

The Language of Faith: Part Two

Speaker: Tim Mackie

[EMSB theme fades in]

Tim: Hey everybody, I'm Tim Mackie, and this is my podcast, "Exploring My Strange Bible." I am a card-carrying Bible history and language nerd who thinks that Jesus of Nazareth is utterly amazing and worth following with everything that you have. On this podcast, I'm putting together the last twenty years' worth of lectures and sermons, where I've been exploring the strange and wonderful story of the Bible and how it invites us into the mission of Jesus and the journey of faith. And I hope this can all be helpful for you, too. I also helped start this thing called the BibleProject. We make animated videos and podcasts and classes about all kinds of topics in Bible and theology. You can find all those resources at bibleproject.com. With all that said, let's dive into the episode for this week.

[EMSB theme fades out]

In this episode, we're exploring a really important word in the Bible that's often misunderstood and not used [chuckles] for the most part in modern Western English vocabulary. It's the word and concept of "glory." So there you go. This is actually a crucially important word [chuckles] for understanding much of what's going on in the Old Testament and in the New Testament. It's actually really profound. This was such a fun teaching to bring a whole bunch of ideas together.

[Music fades in]

So there you go. Hopefully it's helpful for you. Let's dive in and learn together.

[Musical break (01:35-1:40)]

In this series, we are taking twelve of the most common words in the Christian vocabulary. And they're words that religious people, or Christians, tend to use a lot. And they're so strange and foreign that if Christianity is new to you, it's just like, "What are these people talking about?" So, bizarre words.

And then if you have been around Christianity, or the church, for a long time, you're so used to these words, they become over-familiar—they lose their depth and their meaning. So we've looked at words like "sin," and "holiness," and "faith," and "atonement." Today we're looking at the word "glory." *Glory*—which I guarantee none of you thought up thinking about—thought up?—woke up thinking about.

And I don't know, maybe—I think there's a few ways that, in modern English, we use the word "glory," or "glorious." What would you say about a sun or marvelous sunset? What's maybe one word you would use about it, to describe it? *Glorious*. I think that's about the only way that we use—we don't say, like, "My birthday party was for my glory." [Tim laughs] We don't talk like that. We don't use that word. So we sometimes use "glorious" to describe beautiful things. We hardly use the word "glory" at all.

So maybe, I've had friends from the South who grew up in the South, and there is this one—it's kind of like an exclamation, when something is awesome or amazing—my friend would say, "Glory. [Tim laughs] Glory." Which I think was shorthand, just, for "wow," or "that's amazing," or "that's incredible." But I don't know, maybe you're not from the South, and so you don't say that, like me.

So there you go. This is one of these challenges. We've had this every, kind of, week with this series. It's the power of these words that's lost on us, because they're just not a part of our vocabulary. "Glory," however, is a really, really significant term in a Christian's vocabulary. The word occurs hundreds of times throughout the Bible. And actually, some of the most memorable stories, or lines, in the Bible use this word "glory."

For example—this is, like, the "top ten" list of "glory" in the Bible. Remember that scene in *Charlie Brown's Christmas*, where Linus reads a Christmas story? You remember that part? You'll watch it again this time of year? So, this is from the Christmas story. It's a famous Christmas-card moment, where "the shepherds were out in their fields nearby"—it was right after Jesus was born—and then, "they're keeping watch over their flocks at night."

“Or by night,” says Linus. “An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them”—and, this is the New International Version—“and they were terrified.” But Linus, what does Linus say? “And they were sore afraid.” And that is perfect English from four hundred years ago, because he’s quoting from the King James translation, 1611.

So, there it is. There’s “the glory of the Lord”—it’s a famous scene. And it has to do—it’s nighttime, and the shepherds, and they’re doing their thing at night. And then there’s this appearing of an angelic being. And then, whatever “the glory of the Lord” is—we’re not told what it *is*. We are told what it *does*—what does it do? *It shines*. So what you can, kind of, infer—what is it?

Think of any Christmas card you’ve ever seen. What *is* the glory of the Lord? It’s a bright light emanating from what? Usually from a cloud. Yeah, if you look at, like, the history of—Google Images makes this all very simple now, right? [Tim laughs] You can search the “art history” of any image.

And—but the art history of the scene, it’s always some angelic beings, up on a cloud, that’s emanating light down, and the shepherds are going like [Tim gestures] *this*. So the glory of the Lord is a bright, shining cloud. So what’s *glory*? It’s what happens when God shows up, personally, and there’s like a lightning storm—a lightning thundercloud that emanates light. That’s the glory of the Lord.

