



The God We Worship

Adoring the One Who Pursues, Redeems, and Changes His People

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EDITED BY JONATHAN L. MASTER

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P U B L I S H I N G

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To Bob and Leslie Doll

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Editor's Preface

IT IS AN HONOR to write a preface for a book such as the one you have in your hands, but for me the deeper privilege was to be able to hear these addresses as they were first given—in historic Princeton, on a succession of November weekends over ten years.

The Princeton Conference on Reformed Theology was founded by some Christian friends who had benefitted tremendously from the flagship Philadelphia Conference on Reformed Theology. Year after year, they saw the fruit borne by the faithful preaching and teaching in Philadelphia and wondered whether something on a smaller scale might be used by God in Princeton. While Princeton has a long tradition as a center of confessional Protestant theology, it is now known more for its quaint downtown and for the elite university that lies at its center.

These friends began to meet and earnestly pray, and they contacted the Alliance of Confessing Evangelicals to see if a regional conference might be possible. Thus was born the Princeton Conference. The Alliance hosts many regional conferences now, but Princeton was the pioneer. The working idea behind each conference was always the same: sound doctrine, preached. To hear these addresses—this sound doctrine—proclaimed in Princeton, and to engage in glorious singing and praying with those who were gathered, was a delight. But make no mistake: the venue was of far less importance than the content.

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As I read over these selections, I cannot help but recall the occasions when they were first delivered. But, while they were given at a particular time to a particular audience, the reality is that these are timeless. All of these sermons explore and expound upon the nature of God—who he is, how he draws sinners to himself, how he is at work providentially, and how he is to be approached by us in worship. In a sense, the glory of these sermons is that they never begin with man as their subject. They are focused on the triune God revealed in the Bible: the Creator, the Redeemer, and the source of all that is true.

I remember one of the early prayer meetings, when preparations were being made for what would be the first or second Princeton conference. A plan was formed, even then, for future conferences. Each year's addresses would explore a different aspect of the God of the Bible. This planning decision was motivated by the understanding that the doctrine of God was like a brilliant diamond: its facets needed to be held up to the light continually, moving Christians to greater knowledge of God and to greater wonder. The intent was to host these events in such a way that students could attend as well—a multigenerational reflection on the majesty of God. In fact, although it was never verbalized in quite this way, I always thought of our efforts in terms of David's words in Psalm 145:

I will extol you, my God and King,
and bless your name forever and ever.
Every day I will bless you
and praise your name forever and ever.
Great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised,
and his greatness is unsearchable.

One generation shall commend your works to another,
and shall declare your mighty acts.

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On the glorious splendor of your majesty,
and on your wondrous works, I will meditate.
They shall speak of the might of your awesome deeds,
and I will declare your greatness.
They shall pour forth the fame of your abundant goodness
and shall sing aloud of your righteousness. (Ps. 145:1–7)

David includes all the elements that we prayed about during those early days of the conference: the need to bless God's name, the unsearchable greatness of his being, our desire for generations to commend God's works to one another, and the glorious singing that results from meditation on the goodness of God.

By God's grace, these things happened year after year in November. For some of us, the conference at Princeton became one of the spiritual highlights of the year. And the truths that were proclaimed—the sound doctrine contained in this volume—can sustain meditation on God's goodness even now.

The structure of this book is fairly simple. The addresses are not printed in the chronological order in which they were preached; instead, they are thematically presented. The book begins by meditating on the glory of God, then on the utter ruin of the fall of man. Then the call and responsibility to worship God is addressed, along with his sovereign providence, mercy, and grace in making sinners into worshipers. Finally, the sanctification of the believer, along with the absolute truth-claims of Jesus Christ, is presented. The book is essentially organized according to the revelation of our triune God, beginning with God the Creator and lawgiver and moving to the work of God in sending his Son, Jesus Christ. Finally, it ends by addressing the person of the Holy Spirit and the way in which the Spirit-inspired Word of God gives us thorough guidance in our understanding of the Lord.

