory illuminating the courts of heaven. There he is worshiped, for he alone is “worthy . . . to receive glory” (Rev. 4:11).

At the end of the ages, the glorious Christ will come again. Whenever the New Testament mentions his Second Coming, it emphasizes how glorious the event will be. Jesus promised he would return “in his Father’s glory with his angels” (Matt. 16:27). He will come “on the clouds of the sky, with power and great glory” (Matt. 24:30b). “When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory” (Matt. 25:31). The same Christ who was raised in glory will reign in glory forever and ever.

GIVE HIM ALL THE GLORY

If God is so glorious, then we ought to give him all the glory we can. This is why God made us in the first place. He made us for his glory (Isa. 43:7).

“What is the chief end of man?” asks the first question of the Westminster Shorter Catechism. It is a question about the ultimate meaning of human existence. What is life all about? The answer is: “Man’s chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever.”

That is a good answer, maybe even the best answer, but it raises another question. If God is glorious in all he is and does, then how can we give any glory to him?

We cannot add any weight to God. He is already completely

glorious in himself. But what we can do is reflect his glory, the way Moses reflected it when he came down from God's mountain.

A person who glorifies God is like one of the mirrors in a powerful telescope. When an astronomer looks through his telescope, he is not trying to see the mirrors inside. Yet actually that is what he is looking at—not stars, but mirrors. By their reflection, those mirrors enable him to see the bright stars of the heavens. In the same way, the followers of Christ reflect the glory of God. We have no glory of our own. Whatever glory we have is a reflection of God's glory.

How can you reflect God's glory? First, by putting your faith in him. Until you trust God, it is doubtful whether you can glorify him at all. You have to begin by admitting that you cannot save yourself, that only Jesus can save you. Once you do that, then all the glory for your salvation will return to God. You will be like Abraham, who “was strong in faith, giving glory to God” (Rom. 4:20 KJV).

Next, glorify God by confessing your sins. There was a man in the Bible who glorified God by confessing his sin. His name was Achan. He committed a sin that involved deceit, treachery, theft, and in a way, murder. When Achan's sin was discovered, he was brought before Joshua, the leader of God's people.

What Joshua said to Achan is significant: “My son, give glory to the LORD, the God of Israel, and give him the praise. Tell me what you have done; do not hide it from me” (Josh. 7:19). Achan confessed his sin, and then he was taken out and executed for his crime. The Bible does not say whether he was granted eternal life or not. Perhaps he was. But in any case, Achan glorified God by confessing his sin. Repentance, as well as faith, gives glory to God.

Then glorify God in your worship. This is what the psalms so often call us to do. “Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name” (Ps. 29:2a). “Sing the glory of his name; make his praise

glorious!” (Ps. 66:2a). “I will praise you, O Lord my God, with all my heart; I will glorify your name forever” (Ps. 86:12). Whenever we worship God, we do what we were made to do. In our prayers and praises we declare that God alone is glorious.

How else can you glorify God? Glorify God by your good works. Jesus said, ““This is to my Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples”” (John 15:8). The fruit Jesus had in mind is the fruit of good works. So give God the glory by feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, healing the sick, loving the orphans, and helping everyone in need.

Glorify God by telling other people about Jesus every chance you get. If they are led to trust God and repent for their sins, then God will have gained another worshiper.

Glorify God by supporting the work of missions. The reason the church sends out missionaries is to “declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous deeds among all peoples” (1 Chron. 16:24). To pray for or pay for a missionary is to help spread God’s glory.

Glorify God with your art and music, by what you make and what you perform. One man who did this was Johann Sebastian Bach, who signed his compositions “S. D. G.,” which stands for *solī Deo gloria*, “to God alone be the glory.” Another good example is the jazz musician Duke Ellington, who wrote *Concerts of Sacred Music*. Bach and Ellington wrote and played their music to the glory of God. Even if you are less talented than they are, you can give glory to the same God.

Glorify God in your play by resting in his goodness. Glorify him in your work by working with all your strength. Glorify him in the menial tasks of the home. God receives glory whenever a dish is washed, a floor is mopped, a newspaper is recycled, or even a diaper is changed in his name.

In short, glorify God in any and every activity of life by doing it in his service and according to his will. “So whether you eat

or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God” (1 Cor. 10:31).

If you glorify God, one day God will glorify you. Remember how Moses reflected God’s glory when he came down from God’s mountain? The Bible says that one day the same thing will happen to every child of God. “When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory” (Col. 3:4). You will receive what the Bible calls “an eternal weight of glory” (2 Cor. 4:17 KJV).

This is the doctrine of glorification. When you see Jesus in all his glory, you will be filled with as much glory as you can bear. Indeed, the Bible says that this is already starting to happen. “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” (2 Cor. 3:18). The more you get into Christ, the more Christ gets into you, until eventually you are glorified all the way through. One day you will be totally glorious!

But God will not stop there. He has promised that he will not be satisfied until the whole earth is “filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea” (Hab. 2:14). God’s ultimate purpose is to do everything for his own glory. When he discards this tired old world, he will fill the new heavens and the new earth with the full weight of his being. Then we will spend eternity praising him for all his glorious attributes. “For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever! Amen” (Rom. 11:36).