

Written simply, clearly and humbly, this short book invites us to look up and see God's glory from the Bible's beginning to its end. And then to be changed by the sight.

Andrew Cornes,

Former Minister, All Saints Crowborough

So often I have a small view of who God is and what He can do. In this little book Tom Robson encouraged me to use my imagination to have a bigger view. Thinking over these four vivid pictures of God's glory in the Bible gave me a glimpse of our eternal home in glory. That bigger view now is what will keep us going until we will see Jesus face to face.

Liz Cox,

Minister for Women & Community, St Giles' Church
Derby. Chair of Midlands Women's Convention

Fresh and warmly written, Breathtaking Glory unfolds a lovely view of the glory of God. In a few brief chapters Tom Robson shows us God's grace, faithfulness and ultimate triumph in Jesus Christ such that the reader is humbled, thrilled and edified in equal measure.

Reuben Hunter,

Lead Pastor, Trinity West Church

BREATH TAKING
GLO RY

SURVEYING THE PANORAMA OF
GOD'S GRACE, FAITHFULNESS AND VICTORY

TOM ROBSON

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First published in Great Britain in 2020

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British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN: 978-1-912373-87-1

Designed and typeset by Pete Barnsley (CreativeHoot.com)

Printed in Denmark by Nørhaven

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1 3 5 7 10 8 6 4 2



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INTRODUCTION

How would you react if I said you're destined for glory?

If you're a child prodigy, reading this in nursery whilst solving Fermat's last theorem with your ABC cubes, then it would come as no surprise. But for most of us, hopes of being destined for glory are probably long gone, or may never have arrived in the first place. If someone told me I was destined for glory, I think it would come across more sarcastic than supportive!

And yet, if you're trusting Jesus, you are heading towards a glorious destination. You are *destined* for glory – the glory of God, in whose presence will be greater joy than any of us can imagine.

Through the prophet Isaiah, God declared that he would bring his people to be with him. That promise was partly fulfilled at the time, but it also points forward to when all God's people will be gathered to glory: 'Bring my sons from afar and my daughters from the ends of the earth – everyone who is called by my name, whom *I created for my glory*' (Is. 43:6–7, my italics).

The New Testament develops the same promise. We are saved in order to be with God, to enjoy his glory forever. The apostle Paul, whilst discussing Jesus coming again, describes this gathering home of God's children: '[God] called you to this through our gospel, that you might *share in the glory* of our Lord Jesus Christ' (2 Thes. 2:14, my italics). Notice that Paul says we won't just see Christ's glory; we will share in it.

The hope of this gospel is that Christ can reset anyone on a path to share his glory; no one is too far off-track. Take the thief crucified next to Jesus. Here was a man seemingly destined for nothing but an agonising death. Yet his plea to Jesus is answered with the promise of a glorious destination: 'today you will be with me in paradise' (Luke 23:43).

We can all know the feeling that life isn't really heading anywhere. Maybe when you wonder about your future, you can't see how things will ever improve. If that's you, please listen to Jesus' promise. When we put our trust in Jesus, the best – by far – is still to come: 'our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal (2 Cor. 4:17–18).

But, if we fix our eyes on that glorious eternity, are we in danger of becoming 'so heavenly minded as to be of no earthly good?' as Oliver Wendell Holmes allegedly said. Actually, I'm convinced that the opposite is true. Anticipating your destination inspires the journey to get

there. And the glory of our destination isn't really where it is or what it's like; it's the one with whom we'll be. The more we look forward to being with him, the more we will enjoy living for him on the way.

Imagine setting out on a long drive. I doubt anyone is motivated by the prospect of crawling through traffic jams and endless games of I Spy. Unless you're a big fan of ring roads, you'll set out because you have a destination in mind. When you're going to see someone special, even a difficult journey can be full of expectation.

Climbing a mountain is my favourite illustration of this. If you've ever walked, scrambled, or dragged yourself up a mountain, I hope it provided you with a glorious view. Yet, for most people, the way up is hard work. The paths are steep and uneven; there are unexpected twists and dangerous falls. So you proceed carefully, watching your footing. But no one climbs a mountain to stare at their feet; you're hoping for a panoramic reward when you reach the summit. And as you climb, you pause and catch your breath. You look up for a moment and take in an early sight of the landscape. Those glimpses whet your appetite for what's to come and motivate you to keep going. They're little previews that say, 'If you think this is good, wait until you get to the top!' I spend a lot of time watching my (metaphorical) footing. I try not to stumble through life's rocky patches and hope to stay on track. Unless you're gliding effortlessly through life, I imagine you might feel the same. When times are tough, it's only natural to focus on what's right in front of us.

We don't always make time to pause and take in the view, or remember the glory of where we're heading. Perhaps we're consumed by the busyness of life. Maybe we are rightly giving our time to people or situations we care about. Or possibly we're bruised from too many stumbles and now proceed cautiously – eyes down, one step in front of the other.

