January 21, 2024

Rick Myatt

IT’S TIME FOR THE CONFETTI

John 17:5

If you ever go to Key West, there is something you might see. Every night at Mallory Square in that town they have a sunset celebration. Musicians, performers, artists, food vendors all show up a couple hours before sunset. And crowds of people attend. The sunsets there are spectacular. But every night something curious happens. When the sun sinks below the horizon, people applaud. Who are they clapping for? They may not even know. They have seen something glorious, awesome, and they feel the need to respond.

I can understand that. Laurie and I wanted to send out Christmas cards this past Christmas. We didn’t last year because we were going through a very tough time that pretty much drained our energy and enthusiasm for such things. So this year we were determined to send out cards with the now common family pictures. We hoped to get some pictures to put in our cards when we went to Disneyland in November with our entire tribe. That tribe now includes our 6 grandchildren, 3 of whom are under the age of 3. What are the chances we could actually get everyone in one place, remaining still and looking in the right direction amid the crowds and craziness of Disneyland? It turned out the chances were zero, which we should have known. So we had to settle for a picture of the whole clan in our living room. It was better than nothing. But we also wanted to include a picture of just Laurie and me, since the card was from us. I came up with the bright and unoriginal idea of getting a picture of us in front of our Christmas tree. That proved to be very disappointing. The best we could get was blah and boring. We were down to the last day we could get a picture in time to make cards with it, and I came up with another bright idea. Let’s go down to the beach. We live right next to a beautiful and dramatic setting for photos, the Pacific Ocean. We scrambled to get down there in time for sunset. We had no idea if the sunset would be any good, but the ocean is always a big win in pictures. We got down to the beach and the sunset was terrific. We ended up taking a lot of pictures. The scenery was spectacular, captivating. Looking at the beautiful sunset over the ocean just causes something to well up inside that I can’t even name. It somehow touches our souls and causes us to want to grab and hold onto it, even though we know we can’t. It turns out that seeing that glory and being in awe of it is something that every human needs. We’ll get a glimpse of that from John 17:5.

JESUS LIVES IN GLORY

We saw last week that Jesus had asked the Father to glorify him. He was about to fulfill the mission that had been the reason for his entire life by being executed on a cross. Crucifixion was not a glorious thing. Yet in Jesus’ case it turned out to be glorious, for it revealed who he really was. Though his death and resurrection he was proven to be God in human form. It showed him to be utterly faithful to his Father, to be driven by unimaginable love for unlovely people, to be filled with grace, but also to have power even over death.

When the truth about Jesus’ character was revealed at the cross and the tomb, he was glorified. What he was and what he did was truly glorious. But in verse 5 he prayed that the Father would also glorify him in his presence when Jesus returned to him with the same glory he had before the world began. That is an astounding statement. He said he was with the Father before the world began. There are people who believe the world is only a few thousand years old, perhaps 10,000. The prevailing view of our culture is that the earth is around 4.5 billion years old. Which is it? I don’t know, I wasn’t there at the time, even though I may look like I was. Jesus was at most 33 years old. If even the most conservative figure of 10,000 years was correct, how could Jesus have talked about being with the Father before the world began? If the earth is billions of years old this statement becomes even more outrageous.

This takes us back to the very beginning of John’s biography of Jesus. In John 1:1, referring to Jesus as “the Word,” he wrote, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God.” He was talking about the beginning like in Genesis 1 in the beginning. The beginning of time. Whether thousands, millions or billions of years ago, Jesus was there! In verse 3 speaking of Jesus, John wrote, “Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made.” John claimed Jesus was there at creation, and that without Jesus nothing would have been made.

Paul wrote the same thing in Colossians 1:16 where he said of Jesus, “In him all things were created in heaven and on earth.” He went on to say, “All things have been created by him and for him.” In other words, Jesus existed before he was born! Long before. Thousands, maybe even millions or billions of years before. He wasn’t named Jesus until that very first Christmas, but he existed. As a grown man he knew that he existed before he was born.

