

The God of Glory

Acts 6:8–7:53

August 5, 2001

“The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham.” Thus began the ancient Christian preaching of the gospel of Jesus Christ. “The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham.” The words are still true today. Abraham is our father in the faith. And more importantly, the God of glory rules over all things.

Here is the heart of the gospel: the God of glory. Here is the source, the content, and the goal of the good news we preach: the God of glory. Too often we think the gospel is about us: our needs and our salvation. It is about that, of course, but only in a secondary sense. It is, first of all, about the God of glory and therefore about the glory of God. This is why we worship. This is why we sing. This is why we pray. This is why we preach. In Jesus Christ, we have come to see and to know the glory, the wonder, the beauty, the majesty, the sovereignty, the power, the goodness, and the love of God. In Jesus Christ, the God of glory comes to us, appears to us, meets us, encounters us, calls us, redeems us, commissions us, and makes us his very own. Thanks be to God!

Throughout the history of the people of God, God worked with, in, and through his people, but often they did not realize it. Moses made a serious mistake in this regard. “He supposed that his brethren understood that God was giving them deliverance by his hand, but they did not understand.” Even “David, who found favor in the sight of God,” wrongheadedly thought he could build a house “for the God of Jacob.” “Yet the Most High does not dwell in houses made with hands; as the prophet says, ‘Heaven is my throne, and earth my footstool. What house will you build for me, says the Lord, or what is the place of my rest? Did not my hand make all these things?’” The infinite God of glory cannot be contained within the finitude of this world which he created.

So it came down to the people of Israel at the time of Stephen: “You stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears, you always resist the Holy Spirit. As your fathers did, so do you. Which of the prophets did not your fathers persecute? And they killed those who announced beforehand the coming of the Righteous One, whom you have now betrayed and murdered.” As the people of God had always resisted the word of God, so did they resist the Son of God, Jesus Christ. They executed him outside the city of Jerusalem, hanging him on the cross until he died. And here, once again, the God of glory appeared.

The God of glory appeared in the death of Jesus Christ, because the glory of God is so great that it appears to us under the sign of its opposite. The glory of God shines through to us in the suffering of Jesus Christ, in the humiliation of Jesus Christ, and in the shameful death of Jesus Christ. If it had been anyone else, they would have broken him. But they did not break Jesus Christ. He never quit loving, even those who hurt him. He never quit believing in God, even when he seemed forsaken. He never sinned or committed evil, even when the full fury of hell bore down upon him and killed him. In his endurance of the indignities heaped upon him we see the glory, the majesty, the strength, the power, the goodness, and the love of the God of glory. Thanks be to God!

Today, we live in an age reluctant to see or to admit glory at all. Stephen M. Barr, a theoretical particle physicist at the Bartol Research Institute of the University of Delaware has

recently published an article, “Anthropic Coincidences,” in the journal *First Things* (June/July 2001, pp. 17–23). There he acknowledges:

In the story of science as it is told by materialists the human race is not central to the purpose of the universe for the simple reason that the universe has no purpose. . . . It is the view . . . of many scientists that the progress of science has more and more made the universe appear ‘pointless,’ and the human race an accidental by-product of blind material forces. Indeed, this is thought by many to be the key lesson that science has to teach us.

This is what I mean by saying that we live in an age reluctant to see or to admit glory at all. The very mind set of our times tends to rule out perceptions of beauty, design, purpose, reason, intentionality, personality, and revelation.

And yet, Mr. Barr goes on to make a number of scientific observations which tend to carry us beyond the limits of the current mind set:

There are many features of the laws of nature that seem arranged, even ‘fine tuned,’ to make possible the existence of life, including intelligent beings such as ourselves. At least on the face of it, these so-called ‘anthropic coincidences’ would appear to support the idea that we *were* built-in from the beginning. Even some former atheists and agnostics have seen in them impressive evidences of a divine plan.

For instance, “All life is based on chemistry.” The chemical “elements in our bodies were made inside stars that exploded before the sun was born. We are quite literally made of stardust.” And yet, everything there depends upon the ability of the initial hydrogen atoms to fuse together and make deuterium. If the “strong nuclear force” that holds the nuclei of atoms together had been any weaker, hydrogen could not have held together to make deuterium. But if it had been any stronger, the stars would have burned out too quickly. It seems that the strength of this force was set precisely to allow for the formation of elements and the emergence of life. Another example is the move beyond helium to larger elements.

When two helium nuclei collide in the interior of a star they cannot fuse permanently, but they do remain stuck together momentarily—for about a hundredth of a millionth of a billionth of a second. In that tiny sliver of time a third helium nucleus comes along and hits the other two in a three way collision. *Three* heliums, as it happens, *do* have enough sticking power to fuse together permanently. When they do so they form a nucleus called ‘carbon-12.’

Without this, there would be no life. With it, it all appears to be carefully designed, by a creator of intelligence and good will. Even if what appear now to be coincidences could someday be explained by physical principles, the fact that all of them are also “propitious for life” would itself be “an astonishing coincidence.”

“In the final analysis one cannot escape from two very basic facts: the laws of nature did not have to be as they are; and the laws of nature had to be very special in form if life were to be

possible.” Barr presents a scientific and philosophical way thinking which is willing to look underneath the science and philosophy of our age, and when it does so, it finds evidences of the glory of God and therefore of the God of glory. God continues to invite us not to reject him but to believe.

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To God be the glory, forever and ever! Amen.

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