

SERMONS

BY THE

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SERMON III.

THE GLORY OF GOD.

EXOD. xxxiii. 18.

And he said, I beseech thee, shew me thy glory.

AT the time when Moses spake these words, he had just received a remarkable proof of the favour of God towards him: God had punished the Israelites for the great sin which they had committed, in making and worshipping the idolatrous calves, at the very moment when he was delivering the Law in Mount Sinai. On this account he had destroyed many; he had threatened to visit their sin upon future generations; he had separated himself from them, and ordered his Tabernacle to be pitched without the camp; he had refused to go up with them into the land of Canaan; he had ordered them to put off their ornaments, and, in dread suspense, to await his judgment. In the midst of this indignation, Moses had ventured to prostrate himself before God, and to become an earnest intercessor in their behalf: he prayed for them, and prevailed. At his intercession, God was pleased to promise that he would not deprive them of his protection, but continue the visible tokens of his presence amongst them as before.

Emboldened by such gracious condescension, and mercy, Moses prefers a farther request which he had probably long, though in vain, sought an opportunity of preferring. “And Moses said, I beseech thee, *shew me thy glory.*”—What! it may be asked, had not Moses before this seen the glory of God? Had he not witnessed it when God appeared in Horeb, as a fire in the midst of a bush? Had he not seen it in the Pillar of the Cloud, which guided the Israelites in their passage from Egypt? Had he not seen it continually resting upon the Tabernacle, and appearing with awful brightness at its entrance? Had he not, in common with all the Israelites, seen it resting upon Mount Sinai, when the glory of the Lord covered the mountain, and the mountain appeared to burn with fire? Had he not seen it, in still greater effulgence, when he was called up into the mount, and entered within the cloud and the glory, and remained there forty days and forty nights convers-

ing with God?—He had; and, therefore, it is plain that Moses meant, by the glory he desired to see, something far surpassing the splendour he had already witnessed; something which should be more expressly characteristic of the God of the universe. He wished, probably, to see God in his proper form, under such an appearance as that in which he manifests himself to the blessed inhabitants of heaven.

This request of Moses, it may be, was founded on a misapprehension, both of the nature of the Divine glory, and of the capacity of man to behold it. Yet God was pleased graciously to answer it; at once instructing him in the true nature of the Divine glory, which is that of his moral attributes; and intimating, that, in the present state of man, he was incapable of beholding the proper glory of the Divine Essence. “And he said, Thou canst not see my face; for there shall no man see me and live.” Yet, that he might in some measure gratify the desires of his faithful servant, he added, “Behold, there is a place by me; and thou shalt stand upon a rock; and it shall come to pass, while my glory passeth by, that I will put thee in a cleft of the rock, and will cover thee with my hand while I pass by; and I will take away mine hand, and thou shalt see my back parts, but my face shall not be seen:”—*i.e.* I will give thee such a lowered representation of my glory, as thou mayest be able to bear; a representation which may be compared to seeing only the back of a person, instead of surveying the whole figure.

It is a natural mistake to judge of glory by the outward appearance. Hence we are apt, at first sight, when we hear of the glory of God, to conceive only of some external glory; something bright and dazzling, like the radiance of the sun in the firmament. The glory of God, in this respect, might indeed sufficiently display his infinite superiority to all other beings. His glory, even in this lower sense, is represented by St. John as illuminating the boundless regions of heaven: nor could man any more endure the splendour with which the Divine Majesty might clothe himself, than the eye could endure the brightness of the meridian sun. But from this lower sense of the word it is necessary that we should turn our attention to one which is far more elevated and sublime. Indeed, the aim of all Scripture is to wean our thoughts from the objects of sense, from what is material or external, and to fix them upon things spiritual and internal.

We rise to a nobler and juster sense of the term, THE GLORY OF GOD, when we consider it as consisting in the perfection of his attributes. In these his glory pre-eminently consists. Let us proceed with reverence to contemplate them.—His attributes are either his *natural* or his *moral* qualities.

