

Angels Song

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Preacher: Derek Lamont

[0 : 00] Now I want today just for a little while to look at Luke's Gospel, chapter 2, and take the theme of the message that was sung or spoken or said or proclaimed by the angels that's given to us in verse 14, glory to God in the highest, thanks John.

And on earth peace to men on whom his favour rests. And I want just to look at that for a little while this morning because I'm not sure how much we would understand or think about or the society in which we live, at least in terms of biblical language, would think about this whole idea of giving glory to God.

What I want to do just for a few moments is encourage us to think about that and to think about why we are who we are, what makes us what we are, and why it's a good and a right thing and indeed is the focus of our lives is to give glory to God who is the one who made us and who as we know from Scripture also rescues us, redeems us.

It's very difficult for us to do that because so much of our life is taken up with what is immediately before our eyes. And I think probably that becomes even more intense around this time of year.

We need to make a conscious effort to think about God and who he is. And I think that goes for us as believers, as Christians, just as much in our own lives.

[1 : 51] A secular world and the secularity of the world in which we live, I think that's probably a made up word, is something that makes it difficult for us to think about God because we've seen recently, we've talked recently about keeping our eyes on things that are eternal rather than the things that are temporary.

And that's difficult for us to do because everything screams at us to keep our eyes on the things that are temporary, like today and how we'll get through today and what today's about and what today's tweet is and what today's thinking is and what people are envisaging and what's in their minds and what's capturing our imagination.

So it's very difficult sometimes for us to move beyond that into the spiritual and yet we recognise that we see by faith that the things that are eternal and therefore we need God, we need God to see God.

Oh, sorry. Was that me that blew up or was it my microphone? Was that, am I still working? Okay, sorry, that's quite good.

Okay, if I do that every so often I'll know that you're awake. But I just want to think about a couple of things that I'm not going to say. To think about a couple of things that I'm going to think about the glory of God and I'm also going to think about just for a moment the glory of worship.

[3 : 21] The glory of God is spoken of here. I mean we know this passage very well and it's often read at this time of year and we've got this amazing declaration of the birth of Jesus.

You know every birth, I'm not going to say much about the birth of Jesus because I'll say a little bit about it at the communion service, at the carol service to the children next week. But it's a unique birth in many ways, not least, it's a unique birth in every way, but it's a unique in the sense that this declaration comes with it from heaven, from outside of the situation and it comes with this great host, this great company of the heavenly host, the armies of God, the angels, appearing with this angel of the Lord who comes in this terrifying and yet glorious way and says glory to God in the highest and on earth peace to men on whom his favour rests.

I wonder what we think of that concept of glory. Do we understand it? Is that kind of biblical thing? I know we use it just generally, but it seems to be quite a religious word and kind of a word that we use in church, maybe we take it for granted.

What does it mean, the glory that we would aspire to give? Well, I think it kind of just means the praise and the worship, the adoration we give because of the importance of the person to whom we are focusing our attention.

We can do it on a human level, we can give glory to people who we believe are worthy of that glory as it were, someone who has won a prize, someone who has won an Olympic gold, the glory that we do, the adulation, the praise, that's really what it is.

[5 : 09] You would give glory to someone who has done something significant. Many people over this week have been reflecting on the life of Nelson Mandela. Now there's all kinds of different opinions about him and different opinions about his greatness.

Now, from a human point of view, there's this great recognition of what he achieved, what he managed to achieve, and many from within South Africa, white and black, will give credit to him for that.

So there's a sense in which many people have been giving him a sense of glory for what he's achieved now. He's a fallen human being like everyone else, but from a human point of view, he was able to suffer much, he was able to cope with a great deal, he had an amazing intellect, a phenomenal capacity to forgive his captors, and a willingness to not seek revenge when he came into power.

And so there was a sense in which people have given him adulation for that. But this is a different level, all of these things are reflections of what we have been created to do and what our life is about, which is to give glory to God for who he is.