One of the things I hope to get a chance to talk to him about some day is what Jesus, the man, knew and when he knew it. I can’t help but wonder when he became aware of the fact that he existed before the creation of the universe. Was he 2 years old? Was he 12 years old? Was he 18? We don’t know. Neither do we know how much he knew about his pre-existence. Here he reveals that he was aware he lived in glory, but how much did he know about that? I hope to find out some day when we can talk to him face to face.

What a strange thing that must have been for him. My earliest memory comes from when I was 3 years old. I recall being on a train when we were traveling back to visit my grandparents in Cleveland, Ohio. It isn’t much of a memory, almost more of a snapshot. I don’t recall anything other than looking out that train window. Other than that I don’t have a lot of memories of my childhood. I remember playing with the other boys on our street. I remember our dog, Specs, and our house. But other than that I have few specifics. I can only remember my third grade teacher, Miss Lemert, and my teacher in 5th and 6th grade, Mrs. Shrader. I think I remember her because her son was a star football player for the despised cross town rivals, the Bakersfield High Drillers. How strange that Jesus had at least some memory of his existence before the universe was created.

It is important that we take note of the fact that Jesus existed in glory prior to creation, and that when he left this earth and returned to his Father, he returned to that existence in glory. Jesus exists in glory even today. When I picture Jesus in my mind, I think of him much the way he is depicted in the current TV series, *The Chosen*. He didn’t look any different than anyone else. As a woodworker who walked everywhere he went, I’m pretty sure he was very strong and in good shape, but he looked like just another guy. He was a joyful, loving, strong personality with a terrific sense of humor, but very human.

I think God wants us to think of him like that. He chose to reveal himself in a form that we can relate to. He didn’t come in some frightening, intimidating, overpowering way, because he wanted us to draw near to him. Jesus made a point we saw in chapter 15 of calling us his friends. He revealed himself in a way that we can feel loved and safe in his presence.

However, that is not the sum total of the story about Jesus. As the Creator of all Jesus was and is an inconceivably powerful being. C. S. Lewis made the point that we don’t create things. We make things, we build things, but we don’t create them out of nothing. We have to have some material to start with. I occasionally hear of someone making something out of scratch. That means that they didn’t get the ingredients out of a box or as part of a kit. What exactly is scratch? I don’t know, but it seems to be the raw material for all kinds of different things. I’ve heard of people making bread, pasta, pie, cake even refried beans from it. Versatile stuff apparently. But even when we make something from scratch, we are making it out of something. We have material to start with. Before Jesus created, there was no material. Nothing material existed. He didn’t make the universe out of scratch. He made it out of nothing!

Jesus exists in glory. What does that mean? It means he exists in a way that his true, all powerful, majestic, magnificent nature is unveiled. He can be seen clearly for who he is, and it wis massively awesome. Yes, Jesus was a human being who walked on this planet, who ate and slept and talked with people like every other human being. But he is also the Almighty Creator who once lived in unimaginable glory and now does today. We get glimpses of this in some passages of Scripture.

In Acts 26:13 Paul was on trial before King Agrippa and was telling the story of how he was transformed from being a violent hater of Jesus all things having to do with him, to being the most outspoken preacher of the good news of grace through Jesus, the most prolific planter of churches in the name of Jesus of his day, maybe of all time. He said he was traveling to Damascus in Syria to run down some followers of Jesus that he had heard were there, when Jesus confronted him. He said, “About noon, King Agrippa, as I was on the road, I saw a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, blazing around me and my companions.” Jesus could have appeared to him as the woodworker from Nazareth. Paul would have known who he was. He had opposed Jesus during his ministry. That would have been enough to rattle Paul right down to his bones, because Paul thought Jesus was dead. Seeing him alive after watching his execution would have been earth shaking.

