

# SHOW ME YOUR GLORY

This Sickness is unto the Glory of God

*John reveals to us the true essence of God's own character in the account of Jesus' raising Lazarus from the dead. A sermon.*

**W**HAT YOU HAVE IN YOUR hands isn't any ordinary book. It is the revelation of God. We wouldn't understand Jesus, the cross, or the resurrection without it.

The author of Hebrews tells us that in times past, God spoke to our forefathers in many different ways by the prophets. But now, he says, in these last days he has spoken to us by a son whom he has appointed heir of all things. And it is through this son that he also created the worlds. So what has God said to us through the son?

He inspired holy men of old to understand what had been hidden for generations; that is, his plan of redemption. Paul sums it up by calling it the "mystery of Christ."

Here we want to explore, to understand, the meaning behind Jesus' statement in the Gospel of John that Lazarus's sickness was not unto death, but "for the glory of God." After all, Lazarus did die. He was dead for at least three days. So what did Jesus mean by saying his sickness, his death, was for "the glory of God"?

We'll have to go back to Moses to unpack its meaning.

Consider the stature that Moses had with God and with Israel. He knew that he had a calling, but he also fled to the backside of the desert after killing an Egyptian. He stayed there for forty years before God appeared to him in a burning bush and called him to deliver his own people out of slavery to Pharaoh. Romans tells us

that the Lord hardened Pharaoh, and Moses challenged him again and again with all kinds of plagues—flies, frogs, locusts, blood, and even death of the firstborn. Pharaoh finally gives them up, and we see their deliverance through the heaped-up walls of the Red Sea. Remember when Pharaoh's army was closing in on the children of Israel, and the Red Sea was in front of them? Moses prays and God tells him,

*Why are you crying out to me? But you lift up your staff and stretch out your hand over the sea and divide it, that the Israelites may go into the sea on dry ground. Then I will harden the hearts of the Egyptians so that they will go in after them; and so I will gain glory for myself over Pharaoh and all his army, his chariots, and his chariot drivers. And the Egyptians shall know that I am the LORD, when I have gained glory for myself over Pharaoh, his chariots, and his chariot drivers.*

Once the children of Israel walked through the Red Sea, Moses turned around, lifted up his staff again, and the sea collapsed on the marauding Pharaoh with his armies.

Moses' stature with the LORD didn't end there. There was the miracle of manna in the desert. Let's focus on this account because it includes the shekinah glory, or glory cloud. The Israelites have been in the wilderness for some time, and they begin murmuring and complaining to Moses and his brother Aaron about the lack of food and water out there. Moses seeks the LORD in prayer, and the LORD answers.