If you're living your life without any reference to God, then you're missing out. It's part of the problem of sin, isn't it? Is that we miss out on this absolutely central part of our life, which is to recognize the attributes, the character, the person, the beauty, the stunning nature of God, and worship and glorify him for his being, for who he is, glory to God in the highest, glory in his person, just glory to God.

[7 : 07] We don't need actually anything more than that, simply to see and know as the Bible unfolds the nature and the character of God, which is worthy of our praise and our worship.

Now I know that is difficult for us. I know that's difficult for us, because we can't see him as it were right in front of us.

The reason we can't see him is because it would just be far too remarkable for us to cope with, far too much for our mortal beings to cope with. But there's this great sense in which even in a small way, we're told in verse 8 and 9 there that an angel of the Lord appeared to them and the glory of the Lord shone around them and they were terrified.

Even almost as it were like the reflection, the shadow, if you could talk about the shadow of someone's light or the shadow of his glory, was so great that it terrified those who were around him.

They didn't kind of skip along. Whoa, there's God, isn't he lovely? He's got a long beard and a nice friend. It wasn't like that. There was this terror and this recognition that he was an absolutely awesome being and an incredible being, in Revelation that speaks in the future about the new heavens and the new earth being a place that doesn't need a battery and doesn't need an electric source and doesn't need, even the sun, the city, doesn't need the sun or the moon to shine it for the glory of God gives it light and the lamp, the lamp is its lamp.

[8 : 42] So there's this whole picture of a God who is self-sustaining in his being and who creates around him this great sense of light and life and beauty.

There's a purity about God that we simply can't understand, a righteousness, a holiness, a creative genius, a size, a magnitude that we just can't contain that would blow our minds, a reputation for outstanding love but also for outstanding purity and holiness that leaves us uncomfortable.

That is truly awesome. We use that word a lot today, don't we? We use it a lot. Wow, that was awesome. But we don't really understand the meaning of that word because it is an awe-inspiring word and the glory of God is such that it ought to, and often doesn't, I appreciate, but ought to in many ways leave us awe-struck because of who he is.

All light as it were. You know, there's various evidences of the glory of God being a light that comes from him. However, or whatever that indeed means, we see it in the transfiguration, even with Jesus, where it says if his glory is beginning to be revealed, then he's light and life and all that comes from it.

So there's a sense in which we have a picture of God who is light and life, the source of everything else is derived, all is derived, and that is hugely significant and important that in himself he is worthy of our worship.

[10 : 28] So if he didn't send Jesus, if he didn't have Jesus, if he didn't have the Bible, he would still be worthy of our worship.

He is glorious and worthy of ourselves. And the great catastrophic problem of our lives is that we don't worship him.

Is that we worship created things rather than the Creator. So we glorify, I know it's using Bible kind of language, but we glorify created things rather than the Creator.

So we spend our lives adoring and focusing on and thinking about things we can see and feel in touch and the transient that are there because that's what sin has done for us.

It's turned us against who God is and has blinded us to who he is and we worship. We still worship. We still glorify, but it's not God.

[11 : 29] In fact, we go the opposite way. We hate him very often. We reject him. We turn against him. So he's glorious in his own presence, but he's also, and we thank God for this.

He's glorious through his message. Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace on whom his favour rests.

This great revelation of who God is in the person of Jesus, this child who is born in the manger, the birth of the God child, the Messiah, who in many ways gives up his glory, gives up his right to worship, gives up his right to be recognised as one who is worshiped because he becomes a human being and he's born into anonymity and he's actually born into immediate opposition.

In the days born, there's a relentless drive to have him expunged. Get rid of him. And so he's born in anonymity and he hides his glory.

And yet we see in the gospel accounts that that even spills through. It spills through in his obedience to the Father. It spills through in his understanding of his calling.

[12 : 47] It spills through in his being able to turn water into wine so that the disciples would put their trust in him because they'd seen his glory for who he was. Imagine that. The first thing that he did, turned water into wine, is that what we would have chosen?

