

# The Problem With Glory And Peace

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] Well I'd like us to turn together back to the passage that we read in Luke's Gospel. We're going to look in particular at the words of verse 13 and 14.

And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, glory to God in the highest and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased.

The passage that we read records that great announcement that accompanied the birth of Jesus. This announcement was given to shepherds who were out watching over their flocks at night in the fields.

And it's an amazing moment because here we have one of those rare occasions when the realities of the heavenly realm were visible to the human eye. And this is a great reminder that that the coming of Jesus was the moment that all of heaven was waiting for. And this is where we see a really fascinating balance when it comes to Jesus's birth because it's important to remember that on one hand the birth of Jesus took place in obscurity. So hardly anyone was there. No one really paid much attention to what was happening whether it was in that cattle shelter or cave or whatever it may have been. Nobody was kind of making a huge fuss about the fact that Jesus was born. It was, it took place in obscurity from a human point of view. But at the same time we must never forget that although the world didn't take much notice, the whole of heaven was watching.

And in the announcement to the shepherds on these hills outside Bethlehem, we've got this remarkable description of the angels, of an angel appearing to them. In that same region, there were shepherds out in the field keeping watch over their flock by night. And an angel of the Lord appeared to them. The glory of the Lord shone around them. They were filled with great fear.

[ 2 : 1 3 ] And the angel said to them, Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people, for unto you this day in the city of David, a Savior, unto you is born this day in the city of David, a Savior who is Christ the Lord. And this will be a sign for you. You'll find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger.

You've just got this amazing image of these shepherds and their angel appears to them. The glory of the Lord shines around them. They're told about good news of great joy.

And then all of a sudden this angel is accompanied by a vast multitude of the heavenly host. Now, when you think of that, what you should have in your minds is something that looks a bit like an army, a huge army, rose upon rose upon rose of angels. And with one great voice, they are crying out glory to God in the highest and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased. And whether this is the first time that you've read that passage, whether it's the hundredth time you've read it, I still want you to imagine what it must have been like to be one of those shepherds.

You see the sky filled with row upon row of a vast heavenly multitude. The darkness around you is lit up by the glory of the Lord and you hear this deafening cry from the heavenly host. And anyone who's been to somewhere where there's a huge crowd, whether it's a football match or a concert or whatever, you will know just how much noise a crowd can make. Well, imagine what this must have been like. What a noise. But what I want to focus on today in particular is not the vastness of the multitude or the magnitude of the noise. What I want to focus on is the choice of words in the angel statements. Because in particular, I want us to focus on two key words that the angels use, the angels use, which I think are incredibly important. And these two words are glory and peace.

At first glance, when you look at verse 14, it can seem, you know, it's easy to think, well, this is just a general expression to say that something good has happened. You know, this is good news of great joy, glory to God, peace on earth. It's kind of consistent. Like it's easy to whiz through it as though it's a general statement saying, you know, something great has happened.

[ 4 : 57 ] I want to suggest today that this is much more than that. Because these two words, glory and peace, they are incredibly important. And they're pointing us to some of the key truths that lie at the heart of the gospel and at the heart of why Jesus came. So we're going to have three headings.

They are glory and peace in Scotland 2021, glory and peace in redemptive history, glory and peace in the passion and work of Jesus. So let's begin by asking the question, what are you aiming for this week? What would you say if I asked that question? What are you aiming for in the next seven days? Well, there's probably lots of different things that you could think of. We want to do a good job at work. We want to enjoy time with family and friends. We want to make a difference in our community. We want to get through our workload at school or at our jobs.

We want to get some exercise. We want to lose a bit of weight. Maybe we want to get our Christmas shopping finally done. There's lots of things that we could be aiming that I'm sure you were all aiming for this week. But if I asked that question, what are you aiming for this week? I doubt that anybody here or anybody out there, if we were to ask them, I doubt any of them would say, this week, I am aiming for glory and peace. And yet if we stop and think about it, I think it's the case that these two words are exactly what most people in Scotland are aiming for. Now, to prove that, first of all, we have to define what we mean by these words. What do we mean when we talk about glory and peace? Well, glory, that's one of these words that it's one of these hard words where we know what it means, but it's very hard to put in a sentence exactly what we think it means. And so I find it helpful to think of glory as the qualities that make something special. So there's something glorious about a sunset over little Burnva.

