

# ***“The Glory of God”***

Robert M. Thompson, Pastor

**Corinth Reformed Church**  
150 Sixteenth Avenue NW  
Hickory, North Carolina 28601  
828.328.6196 [corinthtoday.org](http://corinthtoday.org)

*(© 2019 by Robert M. Thompson. Unless otherwise indicated, Scriptures quoted are from The Holy Bible, New International Version, Copyright 2011 by New York International Bible Society.)*

***The glory of God is seen fully, finally, and unalterably in Jesus Christ.***

***Ezekiel 10:15-19***

***September 15, 2019***

(Corinth sermons are available in audio and print forms at [corinthtoday.org/sermons](http://corinthtoday.org/sermons).)

## ***Superlatives***

As we begin this morning, I want you to remember or imagine....

- *The thickest fog you’ve ever encountered.* I remember driving on a winding mountain road where we could see nothing but the yellow line to guide us.
- *The fastest motion you have witnessed.* Mine might be a bolt of lightning.
- *The brightest light you have seen.* Even though it’s 93 million miles away, I guess for me it would be the sun – especially in Hawaii lying on the beach.
- *The highest height you have climbed or seen.* I grew up not far from the world’s second tallest mountain, K-2.
- *The greatest wealth you have contacted in person.* I would say maybe Biltmore House in Asheville.
- *The greatest power you have witnessed.* Even though it was on TV, what comes to mind is the liftoff of a Saturn V rocket.
- *The purest beauty your eyes have seen.* Linda and I can’t forget the first winter snowfall at Murren, Switzerland.
- *The most terrifying event you have experienced.* If TV counts, the 9-11 planes flying into the World Trade Center, with its aftermath and endless replays.
- *The most breathtaking spectacle.* For me, the sunrise at Haleakala on Maui.

If you could bundle all of that up into one experience, you would come close to the physical display of “glory” in the Bible. You have to put it all together, because there’s nothing on earth that approximates God’s glory. Everything we can imagine is a shadow of the reality that is inexpressible, indescribable, incomparable.

## ***Declare his glory***

In Ezekiel 8-11, God's glory departs the temple. In order to understand the significance of that event, we need a brief overview of glory in the Old Testament.

The first mention of "glory" in the Bible comes in a conversation between God and Moses in Exodus 14. The children of Israel have left Egypt and arrived at the Red Sea. God uses this moment to inform Moses that Pharaoh and his officers and chariots and army are on the way to force the Israelites back to Egypt. God says to Moses, "But I will gain glory for myself through Pharaoh and all his army." You know what happened.

Glory becomes a theme for the Israelites on their way to Canaan. Manna on the desert floor displays God's glory (Exodus 16:7). Fire on Mt. Sinai is the glory of the Yahweh (Exodus 24:17). Moses asks to see God's glory on the mountain (Exodus 33:18). When the tabernacle is set up, "The cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle" (Exodus 40:35). This radiant cloud appeared regularly at the tent of meeting, including when rebels opposed Moses (Numbers 16:19).

From that time on, the glory of God was associated with the ark of the covenant in the tabernacle, whether or not there was a cloud or brilliant light. When the ark was captured by the Philistines, the shock killed the aged priest-judge Eli, and sent his daughter-in-law into labor. She died shortly before giving birth, but not until she had named her son Ichabod, which means "No Glory!" (1 Samuel 4:21).

When Solomon built Israel's permanent temple, it was magnificent in size and grandeur, and the day of dedication included thousands of ritual sacrifices, pageantry, harps and trumpets and choice. But only when the ark of God was brought into the temple did "the glory of the LORD fill the temple" (1 Kings 8:11; 2 Chronicles 7:1-3).

All of this is background for how God's glory in the Psalms. Glory is occasionally associated with human kings, but overwhelmingly with God. Psalm 24:8 says, "Who is this King of glory? The LORD, strong and mighty, the LORD might in battle."

We see glory in nature – but it is always God's glory on display: "The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands" (Psalm 19:1).

Glory becomes a verb in the Psalms: a command for all creation, all Israel, even all nations to recognize who God is and what he can do: "Glorify the LORD with me; let us exalt his name together" (Psalm 34:3). "Declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous deeds among all peoples" (Psalm 96:3)

The one place identified with the display of God's glory is the temple in Jerusalem. "I have seen you in your sanctuary and beheld your power and glory" (Psalm 63:2). It's not like the cloud is *always* there, lighting up the sky like it's Bank of America stadium during a night game. The temple itself not only represents God is present but

his unique relationship with Israel. The temple is about the history of God's presence, his covenant, his promises. If you want to experience God's glory, go up to Jerusalem, to the temple.

"Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name; bring an offering and come into his courts" (Psalm 96:8). Bring an offering. Smell the burnt offerings. Gaze at the incomparable architecture. Mingle with the worshiping mobs. Remember the promises given to Noah, Moses, David, and Solomon.

For much of the Old Testament, then, God's glory is physically located on the temple mount. If you need God, go to the temple.

### ***The glory is gone!***

All of this is critical background to Ezekiel 8-11. Ezekiel is not the only prophet who speaks about the glory of God, but he is the most visual and dramatic. If Ezekiel were alive today, he would be the master of YouTube, of Power Point, of theater.

Ezekiel could have limited himself the displays of God's glory before him. His visions make use of clouds and fire and light, but he also uses things like wings and eyes and wheels and rainbows and cattle and birds and lions and faces and thrones.

Ezekiel's visions of God's glory will never leave you with the presumption that you "get" God. Ezekiel's visions, especially in chapters 1 and 10, leave you breathless and puzzled. In chapter 1, Ezekiel falls flat on his face. Why? What does he see?

He says what he saw was "the appearance of the likeness of the glory of God" (1:28). Readers usually find his visions confusing at first; I did at first.

In chapter 1, Ezekiel sees clouds and lightning and fire – just like Moses had seen on the mountain. He sees living creatures that are multi-faced, representing all of creation. They glow and fly at lightning speed, and they're associated with intersecting, whirling wheels – gyroscopes that spin and move in seemingly all directions. The creatures and wheels are full of eyes. All this represents the omnipresence of God – he's everywhere at once – and his omniscience – he sees and knows all. The sounds are like Niagara Falls or an army on the march, and the expanse and throne are likened to brilliant gems and a rainbow. Ezekiel has an Imax Theater/Dolby Sound multi-sensory experience of unspeakable grandeur. No wonder he falls down and worships.

Now you know why it's such a weighty event when Ezekiel says the glory of the LORD departed from the temple. In keeping with his style, he doesn't just make that statement. He dramatizes it – makes you see it, feel it, hear it. Remember, Ezekiel is not in Jerusalem. He is among the first wave of exiles in Babylon, 700 miles away. They believe Jerusalem is eternal and indestructible. Why? God's glory dwells there; every Jew knows that. Who can possibly remove the glory of God?

The sequence begins in chapter 8, as Ezekiel sits with the elders of Judah in his house in exile in Babylon. He even dates the experience – the sixth year, the sixth month, the fifth day. It was 2,610 years ago this coming Tuesday – September 17, 592 B.C. The Spirit grabs Ezekiel by the hair, lifts him up, and teleports him to Jerusalem, where there’s still a temple and still sacrifices. Ezekiel had been raised by a priest.

There at the entrance of the north gate of the inner court, Ezekiel sees “the glory of the God of Israel” just as he had seen in his vision. The rest of what he sees must have shocked and sickened him. Images of animals being worshiped, a sensual goddess named Tammuz, and people bowing to the sun god. For generations, the problem had been pagan worship out on the rural high places. Now all sorts of detestable religious practice had been ushered into the temple, desecrating God’s very home, allowed to co-exist with the glory of God.

In chapter 9, Ezekiel sees six assassins who fan out into Jerusalem to slaughter the idolaters, unless a seventh man, dressed in linen, uses his Sharpie to mark them as repentant. The glory of God moves from the inner court of the temple to the threshold.

Chapter 10 repeats Ezekiel’s vision of cherubim and wheels. He once again sees the glory – the radiant cloud – but now it moves, accompanied by those creatures and wheels from chapter 1. It moves from the threshold to the eastern gate of Jerusalem. Ezekiel now realizes those strange mobile creatures are cherubim. We first meet cherubim in the Bible after Adam and Eve sinned (Genesis 3:24), guarding the garden. Cherubim were embroidered on the temple curtain separating the holy place from the holy of holies (Exodus 36:35; 1 Kings 6:23-29). They were placed atop the ark of the covenant, symbolically displaying God’s glory.

In chapter 11, the glory of God departs the temple all together. With the cherubim and wheels as royal honor guards, the brilliant cloud of the very presence of God rises and moves to the Mount of Olives (11:22-23). The glory is gone!

And it *never came back*. There’s no mention of the glory of the LORD returning when the exiles return and rebuild the temple. In fact, Haggai the prophet sees the effort to reconstruct that house and laments, “Who of you is left who saw this house in its former glory? How does it look to you? Does it not seem like nothing?” (Haggai 2:3)

When Herod the King rebuilt the Jerusalem temple, expanding the platform and the sanctuary into something far more glorious than even Solomon had built, there’s no accompanying account in the Bible or outside about the glory of God returning to that place. God’s glory permanently abandoned that place in Ezekiel 8-11.

Will it never, ever return? Ezekiel, the master of details and dates and visuals, wants you asking that precise question. For Ezekiel’s answer, you have to read further.