EDITOR'S PREFACE

Because these chapters began their life in a conference setting, it is only right that I thank some of those who served on the conference team. Many contributed, but special recognition needs to be extended to Ray and Micheline Watrous, Brandon and Lynette Hull, Bob and Leslie Doll, Kathleen Hurley, and, more recently, Matt Ristuccia. Of course, much of the behind-the-scenes work—both in the conference and for the book that has resulted—was done by the Alliance of Confessing Evangelicals and its dedicated and capable staff. Speaking more personally, both Janet Master and Marissa Rumpf gave me significant assistance in transcribing and editing these sermons, which previously existed only as recordings.

Early printed programs for the conference would contain a message about the conference topic, written by the chair. For many years this was written by Ray Watrous, and he always ended, appropriately, with the Latin phrase translated “to God alone be the glory.” Indeed, it is my prayer, and the prayer of all those involved in this project, that God alone receive the glory, as these addresses are continually read and as God’s greatness is repeatedly extolled.

Jonathan L. Master

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God's Glory Revealed

BRYAN CHAPPELL

WE ALL HAVE some dates forever fixed in our memories: November 22, 1963, Dallas; Saigon at the end of Tet; September 11, 2001, New York. As we saw the headlines following those dates that seemed to make the world come apart, we wondered, “What is God doing? Can there ever be glory again in those places?”

In Isaiah 6, a similar tragedy has just occurred. Isaiah mentions the death of King Uzziah—an unsettling blow to the people of Judah. During his reign, Uzziah had kept the wheels of commerce spinning and the walls around the nation secure. Now that he has died, people are wondering whether the good times will continue, whether their place will still be secure. Into this uncertainty comes a word, not in headlines from a reporter, but from a prophet. Isaiah has interviewed the Most High God—and he says that things will come undone. It is not a word that the people want to hear, but with the word there is glory.

Perhaps you can sense the glory by considering another front page from some years ago. I don't remember the headline, but I do remember two front-page pictures. In the first, various foreign dignitaries were visiting the president at Reagan National Airport. Behind the president was Air Force One, and alongside were the rainbow colors of the flags of the nations. Although I dimly remember that picture, the glory on display was not memorable. After all, there had been too many summits of nations, too many pictures of presidents on parade. But there was a second, smaller picture on the same page. This shot showed a woman kissing an infant on the lips. The caption explained that she was the first American to adopt a child with AIDS. At that time, our nation did not understand the disease or its source, so people were terrified, responding more out of fear than of reason. Consider these two pictures: the president in great pomp, and a woman kissing a child, perhaps at great sacrifice to herself. Which was the greater glory?

Such a question is difficult to answer. After all, how is glory measured? But we of the Reformed faith have to answer. How can we say that man's chief end is to glorify God and enjoy him forever if we don't understand glory? How can we know our life's purpose if we do not recognize which is the greater glory? Perhaps we can understand as we see how God displays his own glory in Isaiah 6. His display of glory comes through an expression of his holiness: "In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord seated on a throne, high and exalted, and the train of his robe filled the temple" (6:1). The marks of his holiness are on display; God's sovereignty is on display. Even as the nation wonders, "Has everything come apart?" and God is seemingly gone, Isaiah goes into the temple and sees a throne. God remains so holy that his purity itself is radiant. In the face of this glory, the heavenly host cover themselves so as not to be

exposed to the radiance of the holiness of God. Even the angels are unable to look upon this radiance so cauterizing, so clean, so exposing that it's deadly. So great is the effulgence of the glory of God that even the heavens cannot contain it; it rolls, as the train of his robe, down into the earth.

There is no parallel setting in Israel's history or experience. Thrones don't belong in temples. But as Isaiah walks into the temple, the heavens are opened and he sees God seated on his throne. What does this mean? The world may seem undone, but God is still on his throne. He still lives. He still rules. The episodic nature of our existence, good or bad—that which comes undone, that which seems to unravel—does not touch him. He is not undone by what undoes us. He is sovereign, shining in his glory. He is high and exalted. Only his robe comes down to the earthly temple. God himself remains apart, untouched by the worst things of this world, not sullied by earth's stain.

