

# The Weightiness of God

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Date: 25 August 2024

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[ 0 : 00 ] And so we're going to turn now to John's Gospel, to chapter 1 and the prologue of that magnificent Gospel of John. We're going to read together the first 18 verses and Martin is going to be preaching to us, particularly from the last paragraph of that, from verse 14 to 18. If you need a Bible, there's some at the front and the back and the sides. Do grab one if you need one and you can follow on and hear and see where we're reading from. So John's Gospel in chapter 1 at verse 1. In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made. In him was life, and that life was the light of men.

The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. There was a man sent from God whose name was John. He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him. He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light. The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.

And the word became flesh, and dwelt among us. And we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. John bears witness about him, and has cried out, this was he of whom I said, he who comes after me ranks before me, because he was before me. And from his fullness, we have all received grace upon grace. For the law was given through Moses. Grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God.

God, the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known. Amen. And may God bless to us this is word.

Amen. The invitation here, and for your warm words of welcome, let me say to everybody here, it is a tremendous privilege for Anne and myself to be here this evening as you mark the 20 years of your minister's ministry. I was tempted to say the first 20 years of his ministry, but that might be to tempt providence. But there, I've said it anyway. The Tron has a very special place in our hearts, Anne and myself over the years. And further, it was a personal privilege and joy to actually chair the vacancy committee that chose Willie Phillip as sole nominee for the congregation to vote on, because as Willie has mentioned, our links go back a long, long time. And Anne and I owe a great debt to his dad, along with Mary James and Mary Phillip. I was 10 years under that ministry and called to preach, as were many, many folks through Jim Phillip's ministry. So yes, it's a great privilege to be here.

[ 4 : 36 ] And I'm sure you'll also appreciate it's a huge responsibility, as I've tried to seek God for the message and for his help tonight. Now, I want to draw your attention to the familiar words in the Gospel of John, chapter 1 and verses 14 to 18. And I'll be focusing largely on verse 14, as we explore together the theme of the theme of the weightiness of God. And so, perhaps your Bibles are already open at that passage. I'm using the ESV apart from the middle line of the verse 14, which Don Carson says there. The NIV is probably more accurate at this point. Let me just read verse 14 again and focus on this text.

And the word became flesh and dwelt among us. And we have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

And let's just pause for a sentence of prayer as we seek God's help together.

Almighty God, we humble ourselves and quieten our spirits in your living presence as we make our request.

Lord, we humble ourselves and quieten our spirits in your living presence as we make our hearts. Amen. Open thou our eyes that we may behold wonderful things out of thy law and word and for your glory.

[ 6 : 45 ] In Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. It was in 1994 that the theologian David Wells, coined the phrase, the weightlessness of God. In his popular book, *God in the Wasteland*, he wrote, A God who has lost weight is one who is there to satisfy our needs, has no real authority to compel, and will soon begin to bore. Almost 30 years on, John Piper, in his book *Providence*, which was published in the *Wasteland*. In the *Wasteland*, he wrote these words.

I might say after 698 pages of words. My impression, says Piper, is that the root of a culture in the church of casual trifling is a loss of the weight of the greatness and awfulness of God.

Everything is light and bouncy and chipper because God is viewed as lightweight.

So, with these two quotations as background, we turn to consider the text of John 1.14. And the apostles' view of the Lord Jesus Christ with these words, We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only.

Now, just a few sentences about the general use of the term glory in New Testament times. The word was used outside the Bible and inside the Bible to refer to the greatness of a person's reputation.

[ 8 : 41 ] That is to say, the person's honor and fame. But notice two quick specific points. The root meaning of glory contains two ideas, the idea of weight and the idea of light.

Put the two together in the Bible in respect of God's greatness, and you get the weight of his light, or conversely, the light of his weight.

That is to say, God's unique glory may be understood as something like the radiant reality of his majestic greatness.

Martin Luther's favorite description of the Lord was as him being the majesty of all majesties.

That's the root meaning. The second point, glory in the Bible has a comprehensive meaning from what I have read. The glory of God is to be thought of not so much as one of his attributes, but the sum of all his attributes.