Another classic line about the glory of God: Psalm 19, “The heavens declare the glory of God—the skies proclaim the work of his hands.” So here, in Psalm 19, the glory of God isn’t a light-emanating cloud. Rather, the clouds in the sky *declare* God’s glory. God’s glory is something *else*. It’s something that the heavens *point* to. And this is a famous line that the part—it speaks to a bigger thing, a bigger issue in a Christian’s view of the world: that all reality, the sky and the heavens—because they’re high above us, and so it’s an image of transcendence, and majesty, and so on—but it’s this idea that all reality points to, or declares and proclaims, the power and wisdom of its maker, of its creator.

This is creation theology—not the debates about “faith and science,” and how old the earth is—none of that. Just that basic claim that reality, as you and I experience it, however old it is, it’s the handiwork of a beautiful mind—of a mind and a being with such wisdom and power and generosity and creativity, that out of that mind, and out of that being, emerges the universe that you and I inhabit, in all of its physical wonder, right?

So it could be “the heavens declaring the glory of God,” but so does a tomato plant, and so does a tree, and so does a whale, and so do you, and so does your cup of coffee, and so—are you with me? It’s just [that] *physical reality* declares the glory of God, because it’s God’s *handiwork*, the work of his hands. So the glory of God’s a shining cloud, but it’s also something that the shining clouds *declare* by their existence.

Here's a famous line from First Corinthians 10: "So whether you eat or drink, whatever you do, do it for the glory of God." So pretty sure, there, it doesn't mean "bright, shining cloud," you know? You know, like—[Tim laughs]—drink up, for the clouds. You know? No, that's not what it means at all.

So your "glory" means something like God's reputation—God's honor—God's goodness that I receive this food. I didn't make it. It's a gift of sustenance that comes from outside myself. I live, and I've survived by it—and so that I eat and drink out of gratefulness to the one who provides it: *for the glory of God*. So here, it's about God's reputation.

Here's another famous line with "the glory of God," and it's from Paul's letter to the Romans, chapter 3: "For all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God." So it definitely doesn't mean "shining cloud" there. God's going to blame you for not being a shining cloud? [Tim laughs] You know—it doesn't make any sense at all. So what does it mean? To "fall short" of God's glory means: there's some purpose or destiny to which I'm called that connects to God's honor and power, but I've fallen short of it somehow.

[Laughs] All right, who's thoroughly confused about the meaning of the word "glory"? Is it a cloud, or is it something to which the clouds point? Or is it God's honor, that you can eat and drink too? Or is it some standard, for which you and I have not attained? The Bible uses the same word to talk about all of these—what for us seem like very different ideas. What on earth is glory? And—because it's really important. These are just four. The word occurs hundreds of times, from cover to cover, in the Bible.

So here's what I have found. I have found this word invites us into a whole way of thinking: about who God is—and who we are as human beings—and what we're here for. And this word, actually, if you explore this word—which is what we're going to do in the next little bit here—it actually enters you into the storyline of the whole Bible, in a really powerful way. This word, and what it means, continues to surprise me as I reflect and learn more about it, and so—the rabbit hole goes deep.

[Tim gestures to visual] And so as always, before we dive into anything nerdy in Hebrew and Greek—because of course, you know, it's me—I'm going to do that—but let me first show you an image of an image that will make it very concrete, because this has been really helpful to me.

Yep, Cesar Chavez, or 39th and Glisan—like a mile-and-a-half from here, right up the road. And it stands at one of Portland's only large roundabouts, at a main—main intersection. It's a really busy intersection. It has huge roundabouts. And at the center of it stands a statue of whom? It's Joan of Arc—did you know that? And there it is. Why on earth is Joan of Arc [Tim laughs] in the middle of a roundabout on Glisan Street, in Portland? It's a really interesting story. And it invites us into a bit of Portland history.

So that statue has been standing there since 1925—almost one hundred years. And it got a new, gleaming bronze-plate cover job, about a decade ago. When I was growing up, it was *green*, like that, because it's bronze. It's been there for way longer than any of us sitting here in the room. It's been there for almost one hundred years.

It was commissioned, paid for, and established—put there. A man named Henry Coe was a banker—a bank president—of a large chain of banks, here in the U.S. He was an Oregon senator, and he was a personal friend of Theodore Roosevelt.

And this is one of actually four large bronze statues that Henry Coe donated to the city of Portland, and all four of them still stand today—there's three others. Does anyone know—this is a great Portland trivia—the other three? They're of people—people.

One is on 56th and Sandy. George Washington—that's exactly right. Do you know—there's that triangle—it's that crazy intersection.

Okay, the other two? Lincoln—Abraham Lincoln, standing there, in the park blocks—South Park blocks, by PSU. And another one's in the park blocks too: Teddy Roosevelt, Rough Rider, standing—do you guys know these statues? Now you need to get a cup of coffee and enjoy different parts of the city and walk around.

All four of these were set up in the Twenties and donated by Henry Coe. It's really interesting. Three presidents and Joan of Arc [Tim laughs] on Glisan Street—it's so interesting.