To reveal his glory? That's why he chose. His ability to raise the dead. His ability to calm the waves. His remarkable teaching, his message that was relentlessly focused on the religious hypocrites and bigots and not on a lost and broken and bruised world who ate with publicans and sinners who spent time with prostitutes because he wanted them because he knew that they sensed their feeling of loss and their feeling of sin and their feeling of rejection and he wanted them to know his love and his forgiveness and his salvation and his rescue.

And was able to offer them and is also able to offer us this great message of peace. This great message of peace that he gives.

And it's such a significant reality for us that that is the gospel message. It's a message that we receive light, the same as him, and life, spiritual light and life.

We receive that from him because of what he's come to do. He has come, he receives and takes our sins. Dies for them on the cross. We receive his glory, as it were, the glory of his life and his light.

[14 : 23] It's in 318 says, And we who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory and are being transformed into his likeness with ever increasing glory. And that's part of what it is to be a Christian is to begin to see God, to see his light and begin to see his life and be able to worship him because he is dealt with and is dealt with our sins on the cross and is dealing with our sins on a day to day basis.

And that enables us to have a peace that is a glorious peace that is mentioned here. Now a lot of spoken of peace, it's not inter-national peace.

It's not between nations that's spoken of here. It's not even primarily between individuals. The peace that's spoken of, which is maybe misunderstood at this time of year, peace on earth and goodwill to all men and that kind of nice kind of Christmasy, you know, mild wine kind of sentiment.

However, nice though it is, significant though it is. It's a much more significant piece than that. It's the peace that comes between ourselves and God because Jesus Christ bridges the gap.

And it's the peace that, you know, it's a peace that Philippians talks about that passes understanding. In other words, it's beyond just simply human peace.

[15 : 53] It's a peace that passes understanding and that verse that's spoken of in Philippians, it's very much in the context of recognizing one another and recognizing that in trouble and in difficulty there can still be a peace.

In other words, it's a peace that you don't, you wouldn't say something plus something equals peace. You know, good job, good family life equals peace.

It's not that kind of human formula of peace, formulaic peace. However significant that may be, it's a peace that's beyond and passes understanding because it's a peace in the midst sometimes of the most trying and difficult circumstances because it's a peace that says it doesn't matter what hurricane is happening around me because I know in my heart I'm at peace with God and if I die tonight I will go to be with him and live with him and him because my sins have been dealt with.

It's the dis-peace that causes the problems in this world. It's primarily it's the dis-peace of sin and our broken relationship with God that causes the problems.

And it's his peace that deals with dis-peace and gives us true peace. And that is what we recognize and know.

[17 : 11] It's a great message, this message of peace. It comes at a cost, comes at the cost of his own life, comes at the cost of the excruciating a cost of Jesus Christ coming and leaving the glories of heaven and emptying himself and dying in a cross and being misunderstood and facing the powers of darkness and sin and the grave and in the third day he raised again not for himself but because of us because he's dying in our place.

And that's a message that is a glorious message and one that enables us to worship. So if we are Christians today, we worship because our heart has been changed as we can see light and life from God in a way that we could never see before because we've come by faith to trust in Jesus Christ.

Therefore we can glorify God albeit in a rubbish way sometimes, don't we? We're really rubbish sometimes at the way we glorify God.

We do it in a very often a really self-centered way and sometimes in a self-righteous and arrogant way. Sometimes we just don't do it at all. We don't give them the rightful place.

We can be rubbish at giving them glory even though he's given it all to us and what he has done for us. But it's an amazing message, a message that is exclusive.

[18 : 34] It's a piece that's exclusive to those on whom his favour rests. That is those who will come to faith in him, those who will put their faith and trust in him.

And that's a great cry and that's a great challenge and that's a great call of the gospel. But it's also a great message in the way, in the ironic way it was given or in the ironic way to whom it was given.

It was given to the shepherds. It's great that we don't really understand in the culture in which we live and I'm not going to make parallels because I've tried to make parallels before and I just got into trouble.

And the shepherds were kind of non-class of people. Well, maybe I could use this in a very relevant example this week in terms of pre-apartheid or, yeah, apartheid South Africa when the blacks were non-persons.