[ 9 : 57 ] Dr. Martin Lloyd-Jones, famous Welsh preacher, in a sermon on Romans 9.23, in the expression, the riches of his glory, states, What makes God God is his glory.

That is to say, in all he is and in all he does. So to him, God, be the glory. Moving from the general to the particular, that's to say the particular explanation of verses 14 to 18, I want to highlight from the text four very basic aspects of the weightiness of God and make some pastoral applications for each.

Now the first two points will be longer, so don't be overly alarmed when I'm only beginning point three. Three and four will be done fairly quickly, but the first one is a very obvious one.

As we consider together the weightiness of the character of God, the character of God, which is surely the central point about the glory of the Lord Jesus.

In verse 14, we have seen his glory full of grace and truth. That's to say, we've seen the glory of the character of the Lord.

[ 11 : 21 ] Now the commentators point out that John is almost certainly here, directing his readers, us, to the Old Testament story concerning Moses in Exodus 33 and 34.

And there, after the idolatrous rebellion of Israel and their worship of the notorious golden calf, Moses, the leader of Israel, in his prayer to God makes this request.

Chapter 33, verse 18, Please show me your glory. What an astonishing request. In fact, we may be saying under our breath, what a brass neck, especially given what's happened.

And yet it does seem that in the Bible, the living God is at times open to a brass-necked boldness of faith. And so in the very next verse, 19, the Lord immediately responds to the request, show me your glory, and says, I will cause all my goodness to pass before you.

So clearly God's glory is supremely displayed in his goodness. But what does divine goodness look like? Well, the Lord spells this out.

[ 12 : 44 ] As verse 19 continues, I will proclaim before you my name. That's to say God's character, characteristics. And he does so a few verses later. As we read, the Lord passes by Moses, proclaiming what his goodness looks like.

Chapter 34, verse 5, The Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger and abounding, or full of, and notice this pair, love and faithfulness.

Now, the scholars tell us that this familiar Old Testament pair of love or graciousness and faithfulness or truthfulness equate precisely with the meaning of John's pair in verse 14 concerning Jesus, who's full of, or abounding in, grace and truth.

So we're meant to conclude, surely, that the glory of the character of the Lord God revealed to Moses in the Old Testament is the same as the glory of the character in the Lord Jesus as seen by John and the apostles in the New Testament.

He is truly full of grace. I think that's the simplest paraphrase to give the meaning of what's here.

[14:19] The Lord Jesus is truly full of grace. And here in a nutshell, I would suggest, is what we might call the disposition of the Lord.

We use the term disposition to indicate what makes a person tick or to highlight the main traits or the main things about a person's character.

A person's disposition is what the individual is inclined on the whole to want and to will. So if the main thing about our Lord Jesus is that he's truly full of grace, we as Christian believers, those who are Christian believers, should keep the main thing as the main thing.

Especially in times when we may feel or think that we've blown it with God because of the memory of some gross mistake we've made, perhaps in the distant past, but it's ever fresh.

Or it may be because of some shortcomings and continuous failures that we feel in the present. But no, we stop and we remember the Lord's disposition.

[15:43] This is the main thing about the Lord. He is truly full of grace. That's his disposition. So we go back to him. We confess. We repent.

We trust him for who he is and says he is. That's the truth. Now it's not the whole truth.

There is also what we may call the integrity of the Lord's character. The Exodus reading, chapter 34, verse 5, does not stop at the main thing is disposition, but the verse continues.

The Lord, the Lord, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity, transgressions and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty.

The Lord's love then is characterized by graciousness and truthfulness and holiness. And this points us to remember the integrity of his character.

[16:46] That's to say, God is consistently true to the whole truth about himself. Now I wonder if you might agree with me when I say there is a great danger today in the wider Christian church to over-sentimentalize the love of God and even grossly misrepresent that love at times.

What I mean by that is that we may give the impression that God's great love means that people can do what is right in their own eyes to use an infamous biblical expression.

And that kind of attitude has sometimes been traced back to a man called Heinrich Heine and his notorious witticism on his deathbed.