Okay, so two things are interesting. One is that this is a copy. Henry Coe was in Paris, and he saw this—the original. This is a copy. And it's a copy of—yeah, there—you can see—of the original Joan of Arc—I'm not going to butcher his last name, because I don't speak French—so, by Emmanuel Frenchman. [Tim laughs] But there you can see the original, and it's very, very close. Only the flag—unless it's just the angle—the flag, it looks like a slightly different shape. But there you go. That's the original. And it was put there in 1925.

Now, Joan of Arc—I don't know if you know this story. I didn't see the movie whenever it came out. And so what I know is, you know, the basic outline—what Wikipedia tells me, and the *History of the Roman Catholic Church*, that I have sitting in my library. And what it tells me: Joan of Arc, she lived 600 years ago.

And she was, after her death, declared a Roman Catholic saint—sometime after it. She was a French teenage girl. And this was in the early 1400s: Britain and France were going at it, as they did through much of European history. But the 1400s began with France under the rule and military occupation of the British.

And so Joan of Arc famously had a dream, a vision—angelic vision. And God told her that she was to lead the French forces to victory over the British and free this besieged

town that she was in. And so she came up out of her dream, and it was this remarkable story of her inspiring all these soldiers to break through the siege lines and to free this French town that was being besieged.

And then she went on, over the next year, to lead and inspire the French troops to push back the British—you guys know the story roughly? It's incredible—she was nineteen when she was captured by the British and burned at the stake—it's an incredible, incredible story.

And so just, like, stop. It was 600 years ago. 100 years from now, the odds are very high that no one's going to remember any one of us in this room, or anything that we did—100 years from now. So I don't know if that's what you wanted to hear when you came to church this morning, but it's true.

And here we are on the other side of the planet, 600 years after this teenage girl, and there's a gleaming statue of her in the middle of our city—and thousands and thousands of people drive around her, every day, and rekindle her memory. Isn't that remarkable? So there's something—what happens every week, in my own—since I was a little boy, right?—I've been seeing the statue, and her story has always been fascinating to me because of the statue.

So here, in English, what we might say about the statue: that this image is “a memorial.” It memorializes her great accomplishments, or boldness, or whatever. We might use the English word “honor,” right? It “honors” Joan of Arc, or it “elevates her honor,” her reputation—this is the language we would use.

In Bible-language, what you would say is that this statue “glorifies” Joan of Arc. And you would actually even say more than that. This statue, this image, points you to a reality. It's a physical representation of a person. And so it *enhances* the reputation of Joan of Arc—it “glorifies her,” is how you would say it, in Bible-ese. But you would say more—you would also say that this statue is Joan of Arc's “glory.” It *is* her glory. It's a physical embodiment of her importance, and reputation, and significance, sitting right there on Glisan Street.

So with all of that in mind—we'll come back to the Joan of Arc statue, because it has a really interesting history over the last 100 years—I'll teach you the Hebrew word for “glory,” because how can I do otherwise, at this point? I've just perfectly set you up. And because the word occurs so many times, and we've already seen it has lots of different meanings, or nuances of meaning, and putting this all together in one big idea and running it through the storyline of the Bible—*boom*. Like a bold moment, at least for me.

So here's the Hebrew word, if you want to take a crack at it—anybody? *kavod*. If you said *kavod*, pat yourself on the back. *kavod*. So here's what the word means, at its most basic, its most literal meaning. It's a story about an old Israelite priest named Eli. And

there was a battle that the Israelites were fighting, and they had taken the ark of the covenant, which had the cherubim and—the *Raiders of the Lost Ark* thing, right? And so they went out, took it to battle, and the Israelites lost the battle. And their enemies in that battle, the Philistines, stole the ark, which was very precious to the Israelites.

And so when Eli hears of the loss of the ark and the loss in the battle, he fell backward off his chair by the side of the gate. His neck was broken, and he died. It's really intense. A really revered man in his town. Now, is it odd to fall backward in a chair and die? That's a little intense, isn't it? [Tim laughs] You know? I mean, you can get really hurt falling backward in your chair, but he fell backward in his chair, and he died. How did that happen? And the storyteller gives us two pieces of information to clarify, to help us paint the mental image here.

First of all, he's very old—his bones are brittle. Now, if your bones are brittle, and you fall backward in your chair, are you likely to get hurt? Are you likely to *die*? Second piece of information: he had *kavod*. He had *kavod*. So we're talking four hundred and fifty pounds of human, falling on a ninety-year-old vertebrae, backward in a chair. And it becomes understandable now—are you with me? His neck snapped.

So that's *kavod*. It's the most basic—there's all kinds of uses of the word *kavod*, which we translate as “glory,” but that would be a bad English translation. It means “weight,” or “heaviness.”