So in life, as on a mountain climb, it's good to catch your breath occasionally and look up. This book invites you to do that: to pause and take in an early view of the glory you're heading to in Christ. These are glimpses of God's glory that we'll one day enjoy in full. Here are the initial sights of the one whom we will enjoy forever. Indeed, the greatest motivation for trusting Jesus is not where we'll be, but the glory of the one with whom we'll be.

As we take in these sights of God's glory, I won't recommend too many things to do. I assume you have enough of those already. You might even be one of those people who has a to-do list of to-do lists you still need to write. Instead, I hope this is a chance to take a short break from those to-dos. Simply take in the glory of the God who made you, who died to save you and whose glory will fill you with joy now and forever.

GLORY

‘Forever’ is not an easy concept to get our heads around. The British politician Lord Mancroft once joked, ‘Cricket is a game which the English, not being a spiritual people, have invented in order to give themselves some conception of eternity.’¹ But even five-day Test matches (eventually) come to an end. So how can an eternal destination inspire us if it’s so hard to picture what it’s like?

Then there’s the feeling many people have that anything that lasts forever will eventually become boring. One of the deliberately infuriating characters in Joseph Heller’s *Catch-22* is an airman called Dunbar. He sees this connection between longevity and boredom, and tries to extend his life by filling it with as much tedium as possible. When he’s challenged on why he would want to experience a long life if it’s so uninteresting, he simply replies, ‘What else is there?’²

¹ Lord Mancroft, *Bees in Some Bonnets* (Bachman & Turner, 1979), p. 185.

² Joseph Heller, *Catch-22* (Vintage, 1994), p. 44.

The Bible's answer to both those questions is the same: eternity inspires us and promises limitless joy because we've seen what the Lord is like. When we fix our eyes on God's glory, we not only look forward to being with him forever but also know a foretaste of that joy in the here and now.

GLORY DEFINED

In general, there are two ways to use the concept of glory. The first relates to attributes of the world around us. We've already thought about the glory of a mountain-top view. Glorious in this sense describes something inherent in creation. It is the colours and landscapes that convey a beauty or magnificence, such as the glory that a sunset has simply by being a beautiful sunset.

The other way we think of glory is through victory or success. This second form of glory is one that is achieved. My closest brush with this type of glory came aged eleven on school sports day. In previous years my teams had never excelled in the competitive fields of bean-bag throwing and hoopla. But then, in my final year of primary school, I was given the honour of captaining one of the teams. Finally, it all came together; our elite band of sports stars triumphed through relay races, hopscotch and other high-precision events. We finished in first place and ran laps around the playground in celebration. As you can tell, it still ranks worryingly high on my list of life achievements. It must be the early tastes of glory that inspire future champions towards even greater success.

So when we find something glorious, it's because of its attributes or its achievements, but rarely both. A clear day following a heavy storm might be called a glorious morning, but it isn't praised for having created itself. On the other hand, a great artist might be called a glorious painter, but that is a result of the beauty she crafts on her canvas, not a glory in and of herself. Had she never picked up the brushes, she would never have received that praise. However, the characteristics both expressions of glory share is to be considered worthy of praise, honour and adulation. To be glorious is to have attributes or achievements that others enjoy celebrating.

To fully understand glory, we also need to recognise the impact it has on those who experience it, either for themselves or in someone else. It would be very odd to encounter something we find glorious and not be affected. Have you ever been at a performance that has been so moving you could describe it as glorious? There's something about glory that transcends the ordinary. In those moments we feel a desire to share the praise of it. We 'glory in it' and feel that others will lose out unless they do the same. It's like when a friend shows you photos of the 'glorious view' from their trip. They want you to share their amazement as they sit you down for the slideshow.

However, even the most impressive photo is nothing compared to seeing the view for yourself. When we come face to face with something glorious, it lifts our sights above the routine. It reminds us that there's more

to celebrate than we sometimes remember. Those are moments when the world does its best to take your breath away.

God's glory has a similar impact, but on a far greater scale. The Creator is revealed as utterly glorious in attributes *and* achievements. Scripture pictures God's glory as an overwhelming brightness and an unchanging goodness. This inherent glory is then perfectly mirrored in all God's actions. Seeing the glory of what the Lord has done is a window onto the glory of who he is. And an experience of his glory has a profound effect.

GLORY REVEALED

The Old Testament describes several encounters with God's glory, and no one comes closer than Moses. Having been called to lead his people out of Egypt, it is Moses' experience of God's glory that defines the next stage of their journey. When the Lord speaks to him from the burning bush, he is warned to keep his distance in case the glory of God's holiness consumes him (Ex. 3:5). This proximity to God's glory has a powerful effect on Moses. When the time comes for him to lead God's people towards the promised land, he seeks the assurance of God's presence going with them. Moses even pleads with the Lord to 'show me your glory' (Ex. 33:18). God agrees, but on one condition. His glory is so intense that Moses has to hide in the rock cleft, shielded by God's hand, as his presence passes by. That is the closest Moses can come. Even then, Moses' face shines as he comes down the mountain.