They weren't given the vote, they didn't have any rights. They were non-people in many ways in the eyes of the governing classes. And in a similar way the shepherds were a bit like that and they weren't a high and mighty and good and important part of the community like Shepherds aren't Scotland.

[19 : 54] Because my brother-in-law's one. But in the Middle East they were an underclass, you know.

I don't know. I suppose they had to vote if there was such a thing in that society that way. And at the risk of alienating people here as well, it was like the women.

Women didn't have that position in that society. And it's interesting that at the very beginning of the Gospel that Jesus declares this amazing good news to the shepherds who are non-people.

And the first people to see Jesus Christ resurrected, the witnesses to the resurrection were women. Neither group of whom would have stood, their word would have stood in a court of law.

And yet the glory of God is revealed because he is putting right these wrongs. And he is recognizing who is important to him.

[20 : 52] And it's a great encouragement because the church is made up of non-people, isn't it? Generally speaking. People that are not that significant and important in the wider world.

We don't, many of us have a voice, not many rich, not many famous, not many influential people end up in the kingdom of God. And yet God reveals his truth to us and we are ecstatic about that reality.

And it is to ordinary people that the Gospel goes. Ordinary people. We are ordinary people. There's nothing special about us. And we don't need to be special to be loved by God.

We need simply to receive this message and receive this good news and know his peace in our lives. So the glory of God, I just very briefly can I mention the glory of worship as well.

Worship is an amazing thing. Sometimes it's not in our experience in terms of our worship of God, our public worship particularly I'm speaking about maybe, but also our private worship.

[22 : 00] But here's this picture of a kind of amazing, glorious event where this great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel of the Lord praising God.

It's an amazing picture. It's a beautiful picture of this. This innocent almost at some levels anonymous birth is paralleled with the most remarkable declaration from beyond this world.

If you've ever been in a really big crowd, you'll know what this is kind of pointing towards. The amazement of that crowd.

Daniel 7 speaks about a river of fire was flowing coming out from before him. Thousands upon thousands attended him. 10,000 times 10,000 stood before him. And then Hebrews 12, but you've come to Mount Zion to the heavenly Jerusalem to the city of the living God.

You've come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly. And there's this picture of just magnitude that is kind of reflecting the glory of God and the significance and importance of him.

[23 : 11] And that's good. And that's important when you see that because it reminds us of his significance and of the angelic beings. And I don't know if any of you have been watching on Saturday night the series that's on channel five called, it's not as it was, a mini series called The Bible.

It's a kind of production. The Bible story in four sections. So we're kind of missing out a great deal. But the one for me, the one really disappointing thing, it's not bad. I mean, it's not that it's pretty accurate most of the time, but sometimes it's a bit, some of the accents are a bit naff.

And what really disappoints me about it though is that, you know, they're obviously working on a limited budget. So you've only ever got about 25 people on scene, you know, and you miss the magnitude of, you know, the nearly a million Israelites that left Egypt across the red scene.

You've got a few hundred going about and it's not quite the same. You lose the magnitude, you lose the bigness, you lose the importance of it. I'm sure they could have computer generated it.

If you can do it for Lord of the Rings, why can't you do it for them? Maybe it costs more, I don't know. But it just seems a wee bit kind of naff just to have that. It doesn't really, it doesn't convey the picture that we have in the Bible.

[24 : 32] And in many ways, I would love to see a computer generated picture of this, because I think we can do great things with our imagination and with our minds and our creativity. But whatever we would do, it would never match the glory of the worship and the sound and the noise and the thunder of the heavenly host.

I've had the privilege a couple of times of going to Niagara Falls and as you become, as you come towards it, you just begin to hear the thunder of the water.

You almost feel it's a bit like that. People must have been walking near and you would hear this great thunder sound of the heavenly host. The heavens are open and they're worshipping God.

These angels are morally perfect beings, intelligent, proactive, glorifying God, worshiping Him, amazed, probably dumbfounded by what He's going to do.

But we know that they are part of this heavenly host that worship Him. And I do think it's a reminder to us again of the unseen world that's very real, according to scripture, but one that we often forget.