There's something glorious about a summer flower in full bloom. There's something glorious about a goal in football that's from outside the box and hits off the underside of the bar and goes in. When we think of glory, at a general level, we're talking about something that's very special.

But I think we can break it down a wee bit further. Glory speaks of something impressive, doesn't it? By that, we mean something that leaves an impression on you. In fact, the Old Testament word for glory actually comes from the word that means to be heavy, that idea of making an impression, a firm impression on someone. Glory speaks of being attractive. Verse nine in this chapter speaks of the glory of the Lord shining around the shepherds and the New Testament word for glory can also refer to brightness. So when you think of glory, you're thinking of something with a radiance, a splendor, a beauty that draws our attention. It's attractive, it's actually stunning. And glory speaks of something valuable, something impressive, something attractive, something valuable. When something has glory, then there's a worth and a value that stands out.

[ 8 : 33 ] In other words, it's precious. Peace, that's probably easier to define, but I think it's probably fair to say that it's also easy to underestimate. Because peace doesn't just refer to an absence of conflict. It speaks more of a settled harmony and wholeness and satisfaction that applies to the whole of life, that encompasses everything. So we get peace when conflict is resolved. But we also enjoy peace when noise is quietened. Any of you who've ever had a party for four-year-olds will know what peace can be enjoyed when that party concludes. I can say that because the picture of them aren't here today. We enjoy peace when anxiety is eased. We enjoy peace when a task is accomplished. We enjoy peace when we relate well to others. We enjoy peace when we're at ease with ourselves. So if we think about it in these terms and we go back to our question, are you and the other people in Scotland aiming for glory and peace this week? I think we are.

And that's confirmed when we think about the opposites of these things. So in terms of glory, the opposite of being impressive is to be irrelevant. The opposite of attack is to be repulsive. The opposite of valuable is to be worthless. Nobody is aiming to be these things.

And it's the same in terms of peace. Nobody, I don't think anybody here is saying, you know, this week I want to worry more. This week I want more hostility and tension with colleagues or family. This week I want more grief and stress at work. Nobody's saying that.

I think it's justifiable to say that this week every sane person in Scotland wants to live the next seven days in a way that makes a positive impression, in a way that's attractive, in a way that is worth something. And I think everybody also wants to have a settled harmony and wholeness, both with others, with their circumstances, with themselves. In other words, everybody wants glory and peace. But the key issue that I want us to notice is that the pathway to finding glory and peace is something that humanity gets spectacularly wrong. And the big mistake that we make is that we think that if we can get the glory, then that will give us peace.

All across Lewis, all across Scotland, all across the world, there are people who think that personal glory is the key to finding personal peace. And because of that, people try to maximize personal glory in order to find peace that they hope it will give them. Let's give some examples that we can think about for a moment. As we give these examples, I want you just to, want us all just to examine ourselves and you can inwardly raise your hand if you've ever fallen into one of these traps. You don't need to do it outwardly at all. But just inwardly, you can raise your hand as to whether any of these examples have ever applied to you. So where do we see this pursuit of peace by attaining personal glory? But one of the places where you see it very frequently is in the school playground. So you will often find a child and they'll maybe talk about something. And we can take football as an example, but it can be anything, playing computer games or whatever. You get the child who says, I'm amazing at football. I'm the best in my class.

[ 12 : 48 ] No one's better than me. I'm fantastic at football. And that's how they talk. They want everybody to listen to what they're saying. Or you've got the child who's got the cool new jumper that everybody wants to have that's got the right label or the right logo, whatever it might be.

And they're only too happy to show it off. And they do that because they think that by saying these things or wearing these clothes, they're going to be admired. But it's not just at school, you see it, you see it at work. I'm sure everybody here has come across a boss who wants everybody to listen to them, to jump at their beck and call and to always be proved right. Some of you may have had the situation where you've maybe got a boss or a colleague and you suggest an idea to them.

