

why?

You are here because?

We are reminded of the principal reason for our existence

You would think, would you not, that “Why am I here?” would be every mortal’s most pressing question, but in this unthinking, ‘post-truth’ age, it is little more than the comic query of the ‘senior moment’ so familiar to those of us who forget why we just left our armchair and went to the kitchen. Yet, if our few mortal decades ‘here’ do have a purpose – and if that purpose has an eternal outcome – no question or its answer could be more pressing... Why are we here?

The 17th century theologians who penned the ‘Westminster Catechism’ summarised the wisdom of God’s Word to provide the answer. The statement is well-known, but its immense implications – for anyone who draws breath – are breath-taking:
“Man’s chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever”. That they considered it necessary to state this implies that:

- **human beings do not automatically discover (or remember) the principal reason for their existence.**
- **it is possible to be born, live and die without ever discovering one’s “chief end.”**
- **we are not born knowing how to glorify God – nor even that we ought to**
- **the ‘enjoying’ of God needs to be taught, because the concept is alien, not naturally perceived.**

The proof of all this is seen most readily in the practice of ‘religion’ **as it is generally understood**. The religious life is generally aimed at **pleasing God and winning His favour**. Regular devotions, observance of rituals, ‘doing one’s best’ to live a good life, comparing personal performance with that of criminals and unbelievers – all this self-effort is underpinned by uncertain hope. When tragedy strikes, the anxious religious mind immediately asks: *“Why would God do this to me?”* Because, **underlying that question is a vague hope that God is the debtor in the relationship; that He ‘owes’ something.**

On the other hand ...

This is exactly opposite to the way taught by **Jesus** and the apostles. **James** (proper name Jacob), Our LORD’S brother, defined religion as respected by God: *“Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world.”* (James 1:27) He was writing to followers of Jesus Christ who **already enjoy God’s favour**, not because of their good works but because of His mercy to sinners. This is total reversal of the ‘religious’ way... God does not want orphans and widows used by us to accrue favour with Him. *“We love because He first loved us”* (1 John 4:19). We serve not to win His favour but because we ‘enjoy’ it – all undeservingly.

James is often wrongly contrasted with **Paul** – as if Paul taught justification by faith alone whereas James emphasised the need for faith + good works. This could not possibly be true. When Paul, apostle to the Gentiles first met James, **Peter** and **John** in Jerusalem fourteen years into his missionary life, he said these ‘pillars’ of the church *“added nothing to my message”* (Galatians 2:6 – NIV). Not only so, but he made this point in a passionate letter in which the very issue at stake was ‘justification by faith’: *“... a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ”* (Galatians 2:16)

Christianity is not “religion as generally understood”!

Those who busy themselves trying to impress God are clearly not impressed by God. If our chief end is to glorify God, we are not going to do this through religious sweat!

Now for God’s perspective

What then about this two-fold primary reason for our existence? What is the glory of God? How can sinners glorify Him – and how on earth are we supposed to ‘enjoy’ Him?

The Hebrew word *kavod*, most often translated ‘glory’ in English Bibles properly relates to the idea of ‘weight’. Hence, in Scripture, the words ‘glory’, ‘honour’, ‘splendour’ and ‘wealth’ are often used interchangeably to convey the ‘weightiness’ of a person or a thing. Thus, *kavod* is variously **Jacob’s ‘wealth’** (Genesis 31:1), **Joseph’s ‘honour’ / authority** (Genesis 45:13), the ‘glory’ of the LORD Himself – such that **Moses** could not enter the *Tent of Meeting* (Exodus 40:34-35) and the ‘splendour’ of God’s kingdom (Psalm 145:12). One other interesting usage seems to be a synonym for the burdened heart or soul (Genesis 49:6) of dying Jacob who can’t forget the shame of **Simeon** and **Levi’s** murderous vengeance at Shechem. *Kavod* is also the Psalmist’s entire ‘being’ poured into his adoring worship of God (Psalm 108:1).