God will forgive my sins. That's his job. But that's to deny God's integrity and particularly his holiness.

John Stott in his book *The Cross of Christ* spoke about a certain kind of tension that existed within the character of God at least as we view it from a human point of view.

[18:09] In simple terms the tension was between his perfect love and his perfect holiness. So John Stott suggested that it might be helpful for us when we are viewing the overall character of God to always think of and always speak of his holy love.

his holy love. And that would remind us of his weighty integrity and beauty of character because it's his holiness along with his love which is his beauty.

Some of our hymns we sing of this blend and harmony within his character. For example the hymn of Frederick William Faber although I'm not so sure that we sing hymns like this anymore nowadays but some of you here will know the words I'm sure.

My God how wonderful thou art thy majesty how bright how beautiful thy mercy seat in depths of burning light how beautiful how beautiful the sight of thee must be thine endless wisdom boundless power and awful purity.

His weighty integrity but back to his weighty disposition because the pastoral application for us this evening concerning the Lord's disposition is found in verse 16 which is a reminder that the Lord's grace is also his power at work in our lives.

[20:02] Verse 14 he is truly full of grace verse 16 for from his fullness have we all received grace upon grace that is to say literally grace in place of grace I think the idea here is fresh grace to replace previous grace Derek Prime was for quite a long time senior minister in Charlotte Baptist

Chapel in Edinburgh and a good friend of Willie's dad and he was once preaching at the Port Stewart Convention in Northern Ireland and James Philip happened to be one of the other speakers that year and Derek Prime was preaching on this text John 1 verse 16 and he used a very simple illustration to explain the phrase grace upon grace he told the audience that when he arrived for the convention he went to the hotel in which he was staying the Windsor hotel right in the front of

Port Stewart if you know it and he went up to his bedroom and there on the dressing table was a large bowl with an orange in it and he said oh that's a lovely welcome gift and it was hot and so he peeled it and ate it enjoyed it and forgot it and then the next day just before lunch after the morning session he went back up to his bedroom and lo and behold the bowl and another orange in it so he said oh well they must have forgotten they've given me my welcome gift already but it's hot and so he ate it and enjoyed it and came back the next day at the same time and well you know what happened for the rest of the remaining seven days the previous orange was replaced by a fresh orange it seemed to be a constant supply he said and then he asked the question of the audience in the tent at Port Stuart and he said what is it that we Christians need more than anything else in life and he answered his own question and he said well it's the supply the assurance of the supply of God's grace to us and there is an abundant supply he says and it fits in with the promise remember the four word promise

James 4 verse 6 he giveth more grace the verse goes on God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble that's to say we are always to recognize that in and of and by ourselves we have empty hands we are helpless and hopeless we are poor in spirit as Jesus said the truth about human beings in fact we are bankrupt in spirit and we need the grace of God and the power of God in our lives all the time each day each need we need it for trials and troubles we need it for all our tasks and duties and service everything in life and so we must go to him constantly I wonder if we do for everything specific that we are called upon to encounter go to him constantly and there's an infinite supply of grace in the Lord Jesus Christ as we receive fresh grace to replace previous grace what a weighty thing this is the weightiness of the character of God in Christ truly full of grace and holy love towards us the second aspect the weightiness of the word of

God the word verse 14 became flesh and we have seen his glory says John and this line links us of course with the opening line in the gospel verse 1 in the beginning was the word that is God and the word of God is a comprehensive theme in the Bible it's a bit like a huge tapestry containing many different threads let me take and trace one clear thread namely that the word of God is essentially about God's communication God's speech so notice five simple strands of this thread in the Bible I'm going to go very quickly so hold on to your seat belts strand number one all things stem from God's speaking Genesis 1 verse 3 and

God said let there be eight times in Genesis 1 which chapter ends and it was so strand number two the glory of God is seen in God's speech being available to us humans Isaiah 40 verse 5 and the glory of the Lord shall be revealed and all flesh shall see it for the mouth of the Lord has spoken strand 3 God's speaking is associated with God's scriptures Psalm 19 verse 1 the heavens declare the glory of God his general speech verse 7 the law of the Lord his revealed scripture is perfect reviving the soul strand 4 the Lord Jesus in all he says and does is the ultimate self expression of God himself and that takes us to our text the word God the son became flesh incarnate in Jesus of Nazareth and notice verse 17