And they're like, oh, no, no, no, no, that won't work. And then two or three weeks later, they come back, you see, I've had this great idea and they tell you your idea back to them. And you're just like, oh, yeah, that's a great idea. That's how it can be very often. I remember once, I've hardly ever watched the program The Apprentice on TV, but I once saw it, or I saw a wee bit of it, and they were split into groups. The Apprentice is that program where they get lots of people who are all kind of competing to get a big fancy job. That's probably the worst definition of The Apprentice, but that's my understanding of how it works. Anyway, there was this group of young people, they were put into two groups and they had to make an impression to impress the judges, make a presentation to impress the judges. And there was a team leader for each group, and the team leader of one group, they all had the same clothes on. And just, I think, not long before they went on, he was like, oh, you all should take your jackets off.

And I'll leave my jacket on so that it's clear that I'm the leader and that I'm the one who's in charge, which I thought was kind of a fascinating sort of a thirst for personal glory. But it's not just bosses, sometimes colleagues can be the same, people who want power and status, so that they'll be respected. We see the same thing on social media. You get a constant flood of photos that are either staged or filtered to make everybody look as beautiful as they can, and to make houses look as impressive as possible, or holidays or whatever. There's this great desire to make everything look good in order to attract attention. And we even see it in our possessions. So we get stuff, whether that's something big like a car or something small like a jacket or even a new phone. And we like it when it looks as though people are impressed by what we have. Now, all of these are examples of thinking that if we get more personal glory, then that's the key to finding personal peace.

But it doesn't work. And I know it doesn't work because I've tried these kind of things myself, and I'm sure every one of you here is exactly the same. I've never been on social media to any great extent myself, but as a child I wanted everybody to think that I was good at football. I wanted people to be impressed when I got my first pair of Nike Air trainers. I wanted to have the best grades. I want people to admire my work, and I still want my opinion to be the one that's proved to be right. And we pursue all these, we pursue glory in all of these different areas, and it has never, ever given me peace. All it has given me is a thirst, a thirst for more personal glory, a thirst for peace that isn't coming.

[ 16 : 27 ] And that's repeated a million times over in the lives of people all over Scotland this week. People wanting to be admired and valued, but in their pursuit of glory they are repeatedly left empty. In fact, very often the pursuit of glory actually results in the very opposite of what we're trying to achieve. So think of the child who boasts about their football skills or their clothes or whatever. What effect does that child trying to achieve? They want everybody to think that they're great, don't they? They want everybody to admire them, but what do their classmates actually think? They think that they're idiots. And it's exactly the same for us as adults.

The colleague who wants everyone to think that they're the bee's knees would actually be the one that gets on everybody's nerves. The person who's plastering perfect pictures on Facebook or whatever might get lots of likes, but actually people are fed up of seeing them. And the person who buys our sports car so that they can drive it through Stornoway thinking that everyone will say, wow, what a guy is only half right. Everybody is looking at them, but it's not to say, wow, what a guy, it's to say, wow, what a plunker. All across society people chase personal glory because they think it will bring personal peace, but it's a huge mistake. It does not work.

Why is that? Well, the Bible gives us the explanation which brings us to our second heading, glory and peace in redemptive history. Now, when we say redemptive history, what do we mean? Well, we're talking about the way in which God's plan of salvation has been worked out across the ages of history. So it's referring to that big picture from creation in the beginning to the return of Jesus at the second advent. What I want us to recognize is that glory and peace are crucial aspects of that redemptive history. If you go all the way back to the beginning of the Bible, you'll see that humanity was created as the pinnacle of the glorious universe that God created. We were made by Him, made for Him. And at the creation, humanity enjoyed amazing peace.

If you read through Genesis chapter two, you'll see that there's a beautiful fourfold harmony between humanity and God, between humanity and the environment, between humans and other humans, and even between humanity and themselves inwardly. There's a beautiful peace. But in Genesis three, that peace was lost when Adam sinned. So the peace was lost when Adam sinned. Why did he do it? Why did he sin? He did it because he wanted more glory. That was how the devil deceived him, how he deceived Adam and Eve. He convinced them that God's goodness should be doubted. He said to the woman, you're not surely die. God knows that when you eat of it, your eyes will be opened. You'll be like God, knowing what is good and evil. Do you see what the devil is implicitly offering in these words? He's offering glory. He's saying you will be like God. And it was so attractive to them.