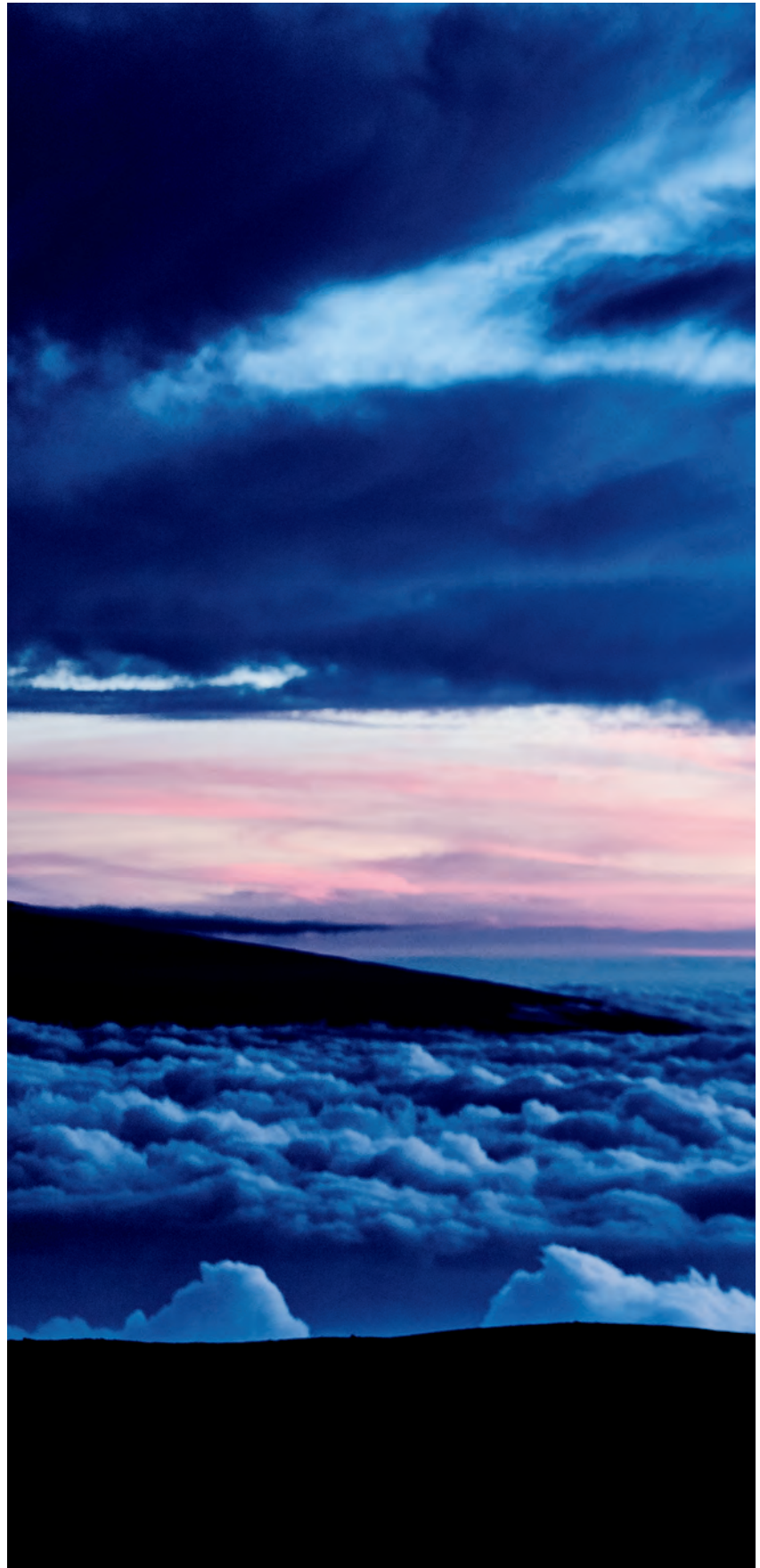
*So Moses and Aaron said to all the Israelites, "In the evening you shall know it was the LORD who brought you out of the land of Egypt, and in the morning you shall see the glory of the LORD, because he has heard your complaining against the LORD. For what are we, that you complain against us?" Then Moses said to Aaron, "Say to the whole congregation of the Israelites, 'Draw near to the LORD, for he has heard your complaining.'" And as Aaron spoke to the whole congregation of the Israelites, they looked toward the wilderness, and the glory of the LORD appeared in the cloud.*

The glory of the LORD appears in the cloud, and Moses sees this for himself. He will see it again at Mount Sinai.