[ 25 : 50 ] Christ revealed himself in the New Testament era verse 17 for the law was given through Moses that's the Old Testament era and scriptures grace and truth came through Jesus Christ that's the New Testament gospel era and scriptures and then to complete it there's strand number five the preaching of God's word this Jesus by the Holy Spirit through the church is powerful and fruitful Acts chapter 2 records Peter's Pentecost sermon and the sermon's result verse 41 those who received the word were baptized and they were added that day about 3,000 souls well that was a weighty outcome to say the least wasn't it it's amazing how the church somehow has managed today to almost reverse these figures it seems to take about 3,000 sermons to get one convert well five strands of one

Bible thread about the weighty word of God we have seen the word's glory says John he might have said we apostles have felt the weight of his glory and I want you readers now to feel the weight of God's glory and so he continued to write the gospel this weighty gospel and it's very instructive I think to note that the revelation of Jesus glory is recorded by John in this gospel at every stage of Jesus work and teaching but Jesus glory in this gospel is especially tied to the death

and resurrection or exaltation of Jesus that is to say the gospel word of the death and exaltation of Jesus is the weighty word of salvation for us needy sinners and that's why we return to it again and again and glory in it so it's instructive it's also interesting

I think how John ends his gospel with a verse about many words concerning the word of God Jesus you remember the closing verse chapter 21 verse 25 it's amazing now there are also many other things that Jesus did where every one of them to be written I suppose the world itself could not contain the books that could be written well that's some testimony to the weightiness of the word isn't it it's a divine testimony and so to the application of this for us now this evening and it's fairly obvious isn't it for the need of the hour for the church in Scotland is for more and more word centered gospel ministries now at this particular moment

I feel a bit like somebody taking coals to Kelvin Grove if not Newcastle as the saying goes for we're here this evening to mark and to honor and give thanks to God for a truly fruitful word centered ministry and the growth of such ministries so let me bring words of encouragement and exhortation to you first of all to the whole body of the congregation to encourage you by thanking you for your enabling supporting financing training and praying out a new generation of word centered preachers for word centered ministries in the land yours is a crucial contribution and my exhortation please do so more and more then a word for the pulpit that's to say all those who are involved specifically in teaching

God's word to old and young or to promote it as elders but principally to your ministry minister willy and his leadership over twenty years thank you for the courage shown to many Christians in the land to stand up consistently for the truth of the sufficiency of scripture and that in the face of opposition the main issue of the day is not the authority of the Bible so much as in my estimation looking at the wider evangelical constituency the danger is the truth of the sufficiency of the Bible and it's being taught and preached fueled of course by congregational prayer and lived out consistently in the context of pastoral and congregational love but sufficient that is to save souls and sanctify such souls progressively in Christ like living and loving as the

[ 31 : 42 ] Lord prayed it would be concerning the word remember John 17 verse 17 father sanctify them through the truth thy word is truth William still one of Willie's great mentors in the past many years ago was asked what are the three great necessities for somebody who feels called to preach the word in Scotland and he replied the first is courage the second is courage and you know what the third is thank you for giving an example to many of us in Scotland of retaining confidence in the word and maintaining courage in its declaration and my exhortation do so more and more a word for the few individual members and attenders here

I know that you love the preached word and I know that you love the Bible but do so more and more in fact I would make a suggestion to help you I think with this is to sing on your own in your own house close the doors Anne steals hymn on the Bible it's 300 years old and Anne my Anne thinks I only love hymns and read books that are 300 years old but that's not strictly true Puritan books are 400 years old but Anne Steele's wonderful hymn on the Bible is in praise hymn book number 545 and I first heard it in the Tron at a

