

GOD'S GLORY IN FOUR DIMENSIONS
PSALM 19; JOHN 2:13-22

“What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us.” (A.W. Tozer) This is one of these sweeping statements that you need time to digest, so let me repeat it. What we think about God as the most important thing? Well, here's why it was said, as far as I can tell: what we think about God shapes what we think about ourselves, about life, about other people, about our priorities, about faith, and forms our attitudes to a whole host of things. At the centre of what we think about God stands the figure of Jesus: much of what we know of God, believe about God, and think about the world is shaped by Jesus. Someone has suggested recently that one of the things that the Church in the West needs to do is rediscover the place and importance of Jesus so that our faith be given a new sense of zeal and inspiration.

What shapes our view of God? I want to offer you a set of four snapshots that show us how what we think about God is shaped. I enjoy taking photos and sometimes a photo can capture something that words can't do; a picture is worth a thousand words? I offer you four snapshots that show us something of the glory of God and the greatness of God, so that we might go away with a bigger picture of God, a deeper understanding of God's greatness, and a stronger, deeper faith!

1. The Night sky: did you see the meteor last week? It was a quite dramatic event by the sounds of it; my mother-in-law watched it from her front window. Many people are fascinated by the night sky and by the distance you can see when it's clear and the number of stars in the sky. Sometimes the city lights make us lose something of the scale of that, but get away from the city and you see just how massive is the universe in which we live. The psalmist wrote: *“The heavens...” (Psalm 19:1)* and he goes on to describe how, without words, the skies declare the glory of God. Without words, the sun, moon, and stars tell us that God made them and they reveal to us something of the great power and glory of God. If this is the scale of the sky, how much greater must be the hand that made these things.

It is controversial to talk about God as Creator in some places. Some will tell us that 'science has removed the need for God' and that Professor Brian Cox and his television programmes about the origin of the solar system tell us the processes by which the stars and galaxies were formed. All of that just proves to me what a fascinating place is the world in which we live. Yet, there is still room for me to say *“By faith...” (Hebrews 11:3)* The snapshot of the night sky declares the glory of God and shows us that we have a God who is great and full of majesty and power, someone who is worth believing.

2. A book: The wonderfully poetic sentences in Psalm 19, six of them, open up for us something of the value of the book we call the Bible. *“The law...” (Psalm 19:7)* This is such a positive view of the book that breathes life into the human heart, that makes us wise and brings joy to our hearts, that gives us light and insight, the book that stands forever as the way God has made Himself known to us. As if to confirm its great value to us, the psalmist takes the most precious thing there is and the sweetest thing he knows and says *“They are...” (Psalm 19:10)* The Bible shows us what more God is than the Creator and what else God is like and how He has blessed us and the promises He has made. We read the stories and we see God who is gracious and loving, kind and

compassionate; we see a God who loves the world endlessly, a promise-making God, and God who is faithful to keep these promises. The Book shows us God like this.

Biblefresh last year was fascinating. It was the project that celebrated the 400th anniversary of the King James Bible. As part of *Biblefresh* we invited people in our church to choose their favourite bible passage, tell us why, and then read it as part of morning service. In about forty choices, we only had one or two duplicates and people who chose the same reading did so for different reasons. It demonstrated just how deep an impact the Bible still makes on people's lives, old and young. The whole year gave the bible a profile in the UK that it had not had for some time as we celebrated the 400th anniversary of the Authorised Version. But we have a problem in the Church in Scotland: the statistics tell us that only one in ten Christians in Scotland read their bible regularly. I know it is a difficult book to read at times; I know it often raises more questions than it answers; I know it comes from a different culture and time; but it still shows us what God is like; it still reveals God to us in way that nothing else does; it is still the only place where we read the stories of Jesus. God reveals Himself in a book.