But Jesus didn’t do that. Instead he appeared to Paul as a brilliant light blazing out of heaven. Paul said the light was brighter than the sun. That would be incredibly bright and powerful. Just try taking a look at the sun some time. I have a recollection of something that happened decades ago when I was in college. It was a sunny spring day when I was playing in a baseball game. I was playing first base and the batter hit a pop fly in foul territory to my left. I tracked the ball over near the fence that surrounded the field, but as it was descending the ball got right in line with the sun. I tried to block the sun with my glove, but then I couldn’t see the ball. I tried to move to change the angle so I could see it, but it didn’t help and finally I had to close my eyes because the light was too painful to look at. At that point, self-preservation took over. I was in the descent path of that ball and I couldn’t see where it was, so there was a good chance it was going to hit me in the head. I ducked away to avoid getting hurt, but a remarkable thing happened. As I was ducking out of the way I felt the ball smack into the pocket of my glove. It was probably the second luckiest catch I made in my baseball playing days. But after that my eyes were watering like crazy, and I couldn’t see much. It took a while for my eyesight to return to normal. In Paul’s encounter it wasn’t the sun, it was Jesus and he was shining even brighter than the sun. The effect was truly powerful. Paul was blinded for 3 days.

Why did Jesus appear to Paul that way? I think he wanted to impress on Paul his true identity. Do you remember when God first appeared to Moses to call him to do the historical, monumental thing of leading the people of Israel out of captivity in Egypt? How did he reveal himself? He could have just appeared as a human being. God did that with Abraham. But Exodus 3:2 says he appeared to Moses as flames of fire, as a bright light from a bush. God revealed himself as brilliant light.

Jesus was going to call Paul to an equally difficult and monumental task. So he revealed himself as brilliant light to enable Paul see that what happened to Moses was happening to him. In 1 Timothy 6:16 Paul said of God, the King of kings and Lord of lords, that he “alone is immortal and who lives in unapproachable light.” He understood, this is who Jesus is.

John was given a glimpse of Jesus in glory. In Revelation 1:15-17 he wrote that he saw, “among the lampstands was someone like a son of man, dressed in a robe reaching down to his feet and with a golden sash around his chest. The hair on his head was white like wool, as white as snow, and his eyes were like blazing fire. His feet were like bronze glowing in a furnace, and his voice was like the sound of rushing waters. In his right hand he held seven stars, and coming out of his mouth was a sharp, double-edged sword. His face was like the sun shining in all its brilliance. When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead.” The common reaction to people who are confronted with him in glory is to fall down and cower before him because he is so awesome and powerful.

Glory has two aspects to it. It has an attributive aspect and it has an inherent aspect. The attributive aspect means we can attribute glory to someone or something. We can give glory. A couple of weeks ago Laurie and I watched the NCAA national championship football game between Washington and Michigan. When the game was over they brought the Michigan coach Jim Harbaugh and a couple of key players onto a stage set up on the field. Confetti was all over the place, people were cheering, and they handed the coach the championship trophy and allowed him to speak. Same with the players. They were being given glory. They were being praised for what they had done.

Jesus right now exists in glory because he is being praised and honored for who he is and what he has done. Revelation 5:13 says John saw Jesus in heaven. He says every creature in heaven and on earth was saying, “To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honor and glory and power, forever and ever.” He is being given glory.

The inherent aspect of glory is that someone or something has something about them that is glorious. You might think of it as radiance. Some magnificent thing shines out from them. We have a neighbor who refers to Laurie as “radiant Laurie” because she sees the joy, love and beauty that emanate from her. An inherent glorious thing like what Laurie has provokes observers to give glory.