Sunday evening service many many years ago and I think Bob would be playing the organ perhaps at that time and the lovely tune to these words does anybody know the words of Anne Steele's hymn I promise you if you sing it to yourself at least once a month you'll receive fresh confidence and joy in your relationship to God's word father of mercies in whose word what endless glories shine forever be thy name adored for these celestial lines oh may these hallowed pages be my ever dear delight and still new mercies beauties may I see and still increasing light divine instructor gracious Lord be thou forever ever near teach me to love thy sacred word and view my savior there the weightiness of the word of

God much more briefly the weightiness of the presence of God verse 14 and the word became flesh and dwelt among us and we have seen his glory literally tabernacled amongst us or pitched his tent amongst us and John again is surely pointing us to the Old Testament record of the manifested presence of God and his glory as it rested on the tabernacle on the tent of meeting and eventually the temple in Jerusalem and John's vocabulary in these words alludes to what was known in the Old Testament as the Shekinah glory of God and the Shekinah glory rested upon the Lord Jesus and his earthly ministry though only a few saw it the late professor Donald MacLeod of the Free Church of Scotland wrote with Jesus there was no halo no shining face no turning of heads and yet one day John the writer plus two others did see the shining face and also felt the sheer terror of awe

as the

Lord Jesus was transfigured on the mountain and Luke in his gospel writes chapter 9 verse 3 they saw his glory day of day my my what weightiness of the manifested presence of Christ that day so there's God's omnipresence there's his spiritual presence by spirit known to faith in the church but there's also his manifested presence at the times of his choosing So I wonder, what would this manifested presence of God look like today in our day of small things?

[ 36 : 58 ] For we are exhorted not to despise the day of small things. Now, it's a kind of subjective question here, but I think it's a legitimate question.

What would it be like? And I suspect that many in the church at large would think that the manifested presence of God would be marked by noise of some kind.

And I'm wondering if it's not the precise opposite of that. God's manifested presence characterized by a hush, a weighty hush.

Think of the still small voice that Elijah experienced in his day of small things, 1 Kings 19. But Elijah, as he experienced a living and powerful word of God, Elijah was made ready to receive it by, well, in the words of Simon and Gerfunkel's great hit in the 60s, by the sound of silence.

One scholar has literally translated the still small voice verse which made the presence and the word of God known that day as literally the sound of sheer silence.

[ 38 : 18 ] Now, if we move the clock forward from days of small things to that day of big things, the day of Pentecost, to be sure it began with noise. But the day centered on a sermon, accompanied it seems with serious listening.

And the day ended, chapter 2, verse 43, with great awe coming upon every soul. Now, surely we can learn from the days of big things, revivals, what we should pray for in days of small things, times of declension as we are living in.

Tom Lenny from Orkney has written four books on the history of revivals in the Scottish Church. In his fourth book, published last year, he provided a fresh examination of the Lewis revival in 1949 to 52.

With painstaking research, he blew away some long accepted myths and stated with great honesty that some dramatic supposed events actually never happened.

But one thing, however, was no myth. It was there in the revival from the start and before the start.

[ 39 : 44 ] One visitor to Barvas in Lewis said this, The most impressive thing in all the gatherings was the presence of God.

Sometimes there would be periods of silence in which the presence of God was so real that no one dared move as God's Word was preached.

Then the Reverend Duncan Campbell of the faith mission, the main preacher, looking back at the revival in later years, said, In Lewis, revival began with the awareness of God.

The well-known evangelical scholar, the late J.I. Packer, was also a great student and teacher of historical and biblical revival, and he identified four marks.

One, God's presence comes down. Two, God's Word comes home. Three, God's purity comes through.

[ 41 : 02 ] Four, God's people come alive. And I wonder how often it is in our prayer meetings, in gospel-centered, word-centered churches, up and down the land, I wonder how often that we pray specifically and continually for God's manifested presence to accompany the preaching of His Word on Sundays, but the teaching of it also in midweek.

The need of society is so great, is it not, that surely only the priority of continuous burdened entreaties to God to intervene is going to turn the tide.

The great prayer at our prayer meetings, among many other things, must be, Lord, will you not revive your work in the midst of the years?

Restore the years the locusts have eaten, and my, what locusts, even in recent years. And you know, it's wonderful.

