

“Holy, Holy, Holy!—The Glory of the Lord”

by Howard Snyder

“Holy, holy, holy!” The words resound in praise to the hymned Trinity.

Surprisingly, this phrase occurs only twice in Scripture—once in Isaiah; once in Revelation:

Isaiah 6:3 – “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory.”

Revelation 4:8 – “Holy, holy, holy, the Lord God the Almighty, who was and is and is to come.”

Verses so similar that we should mark the differences!

Both passages picture glorious scenes of the Sovereign Lord upon his throne. In Isaiah, six seraphs (*seraphim*, “burning ones”) call to each other, proclaiming God’s holiness.

Revelation 4 is similar: Four “living creatures” unceasingly sing “day and night.” “Holy, holy, holy, [is] the Lord God the Almighty, who was and is and is to come.” The seraphs of Isaiah 6 and also the “living creatures” of Revelation 4 have six wings. Pictured here are the glorious angelic beings who ever attend God’s throne.

But the passages are different, and the difference teaches us a lesson. In Isaiah: “The whole earth is full of his glory.” In Revelation: The Lord “was and is and is to come.” Here is the Lord of both space and time. The whole earth (space); all of history (time). Jointly the two passages embrace heaven and earth; space and time! Holy is the Lord.

So in our discipleship, we remember this: The whole earth is full of God’s glory, and all time is God’s context. Through the promises of God, we see a *story* here. We know that more and more, as God’s plan of salvation unfolds, God’s glory will be seen in the whole earth. “The earth will be full with the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea” (Isa. 11:9; cf. Hab. 2:14).

God’s Glory in the Earth

Psalm 33:5 reminds us that the Lord “loves righteousness and justice; *the earth is full of the steadfast love of the Lord.*” Psalm 104 sings movingly of God’s presence and acts in the earth. “O Lord, how manifold are your works! In wisdom you have made them all; *the earth is full of your creatures*” (Ps. 104:24).

Our news channels are full of pain and problems and disasters—not of God’s glory. We get blinded; we forget that the whole earth is full of God’s glory.

The earth shows God’s glory in at least six ways.

1. *The beauty, color, and splendor of the creation reflects God’s glory.* See a horse run, or stately storks walk, or graceful birds fly! The last chapters of Job say it over and over. The poet Alfred Joyce Kilmer caught the scent: “I think that I shall never see a poem lovely as a tree.”

2. *Each God-imaged man and woman reflects God's glory.* Every person is a God-glory-bearer—in fact, or in potential. God's glory shines in human uniqueness and diversity. Humanity created male and female shows God's glory more than would genderless beings.

3. *The glory of the Lord is seen most fully in Jesus Christ*—incarnation, life, death, resurrection, reign. “The law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ” (John 1:17).

4. *God's glory is seen in the church when it is filled with the Spirit.* His glory shines in the faithful expansion of the church worldwide. Faithful community, vital worship, and diversity of the Spirit's gifts all reveal God's glory. Unfaithful churches tarnish the brightness of God's glory.

5. *God's glory glistens in every act of love, kindness, forgiveness, and reconciliation.* Acting justly and enacting justice shows the glory of the Lord. As God's glory is shown in all his works, so all our works in fidelity to God display his glory.

6. *God's glory appears when we practice creation care, demonstrating God's care for the earth.* Creation care is glorious, for it first and foremost honors the Triune God, Father, Son, and Spirit. Honoring God in this way, we bless others now and into future generations.

God's Glory Now and Evermore

Despite the fall and all the problems of sin, the whole earth is still full of the glory of the Lord! Not just *will be*, but *is*! For the One who created us and the whole creation to reflect his glory is still working in the world through his Holy Spirit.

This then is a *fact* we can rejoice in and meditate upon: *The whole earth is full of God's glory.*

Scripture nowhere says explicitly, “Heaven and earth are full of God's glory.” Yet that truth shines from nearly every page. The seraphs emphasize in Isaiah 6:3 that “the *whole earth* is full” of God's glory. How easily we forget; fail to see. So easily we feel that heaven is glorious, but the earth is full only of death and disease, evil and woe.

God is the Lord of space and time, of spacetime. Jesus is King of Kings and Lord of history. The Holy Spirit worked in creation, in Jesus' incarnation and full history, and is working still. God the Father is, was, and always shall be. Jesus came and is yet to come.

O God, by your Holy Spirit give us eyes to see your glory in all the earth, and grace to manifest your glory in every sphere of our own influence. May we see and reflect and extend your glory. Help us trust your promises for the future as fully as we celebrate your past acts and the resurrection of Jesus, the guarantee and firstfruit of your kingdom in fullness. May your will be done on earth, as in heaven. Amen.

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