Our natural response to something that is truly glorious is to give it glory. In fact, we can hardly stop ourselves from giving glory to that which is truly glorious. It is a powerful compulsion we feel inside that just springs up and can’t be resisted. A month or two ago I woke up very early on Sunday morning as I usually do. It was still dark outside, but I get up to prepare for church. When I looked out the windows i was treated to a spectacular sight. The sun was not fully up yet, but the light from it was hitting the clouds. The sunrise was indescribable. The sky was blazing with brilliant reds, oranges and pink colors. If a painter had painted an accurate picture of it you would say it’s not realistic because the colors were too vivid and glowing to be believed. You’d think he way overdid the colors. When I saw it I stopped and said out loud, “Oh, wow. Unbelievable.” There was no one there to hear me, but it just automatically came out, because that sunrise was glorious, and the instant response to the glorious is to give glory. When Laurie got up a bit later I said, “You should have seen the sunrise this morning. It was gorgeous.” I was giving it glory. I had to tell someone about it. I’m generally not a big fan of sunrises. I’d rather be in bed asleep when they happen. Give me a sunset over the ocean. But this one was worth getting out of bed for. It was glorious. I’m still giving it glory today.

At this point you might be thinking that this talk of Jesus in glory makes you a bit uncomfortable. You like being able to relate to him as a friend who knows you, understands you and loves you. He is that, for sure. But it is also important for us to see him as the King of Kings as well. In fact, we need to see his glory.

GIVING GLORY IS ESSENTIAL

As I have just pointed out, the instant reaction to something or someone truly glorious is to be in awe and give glory. It turns out that this is important for us for several reasons. The fact is that we humans are created to be in awe. God has built into us a need to see glory, to be in awe of it and praise it.

An article in the journal *Best Health* a couple of years ago referred to Jennifer Stellar, a professor of psychology at the University of Toronto. With the name Stellar it’s too bad she isn’t an astronomer or astrophysicist. Now that would have been awesome. Anyway, she said that people in our culture are very stressed. She said that one of the most potent solutions for our stress is awe. She said when we experience awe, which is defined as the positive emotion we feel when in the presence of something so vast we can’t immediately understand it, it quiets the ego. An article in *Psychology Today* a few years ago echoed that message. It quoted one physicist who was talking about awe at the universe and said, “Awe gives you an existential shock. You realize you are hardwired to be a little selfish, but you are also dependent on something bigger than yourself…It removes the tyranny of the ego.” When we are stressed, seeing the glory of Jesus and being in awe of him is one of the best things we can do.

Being in awe of Jesus, seeing his glory, not only removes he tyranny of the ego, it enables us to trust him more. Seeing his glory reminds us that he is indeed the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. He is the ruler of all. It reminds us that as Paul wrote in Philippians 2:9-11, “God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father.” This is enormous for us when we go through the difficulties of this life, when it seems to be arrayed against us, even hopeless. When we see Jesus as he is, we can rest easy even in the most ominous of situations.

When we are in awe of Jesus because we see his glory it humbles us. It causes us to submit to him and do his will. It changes us. News man Bill Moyers related a conversation he had with Jacob Needleman that showed the effect that awe can have on us. Needleman is a philosopher and professor. He had the privilege of doing something that would have been on my bucket list, except I didn’t have one at the time. He got to witness in person the launch of Apollo 17, the final lunar landing mission back in 1972. He described what happened. It was a night launch. He said before the launch there were cynical reporters all over the place, drinking beer, telling jokes, just passing the time until they could write their stories. He said when the launch of the 35 story tall Saturn V rocket came the first thing he could see was an extraordinary orange light so bright it was at the limit of what you could bear. The light illuminated everything around that night. Then he could see the enormous rocket slowly rising in what was, at first, total silence because it took some time for the sound to reach them. Then came a roar, a WHOOM so powerful it felt like it entered right into him. He said, “You can practically hear the jaws dropping. The sense of wonder fills everyone in the whole place as this thing goes up and up. The first stage ignites this beautiful blue flame. It becomes like a star but you realize there are human beings on it. And then it is gone, and there is total silence. People just get up quietly, helping each other up. They’re kind. They open doors. They look at one another, speaking quietly. They were suddenly moral people because of the sense of wonder.”