And if we are unable to perceive how great and magnificent is this mark of the holiness of God, the seraphim begin to give us some measure of the greatness of this glory as they sing, "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory" (v. 3). If the Hebrews wanted to emphasize something, they would double the expression. Here the angels triple the word, as if to say that the word cannot contain the measure of the holiness of God. It is beyond the degree that we can imagine, let alone express. Remember these words—"Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty"—because they occur again in Revelation 4, where the angelic host is still singing before God. John there adds that they will sing that song as long as the Lamb sits upon the throne, and he will sit upon the throne forever.

God is the holy God of the Old Testament, he is the holy God of the New Testament, and he is the holy God of the new creation. He is the eternally holy God, holy beyond our

estimation and holy beyond time. And because we cannot capture in our human finiteness what it means to see God in all his holiness, we actually have a drama enacted before us. God often expresses his glory in the Old Testament in storm, in lightning and thunder. When God descends to Mount Sinai, clouds surround the mountain. Lightning flashes and thunder roars. Now this storm is inside the temple.

Isaiah 6:4 records that “at the sound of [the angelic] voices the doorposts and thresholds shook and the temple was filled with smoke.” Why smoke? The smoke comes from the altar of atonement, the place where Israel is supposed to offer sacrifice for sin. Now the smoke overflows the temple, as if to show how great would be the sacrifice needed to satisfy the holiness of God. The smoke forms a dense, black cloud, but in this dark cloud fly seraphim. Their name means “burning ones.” Like flashes of incessant lightning they fly through the cloud, and, like the storm, their presence is audible. They thunder their song. These are not the sweet angelic strains of heaven that we often imagine. At the thunder of their “Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty,” the foundations of the temple, set in the core of the earth, shake so that earth itself is shaken.

The thunder of the holiness of God drives the prophet to his knees. Face down, he calls out, “Woe to me! . . . I am ruined!” (v. 5). The Old Testament word for “glory” means “weight.” The revelation of the glory of God bears down even upon a holy man of God, so that his knees can no longer support him, and he is prostrate before God and cries out his own ruin.

At the 1996 Promise Keepers conference in Atlanta, Georgia, the nearly forty thousand clergy present were urged by the speaker to repeat antiphonally to one another these words from Isaiah 6. So forty thousand voices cried, “Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory.” When

they said it to one another, men got out of their seats. Some got on their knees. Some fell on their faces, because you cannot receive the holiness of God without exposing your own sin, your utter unworthiness, and the necessity of worship. What should God's people understand when he reveals his holiness? Their unholiness. Even as the heavenly host seek to cover themselves, we recognize that we have no right to stand before such a God. The Creator of the universe is still enthroned, and he is holy.

The manifestation of God's holiness is meant to humble, to break, but also ultimately to restore. How does that happen? Once we recognize how great the holiness of God is, we recognize how awful our sin is. And when we recognize how awful our sin is, we can recognize how wonderful our salvation is. If God is not very holy, then our salvation is not very great. But if God is holy, then his ability to reveal that holiness to finite beings such as you and me, and yet to claim us as his own, means that the gospel is wondrous, amazing, glorious. So when we gather, we not only worship his glory but also desire that the whole world would know it as we do.

In my ministry, I proclaim the salvation of our God. There are times in the work of the church when I seem to be plowing on such dry ground that I wonder if it is worth it. We who minister seem so often to be torn up with our own internal debates and difficult enterprises, unable to agree on basic aspects of our mission to the world. When I fail, I am not the only one who is disappointed, yet God, who has every right to be disappointed in me, still calls me in his love. God, who always has every right to cast me on my face before him, has nonetheless shed the blood of his Son on my behalf, so that his holiness would be my holiness and his righteousness my own. And since this God, so glorious in his holiness, would call me his own child, I know that if I can share the greatness of his glory with another person, that is good.