There's a famous spy story in the biblical book called “Judges,” and there's a man named Ehud, who—he's left-handed. And so he always wears his dagger—he has a little secret assassin's dagger that he straps to the inside of his right thigh, and so the guards don't think about it. And so they check him when he goes into this king's palace; they check his left thigh, and there's no knife there.

And so Ehud, he goes into the throne room of a king named Eglon—wonderful boy name, Eglon—and he's the king of Moab. And he's so *kavod*, he has so much *kavod*, that when Ehud stabs him in the belly, the whole dagger's swallowed up and you can't pull it out—do you guys know that story? It's in the Bible. Every junior high boy who's grown up in youth group knows that story. [Tim laughs] Right? Because you never forget—I didn't grow up in youth group, but people I've met who did. So there you go. This word is used many times in the Bible in its most basic, literal meaning: “heaviness” or “weight.”

Okay, so let's take the next step. In English, even the word “heavy,” we use literally—you know, “this is a heavy rock.” But we also use the word “heavy” as a metaphor. Like if you hear of some bad news that happened to your friends, one of the things you would say, in English, maybe is—what kind of news is that? It's “heavy news—” it's so “heavy.”

Or you might use another metaphor, of like, your heart being “heavy.” We might talk about “the gravity” of a situation. And so we’re using *literal* images of “weight” to describe, metaphorically, that something is important—that it’s really intense—that it’s really significant. And Hebrew uses the word *kavod* in exactly the same way.

So Psalm 7 is connected to King David—and this is in a group of Psalms, at the beginning of the book of Psalms, where David had to flee. He was king, and he had to flee his own palace because his son, who was named Absalom, launched a coup to assassinate his father. And so King David has to flee from the city and castle that he built and, you know, he runs into the hills, and so on.

And so when he describes how difficult and tragic this is for him, he uses language like this. He says, “The enemy pursues my soul and overtakes it—he tramples my life to the ground. He lays my *kavod* in the dust.” [Tim grins] This is such a good metaphor—do you get it? Or does this just seem weird to you? My *heaviness*. My enemies chase me out of *my* palace [Tim laughs] that I built, and now I’m a king with no nation, and I’m running for my life in the desert. My *kavod* is in the dust. It’s very visceral—but you get what he’s talking about. My *heaviness* is in the dirt.

So here, *kavod*—it’s not about literal weight. It’s about my *metaphorical* importance. The “heaviness” of my role in society. We might say “my reputation” or “my honor.” And what we’re talking about here is someone’s *gravitas*, right? Someone’s *ethos* when they enter into a room. I’ve never been in a room with the president of the United States. But I have been in the city when he came to our city.

This happened a couple of years ago when President Obama came to our city. And you remember, they shut down I-84—speaking of I-84 again—do you remember? And I was on 20th—I was on the overpass at 20th with some friends who were visiting town. We’d picked them up from the airport, we’re showing them around, and then all of a sudden we meet this blockade, and we can’t go over the overpass. And then we see—right?—the motorcade of these police officers.

And they come, and then it’s like three minutes later—finally comes the limit. You guys remember when that happened? It, like, shut the whole city down. He was going to the airport. Anyway, so what I would say is: it was like a wave—this invisible “barrier” surrounding a very, very important person—whose “heaviness” goes before him and after him—in the form of police cars. And there’s this invisible, but real—social reality—of someone’s importance and significance—their “weightiness.”

And so you, kind of like, when they come into your room or your presence, you notice it. Maybe you’ve been around somebody that you consider famous. And how did you feel when you went up to them to have them sign your book, or shake their hand, or

whatever? You feel a little intimidated—you feel a little nervous, right? That’s their *kavod*. [Tim laughs] You’re in the presence of their *kavod*—their significance.

And so what David is saying is that “my weightiness”—what makes me significant—is now laying in the dirt, in the mud, by Absalom. So—it’s such a good image. So, it can mean “physical weight.” It can mean your “metaphorical importance,” or significance.

And connected to this is even another usage of meaning—it’s really interesting. Because it can be invisible—this social presence that somebody important has—but it can also take physical form as well. For example, King Hezekiah—who’s a great, great, great, great, great-grandson of King David—he had immense riches and *kavod*.

Now, how do you know he had *kavod*? Well, he made for himself treasuries, for silver and gold and precious stones and spices and shields, and all kinds of valuable articles. He had storehouses also for the produce of grain and wine and oil, and pens for all kinds of cattle, and sheepholds for his flocks. He has *kavod*.

This is a human with great *kavod*—how do you know? Well, it’s not just that you get nervous when you see them. You walk around his kingdom, and you see these physical realities of this person’s importance—his *kavod*. Like what? Well, you go in, and you see, like, a warehouse full of army shields—[Tim laughs] right? This is very impressive. And you’re like, “This single person has so much power. This single person was able to build and architect and design all of this speak”—are you guys with me? It makes sense.