3. The Temple: what do you make of this story? John tells us the story of Jesus cleansing the temple at the beginning of his gospel; others have a similar event at the end! Has someone got it in the wrong place? Or did Jesus do this twice? Once at the start of His ministry and once again at the end because the same things were still going on? It is not unlikely! What does Jesus expect to find in the temple precincts? He expects to find a place of prayer; a quiet place where people can gather to pray and seek the blessing of God. In this outer court, it is the only place where Gentiles can gather, they are not allowed any further in, yet instead of an atmosphere that leads them to prayer, they find a market-place, people buying and selling. Jesus throws them out; He turns the tables over: "*How dare...*" (John 2:16)

What do you make of this story? Was Jesus just in a bad mood? Had He got out of bed on the wrong side that morning and what He saw just riled Him? Well, there is clue in these words: "*my father's house*". For anyone who has ears to hear, there is a huge claim. Jesus has God as His Father: no Jew would make that claim; it is quite different, revolutionary almost. What John is trying to show us is the special-ness of Jesus and that Jesus shows us something of the glory of God. Jesus is Lord of the Temple; the Lord of the temple has come to visit in the name of the Father and is exercising His God-given authority. Jesus the Messiah shows us what God is like; God is in our world in human flesh and blood. Jesus is Lord with authority over the temple, over the people, over all things. God reveals Himself in Jesus Christ.

4. The cross: "*Destroy this...*" (2:19) "what on earth are you talking about, Jesus? It has taken 46 years to build this temple and you're going to raise it in three days when it gets knocked down?! It can't be done!" John, in his editorial comment, tells us that Jesus is speaking about Himself and His body. Even at this early stage in the gospel, John shows us the shadow of the cross hanging over Jesus. There is a famous painting by Holman Hunt called *The Shadow of the Cross* and it shows Jesus at work in the carpenter's workshop; He is stretching after a few hours of hard work, His hands above His head, and the sun is casting a shadow on the wall behind Him; it looks for all the world like a cross on the wall. The toolrack on the wall behind him looks like the crosspiece; His scarf on the floor is shaped like the crown of thorns. This is a work of Hunt's imagination, but showing that from the very start of His life and ministry that the shadow of the cross

loomed large over Jesus' life and ministry. Of course, whenever we talk about the cross, we talk about the resurrection too.

How can this snapshot show us the glory of God? This is the twist in the tail of Christian faith; the fourth snapshot is the cross, the place where Jesus died. We can't understand the Christian faith without understanding the cross. It was the reason for Jesus' coming; it was His deliberate choice to go to Jerusalem; He set Himself on the course that led to the cross; He wrestled with that choice in Gethsemane and then went to the cross, doing the will of God. The cross was a grim place for the first century, but it has become the place of salvation for the world. The resurrection declares that Jesus' sacrifice has worked and Jesus is the Saviour for the whole world. The cross is the place where the plans and promises of God have come to their climax and fulfillment and so is the place where the grace and endless love of God are seen for all the world to see. *"Christ the power of God and wisdom of God" (1 Corinthians 1:24)* God reveals Himself by the cross of Christ.

These are four snapshots that help us see something of the glory of God: God who made the universe and whose glory is declared by the heavens; God who is revealed in the pages of the book and the Bible shows us the grace, love, and holiness of God; Jesus in the temple, Lord of temple, "my Father's house", God in human flesh and blood, showing us what God is like; the cross, God who suffers with us, God of endless love who gave His Son to be the Saviour and Jesus who laid down His life for us.

"What we think about God...?" At best these four snapshots inspire us to:

- **worship** – here is the great, glorious God who is worthy of worship, the creator of all things, Lord of heaven and earth; worship is our fitting response to such a God as this, to bow down before Him with worship in our hearts and songs of praise on our lips.
- **Love** – to love God with all our heart; God who loves us, draws from us the love of our hearts, a love that will never die; and not only a love for God but a love one another because of God's love for us.
- **Faith** – here is a God we can trust; a faithful, dependable God; a promise-keeping God; someone we can trust with our lives, with our salvation. He won't let us down.
- **Discipleship** – being the kind of people Jesus wants us to be. "Jesus is Lord" and that confession commits us to being the kind of people Jesus wants us to be, to reflect God in the way we live, in our attitudes, our behaviour, our words, our kindness.

"What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us." I'm not sure if you'll agree with that or not; but of one thing I am sure – understanding God in all His glory is good for us; it strengthens our faith, it deepens our love, it inspires our worship, it makes us better people. Let us worship God with songs of praise; let us love Him with all our hearts; let us trust Him completely; let us follow Jesus faithfully.