However, lest we forget that earth’s vocabulary struggles to express the terrible uniqueness of God, Scripture provides snapshots that remind us to define **His** glory with awed reverence and holy fear. Our mortal tendency to reduce the *Infinite* to our own measurements draws a stern warning from the Almighty: *“These things you have done and I kept silent; you thought I was altogether like you. But I will rebuke you and accuse you to your face”.* (Psalm 50:21)

So, is God ‘precious’ about His glory? Does He become petulant and vengeful if we soil His reputation? Consider and question the need for such questions: Jesus *“... who had always been God by nature, did not cling to his prerogatives as God’s equal, but stripped himself of all privilege by consenting to be a slave by nature and being born as mortal man. And, having become man, he humbled himself by living a life of utter obedience, even to the extent of dying, and the death he died was the death of a common criminal. That is why God has now lifted him so high, and has given him the name beyond all names, so that at the name of Jesus ‘every knee shall bow’, whether in Heaven or earth or under the earth. And that is why, in the end, ‘every tongue shall confess’ that Jesus Christ is the Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”* (Philippians 2:5 – Phillips) Note that a “mortal man” revealed the “glory of God”. We are not finished with this thought...

What does the Bible say?

Moses’ first encounter with the glory of the LORD required God’s own protection. The Almighty hid His servant in the cleft of a rock and permitted only a filtered ‘back view’, lest Moses’s mortality be overwhelmed.

In **Isaiah’s** vision of the Lord’s glory, the cherubim cried ‘Holy!’ three times – underscoring the utter uniqueness of the one (or Three in One) *“high and lifted up”*, whose glory is not to be compared with anything or anyone considered glorious on earth. The angelic chorus that *“the whole earth is full of His glory”* (Isaiah 6:3) equates to King **David’s** *“the heavens declare the glory of God”* (Psalm 19:1). Prophet and Psalmist both affirm that all of creation is God’s showroom. His awesome majesty and power are incrementally displayed for the appreciation of our limited minds. **The skies are a classroom, nature’s artless beauty is a wordless sermon, a child’s first cry is an unskilled prayer, the raw power of the ocean a humbling theology...**

Most riveting of all the Bible snapshots of God’s glory is the *Transfiguration of our Lord Jesus*, recorded by **Mark, Matthew** and **Luke**. While Matthew tells us that *“his face shone like the sun and His clothes became white as light”* (17:2) and Luke (usually our ‘go to’ for detail) says only that *“the appearance of His face was altered, and his clothing became dazzling white”* (9:29), it takes Mark’s breathless account to give us the detail that *“his clothes became radiant, intensely white, as no launderer on earth could bleach them”.* (9:3) Whatever was happening in that moment, mortal eyes were enabled to see and record God’s glory shining through His Son as ‘light with no darkness in it’. Clearly their eyesight was protected to enable them to see what would normally have blinded them. **We can’t look directly at the sun, but Peter, James and John could look directly at the Son** who was and is *“the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word...”* (Hebrews 1:3). *“In Christ lives all the fulness of the Deity in bodily form”* said Paul (Colossians 2:9) – but there is a mind-blowing lesson for us here that we must not miss...

And the bottom line is ...

In the transfiguration, the fullness of God’s flawless glory was revealed in *“the Man, Christ Jesus”*. Of course, we have no difficulties ascribing glory to Jesus. He is also God is he not? Yes, but His perfect humanity has awesome implications for us who believe. This is the glory of God in a man. **The transfiguration permitted by sight, what could only be seen by faith in Bethlehem’s baby.** Old **Simeon** and **Anna** recognised the child as God’s *Messiah*, not because they saw His glory, but because decades of prayerful intimacy with God had sensitised them to the prompting of the Holy Spirit and they just ‘knew’ ... The three disciples were granted visual revelation – they saw with their own eyes God’s glory in a mortal body – the ultimate purpose of the incarnation. Jesus’ mission was focussed on *“bringing many sons to glory”* – and don’t let’s merely futurize this as ‘getting us to heaven’. It’s bigger than that. The implications are for ‘now’ as well as ‘then’!

Jesus said, *“If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him”* – implying here and now, in this life (John 14:23).

God – *Father, Son and Holy Spirit* – will make a ‘home’ for Himself in any man or woman or child who loves Him and who refuses to join the crowds who despise His Word. **And will that home radiate God’s glory into society? Yes, it will.** God wills that we believing mortals be made like His Son. And will His Son fail to glorify the Father in us? No, he will not. Is it the Son’s pleasure to glorify the Father? Yes, it is. As we become like Him, and glorify the Father, will this be our pleasure too? Will we enjoy God – here and now, in this life?

Yes, we will!

There is a strong possibility that you, dear Reader, have grown old with this publication (like its editor). For your remaining days on earth, may you not miss your chief end. God’s chief end, to make us like His Son, finds its fulfilment in our chief end when, like His Son, we live to glorify Him – and that becomes our joy. Enjoy Him!

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