Yes, his holiness is a great glory. But there is a still greater glory. Greater than the holiness transcendent is the holiness transferred—not merely the glory of holiness, but the glory of grace. Here is the prophet—undone. Verse 5 reads, “‘Woe to me!’ I cried. ‘I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips.’” He knows he cannot join the angel’s song. His unclean lips make him unworthy. Not only that, but he admits, “I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the LORD Almighty.”

Now we know why the prophet trembles. According to the Old Testament, a person could not see God and live. Yet Isaiah has seen God in all his glory. No one of mere human nature could now survive, and so God must change his nature—and in verse 6 he does: “Then one of the seraphs flew to me with a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with tongs from the altar. With it he touched my mouth and said, ‘See, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for.’” Here the angel carries a burning coal from the altar, taken with tongs. Even the angel does not want to be burned by it. Yet that burning coal gives the sweet burning of a divine kiss to a wounded prophet. Here we see grace—grace in great glory.

What are the marks of that grace? The infinite becomes intimate. This great God in all his holiness, who could remain exalted, removed, and unmoved at the plight of the prophet, sends a messenger from heaven. Heaven itself reaches down and touches the sinner. This is a great glory because whenever the infinite becomes intimate, glory comes.

Just think of that in terms of one aspect of the glory of God: his omnipresence. A friend of mine, a student at Covenant Seminary some years ago, told me that he was once studying in the library, trying to fathom the omnipresence of God. He pored over all the verses, read the theologians, and was getting

some idea of the omnipresence of God as he tried to comprehend intellectually what it meant that God is in all places at all times. But what struck him then was this: if God is omnipresent, then God was present with him in that library at that moment. God's omnipresence meant that the heavenly God of all creation had his hand on that young man's shoulder right then, just as he has on our shoulders right now. When the infinite becomes intimate, we realize that the greater glory is really great grace.

We see the measure of glory revealed also in the seraph's flight and the burning coal. In the temple there are many sacrifices, but though their smoke of atonement fills the temple, they are insufficient—for here we see the prophet prostrate, still facing his sin. We see that sin is still not fully atoned for, for the fire on the altar will not go out until a perfect Lamb is slain. All the sacrifices in the temple presage what has come, even the death of our Savior. In him, the infinite becomes intimate at the cost of the Son of God. The temple's sacrifices are not enough; grace must come, and its full measure comes when the purpose of this sacrifice is finally accomplished. God, at infinite cost to himself, makes you and me his own sons regardless. Such cost for such as we? What great glory!

Some years ago, I had a friend who told me about her family. Her father was a believer, but neither she nor her brother had accepted the faith. Her brother had gone off and was living a rather wild life, but one day he called, saying that he was coming home by train and wanted his father to pick him up. His dad offered to go down to the station after work, and one of his coworkers happened to go with him. The two men stood on the platform, waiting for the son to come off the train. Various people got off and walked past. In the midst of the crowd, a very large man got off with a great beard, flowing hair, cap turned sideways, and a flowing black cape. The business partner jabbed

an elbow into the ribs of my friend's father and said, "Who would want to be the father of that?" Immediately the man went up to embrace his son in front of his partner. Here we see no pride, but a willingness to lay everything aside to show his son love.

Just so, God, the exalted, holy, untouched One, in the person of his Son, took on the sin of the world to embrace you and me. That's how great the cost was, and that's how great the glory is. Even the seraph declares the effect of this grace in verse 7: "See, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for." Here we see the cauterizing, purifying effect of the work of God. Our guilt is taken away, our sin is atoned for—covered, removed—and the price is paid, not by us, but by heaven.

Now this prophet, who has been prostrate before God, hears him ask, "Whom shall I send?" and, in regal Trinitarian voice, "Who will go for us?" (v. 8). And the prophet responds, "Here am I. Send me!" Not only has guilt been removed, but the heart has been restored. The one who felt that he could do nothing, who had no right even to stand, stands and says, "I will serve the Most High God." And what else does he call himself? Flipped around, "Here am I" is "Here I AM." This unworthy one—who should have no status, no standing, no justification at all to approach God—assumes a title of God, proclaiming, "Whatever you call me to do, I will do." Isn't that amazing? That is what grace is supposed to accomplish.