I. Consider, first, his NATURAL attributes.

1. God is *self-existent*.—All other beings are created, and created by Him. He is the great Parent of existence. There was a time when other beings were not; and there was a period when they began to be, and to possess life and the various powers of life. And they then became, not what they chose to be, but what he made them. Their powers and faculties also are limited, and capable of increase. Their knowledge increases, their perfections advance. But God remains the same; unchangeable; incapable of increase or progress in the perfection of his attributes. What he is at this moment, he always was, when as yet there was no created being.

2. Reflect next upon his *Omnipresence*.—He fills heaven and earth. He is equally in all places. Other beings reside where he has placed them; in heaven, on earth, or in hell. They have their proper and peculiar sphere of action. He alone has no place, no sphere, no limitations. His perception, agency, power, and wisdom are operating in every part of the universe, with as much perfection as if they were concentrated in a single spot—as though he were nowhere present and had no existence but there exclusively. He pervades all things, he comprehends all things; yet is pervaded by nothing, comprehended by none.

3. Survey his *Power*.—He is almighty, and can do everything. These words are easily used; but what do they imply? How inconceivable is that infinity of power which they attempt to describe! He can do, instantly and perfectly, all things which are feasible. He can act without agents or instruments. All other beings, animate or inanimate, are but his instruments to fulfil his will. He speaks, or wills, and it is done. He said, “Let there be light, and there was light.” No other beings can create; they work with the materials which he bestows. They combine and modify these: but they cannot create: they cannot form what they please out of nothing. He needs the help of no other being: indeed, the strength of all other beings, annexed to his own, would be no addition to it; for they possess none which they do not derive from him. His powers alone are underived. He is the original Fountain of his own perfections.

4. Contemplate, also, the infinity of his *Knowledge*.—All things in heaven or on earth he distinctly and fully observes and knows. Every truth, in all its bearings, in all its recesses, in all its fulness, is perfectly unfolded to his mind. He knows the smallest things as well as the greatest; surveys and remembers all the actions, and all the thoughts, of every one of the lowest of his creatures, as well as of the highest. There is nothing so minute as to be overlooked; nothing so vast as not to be comprehended by him without la-

bour or effort. Amidst attention to every object in all his boundless dominions, he alone is never fatigued by the intentness of his observations, nor distracted by the variety of his knowledge. All things are equally naked, equally plain, equally revealed to him. The most secret recesses of the most secret mind lie exposed to his penetrating glance. Nor is his knowledge confined to things past or present. In this it is preeminent, that he also knows everything future. All the thoughts and all the actions of all the beings who shall be living millions of ages hence, are now present to him, with as much certainty as are the events transacting at this moment. Yet no confusion disturbs his mind. He is all mind. It is of the essence of his nature to be omniscient.

5. Consider further his *Wisdom*.—He plans and directs all the events which occur in the universe. His plans are invariably pursued by all the creation, devils as well as angels fulfilling his will; all beings, however unconscious, or however averse, acting as his instruments, and accomplishing his purposes. His plans never fail, can never be frustrated. He alone is never disappointed, never deceived, never surprised. All the designs of his adversaries are foreseen, all converted by him to his own glory.

6. View, lastly, the immeasurable extent of his *Bounty*.—By him all things subsist. All creatures in earth and heaven are replenished out of the storehouse of his beneficence. They all wait on him for everything they need, and derive from him everything they enjoy. He gives, to all, exceeding abundantly above what they can ask or think, or can ever conceive: he gives freely, neither expecting nor needing a return: yet the treasures of his bounty are not exhausted; they are not even diminished. Millions of generations yet unborn will equally be dependent upon him for the supply of their wants, and will equally partake of his boundless beneficence. Every archangel is as much a pensioner on his bounty as the meanest creature. All creatures are but parts of his family, for which he daily provides, “giving to each their portion in due season.”