[25 : 45] We lose sight of. We're taking up so much with the tangible, again with the fallibility, or increasingly today, as regards the infallibility of science, with touch and with sight.

We forget that faith is a spiritual gift and we sometimes forget that we have this great, significant, important role as Christians to fix our eyes on what is unseen.

That means you need to work at that and I need to work at that. Not looking beyond the another year end, looking beyond flesh and blood, recognizing that it is a gift of grace, a gift of faith that we need God and we need Christ to see Christ.

And many people come and say to me, well, I would love to believe, but I can't believe. I love to believe this message, but I simply can't believe it does. It's not believable to me, even if I do want to, but I just can't believe.

Absolutely. We're all in that position. None of us can believe naturally just by working up a sense of belief. It's a gift of God to ask Him for the faith, to believe in this message and to see the things that are unseen and to worship Him and to be forgiven.

[27 : 05] But it should, I hope, the glory of this event remind us of our own worship and of enriching our worship.

I think sometimes a Sunday is interesting in St. Columbus. Sunday morning sometimes the worship, the praise, the warmth is sometimes missing a little bit.

It's just we get up, we're all made together, we haven't thought about things. Very often it's different at night. We spent the day together, we've eaten together, we've thought, you know, being in fellowship with one another, a bit more awake maybe at night.

But I think it's good for us, even before we come to church, to be enriched with the recognition that we're not alone when we worship, that it is a spiritual, a reflection of a spiritual worship that is already happening in heaven, that we are part of a great number of people who are worshiping and that the God who we worship is awake at 11 o'clock.

Now that He wants to hear our corporate worship together, He wants us to be prepared in heart, He wants us to be prayerful, and He wants us to recognize that He is worthy through Jesus Christ, through what Jesus has done, and that we don't come half-heartedly.

[28 : 31] And that doesn't really just mean the service, it just means our lives, because the Holy Son, Romans 12, speaks about our whole lives, we've been living sacrifices. So what's our life to be a worshipful life?

Because He is worthy. And so there's an enormous need for us to pray, to ask for God's help, to be prayerful people as Christians. And if you're not a Christian too, I also encourage you to pray and ask for God to open your eyes to see things in the way that He's opened our eyes, because none of us see naturally.

And pray, come together, pray, I can encourage you again on Wednesday evening, the elders are training. Please come to prayer anything on Wednesday night, I'm going to focus, maybe Murdo's going to lead it, and we're going to focus and pray particularly for the evangelistic service, carol service on Sunday evening.

Please pray, and keep on praying in your Christian life. So I guess the ultimate question is whether you can claim to experience the glory of God in your life through Jesus Christ, and sharing that light and life that He gives.

And ask you to consider the significance of that. And as a Christian, we would see that He's worthy. And the reason that we obey Him is not to earn favour with Him, but because He's good, and because He's worthy, and because He has done everything in order to give us light and life.

[30 : 07] So glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom His favour rests. Let's bow our heads briefly in prayer before we sing together. May God help us to glorify you in our lives, and to understand what that means.

Sometimes we make a kind of religious word that we maybe think is irrelevant to our day-to-day living, it's a kind of religious act.

But we know that Lord, to glorify something is simply to in many ways give it the preeminence that it has in our heart, and value and significance, whether it be our own life, our own career, our own family, or whatever it may be.

That which we love is that which we glorify. And so Lord help us to recognise that you are worthy of our worship, our praise, of our rightful adoration, give us eyes to see and faith to believe, and to rise above the transient and passing concerns that sometimes just absorb us completely.

Bless us as a people. Remember those whom we love. Help us to love you and love one another in such a way that is winsome and respectful and gracious and humble, and yet honest and true.

[31 : 44] And guide and keep us, we pray. Bless our praise. We often associate worship simply with singing. We know it's a hugely significant part.

And maybe sing just with all our hearts, from our hearts. But maybe also rise from here and worship you with our lives, and with our obedience and with grace.

For Jesus' sake. Amen.