*Then the LORD said to Moses, "I am going to come to you in a dense cloud, in order that the people may hear when I speak with you and so trust you ever after." When Moses had told the words of the people to the LORD, the LORD said to Moses: "Go to the people and consecrate them today and tomorrow. Have them wash their clothes and prepare for the third day, because on the third day the LORD will come down upon Mount Sinai in the sight of all the people. You shall set limits for the people all around, saying, 'Be careful not to go up the mountain or to touch the edge of it. Any who touch the mountain shall be put to death. No hand shall touch them, but they shall be stoned or shot with arrows, whether animal or human being, they shall not live.' When the trumpet sounds a long blast, they may go up on the mountain." So Moses went down from the mountain to the people. He consecrated the people, and they washed their clothes. And he said to the people, "Prepare for the third day."*

*On the morning of the third day there was thunder and lightning, as well as a thick cloud on the mountain, and a blast of a trumpet so loud that all the people who were in the camp trembled. Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet God. They took their stand at the foot of the mountain. Now Mount Sinai was wrapped in smoke, because the Lord had descended upon it in fire; the smoke went up like the smoke of a kiln, while the whole mountain shook violently. As the blast of the trumpet grew louder and louder, Moses would speak and God would answer him in thunder. When the LORD descended upon Mount Sinai, to the top of the mountain, the LORD summoned Moses to the top of the mountain, and Moses went up.*

Moses went up to meet the LORD. We understand from scripture that Moses spent much time in the LORD's presence: God gave him plans for the tabernacle and plans for the Ark of the Covenant; he set out the Day of the Atonement and the Law. Understand the stature that Moses had with the LORD. The calling, the plagues, the



Exodus, Sinai, the tabernacle, the sons of Korah, the cloud by day and the fire by night. Exodus 34 tells us that there had never been a prophet in Israel like Moses. He stood alone. Yet after all of these supernatural occurrences and the deliverance of God's chosen people, he makes a breathtaking request of the LORD:

*Show me your glory, I pray.*

"Glory" can mean the visible presence of the LORD, which Moses had seen in the cloud and on Sinai. "Glory" can also mean praise, like when we say, "Glory to the LORD." Moses' praise to the LORD is all over Exodus. So what was he really asking of the LORD? He was saying, "Show me who you are." Show me a visible revelation of your true character.

Listen to the LORD's response.

*I will make all my goodness pass before you. I will proclaim before you my name. Yahweh will be gracious to whom I will be gracious. I will show mercy upon whom I will show mercy, but you cannot see my face, for no one shall see me and live.*

In other words, "you cannot handle my glory." The LORD is so holy, so righteous, so otherworldly, that he can't show Moses his true character, his essential core being. He shows him what Moses can bear.

*See, there is a place by me where you shall stand on the rock; and while my glory passes by I will put you in a cleft of the rock and I will cover you with my hand until I have passed by; then I will take away my hand, and you shall see my back; but my face shall not be seen.*

Exodus 34:4 gives us an account of what happened on the mountain.

*So Moses cut two tablets of stone like the former [ten commandments]; and he rose early in the morning and went up on Mount Sinai as the LORD had commanded him, and took in his hand the two tablets of stone. The LORD descended in the cloud and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name of Yahweh. Yahweh passed before him, and proclaimed, "Yahweh, Yahweh, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for the thousandth generation, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, yet by no means clearing the guilty, but visiting the iniquity of the parents upon the children and the children's children, to the third and fourth generation." And Moses quickly bowed his head toward the earth, and worshiped.*

"My glory—my essential character—cannot be seen. No man can look upon it and live." And herein lies man's, and

even God's, ultimate dilemma: man cannot take in, cannot look upon, God's essential character and live.

The Apostle John provides us a fresh revelation of God's glory. Let us read from the beginning of his Gospel, but with one qualification: Read it as if you are looking at it for the very first time. We have been drilled by preachers and theologians alike that the "Word" is Christ, and that is true. But John doesn't identify who the Word is until at least the eighteenth verse. So, erase your theological education for a moment and read anew these verses, because we want to understand John's nuances as a Gospel writer, what he is trying to get over to us.