But this is where we have the first example of the false promise that has repeated itself all the way from the Garden of Eden, right down to the school playground, to the office, and to Facebook. It's the promise that if you try to grab glory for yourself, you will find peace.

[ 20 : 36 ] It is a lie. Humanity did not get any glory by sinning against God. All that happened was that humanity lost peace. And we keep making the same mistake. We keep thinking that if we grab personal glory, we'll get peace, but it never works. And if we stop and think about it, we see how foolish it is to try and show off and impress others in order to gain recognition and gain peace. It's such a foolish way to behave and yet we still do it. And the reason we still do it is because Adam's sin has left all of us broken as well. And on our own, all we will do is just keep making the same mistakes. We keep chasing personal glory. All it does is leave us searching for peace.

So what's the answer? How do we resolve the glory, peace problem? Well, the answer is that we need God to help us. And that brings us to our last heading, glory and peace in the personal work of Jesus. In the aftermath of Adam's sin, God initiated a plan of salvation that stretches across the ages of the Old Testament. It comes to fulfillment in the Persian and work of Jesus.

Jesus has come to be our Savior. And that's why the good news is news that's of such great joy, as the angel said, despite all our rebellion and brokenness, God has not given up on us.

He has sent his Son to save us. And in the Persian and work of Jesus, we see a realignment of this glory, peace problem, a realignment of the glory, peace problem that humanity faces.

And what I want us to see is that the angels have got it bang on. We spend so much time pursuing glory, thinking it's peace, glory for us, then we'll maybe get peace, doesn't work, but we'll get more glory. Let's keep trying. We'll look for glory, glory to me, and then I'll get peace, but that hasn't worked. So I'll get more glory, glory. It's going all like this. And the whole thing needs to be a realigned. And the angels are telling us how it works. They are saying the glory goes to God. Then there is peace on earth for us. And this is pointing us to some key aspects of how God's saving plan actually works. God has sent his Son, Jesus, into the world to be our Savior. He's come to reveal God. He's come to fulfill what God requires.

[ 23 : 34 ] He's come to restore us back into a relationship with God. In other words, Jesus has come with a mission to fulfill. And one of the ways that Jesus describes that mission is to say that He's come to glorify His Father. We see that very clearly in John 17 when Jesus prays to His Father and He says, I've glorified you on earth. So there's that idea of glory. I've glorified you on earth, having accomplished the work that you gave me to do. You can see it so clearly there. The fulfillment of Jesus' mission is glorifying His Father. Jesus has come to serve, honor and obey His Father.

He glorifies Him by fulfilling the mission that the Father has given Him. And it's a great reminder that Jesus as the perfect human doesn't seek glory for Himself. He seeks glory for His Father rather than pursuing personal glory like Adam and the rest of humanity. But what's even more amazing is that in order to fulfill that mission, Jesus laid aside His own glory. Because Jesus isn't just the perfect human, Jesus is also God the Son. He's worthy of all glory Himself as well.

But though He was in the form of God, as Philippians writes, He did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a servant, been born in the likeness of men, been found in human form. He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Jesus sets aside His glory in order to fulfill the mission that His Father has given. But what I want you to also notice is that He doesn't just set aside His glory. He also sets aside His peace. Because what Jesus says in John 12 as He approaches the cross, now my soul is troubled. And what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour, but for this purpose I've come to this hour. Father, glorify your name. Now this is so significant. Look, the same language, glory, accomplishing the purpose that God has given. But what is that causing in the experience of Jesus? It's causing trouble. He's setting aside His glory. He's setting aside His peace.

What that means is that in order for God to be glorified, in order for God's mission to be accomplished, Jesus has to face the horror of the cross. And that makes perfect sense because on the cross, Jesus takes our sin upon Himself. He takes all the punishment for our self-glorifying rebellion against God. That means that for Jesus to give us peace, He has to endure horrific anguish.