## ***New covenant glory***

I've titled these sermons in Ezekiel, "This God is Our God." In what way is *this* God our God? The way I've heard this taught and preached is that God is still a God of glory, and we should never presume that God's glory, meaning his favor and blessing, is permanent. God's prerogative is to remove his presence and power from an idolatrous person, church, denomination, or nation. Many would say God is removing his glory from America. I'm going to say we never had it. Glory, biblically, is not affluence or influence.

To back up that statement, I need the New Testament. That's why I'm altering my usual pattern here. It's important that we see glory through New Testament eyes.

*First, the glory of God is seen fully, finally, and unalterably in Jesus Christ.* On the night of his birth, the glory of the Lord shone around the shepherds and the angels sang, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth, peace to those on whom his favor rests" (Luke 2:9-14). For most of Jesus' life, his glory was hidden. At his baptism and on a few other occasions, a voice proclaimed his glory. John says he revealed his glory when he turned the water into wine and performed other sign-miracles (John 2:11).

The crowds on Palm Sunday shouted "Peace in heaven and glory in the highest" as Jesus rode into Jerusalem through the same eastern gate where the glory had departed. The crowds were right about the who of glory but not about the when. The most visible and memorable display of Old Testament-like glory happened on the Mount of Transfiguration, when three (but only three!) of his disciples saw his face change and his clothes become "as bright as flash of lightning" (Luke 9:29).

John more than the other three gospels speaks of the glory of God in and through Jesus during his earthly life. You may think the pinnacle of that glory is his resurrection, but John speaks of Jesus' death as his glory (John 12:23). John's most important statement about Jesus' glory, however, is this one in his prologue: "The Word became flesh, and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth" (John 1:14). The writer of Hebrews adds, "The Son is the radiance of God's glory and exact representation of his being" (Hebrews 1:3).

The reason God's glory was removed from the temple was to prepare for Jesus. There's only one proper, complete, permanent meaning of the "glory of God" this side of Ezekiel – and that's Jesus Christ. I'm not suggesting that to use the word "glory" for something else – a monarch or a nation or a battle or even an athletic feat – is blasphemy. Even the Bible uses the word "glory" in that way. But all those glories are dim reflections of absolute glory – sort of like holding your phone's flashlight next to the sun and saying they are both light. 1 Peter 1:24 quotes Isaiah, that "all people are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field."

All human glory is a dim reflection of the glory of God. If there's glory in riches, it is a reminder of God's riches. If there's glory in beauty, he is the source. If there's glory in power or victory, his is absolute. If there is glory in sacrifice, he made the ultimate. Jesus is the glory of God – his majesty, authority, mystery, holiness, and power. If you need God, go to Jesus.

*Second, the New Testament speaks of future glory.* That begins with Jesus, who, even though he was the glory of God in human flesh, did not display it visibly very often. He did say repeatedly that he would return “in his Father's glory with his angels” (Matthew 16:27), that he would “sit on his glorious throne” (Matthew 25:31), that he would come “in a cloud with power and great glory” (Luke 21:27).

Glory describes where Jesus is now – at his Father's right hand – and where he will bring his people. Stephen, about to be buried under a hailstorm of rocks, “looked up to heaven and saw the glory of God” (Acts 7:55). Paul says “our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us” (Romans 8:18). The writer of Hebrews says that God “is bringing many sons and daughters to glory” (Hebrews 2:10). The book of Revelation closes the New Testament with exclamations about the end of all things: “To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praised and honor and glory and power, for ever and ever!” (Revelations 5:13). Glory is hidden from us now, but we will share in Jesus' glory at his second coming and forever.

*Finally, you and I display the glory of God.* Given everything else we've said about glory, this is rather surprising. But it's a consistent New Testament emphasis.

Jesus said, “Let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven” (Matthew 5:16). “This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit” (John 15:8), he told his disciples the night before he died. Paul says we are (right now) “being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory” (2 Corinthians 3:18). “Christ in you is the hope of glory” (Colossians 1:27).

The final application of a sermon on the glory of God is what Paul writes to the Corinthians when he's dealing with the difficult (for him and for them) issue of eating food that had been sacrificed to idols. It was a big deal in the church, and Paul lays down some important guidelines. But it all ends with this: “Whatever you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God” (1 Corinthians 10:31).

Your behavior and mine will not alter the glory of God. God has glory, Jesus is glory, and all the universe will ultimately display his majesty, power, light, holiness, presence, omniscience, and beauty. Meanwhile, until Jesus comes, the best and only reflection of God's glory most people will see is in you and me. When we pray, when we sing, when we serve, when we give, when we forgive, when we work for justice, when we share the gospel with grace, when we live holy lives, we bring glory to God. Amen.