Even in our evangelical circles, it is easy to preach a half-gospel, the gospel of simply removing sin. But if God has only taken away your debt, you still have a zero-sum balance. God has done something more. He has given to us his glory, his holiness, his righteousness. We are not just those whose debt has been taken away; we are those who have the riches of heaven on our behalf, even the holiness of God transferred to us. We have his glory.

This transfer is the greatest glory. It is the wonder of the gospel, the beauty of our faith, that we stand before God not on our own merit, but on his merit. He who has such holiness and grandeur that we have no right to approach him, hardly any right to view him, as even the angels cannot gaze upon that holiness, nonetheless considers us as holy as he is by the grace of heaven. This grace is what inspires us. It is what lifts us in our mission and instills in us a longing to speak to the world. We have such glory, such great grace, that it makes our hearts warm for the things of God.

Not until I began to perceive that my holiness was not my own, but God's righteousness on my behalf, could I truly find joy. He does not count me worthy because I'm performing well enough to gain some of his holiness. Rather, I have realized that when I was totally unworthy, he transferred to me all of his righteousness, all of his holiness. When that glory fills me, I can step off the "performance treadmill" and stop trying to please God enough to make him love me. I can recognize the joy of being loved by God, not because of anything in me, but because of his mercy alone: "But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy" (Titus 3:4–5).

When I know that joy, I can begin to love lost people. I am now not seeking to convert them for my sake; I am not even seeking to convert them so that I can please God. The wonder of the love of God on my behalf is such great grace that the natural response of the regenerate heart is to share this grace with someone else: "Come, find the mercy of God that I have found. This is wonderful; this is great; this is glorious; this is good—not because I am better than you, not because I earned this in any way, but because God in his mercy has made me his

own. Let me tell you about this gospel.” Sharing God’s love is now my joy and not my burden.

We are plowing in hard ground. Isaiah was told not only to deliver a message of judgment, but also that this message would be preached to a people whose hearts were hardened. Yet it became the passion and glory of his life to go out into this hard ground, because it was his purpose to glorify God and enjoy him forever. There is no greater joy to the regenerate heart than to say, “This holy God made me holy, through no work of mine, but through the love of my Savior!”

I asked earlier which picture reveals the greater glory: the picture of parading presidents or the picture of a mother taking a diseased child into her heart and life. Perhaps the greatest glory would be if the president were to kiss the sick child—not likely. But something even greater than this mother’s love has happened. We have found the greatest glory in the pages of the Word of God, where the King of heaven in the person of his Son came to touch diseased children like you and me, taking our sickness upon himself, so that he would die and, through the glory of that great act, we would be raised from death and live forever. This is the greatest glory: that a holy God would be so gracious. Let it be our life’s highest joy to let the world know of this great glory.

This is not a book about you.

It's not about any person who's going to pick it up.

No, these addresses fix on a much more glorious, worthy, and fascinating topic: the God, the Creator, the Redeemer as revealed in the Bible. The study of God is like a brilliant diamond—we should keep holding it up to the light to see new details of its beauty.

Before the awe of such a God, what room is there to focus on man? Our only place is to respond to him—and even our response does not depend on us! We must not only worship him, but also—if our worship is to be meaningful and not cheapened—learn *how* he is to be worshiped.

The Princeton Regional Conference on Reformed Theology presents the following pastor-scholars, who delve into the glory of God and into his grace in making sinners into worshipers:

Bryan Chapell

Charles D. Drew

Richard D. Phillips

Joseph “Skip” Ryan

Philip Graham Ryken

Michael S. Horton

Richard D. Phillips

Michael A. G. Haykin

R. Albert Mohler

D. A. Carson

God's Glory Revealed

Called by God to Worship

Sought by Christ to Worship

Guided by God's Sovereign Providence

Redeemed by God's Sovereign Mercy

Sanctifying Grace

Our Holy Redeemer

The Spirit of Holiness

Know the Truth

I Am the Truth

Learn from these teachers about the glory of, the providential work of, and our proper response to the amazing God we worship.

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