So if we could time-warp back to when I was a teenager—when I was thirteen—and I’m at that stage in life where I’m completely dependent on my parents for *everything*. I mean, *everything*. [Tim laughs] Right? I’m thirteen: shelter, food, clothing, money, healthcare. But my greatest desire and goal is to be independent—it’s this irony of being a teenager. Because the whole point of your existence, when you’re thirteen, is to “stick it” to your parents, [Tim laughs] you know—and to, like, “declare your independence” from them, where ironically, you, like, depend on them for every breath and bite of food that you eat, whatever.

So if you were to enter my room when I was thirteen, here’s what you would have seen: you would have seen the walls completely covered with posters of professional skateboarders. You would have seen it covered with pages that I’d torn out from *Thrasher* magazine and put up on my wall. And it would be skateboarding. It would also be advertisements for skateboard companies.

My favorite one ever—it was the graphic art on my first skateboard—which was Eddie Reategui, who rode for Team Alva. And he had—it was a barbarian holding a bloody severed head with a big axe, standing on bloody corpses that he had hacked to pieces.

[Tim laughs] And I thought that was the coolest thing in the world when I was thirteen—don't ask me why.

You would see, like, my display of thirty-two-ounce Seven-Eleven cups, like half-filled with Dr. Pepper, and this kind of thing—and that, actually, the sugar soaked through the wax and glued it to my dresser. You would see my stack of CDs *and* cassettes, because I grew up at the transition period. And so you would see Megadeth and Metallica and Suicidal Tendencies, and all this.

And I would bring you into my room, and I would be so proud, because I'm showing you my *kavod*. [Tim laughs] It's my *kavod*—it's borrowed *kavod*, because the room is my parents' room, and the money—which is all like . . . but I think it's mine. And it's my *kavod*, because I arranged it, and I selected it. And this *kavod* tells you about my unique significance, and importance, and who I am in the world—are you guys with me? You had a *kavod*, too, when you were thirteen, and—whatever you did with your room.

[Tim grins] But think—like, we all do this—think of: if you have, like, a workspace at work and you put little stuff on your desk or your table, right? That's your *kavod*. It's the unique physical embodiments that speak to who you are, and your significance, and your story, and your import—your *kavod*. That's the word you would use to describe this. My *kavod* was not very impressive, compared to a warehouse of army shields—[Tim laughs] that's very impressive.

So it means something that's "heavy". It can mean, metaphorically, my reputation that's significant—and it can refer to the physical embodiments of my significance and my reputation. How you guys doing?

Let's come full circle, because this is all about *people* having *kavod*. But when this word is used in the Bible, it's usually used about God's *kavod*. So we come back to one of the top ten list—lines from Psalm 19. And if you walked around Jerusalem, and saw Hezekiah's *kavod*—when you looked at the storehouses, and the towers, and the shields, and all the gold and so on—and we'd be like, "Oh, such *kavod*."

And in the biblical imagination, the poet of Psalm 19 wants you to walk outside this building, when we're done gathering together, and to look up and to look around, and to see clouds and to see a tree and birds in the sky and say, "This is God's *kavod*." So you walk into my room, you see what I've made that tells you about who I am. Where do I go to see God's *kavod*? Well, I open my eyes, and I experience reality. And it's God's *kavod*—are you with me? So it's exactly the same word, and it's exactly the same concept.

And this is core-core to a biblical view, a biblical—a Christian—view of the world. And it's in stark contrast to, kind of, the main competitor worldview—one of the main competitor worldviews, at least in Western culture, which is non-theism or atheism. And

it's just, simply, the view of: one way or another, the molecules bounced into each other, in a way that brought about us—and lucky us that we are here to experience consciousness and reason and beauty and love. But the molecules just happened to combine—you know?—in that way, and aren't we lucky?

In a theist worldview, or a Christian worldview, believes that all reality—the sky—this wood thing—my hands—my eyes that interpret light reflecting off of your cells and molecules, bouncing, translated through my brain into meaning and reality—and says all of that is God's *kavod*. It speaks to a beautiful mind, full of wisdom and creativity and power and generosity—to both imagine and architect and bring into reality the world that exists, and then to share that reality with other creatures. That's a Christian view of God's *kavod*.

All reality declares God's *kavod*. The skies—all of it—declare that it's the work of his hands. So that's true of physical reality. It's like we're walking into God's room, and that he shows us everything. But there's one more thing that's in creation that uniquely points to God's *kavod*.

It's in Psalm 8—it's another poem in the book of Psalms—Psalm 8. I'll just read it to you. The poet says to God, "Would I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars that you have set in place? What is humanity, that you're mindful of them? What are human beings that you care about them?"

So you know, the poet—it's a clear night—looks out into the stars. It's vast, complex—humans are very small. There's so many other creatures—the world's so big—why are humans a big deal? Well, you made humans "a little lower than angels."