True awe when we see the glory of Jesus Christ will change us. It will humble us and make us more godly people. But there’s another thing it will do. It will enable us to have joy and to love Jesus even more. When we see him as he is and know he loves us and wants to be our friend, it is going to give us great joy and cause us to want to love him. When we experience something glorious, it gives us joy and appreciation.

I really botched it when I proposed to Laurie. I know of guys who go through elaborate plans for proposals getting their beloved in just the right beautiful place, and having a ring hidden where they can find it, that kind of creative, thoughtful thing. I asked Laurie to marry me while sitting in her car in a parking lot at the school we were attending at about 9 in the morning. I didn’t have a ring. I didn’t get down on one knee. We didn’t get any pictures of this momentous even in our lives. Talk about failure to be romantic. Give me an F on that one. My problem was I didn’t plan to ask her to marry me. In fact, I wanted no part of that because I knew if I did ask her she would be hurt and say no. All I can say is that God stepped in and changed everything, and when I blurted “Will you marry me” she said yes. I was stunned at first. Shocked I even said those words because I absolutely did not intend to say them, but even more stunned that accepted that absurd proposal. But very quickly I was ecstatic. I was in awe. It was a glorious moment, the most glorious of my life up to that point. Fortunately, she felt the same. We both had class to go to, but there was no way we could just go to class. We had to celebrate. We were filled with overwhelming joy. We had to tell somebody. We had to share this awesome news, because sharing it is what you must do when something glorious happens. In fact, C. S. Lewis wrote in his *Reflections On The Psalms*, “We delight to praise what we enjoy because praise not merely expresses but completes the enjoyment; it is its appointed consummation.” We attribute glory to the glorious and awesome because it completes our joy.

Awe of Jesus, seeing his glory and praising him for it, brings joy, it brings humility, it changes us, it gives us hope in all situations and reason to trust, and it inspires us. If something isn’t awesome, it will never inspire us. We only get inspired by that which is awesome. God wants us to live inspired lives, and the only way that happens is when we behold the glory of Jesus and are in awe of him.

APPLICATION

The question is, how can we be more aware of the glory of Jesus? Here are a few practical suggestions.

GET IN TOUCH WITH GOD’S CREATION

I live in a house built by humans. I travel around in a car built by humans. I drive on roads built by humans. I work on a computer made by humans. I get my time sucked up too often by a phone made by humans. Everything our culture tells us is focused on what humans do. Everything I do is pretty much focused on humans. Our society is designed to protect us from the perils of nature. Where we live we see some birds and we might encounter an occasional coyote or a possum, but that’s about the extent of our contact with nature. About 20 years ago our whole family went to Nashville to celebrate the 100th birthday of our grandmother. One evening we went out to dinner and then returned to our hotel. We parked at the edge of the parking lot, which was bordered by some thick woods. When we got out of the car our kids encountered something they’d never seen before. There were all these little lights flitting around in the woods, winking on and off. It was the first time in their lives they had seen fireflies. Carissa said with great delight, “It’s just like the Pirates of the Caribbean!” Her reality was seeing fake fireflies on that ride at Disneyland. She was pleased to see that nature mimicked her reality pretty closely. I realized we live in a world dominated by people and the stuff they make.

Some of the most beautiful songs of praise to God were created by David. We call them Psalms. While David had some whopping failures, he was a man with God’s own heart. He loved God and in Psalm 27 prayed that the one thing he asked was to live in God’s presence forever. Think about where that heart came from. In his early years David was a shepherd. He spent much of his early life out in the fields. It was quiet, with few distractions. He had a great deal of time to see the marvel of what God has made.

