

A Nice Knock-Down Argument

When Alice told Humpty Dumpty that she didn't understand what he meant by the word 'glory', he replied, "Of course you don't---till I tell you. I meant 'there's a nice knock-down argument for you!'" And when Alice objected that glory didn't mean 'a nice knockdown argument', he scornfully replied, "When I use a word it means just what I choose it to mean---neither more nor less."

Yes, we're in Lewis Carroll territory, and more specifically in Looking-Glass country. You might wonder what on earth this is all about. It seems irrelevant to current interests, though the concept of words being twisted to suit the speaker's needs has a surprising contemporary relevance (I won't say which politicians I'm thinking of here). But a more important question arises. Humpty never gave Alice a satisfactory answer to her question.

So, what does glory really mean?

I have to say this has a relevance for me. For some time I've wondered what 'glory' really means. It's what I call a 'golden fuzzy word'; when I hear it, it has a golden shine to it, but when you look at it a little more closely it is blurred and hard to define. In everyday life, of course, we use it in various ways. If the weather is bright and sunny, we might say, "Isn't it a glorious day!" It can also refer to military glory, as in the song 'Heart of Oak', with its cry of, "Come cheer up, my lads! 'tis to glory we steer". Again, the motto of the Queen's Royal Lancers is, "Death or glory". (I like the story of the man who had those words on a sheet of paper at his bedside, with underneath in smaller letters, "NB Only one of the above need be attempted.") In any case, recent wars, though containing many examples of courage and gallantry, have shown that war is generally anything but glorious.

Everyday usage doesn't help, so I turned to the dictionary, which defines glory as, "High renown or honour won by notable achievements," or "Magnificence and great beauty." That didn't get me very much farther. Surely glory means something more than this. Doesn't God come into it somewhere? Well, a further dictionary definition is, "Praise, worship and thanksgiving offered to God". At once I thought of the angels at the nativity, singing, "Glory to God in the highest!". This helped a little, but I couldn't help feeling there was something more. The standard dictionary had taken me so far; perhaps I should turn to a Bible dictionary.

The Bible dictionary gave a lot of information, not all of which was helpful. As I read on, I found it showed me that God himself is the source of glory, because he himself is glorious. If your idea of God is of a bad-tempered old man with a beard, sitting on a cloud and hurling thunderbolts at anyone who displeases him, then you're thinking of the wrong god. As far as I'm concerned, God is sheer goodness, sheer beauty, sheer love, and he wants to lift us up rather than to push us down. When we say, "What a glorious day!" we mean that the day, although imperfect, reflects something of the true nature of God. Think of the loveliest thing you can imagine, multiply it by a trillion, and you come somewhere near God's true glory. Because he is the source of power, his glory is also powerful. No wonder that when Jesus was about to be arrested and they asked him, "Who are you?", and he answered, "I am", claiming to be God himself in human flesh, the guards all fell over. (Now there's a nice knock-down argument for you!)

So I've come to the end of my quest. I still haven't found a complete definition of glory; perhaps it doesn't exist, but I've come to understand a little more about the God who is the source of all true glory. I have no problems worshipping a God as wonderful as this. What do you think?

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