So angels, it's another one of these difficult things for people in a Western view of the world. And I'll admit it's even been a challenge for me to wrap my head around what this is. This is another part of a Christian-Jewish view of the world: that creation consists not just of molecules and cells and atoms that take up the four dimensions that we experience. But that there are also things that are real, that exist in more dimensions than we know and can detect. And these beings are called "angels" in the Bible, and they are "like" God in many ways.

And so what the poet's saying is: you made humans just a little bit lower than the angelic, divine beings. And you have crowned humans with *kavod*, and with honor. This might make you nervous, but just remember [Tim laughs] it's the Bible that you're reading here. This is a very high view of what human beings are—that you'd be justified by mistaking a human being for a god, the poem's saying. They're just a little bit less majestic and glorious than a divine being—is a human.

Why is that? Well, human beings have borrowed *kavod*—*kavod* that's been granted to us. God's crowned human beings with *kavod* and honor. How do I know that? Well, look

at what human beings do: “You made them rulers over the works of your hands. You put everything under their feet—flocks and herds and animals of the wild, birds in the sky, fish in the sea, all that swims in the paths of the sea.”

So there’s this acknowledgment here. Human beings are a part of the universe that declares God’s *kavod*; we’re a part of the creation. But then, uniquely, it’s this view of the human species: that the humans are also unique and distinct from the creation that they are absolutely interwoven with. And it has to do with what they do on an average day—they *rule*.

So human beings don’t just exist in our environment. We actually recreate the environments that we spread into—right? Human beings don’t just inhabit—we actually recreate human beings. And all creatures do this—like ants make anthills, these kinds of things—and moose make their beds out in the tall grass. But human beings make skyscrapers, right? And human beings make things like sports stadiums—and human beings make things like art performance theaters, where the human beings just dance around and tell stories inside—you know? Like, that’s very unique.

What other species is quite like human beings? And human beings—through consciousness and reason and love and relationship and our social bonds—have done something here, to planet Earth, that no other species has—it’s absolutely remarkable: *we rule*. [Tim laughs] Humans *rule*. We’re almost gods. That’s what Psalm 8 is saying.

Now, if this is surprising to you, that this is in the Bible, it’s because in our culture, Christianity and its view of human beings is mostly associated with a very low view of humans—that human beings “suck,” that we’re “lame,” and broken, and selfish, and sinners—and that’s all that the Bible, or Christianity, has to say about human beings. And this is one of those cases where a half-truth, or a part of the truth, has, unfortunately, become the whole truth. And so, yes, that’s a very important—we’ll talk about that in just a second—this view of human beings as “compromised.”

But that’s not how the story of the Bible begins. What page of the Bible do you think is inspiring this poet? What page of the Bible has this poet been staring at, and pondering, and taking long walks with cups of tea to think and pray over? [Tim laughs] What page number? Page one. Page one of the Bible inspired Psalm 8.

Psalm 8 is a poetic reflection on page one of the Bible, which just—in the next slide has this to say about human beings, “Then God said, ‘Let us make humanity in our image, according to our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea, birds of the sky, over cattle, over all the earth’—how you guys doing?”

The story of the Bible begins with the God of all *kavod*—the God of wisdom and power and brilliance and creativity that can generate a universe like the one that you and I inhabit, and, even though—through math and physics—human beings know more about

the universe and its incredible age and the incredible processes by which we are here right now—we still haven't a clue [Tim laughs], ultimately, about why and how we actually got here.

And the biblical story begins by saying we're the product of a beautiful mind, who has generated this whole universe—that's wonderful and glorious and raw and incredible and dangerous and beautiful. And that human beings have a unique role within God's universe. There's something about a human being that reflects the creator in a way that's different than any other creature. This is called "the image of God."

This is a Jewish and Christian concept that stands as part of the bedrock of Western society's view of human beings: that life is sacred, and that every human being—no matter gender, social status, whatever—is sacred—that all of life, and all human beings are sacred. This is a Jewish and Christian idea that's been contributed to human history—and it's rooted, right here, on page one of the Bible.

And so human beings are given this unique responsibility that—among all the creatures—that they are to reflect God's *kavod* in such a way that they take all the potential that God's packed into the universe, and they develop it and create it and make more of themselves—and make neighborhoods, and gardens, and those art performing centers, and coliseums, and skyscrapers, and technology—and we take creation into new, uncharted territory. This is the storyline of the Bible. It's a view of what humans are.

And so human beings *reflect* God's glory, just like the Joan of Arc statue on Cesar Chavez and Glisan: it reflects and points to something greater than itself. This image points to the real person. And also, at the same time, this person is an embodiment—the statue—is an embodiment of that person's glory. It's the image of God. How you guys doing—you with me? This is very profound. Now, this is only page one of the Bible, right?

