

The Majesty of God

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Preacher: James Lapping

[0 : 00] Good morning and welcome to St Silas Church. My name is James and I'm the assistant curator at St Silas and it's lovely that you can join us here this morning. And our usual practice at St Silas in the Sunday teachings is to work through the Bible bit by bit, no bit skipped.

But we thought it might be helpful to have a little series on knowing God. And so this morning we are considering the majestic God. Let me pray for us as we start. So God we praise you that you are majestic. Please help us this morning to see you more clearly and fearfully as majestic. Amen. Well let's start with the story. It was a family tragedy. The eldest son was born blind. But despite all the hardships and burden the family had managed to raise him. He had made a possible living by begging and had managed to live just about independently. But then one day, hope beyond hope, the miracle worker Jesus was coming to town. Dare he dream, dare he hope that he would see again. And it's a story that's filled with heartache. That comes from John chapter 9. Years of suffering or struggles of sacrifice.

But when Jesus' disciples asked Jesus why the man was born blind, Jesus replies, this happened so that the works of God might be displayed. And by works here he means glory or majesty. And I wonder how this true story makes you feel about God. That God allows this man to go through years of suffering for the man's good naturally. But first and foremost to show God's glory and majesty. Maybe that's a bit of an idea that you struggle with. Maybe you balk at that idea. What's so great about God's majesty that this man has to suffer for so many years, you might ask. And for myself, for many years, I thought that believing in God was all about my own happiness. But it was only that I realized that life was not about me and my happiness, but about God and his majestic glory. And seeing that glory go out to the ends of the earth and being filled with joy and rejoicing in that glory, that I began to understand what the Christian life is really about.

[2 : 37] And that it started to make sense. You see, to put it another way, our thinking about God might be a bit back to front. That is, we might start with ourselves at the center and not with God when we start thinking about God. So here's how the theologian J.I. Packer puts it. But God's majesty is knowledge which Christians today largely lack. And that's one reason why our faith is so feeble and our worship is so flabby. We're modern people and modern people, though they cherish great thoughts about themselves, have as a rule very small thoughts about God. And when the person in church, let alone the person in the street, uses the word God, the thought is very rarely on divine majesty. And that quote might make us feel a little depressed or maybe a little bit mad even. But the good news is that we have a couple of moments this morning simply to lift our eyes a little higher and see God's glory and majesty, even though maybe a little dimly. And by majesty, we mean God's greatness or glory. Or as Packer puts it, the word majesty when applied to God is a declaration of his greatness and an invitation to worship.

And so the plan for this morning's talk is simply to look at Psalm 33. And we'll pick out three observations of how God shows us his majesty and why we should fear him as majestic. And then one thought on loving God as our only hope. So our first point there, our first observation is fear the Lord because he has made everything. Verses 6 to 9 of Psalm 33. And our key verses there are really verse 8 and 9.

Let me read them again for us. Let us fear the Lord. Let all the people of the world revere him. For he spoke and it came to be. He commanded and it stood firm. And by fearing there, we don't mean shaking or cowering in a corner, but we mean living our lives in reverence to God. So Martin, our senior minister, has a greater expression. I'm just going to steal it because it's quite helpful here. It means treating God not as almighty, but almighty. And why this reverence? Why should we fear and revere the Lord as majestic? And the first reason that the psalmist gives is that God created everything.

So sometimes I like to build stuff, maybe a bookshelf or something, usually from Ikea. And once my creation is complete, it's always a bit of a painful experience.

It always takes ages. There's always lots of mistakes in it. There's always lots of little bits that are left over that I don't know what to do with. And it almost always immediately falls apart. And it looks rather pathetic. But look at verse 6 in our reading.

[5 : 53] By the word, by his word, the Lord made the heavens. By the word of the Lord, the heavens were made. See, everything that you can see, God has made. And there's even stuff out there that we can't see that we haven't discovered yet that God has made. From the greatest galaxy far away, to the biggest star, to the tiniest itsy-bitsy ant, to the smallest sub-molecular bacteria.