*In the beginning was the Word. And the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not anything made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men. And the light shines in the darkness and the darkness comprehended it not. . . . He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not. He came unto his own, and his own received him not. But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God. And the Word was made flesh and tabernacled among us . . . and we beheld his glory.*

"And we beheld his glory." John is thinking back to that account with Moses. Moses couldn't see the glory of God. He couldn't see God's essential character. But John writes, We've seen it. We've beheld it. Reading further,

*The glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth. . . . And of his fulness have all we received, and grace for grace. For the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ.*

This is the first time he identifies Jesus. Before, it was all the "Word." The next lines, John is still thinking about Moses:

*No man has seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he has declared him.*

Jesus, John says, has shown us the Father's glory—his essential character. Question is, how or when have we seen it? How have we seen what Moses could not see, that essential character of God Almighty? The story of Lazarus clues us in.

John 11 is the account of the raising of Lazarus. Sermons are all over the place about this story: sickness is for the glory of God, healing is for the glory of God. But they miss the crux



of the underlying narrative. We see a cast of characters: Mary, Martha, Lazarus, Caiaphas, the disciples, and the Jews, and they all have perspectives and biases and motives. But keep your attention on Jesus—what he says and how he responds. You’ll see “this sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God” in a new and awfully bright light.

*Now a certain man was ill, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. Mary was the one who anointed the Lord with perfume and wiped his feet with her hair; her brother Lazarus was ill. So the sisters sent a message to Jesus, “Lord, he whom you love is ill.” But when Jesus heard it, he said, “This illness does not lead to death; rather, it is for God’s glory, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it.”*

Lazarus is ill and Mary and Martha do something very ordinary. They send a message about Lazarus to Jesus, a friend they know who heals the sick. He is not dead; he is ill. But Jesus’ reaction is peculiar. Looking at other accounts in other gospels, he usually responds immediately. Remember Jairus? He comes up to Jesus and says, “Hey, my daughter is sick.” What does Jesus do? “I’ll come and heal her.” Remember the Roman centurion? “My servant is ill. Just say the word.” And Jesus does. The woman with the issue of blood? Healed instantly. But here, Jesus receives a message that one of his own friends is ill, and he says, “This illness won’t lead to death; rather it is for the glory of God.” He doesn’t leave right away to heal him; in fact, he doesn’t go anywhere.

What is he doing? Why doesn’t he go and heal him? What’s with this mysterious response? Recall that we’ve defined “glory” as the visible manifestation of God’s character. Some way or somehow Lazarus’s sickness is going to bring about this “glory.”

*Accordingly, though Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus, after having heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was.*

Two days longer? Why isn’t he going to Lazarus? Doesn’t he care? What—is he wanting Lazarus just to suffer? Compare this to what we see in Mark’s Gospel. There, it’s pedal-to-the-metal chaos. He’s casting out demons in the synagogues, healing Peter’s mother-in-law, feeding five thousand, feeding four thousand, walking on the water. Time and time again crowds rush in just to touch him to be healed. And here, with one of his friends deathly ill, he waits two days. What gives?

Keep your eyes on him, because he knows exactly what he is doing. He’s not just thinking of a single miracle. He’s got the bigger picture in mind.

*Then after this he said to the disciples, “Let’s go to Judea again.” The disciples said to him, “Rabbi, the Jews were just now trying to stone you, and are you going there again?” Jesus answered, “Are there not twelve hours of daylight? Those who walk during the day do not stumble, because they see the light of this world. But those who walk at night stumble, because the light is not in them.” After saying this he told them, “Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I am going there to awaken him.” The disciples said to him, “Lord if he has fallen asleep, he will be all right.” Jesus, however, had been speaking about his death, but they thought that he was referring merely to sleep. Then Jesus told them plainly, “Lazarus is dead. For your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him.”*

*Thomas, who was called Didymus, said to his fellow disciples, “Let us also go, that we may die with him.”*

Two days after receiving the message from Mary and Martha, Jesus gets up and tells his disciples, “Let’s go.” They aren’t too keen about coming along. They remind him that the Jews wanted to stone him the last time they were in Bethany, and he responds with this quizzical statement about people walking in the light and not during the night. What is this all about? Jesus is telling them that he is walking in accordance with the plans and purposes of the Spirit. His two-day delay wasn’t happenstance. He purposefully waited until Lazarus died from his sickness. Why? Because Jesus’ subsequent raising of him is going to seal Jesus’ fate. Even the disciples understand the gravity of “Let’s go.” Thomas’s remark is virtual prophecy.