So of course, that's not where the story ends. God gives the humans a choice about how they're going to go about ruling this world, right? And whatever you make of that story about the snake and the tree and so on—what's going on here? It's humanity: that they're given this commission as physical embodiments of God's own *kavod*—images of God—they're given this immense responsibility, which means they're going to have to make judgment calls on what is good and what is not good—and what is bad and what is evil—and what is right and what is just.

And so the question, represented by this tree of knowing good and evil, is: will the humans trust God's wisdom? Will they submit to God's wisdom as the glorious, wise, generous one? And submit to God's definition of good and evil? Or will they seize the opportunity and redefine good and evil for themselves? That's what that story is about.

And of course, what happens? Right? What happens? The choice that was made on page three of the Bible, it's the choice that tells the truth about human nature, as far back as we can possibly tell. And it also tells the truth about my life over the last seven days—[Tim laughs] right? Which is: immense opportunities—incredible people around me—and what do I do? I continually blur the lines of good and evil, so that they're convenient *for me*. And usually other people are at a disadvantage because of how I've redefined good and evil.

And we do this on an individual level, and we do it on a corporate level. And when you and I, as a community, redefine good and evil—to my tribe's advantage—usually there's some other tribe that is at a disadvantage. And this is human history.

And so instead of being these glorious images that embody God's rule and beauty, and point to the generous creator God, we become these tarnished images. We vandalize other people—we vandalize ourselves—and we become just “shadows” of the glorious images that we're meant to be. That's how the story of the Bible goes.

And it has an interesting parallel to the fate of Joan of Arc at Cesar Chavez and Glisan. Did you know that statue is also *the most vandalized* statue in Portland history? Just a couple of examples. A number of years ago, two teenagers thought it would be funny to strap on, and then epoxy on, a large drill bit to make the horse into a unicorn. And I have to admit, that's really clever. [Tim laughs] It is actually kind of funny, isn't it?

But it's also horrifying—because it's such disrespect—[laughs] right?—to Emmanuel “Frenchman,” who made it. And to Joan of Arc, and to Henry Coe, and to the city of Portland. Joan of Arc's sword has been cut off before—her wreath has been pried off of her head. And if you drive by it today, you'll notice—what's missing from her hand? The flag's gone. It's been missing for years.

In 2004, there was a group of teenage boys who doused the whole thing in black paint, because they said it was “too shiny.” [Tim laughs] And *The Oregonian* has chronicled all of this. Just go into *The Oregonian* and search for “the Joan of Arc statue,” and you'll get a history of vandalism of the statue here in Portland.

Now here's what's interesting: even without the glorious wreath and the flagpole, can you tell who the image represents—does it still point to Joan of Arc? Does it point to Joan of Arc, with all of the glory that it *could* be pointing to her? No, it doesn't anymore. That's exactly like what the Bible is trying to tell us about the story of humanity: that you and I are made to be *so much more* than we currently experience. You and I are made to be capable of so much greater amounts of love, and generosity, and creativity, and industry, and hard work, and friendship—all of these are, like—it's what we're made for.

Because when a human being is flourishing in full capacity, that is the *kavod* of God. It points to the image that points to the one who is responsible for all that exists. Human

beings reflect the heart and the reality of God's character, in a way that no other creature does. And when you see a flourishing human, you're looking at God's *kavod*, his handiwork.

But unfortunately, most of us live severely under capacity. And so it's not just about the things that we do wrong; it's about the right and good things that we just simply fail to do, or don't live up to. And this is what Paul means when he says, "All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God."

It's not just that there's some, like, moral examination of the Ten Commandments—and if you fail to live up to them, you've "fallen short." It's about you and I actually not becoming the humans that even we, in our hearts, know that we're made to be. I fail to be the version of myself that I know—I know—I'm meant to become. And if you're honest with yourself, you know that's true of you too. And so this is where the story of Jesus comes into it, and we'll just use this to, kind of, conclude and take the bread and the cup.

There's a couple of lines about Jesus—some descriptions about who he was in the New Testament. I remember when I first read them, I thought they were interesting. But then when I—this whole, kind of, storyline was pointed out to me, the importance of these descriptions of Jesus leaped off the page.

They're both in one of Paul's letters, in his second letter to the Corinthians—we call Second Corinthians. And this is what he says. He says that distortion, that vandalism, of the human images of God isn't the end of the story. There's good news—and the good news is about the displaying of the glory of Christ, who *is* the image of God.

Now, just with those few words there, Paul's opening up a whole universe and a whole story. He's inviting us to see Jesus as the physical embodiment of God's glory. He is the wonderful, generous, loving, creative, creator God, *embodied* in the image of a human. And he's both—he's a complete and perfect reflection of who God is, but he's also—he's the image—he's a human. It's a glorious human—Jesus becomes the human that you and I are made to become, but perpetually fail to be. If I want to know what it means to truly be human, if I'm a Christian, I look to Jesus of Nazareth, and what I see is a human, wholly given over to the well-being of those around him.