God sometimes gives us tokens of His presence, doesn't He, in this way, maybe at the prayer meeting itself. We maybe feel at such prayer meetings, our words are just like sighs or groans.

[ 42 : 34 ] And then God draws near. There's a sense of His weighty presence among us. And we say, God is here.

He's listening to our prayers. And we are encouraged. Well, let's be encouraged to pray more and more for our land and our city and for our churches, for God's manifested presence.

The weightiness of the character of God, the Word of God, and the presence of God. Now, the time, I'm afraid, has already gone just about, but if you'll allow me a few more minutes just to come to the fourth and final aspect.

And that's the weightiness of the goal of God. The opening verse 14, we have seen His glory, I think acts as a pointer to the words of the closing verse in our passage, verse 18, which begins, no one has ever seen God.

That is the Father. Which alerts us to the familiar tension in the biblical gospel between faith and sight. Verse 18 continues, the only God who is at the Father's side, the Son, has made Him known in Jesus.

[ 44 : 09 ] And here and now, we know Jesus by faith. Jesus said that. John 20, verse 29, blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed. Here and now.

But the goal of God is that one day, faith will give way to sight hereafter. And the Lord Jesus anticipates this great goal in His great prayer to the Father.

John 17, verse 24, He says, Father, I desire that they also, whom You have given Me, may be with Me to see My glory.

To see it. So what will the sight of glory hereafter mean for us in the ultimate future? Well, we can't and don't know very much.

The Bible tells us, I hath not seen, nor ear heard, nor hath it entered into the heart of man the things that God has prepared for those who love Him. But we are not left clueless because, although that is in 1 Corinthians 2, verse 9, the very next verse, verse 10, goes on to say, but God has revealed it by His Spirit in the Bible.

[ 45 : 23 ] So what will that glory scene be like? And we are given one great clue in the last verse of that great prayer in John 17.

The clue is that the glory of God is to ultimately experience in all its fullness the love of God.

That amazing closing verse in John 17, verse 26, Father, I made known to them Your name, and I will continue to make it known so that, purpose clause, the love with which You, Father, have loved Me may be in them and I in them.

And so it seems that the Father's love for Jesus will so fill us on that day that we will experience and express the love of Jesus and love for Jesus to perfection, or at least to the full capacity of our individual resurrection bodies.

And oh, that will be glory for me and you. But here and now we live by faith and faith worketh by love and the love with which we are learning to love is nothing less than that love which is among the persons of the Godhead.

[ 47 : 01 ] Can we grasp that in dwelling us? But that does mean that here and now we're not hopeless and helpless about loving God and the Lord more and more and loving our neighbors as ourselves because as Peter says, 2 Peter chapter 1, we are partakers of the divine nature now.

in June 8, 1941, and with this I close, C.S. Lewis preached a sermon in St. Mary's Church, Oxford, entitled The Weight of Glory, which included these words, In the end, that face which is the delight or the terror in the universe must be turned on each of us, either conferring glory or inflicting shame.

Now Lewis felt that we Christians can be too preoccupied with our own potential glory, but, and here I quote again, it is hardly possible to think too often of the potential glory of our neighbor. The load and weight of my neighbor should be laid daily on my back, he said. And the fact is there are no ordinary neighbors, there are no mere mortals, each and all are immortal souls created in the image of God, and yes, that image is marred and defaced by sin, and yet is an image to be gloriously renewed and restored and regenerated by the grace of God in the gospel.

so the neighbors in our street and in our networks are to be loved with this divine love in us and to be prayed for continually like a weight upon us that C.S. Lewis refers to and witness to when opportunity knocks and in faltering, fumbling words we're able to give them some knowledge of the glorious gospel of the blessed God as it's called in the New Testament.

[ 49 : 48 ] So may this blessed God bless the Tron Church and bless all of you especially and particularly your minister with increasing knowledge of the weight of the glory of His holy love so may all ministers, preachers, leaders, members, attenders be blessed in days to come so that we may seek more and more to glorify God and then to enjoy Him forever.

may God bless His word in quickening our souls so that we offer to serve Him again.