And this is where we are reminded that in terms of our salvation, Jesus does everything. In Luke 2, we have a multitude of the heavenly host watching on.

[ 27 : 06 ] But we've got to recognise that that's all that they ever do. They just watch because the only one who does the fighting is Jesus.

And in the personal work of Jesus, God accomplishes everything needed for your salvation, everything. That's why you never have to add to it. That's why you only come to Jesus with empty hands.

He does everything. So every sin, every stupid mistake that you've made, every act of idolatry, every time you've put God to one side, every time you've succumbed to temptation, all of that is taken upon Jesus' shoulder so that God can say to you, you are forgiven, you are free.

And that has two crucial consequences. He gets the glory. Why? Because He has done everything.

And we get peace. Why? Because He has done everything.

[ 28 : 38 ] So what's the answer to the glory-peace problem? The answer is to stop seeking to get personal glory in order to impress God or impress anybody else and start seeking to give glory to the God who you don't need to impress because He already loves you so much that He gave His Son to die for you. And this is where you see that the more you look into the Gospel, the more amazing stuff you actually discover because we've been talking about the desire for personal glory.

We all want to be impressive. We want there to be something special about us. We all want to be attractive. We want people to actually like us and want us and to care about us. We want to be valuable. We want to be worth something to someone. But if we go seeking all of those things in personal glory, it's only ever going to leave us empty. But that does not mean that the Gospel is saying, look, you've got to forget any idea that you're special. The Gospel is not saying, look, you've got to just recognize that you're worthless and then you'll be fine. That's not what the Gospel is saying at all. The Gospel is saying, you look at this and you'll discover just how incredibly special you are. So let me ask you, have you left an impression on society in your life?

Have you left a lasting impression on society, whether that's the Society in Carlyway, the Society in Lewis, the Society in Scotland? Have you left an impression on society in your life? Maybe you have.

Maybe we all have to different degrees, but I think we'd all agree that most of us are going to be forgotten very quickly, not with Jesus.

His whole mission tells you that God has not forgotten about you, that he will never give up on you.

[ 30 : 57 ] Are you attractive to people around you? Maybe to some, and well, definitely to some, I know you are to some, but in general though, we're all pretty insignificant. None of us are appearing on the cover of magazines or on the front pages of newspapers or anything like that.

We're all just very, very, very ordinary, not with Jesus. He has come because he loves you so much, because he cares about you more than I could ever describe.

Are you valuable, maybe to a few, but I think that most of us frequently battle with the sense that we feel like a worthless waste of space.

Never with Jesus. It's never through with Jesus. You are so precious to him. He came to be born. He came to die. He came to do everything that was needed. He did it all to save you. He did it because that's how precious you are. And if you want to swap that level of value for the personal glory of a few likes on Facebook or a few admirers at school or at work, then you haven't just lost your peace.

I think you've lost your mind. And all of that leaves us with two good questions for us all to think about. In what ways do we seek personal glory? And that'll be different for all of us. And it's a good question to reflect on. And we should also ask in what ways do we lack personal peace?

[ 33 : 10 ] That's a good question to ask ourselves, because humanity keeps getting this wrong. The angels got it dead right.

And it's maybe helpful to close by pointing out that what the angel said is really what lies at the heart of making a profession of faith in Jesus. So often we can be really crippled by the feeling that we're maybe not able to articulate things clearly enough, that we're not able to talk about a great experience or whatever, that we still have questions and doubts, we're still uncertain. At the heart of professing faith in Jesus is saying, I can't do this myself. I can't save myself. I'm not coming to profess faith because of anything special about me. I'm coming because I want to give glory to God, because He does it all. And I've come because He's given me peace that nothing else can give. I'm not in the slightest bit interested in any of your own glory in terms of professing faith. I just want to hear people say, I want to sit at the Lord's table because I want to give God the glory. Amen. Let's pray.

Father, thank you for everything that you've done. And may all glory be to you. And thank you so much that because of what you've done, we can have peace.

And so we just echo the great words of that multitude of angels, glory to God in the highest and on earth peace among all with whom you've pleased. Amen.