And he was a being who emanated with such love and creativity and generosity that when people encountered him, usually one of two things happened. Either people came to him with openness, and an open mind, and an open heart, and they walked away from that encounter *totally* transformed—their bodies would be changed or healed—their minds and their hearts would be changed. And it was remarkable what happened when people encountered the glorious image of God in Jesus.

And that same power and generosity and creativity for other people, who were close-minded—they've bought into a narrative that their life, and that their story exists for their own glory. Right? [Tim laughs] It's like teenage Tim—everything that's good about my life is borrowed and given to me by somebody else, and I've made it into this story of *kavod* that's for myself and my own interests and my story. That's tragic—that's a human turned inward on themselves. And when those kinds of people encountered Jesus, very often, it just energized all of their selfishness, and they just—they couldn't take it. They hated him. They wanted to kill him.

And so you have the glorious image of God in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. He is, for me, the version of myself that I pray I could one day become. He is the best version of me I glimpse once in a while. And usually when I glimpse it, it's because he's with me and he's kicking me in the rear end to, like, [Tim grins] do something that I know I'm supposed to do, but usually don't do—are you with me?

It's Jesus—he's the image of God, and he's *the* human. And so what he does, as the human, is: he lives as the human that you and I are meant to be, but fail to be. And in his death, what he believed he was doing was: he was taking into himself the consequences of all of the vandalism that you and I do to ourselves—all of the selfishness, and the inward-turn of our hearts—all of the ways that we fail to be truly human to each other, through selfishness and snubbing each other—and we do it on a small level, and then we do it on a huge level.

And this is humans—we're so remarkable. When clans of gorillas fight with each other, like, some trees get broken. When clans of *humans* fight with each other, whole nations are wiped out, and hundreds of thousands of people die. We rule—we have “divine capacity” that's a gift. And when it becomes destructive, it's hell on earth. And that's what human history is.

But into that history comes the image of God. And he takes into himself all of the death and the sin and evil that we've contributed into the world, and he allows it to overwhelm and to kill him. And because this beautiful mind is so generous—he's determined to share his universe with his creatures. He won't allow our evil to get the last word. And Jesus's resurrection from the dead is the beautiful mind—generous, loving heart—that came among us, in the image of God. It conquers our sin and our evil and our death, amen?

It's Good News. The Good News displays the glory of the perfectly human one who is God with us. He *is* the image of God. And so when I look at Jesus, this is what he says in chapter 3: when I look at Jesus with the veil removed, I can see who Jesus actually is. I see, and I begin to reflect the glory of the Lord. And the Lord, who is the Spirit, he's actually transforming *us* to become more and more like his image with increasing glory.

Jesus actually wants to make you and I more human. And when you and I become more human, we become more perfect representations of God's glory, and of God's *kavod*—isn't this beautiful? This is such a beautiful way to see the world. [Tim laughs] Right?

And so whatever "rep" Christians have for having some self-destructive, depressive, self-hating view of the world—whatever—that's not the real story. This is the real story, and it's remarkable. This is an incredible story to find yourself in—and it's exactly the story that the Scriptures are telling us about Jesus and about you. Let me conclude.

We're going to have a time where we sing, and where we pray, and where we take the bread and the cup. What are the bread and the cup? They're images—right? These physical symbols, that show us and retell the moment where Jesus was most divine and most human—when he gave up his life in an act of self-giving love for the benefit of others, regardless of the cost to him.

What Jesus reveals to us is that the beautiful mind isn't just a "brain in a jar." This beautiful being that we call God, is a beautiful mind and a heart that is love, and that is determined on saving and rescuing his world. And that's exactly what we're telling and proclaiming when we take the bread and the cup: it's Jesus's broken body and his shed blood, as he died for our sins.

So I don't know where you're at today. Here's where I would encourage you to go is: just to think back over the last seven days' events, since we were gathered here together. Maybe there are some things that you did where you definitely fell short of the glorious version of who you know you ought to be. You behaved and you acted in ways that vandalized yourself—they dishonored you and the people around you.

Maybe there were ways where there were opportunities to be the kind of person that you know Jesus is making you into, and you walked away from those opportunities. Maybe it was an opportunity for generosity. Maybe it was an opportunity to say a kind word and to love your neighbor, and you didn't do it for whatever reason.

Let's bring both the things we've done wrong and the good things that we've failed to do. And these are precisely the ways that Jesus wants to make us into an image that reflects God's glory, amen? Let's come with confession, and let's come with grateful hearts for Jesus, who loved us and gave himself for us.

[EMSB theme fades in]

All right, thanks for listening to “Exploring My Strange Bible” podcast. And we’re going to go on to future words like “covenant” in future episodes. And there you go—let’s keep learning and growing together. Thanks for listening. We’ll see you next time.

[EMSB theme fades out]