And now, when we consider merely these *natural* perfections of the Deity, how sublime an idea do they present of the majesty of his glory! In how many, and in what important particulars do all creatures differ from him; their powers from his powers, their excellency from his excellency, their glory from his glory! The distinction between them is not only great—it is infinite. They do not even approach to him. Their inferiority is not that of degree only—it is that of kind. He is everything; they are comparatively nothing: he possesses everything; they possess only what he pleases to communicate. Things of a like kind may be compared; but what comparison

can possibly be instituted between finite and infinite, between time and eternity, between matter and spirit? Were all the myriads of creatures which now exist by his power, whether angels or archangels, principalities, thrones, or dominions, to be weighed in the balance against him, they would be found lighter than vanity. All their excellence would be as a drop in the ocean, compared with his excellence and the glory of his perfections. All that he possesses is original, is self-existent, is unlimited; what they possess is dependant, is finite. Hence we see why all creatures ought to seek exclusively his glory; and why he may justly, and without vanity, seek his own. There is, properly speaking, no glory anywhere but in God; and whatever glory other beings possess is but an emanation, a spark, derived from him, and communicated to them. It is his glory which is seen and admired in their glory.

II. But the glory of God derived from what may be termed, by way of distinction, his natural attributes, is not the highest description of his glory, or even that in which it properly consists. A being might be powerful, and wise, and bountiful, without a disposition to direct that power and bounty necessarily and invariably in a right and proper channel. It is therefore the disposition to make a proper use of power, and not power itself, in which true glory consists. In answer, therefore, to the request of Moses, that God would show him his glory, the Lord replies, "I will make all my goodness pass before thee, and I will proclaim the name of the Lord before thee." And when in the morning the Lord descended in the cloud, and stood with him on Mount Sinai, he proclaimed his name: "And the Lord passed by before him, and proclaimed, The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth; keeping mercy for thousands; forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin; and that will by no means clear the guilty; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children's children, unto the third and fourth generation." It was the goodness, therefore, and holiness of God which distinguished his character, which constituted his peculiar glory, and properly supplied his name. These, indeed, as much excel the glory of mere power or wisdom, as mind excels matter. Let us, then, contemplate these as constituting the real glory of God.

1. His *Goodness*.—The goodness of God is that attribute by which all his other perfections are directed to the best possible end. It is that which renders his wisdom, power, and presence, not only not dangerous, but in a supreme degree beneficial to the whole creation. Now, the goodness of God,

like all his other attributes, is infinite. No one can comprehend its extent, can measure its height or fathom its depth: it passeth all knowledge.” “High as the heavens are above the earth, so high are his thoughts” of love and mercy “above our thoughts, and his ways above our ways.” This is true glory—that the most powerful of all Beings should be the most generous; the most lofty, at the same time the most merciful; the most glorious, the most condescending. No finite creature ever was, or can be, as long-suffering and merciful as God. It is the glory of his nature to be exempt from the elements of those passions which tend to diminish the exercise of immeasurable love. “God is love;” pure, unvarying love; love in its essence. No jealousies, nor envy, nor selfishness, nor rivalry, nor private wants, nor poverty of means, can ruffle his mind, or limit the full exercise of his love. But, to understand this subject, we should be translated to heaven. We must see God as he is, and know what he deserves and requires from his creatures; we must understand the evil of sin, and judge of its tendency in its remote effects, if we would learn how gracious and long-suffering, how slow to anger and of how great goodness the Lord is, in passing by the most aggravated provocations of his creatures. Then, and then alone, could we be prepared justly to appreciate the goodness of God. O God of love and mercy! so display to our minds thy goodness and love, that we may ever admire and adore thy transcendent glory displayed in them, and may love thee with all our hearts, and souls, and strength!