*When Jesus arrived, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb four days.*

There is no question in anyone’s mind—Martha’s, Mary’s, Caiaphas’s, the Jews’—that Lazarus had been dead. This isn’t going to be an ordinary healing.

*Now, Bethany was near Jerusalem, some two miles away, and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them about their brother. When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, while Mary stayed at home. Martha said to Jesus, “Lord if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But even now I know that God will give you whatever you ask of him.” Jesus said to her, “Your brother will rise again.” Martha said to him, “I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day.” Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who*

*lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?" She said to him, "Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world."*

Martha comes out, and says what many of us would have said: "Lord, if you had been here, if you had had the decency to come when we sent you that message, Lazarus wouldn't have died." But what had he said to his disciples? "I'm glad for your sake that I was not there so that you may believe." Believe what?

Raising Lazarus isn't the goal; it's not the end game. Jesus has the crucifixion on his mind. We see that in the very next line: "I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me even though they die will live." You have to have a death before you can have a resurrection. By saying, "I am the resurrection," Jesus was necessarily saying, "I'm going to die."

Romans 14:9 brings this more into perspective. Paul writes, "For to this end Christ died and lived again, so that he might be Lord of both the dead and the living." Notice the sequence: he died and he lived again. So when Jesus says, "I am the resurrection and the life," he is also speaking about his own death—the circumstance allowing him to be resurrected. He hasn't died yet. He has healed people. He has even brought people back from the dead. But he says to Martha, "I am the resurrection and the life." Why does he say this? Because he's looking at the end. He is eyeing his ultimate mission. "Those who believe in me even though they die will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die" isn't tied to the raising of Lazarus. It is tied to the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus.

While he has his ultimate mission in mind, everyone else reacts in response to their immediate circumstances.

*When she had said this, she went back and called her sister Mary, and told her privately, "The Teacher is here and calling for you." And when she heard it, she got up quickly and went to him. Now Jesus had not yet come to the village, but was still at the place where Martha had met him. The Jews who were with her in the house, consoling her, saw Mary get up quickly and go out. They followed her because they thought that she was going to the tomb to weep there. When Mary came where Jesus was and saw him, she knelt at his feet and said to him, "Lord if you had been here my brother would not have died." When Jesus saw her weeping and the Jews who came with her also weeping, he was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved. He said, "Where have you laid him?" They said to him, "Lord, come and see." Jesus began to weep. So the Jews said, "See how he loved him!" But some of them said, "Could not he who opened the*

*eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?"*

Both Mary and Martha say, "If you had been here Jesus, my brother would not have died." And even the unbelieving Jews join in: "Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind men have kept this man from dying?" And they were all correct, because Acts 10:38 tells us:

*How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power; how he went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him.*

Jesus had healed everyone who had come to him, which would have included Lazarus, too. But God intended to use Lazarus's subsequent death as a key event in his overall redemptive plan.

*Then Jesus, again greatly disturbed, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone was lying against it. Jesus said, "Take away the stone." Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, "Lord already there is a stench because he's been dead four days."*

Jesus responds to her on a different level.

*Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?*

It is not the raising of Lazarus, itself, that would exhibit the glory of God, but it would be the catalyst. John 12, the very next chapter, lends us the context. There, Jesus tells his disciples:

*The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.*

He is plainly speaking about his upcoming death.

*Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.*

The context of all these statements is his crucifixion. In John 13, Jesus and the disciples are eating the last supper, and he identifies Judas as his betrayer. He gives Judas a piece of bread and says, "To whom I give this piece of bread is the one who is going to betray me." John writes,

*After he [meaning Judas] received the piece of bread, Satan entered into him. Jesus said to him, "Do quickly what you are going to do." Now no one at the table knew why he said this to him. Some thought that, because Judas had the common purse, Jesus was telling him to buy what they needed for the feast, or, that he should give something to the poor. So, after receiving the piece of*

*bread, he immediately went out, and it was night.*

Then we read the pivotal scripture:

*When he had gone out, Jesus said, “Now the Son of Man has been glorified, and God has been glorified in him.”*

Why would he say that? Because all things are now in motion for his crucifixion. Because it is in the crucifixion that God manifests his true character, the Word willingly and lovingly offering himself up to become a curse on behalf of the ungodly. This is why Jesus told his disciples, “This illness does not lead unto death; rather, it is for the sake of the glory of God, so that the Son of Man may be glorified through it.” The raising of Lazarus is the seventh sign in John’s Gospel, the sign of fullness that brings about the crucifixion.

*So they took away the stone. And Jesus looked upward and said, “Father I thank you for having heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I have said this for the sake of the crowd standing here, so that they may believe that you sent me.” When he had said this, he cried with a loud voice, “Lazarus come out!” The dead man came out, his hands and feet bound with strips of cloth, and his face wrapped in a cloth. Jesus said to them, “Unbind him and let him go.”*

But this is not the climax of the chapter. Many preach that it is, because it’s quite a sign. Still, it’s not the climax. Hear what this sign precipitates. Hear why it was “for the sake of the glory of God.”

*Many of the Jews therefore, who had come with Mary and had seen what Jesus did, believed in him. But some of them went to the Pharisees and told them what he had done. So the chief priests and the Pharisees called the meeting of the council, and said, “What are we to do? This man is performing many signs. If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and the Romans will come and destroy both our holy place and our nation.”*

The Jews saw Jesus as a threat to their own existence.

*But one of them, Caiaphas, who was the high priest that year, said to them, “You know nothing at all! You do not understand that it is better for you to have one man die for the people than to have the whole nation destroyed.”*

And “so from that day, they planned to put Jesus to death.” This is the climax of the chapter. It is in Jesus’ crucifixion death that we behold the true character of God. Interestingly enough, Caiaphas hadn’t spoken on his own, but by the Spirit of God. Jesus was about to die, but not for Israel only, but “to gather into one the dispersed children of

God.” Jesus’ death and resurrection would usher in a new paradigm—the Israel of God.

The lifting up of Jesus on the cross was the abject humiliation of God to save his own creation.

*Who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself.*

Who did this? This is the Word, who in the beginning was God but then became flesh. It is the Word, who emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness, for he became flesh. And being found in human form, he humiliated himself and became obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

The humiliation of the cross was a visible, public manifestation of God’s essential character. It showed us, it showed the world, it showed every man, woman, and child who has ever lived, what God’s true character is. Any time anybody asks you what your God is like, you point to the cross and say, He’s like that, because that is God on the cross. He gave himself for my sake.

This is the strength of Christianity. This is the strength of our faith. There is no other God who even contemplated doing something like this. It’s only the Christian God who has done this, who said, “I will empty myself, I will go to the cross and be humiliated in order to save my people.” And this shows us his goodness, his fullness, his holiness and his righteousness. Nothing goes deeper. So when you look upon the cross, when you look upon Jesus being crucified, you’re looking upon the glory of God.

*Seeing it is God who said, “Let light shine out of darkness,” who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.*

This is where we see his glory. So we, like John, can say that we have seen his glory—God experiencing godlessness for us. We are beyond what Moses saw. We are beyond, “I can’t show you my glory.” We have seen it—“He has demonstrated him.” God has spoken to us by a son. This is how he has spoken. It doesn’t get any more holy. It doesn’t get any more sacred. His humiliation for us is his glory. ■