In Psalm 29:3-8 David wrote, “The voice of the Lord is over the waters; the God of glory thunders, the Lord thunders over the mighty waters. The voice of the Lord is powerful; the voice of the Lord is majestic…The voice of the Lord strikes with flashes of lightning. The voice of the Lord shakes the desert.” That came out of David’s experience of being out in the fields when a thunderstorm rolled in. He used poetry, figures of speech, to relate how that storm got him in touch with the awesome power of God. If you’ve ever been in close proximity to a lightning strike and the accompanying blast of thunder you will understand what David felt. It is literally earth shaking. It is awesome. It will help us get in touch with God’s power, his love, his creativity, if we can spend a little time in his creation. I see this in Laurie. She marvels at birds and flowers, and when she sees a magnificent sunset, she doesn’t just say, “That’s nice,” she sees God’s hand in making something beautiful.

WORSHIP THE LORD WITH HIS PEOPLE

There is something spiritual, powerful that happens when we worship God together. When we sing God’s praise together it touches something deeply in us and reminds us of the truth about him. It gives us a glimpse of his glory.

LISTEN TO GOD’S MUSIC

Laurie and I both have a memory from years ago. We were on vacation on Maui. One evening we had gone out to dinner and we were driving back to the place we were staying. It was a spectacularly beautiful evening. The moon was out and it was that tropical warm evening that just puts you at ease. We had the radio on in the car and as we were driving along by the ocean a song we often sing came on. It was Chris Tomlin’s *How Great Is Our God*. It was beautiful. Both of us got choked up. The song got us very much in touch with the glory of God and touched us deeply. We have never forgotten it. The Bible is full of instruction to sing praise to God because music touches a lot more than just our brains. It goes to our heart. It helps us experience the glory of God right down to our souls.

SEEK GOD’S GLORY

We can do that by contemplating his character and his works. When we consider who Jesus is, when we think about his character and his great love and grace, we begin to get a glimpse of his glory.

Sometimes just contemplating God’s greatness in his works humbles us and reminds us of his glory. Right now there is a spacecraft, Voyager I, that is traveling at 38,000 miles per hour, nearly a million miles a day, out in interstellar space. It was launched in 1977, and it is still going, out beyond our solar system. It is anticipated that it will run out of fuel in 2025. At that point it will have gone more than 15 billion miles. Here is an astounding truth. If all of the DNA strands in your body were stretched out end to end, they would extend twice as far as Voyager will have gone! That is mind boggling, but true. David said we are fearfully and wonderfully made, and it is absolutely true.

Here's another strange fact of science. When I was in school I learned that atoms, one thought to be indivisible, were known to actually contain smaller particles called electrons, protons and neutrons. We were taught that protons were something like featureless balls with a positive electric charge. It turns out that’s not quite right. Protons are actually bundles of elementary particles called quarks. Recent discoveries have changed the landscape again. Physicists now say that protons contain tiny particles they call charm quarks that, and this makes no sense, are actually heavier than the proton itself. Huh? The thing in the proton weighs more than the proton? How is that possible?

MIT physicist Mike Williams says, “This is the most complicated thing that you could possibly imagine. In fact, you can’t imagine how complicated it is. The proton has been humbling to humans. Every time you think you have a handle on it, it throws you some curveballs.” God is awesome. You are seeing his glory.

In Exodus 33:12-17 we are told of a conversation between Moses and God when God tasked him with continuing to lead Israel. Moses asked God to go with him, and God agreed. Then in verse 18 Moses said, “Now show me your glory.” He knew that the thing that would most sustain him, give him strength and hope, was if he could get a glimpse of God’s glory. God gave him that glimpse, and it was more than enough.

Jesus said, “Seek, and you will find.” If we desire to see God’s glory, if we look for it, and if we ask him to show it to us, I’m pretty sure that’s a prayer he will answer, as he did for Moses. Pastor and author Mark Buchanan wrote that in times of need our greatest need is to see the Lord. Let’s seek him and we will find him. Let’s see his glory, be in awe of him, and rejoice.