2. But the *Holiness* of God forms another principal feature in his glory: He “will by no means clear the guilty.”—Here, again, we discover a tremendous infinity in his perfections. His justice and holiness are as infinite as his goodness. His mercy is not the weak mercy which cannot punish. He does not threaten, without meaning to execute his threats, No. His punishments are awful, irremediable, eternal. To this part of our subject we must approach with trembling. How terrible is his wrath! It is the wrath of the Almighty! Here, like the angels who are represented as singing “Allelujah” while the smoke of the torments of the condemned ascends, we must adore what we dare not contemplate, and submit to what we cannot avert.—Yet, let me suggest, that the holiness of God, however pure, and his justice, however severe, may be the mere modifications of goodness— inseparably connected with it, and indispensably necessary to its very existence. For what is *holiness*, but the supreme regard to what is just and right? It is equity in the highest perfection. It is the security of the creature, that the power of the Creator will never be abused, never misemployed. It is the defence and the ornament of goodness. It is goodness directed to the purest and best ends;

goodness enlightened by reason and sanctioned by wisdom. Holiness is therefore the glory even of goodness itself.

3. But is *Justice* also a modification of goodness? Yes, strictly so. It is the pledge of its being continued to the creation. Justice towards some is the security of all. Were an indiscriminate mercy to be shown to all, sin would prevail, and soon prostrate the mercy of God, and efface from the universe every trace of his goodness. That God may continue to be merciful, he must be just. That the universe may enjoy the most perfect and lasting happiness, under the mild effulgence of paternal kindness, it is absolutely necessary that vice should be eradicated and the offender be deprived of the power of contaminating others. Justice to a few is, in fact, mercy to all. Nor let it be forgotten, that his mercy and holiness, thus guarded by his justice, become in their turn the guards of his justice itself. His wisdom directs his justice, his mercy guides and proportions it. In such hands and with such guards, who will ever arraign his equity, or doubt the continuance and perfection of his love?

Thus, my brethren, have I ventured, under the consciousness of that ignorance and infirmity which must attend all human endeavours upon such a subject, to direct your attention to the glory of God. But though the subject is infinite, and infinitely transcends all human powers, it does not follow that we ought not to study it, and to endeavour to familiarize ourselves with it.

In everything which relates to God, we find ourselves ever learning, yet never able to come to a perfect knowledge. And this is, perhaps, the condition even of angels. Even they may only know in part, and comprehend in part, the glory of God. Their knowledge of it is perpetually advancing, their admiration enlarging, their adoration of it becoming more profound. Like them, we must endeavour to adore what we cannot comprehend, and to study what we can only imperfectly understand. And we are encouraged by the example of Moses in this pursuit. The desire to see the glory of God, though evidently conceived and expressed under some misconception of its nature, was acceptable to God, and rewarded by the noblest conceivable display of the Divine Nature. And thus every attempt to know God better, and to love him more, will be accepted and rewarded by him. Abraham desired to see the day of Christ, and “he saw it, and was glad.” Let us, then, pray earnestly that we also may behold the glory of God.—But where is it to be contemplated? I answer, Revelation is intended to display it. In the Gospel, especially, we see, as in a mirror, the glory of the Lord. There an exhi-

bition of it has been presented, such as even to astonish the angels, and make them stoop from heaven to contemplate it. Would you see the glory of infinite Mercy and infinite Love transcendently displayed? Behold Jesus Christ; see the Son of God freely given by the Father to dwell with us, to suffer for us, and to bring us to glory. In Christ is the Divine glory transcendently displayed. He was the “brightness of his Father’s glory, and the express image of his person!” He that “hath seen Him, hath seen the Father.” Let us then study to know the glory of the Gospel. In that we shall perceive the glory of the Lord; and as the face of Moses, when he beheld this glory on the Mount, was illuminated by it, so we “shall be changed into the same image, as by the Spirit of the Lord.” The knowledge of God is to be our grand study through eternity. Here then, in this lower school, let us begin, as Christians, to learn the lesson which, as glorified spirits, we shall perfect in the realms of glory.