God has made it all. And he made it simply like this. By the click of his fingers, by his word, in verse 9, for he spoke. And the psalmist there is really describing God as being absolutely and uncontestedly in control, as having power and authority that he can create merely by his word. God lips and creation comes into existence. It's an amazingly majestic picture. And then look at the end of verse 9. It stood firm. His creation is rock solid. It's established.

Not like my flimsy efforts that break and fall apart if I stare at them too hard. God's creation stands firm. And it stands indefinitely. And when I make something, I have to wait for the box to arrive from Ikea. And then I have to unpack the box and put it together. But notice that God makes everything out of nothing. And he speaks it into existence. God's power and authority in creation is that majestic. This is how the poet Gerald Manley Hopkins describes it. The world is charged with the grandeur of God. Everything that we see has been made by God out of nothing at a word. And the next invitation that we're given to worship God or observation that we can make on God's majesty in this passage is that we should fear the Lord because he does what he says in verses 10 to 12.

[8 : 12] So verse 11 reads, but the plans of the Lord stand firm forever and the purposes of his heart through all generations. And what the psalmist is telling us here is that God does everything he wants to perfectly always.

Nothing stands in his way. He always gets it done. And I wonder if you've ever had this experience where you've spoken to your spouse or your housemates or your boss or your flatmates.

And you'll say, I'll do that in a moment. But when that moment comes, that thing, whatever it is, maybe it's taking out the rubbish or something, hasn't been done. And I imagine at home right now there's some parents glancing down at their teenage kids and raising an eyebrow slightly.

And so here's how Crawford Lawrence defines greatness. He says, greatness is the measure of the distance between what you say and what you do.

And by that definition, Psalm 33 says that God is the greatest being in the universe. He does everything that he thinks of, always, every time, perfectly and completely.

[9 : 27] And consider for whose benefit this is that God accomplishes his purposes. Just look down at verse 12. Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord, the people who he chose for his inheritance.

It's for our benefit, for our joy. And because God always does what he says perfectly, we can be assured that God will accomplish all that he has promised for us.

And so when we think about God or think about the Bible, one thing we should understand is that everything God says in it, everything that God has said and promised, he will do.

And he has told us exactly what he is going to do. So we can't pretend that we don't know. And if we fear and worship God in this way, then we should change how we approach to listening to God in his word, in his Bible.

See, no other being in the universe communicates in this way, with complete knowledge that everything he says, he will do perfectly and completely.

[10 : 38] And so if we are wise, we would listen up. And the third invitation that we're given to worship God as majestic or observation that we have from this text is that we should fear the Lord because he sees everything in verses 13 to 19.

So just consider verses 13 to 15 there. From heaven the Lord looks down and he sees all mankind. From his dwelling place he watches all who live on the earth.

He who forms the hearts of all, who considers everything they do. And so what the psalmist is saying there is that God sees everything. Nothing is hidden from him.

You can't escape his gaze. So look at verse 16. The king might think he can get away with stuff and escape God's gaze because he has a great army. The warrior, who's very strong, think he might be able to bully his way out of a situation and that God might not see because of that.

And then you think of the person who's quite wily, who's quite swift and fast. They might think they can jump on their horse and in that way escape God's gaze.

[11:51] But God sees everything. You can't escape it. There's no place you can go where God will not see you. And so we need to realize there's nothing that we can do that is not seen by God.

We can't pull the wool over God's eyes. He sees everything. And so here's Packer again. A God whose presence and scrutiny I could evade would be a small and trivial deity.

But the true God is great and terrible. And just because he is always with me and his eye is always upon me, living becomes an awesome business when you realize that you spend every moment of your life in the sight and company of our all-knowing, ever-present Creator God.

But as terrible as this knowledge is, for those who oppose God, look at the comfort it gives for those who trust in the Lord. Just look down at verses 18 and 19 in our psalm.

But the eyes of the Lord are on those who fear him, on those whose hope is in his unfailing love to deliver them from death and keep them alive in famine.

[13:09] There is no hardship or suffering or struggle that you go through in life that God does not see and preserve you through. Every tear God sees, every sadness.

And knowing this should drive you to worship of our majestic God in thankfulness. And because God is majestic and the only truly great being in the universe, we should finally love the Lord in hope and awe in verses 20 to 22 there.

And so when we realize how awesome and majestic God is, that might cause us to become overly fearful of God in a negative way.

But look at how the psalmist ends off the psalm on God's majesty. So picking up there in verse 20, and we'll read through to the end of the psalm. We wait in hope for the Lord.

Here's our hope and our shield. In him our hearts rejoice, for we trust in his holy name. May our unfailing love be with us, Lord, even as we put our hope in you.

[14:22] And so the psalmist is saying that when they look at God's glory and majesty, they realize that the only hope in life is to trust in this majestic God and to find our joy and satisfaction in him alone.

Because he is the only reliable being in existence. He creates everything out of his powerful word, out of nothing. He accomplishes and does everything he says he'll do.

He sees everything, the good and the bad. And so when the psalmist considers this and sees God's majesty and realizes then that God loves them, they're blown away by that in awe and wonder.

And the reason for that worship is that God has loved them and he has loved us. And may your unfailing love be with us, Lord.

And that's not a request there, but it's a statement of fact. That even though God is the most majestic being in the universe, he loves his people.

[15:33] See, listen how the psalmist puts it in Psalm 8. Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth. And then what is the psalmist blown away by?

What is mankind? That you're mindful of them, human beings, that you care for them. It's amazing that such a great God can love a people who are so small.

And the truth is that when we seek our own glory and majesty in life, we realize that it's broken, that it's temporary and pitiful. But when we give God glory and live for his glory and majesty and we shape our lives around it and allow that glory to drive us, we become amazed and blown away that God considers and loves us, even though we are weak and limited and he is infinitely majestic.

We find our joy and our satisfaction and glory then, not in ourselves, but we find it in being with God and being one of God's people. And so we love God out of awe and wonder of that.

But the most remarkable thing about the gospel is that God reveals to us his glory and majesty in weakness and suffering in the man, Jesus Christ.

[16:51] You see, Jesus was majestic as a creator and ruler of creation when he was on the lake and the storm came.

He calmed the storm by a word with his friends. And then we notice that throughout Jesus' earthly ministry, Jesus fulfilled everything that was said in the scriptures.

He did exactly everything that he said he'd do. And then when the Pharisees, they said to themselves that Jesus is blaspheming by healing on the Sabbath in Matthew's gospel, Matthew describes Jesus as knowing their thoughts.

And so he goes on to say, why do you entertain evil thoughts in your hearts? You see, Jesus saw everything. And then when the apostle Peter reflects in 2 Peter on seeing Jesus transfigured, he says, we were eyewitnesses of his majesty.

And so in the gospel, we see a majesty that is veiled, but that does not make Jesus any less glorious and majestic. and is dying for us on the cross in our place.

[18 : 08] We see Jesus' majesty in that he willingly lays down his life for those who reject him, who are blinded and hopeless and helpless and stuck in their sin.

And it's a majesty that is not a self-seeking majesty, but it is still infinitely majestic and worthy of worship. And when Jesus returns, we'll see that majesty and glory unveiled as it truly is.

And then every person that ever lived or died will fall down and worship before Jesus in his glory. Amen. Great.

Let me pray for us as we close. So, Father, we thank you that you are a majestic God. We thank you that you sent your Son to die for us.

Please help us to worship you more and more each day. Please help us to shape our lives around your glory and live for your glory alone.

[19 : 15] Please, may we never detract from that glory in any way whatsoever. May we never take that glory for ourselves, that majesty. But may we always hold it up as yours alone and live for that in all things.

Looking forward to that time where we'll share with you in heaven in your glory. In Jesus' name. Amen.