

The Glory of God

Isaiah 52:13–53:3, John 12:20-50 (ESV)

May 6, 2007

“The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified....And what shall I say? ‘Father, save me from this hour’? But for this purpose I have come to this hour. Father, glorify your name.” Then a voice came from heaven: “I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again.” The eternal destiny of the entire human race depended upon this moment. Our fate would have been sealed if this had gone the other way. Jesus could have said, “Father, save me from this hour.” He could have declined the crucifixion. He could have lived to an old age. We would never have heard of him. There would be no churches. There would be no Christian worship. There would be no Christian faith. There would be no Christian music. There would be no Christian colleges or universities. There would be no Christian hospitals. There would be no Christian missions. There would be no Christian values. There would be no Christian love. There would be no Christian nations. There would be no western world as we know it. There would be no Christian marriages, homes, or families. There would be no salvation. There would be no hope. And, more importantly than all these put together, God would not have been glorified.

The glory of God is everything. The glory of God is more important than salvation. The glory of God is more important than life. The glory of God is more important than breath. The glory of God is more important than well-being. The glory of God—the honor, beauty, holiness, and majesty of God—is the reason the universe exists, both to realize, and to reflect, that greater good. The glory of God is also the reason that you and I exist, to realize, to reflect, and to enjoy, that greater good. The glory of God is greater than, and more important than, the glory of everything else put together. Jesus knew this. He knew it, he lived it, and he acted upon it.

“The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified....And what shall I say? ‘Father, save me from this hour’? But for this purpose I have come to this hour. Father, glorify your name.” Then a voice came from heaven: “I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again.” Jesus Christ lived for the glory of God. More than that, he was willing to die for the glory of God, and he did die for the glory of God. Jesus Christ held the glory of God to be of greater value and importance than his own desires and his own life. Jesus embodied an overriding concern and even zeal for the glory of God, such that it was more important to him than saving his own life. That is to say, it was more important to him than his own salvation. Instead of asking for

himself to be saved from a horrible death on the cross, he asked for his Father's name to be glorified. And so it was, both in the asking and again in the dying. It was glorified in this willingness to die even as it was glorified again in the actual crucifixion.

This one time in our shared human history, someone chose honoring the glory of God above saving his own neck. And this glorification is our salvation. In this decision, as in the subsequent crucifixion, the powers of sin, death, and evil were broken. Specifically, the power of selfishness and self-centeredness was broken and undone. Instead of seeking to save himself, Jesus chose to accept the horrible death coming to him, which means that he chose God's will above his own well-being, with the result both that God was glorified and that we were saved. We were saved because he chose not to be saved. We were saved because he sought God's glory above his life. We were saved because he sought our salvation above his life. We were saved because God was glorified in this gloriously unselfish decision and action.

"What shall I say? 'Father, save me from this hour'? But for this purpose I have come to this hour. Father, glorify your name." What a wonderful prayer! How often we ask for what we want in prayer. Here Jesus names but specifically declines what he might have wanted. He prays instead for the will of God and for the glory of God. How much we could learn from this! What we think is for our own good may not be the best thing for us, and even if it were, from any earthly perspective, how much better it would be, how much more faithful it would be, how much more appropriate it would be, how much more glorious it would be, for us to seek the will and glory of God.

Immediately after this prayer, "Father, glorify your name," a voice came from heaven saying, "I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again." God was glorified in the prayer, in the willingness to die, in the decision and commitment to seek God's will. And God would be glorified again in the actual deed, in the suffering unto death, in the continuing refusal even under the most difficult circumstances to choose self over God or to choose self over others. Thanks be to God!

"Father, glorify your name." "I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again." These words strike us as words of reassurance and confirmation, but they were not meant for Jesus. He said, "This voice has come for your sake, not mine. Now is the judgment of this world; now will the ruler of this world be cast out. And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself." He said this to show by what kind of death he was going to die. Strangely enough, not only would God be glorified in the crucifixion of Jesus Christ, but also, and perhaps even more strangely, that would be the very moment of Jesus Christ's own glorification. When he mentioned his being lifted up from earth, he was not talking about his ascension

into heaven. He was talking about his being lifted up upon the cross, about his crucifixion, about his very death. That was his being lifted up. That was his elevation. That was his coronation. That was his enthronement. Indeed, it is from the cross that Jesus reigns, drawing all people to himself, even us, for his glory was in this obedience and the fulfillment of this duty.

Perhaps this is what Jesus was telling the Greeks who came seeking to see him. It does not say whether he received them. What he does say, in effect, is that if you want to see him, you need to look to the cross. This is still true today. If you want to see Jesus, look to the cross. If you want to see who Jesus is, look to obedience on the cross. If you want to see his glory, look to his humiliation on the cross. Indeed, if you want to see the glory of God, look to the suffering and death of Jesus Christ on the cross. If you want to see God, look to Jesus. “Whoever sees me sees him who sent me.” So let us believe both in Jesus Christ and also in God his Father.

At one level, what Jesus says here about life and death applies to himself. “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.” Surely no one has borne as much fruit in death as has Jesus Christ. And yet at another level, what he says here about life and death is not only for himself but also applies to us. He elaborates upon the germination of the grain of wheat by saying, “Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life.” If Jesus had saved his own life from the cross, he would not be the Christ. And if we try to save our own lives in this world, we will not be Christians. I do not mean for us to be reckless. I do not even mean for us not to be appropriately concerned stewards of the life with which God has entrusted us. I do not mean for us not to appreciate it. But I do mean for us not to make this life an absolute value. We are not to be inappropriately concerned about this life. We are not to love this life inordinately. Our hope is in the next life, and if we cling to this life too tightly, we will miss the next life altogether.

Thus, “If anyone serves me, he must follow me; and where I am, there will my servant be also. If anyone serves me, the Father will honor him.” We are called to be servants of the Christ. We are called to be followers of the Christ. And we are promised that wherever he is—and we know that now he is with the Father—that wherever he is, we will be there with him. Thanks be to God! It was some years ago now that the movie “Chariots of Fire” was made. It was based on the true story of Eric Liddell, a young Scotsman studying for the ministry and who eventually became a Presbyterian missionary. He was a runner representing Great Britain in the Olympics. But as the games progressed, his main event was scheduled on a Sunday. He refused to run. Even the prince tried to persuade him differently but did not

succeed. Finally, one of the other runners traded a race with him, so Liddell did get to run in the Olympics for his country on Monday, though in another event. Before that race began, a runner from another country, impressed by the witness he had made, handed him a note paraphrasing today's reading: "The Good Book says, 'He who honors me, I will honor.'" And in fact, Liddell went on to win that race.

Let us beware in this life of any competing claims for glory. There is a temptation for us to become intoxicated with our own glory when we should be seeking the glory of God. There is a danger that we might seek the glory of blood and soil when we should be seeking the glory of God. There is a tendency for us to seek the glory of gold when we should be seeking the glory of God. There is a confusion when we revel in the vitalities of life instead of glorying in the giver of life. There is a temptation to love the glory that comes from man more than the glory that comes from God. Let us beware the competing claims for glory, and let us be brave to seek the glory of God alone.

Jesus understood whose glory to seek. He could have said, "Father, save me from this hour." He could have declined the crucifixion. He could have lived to an old age. And we would never have heard of him. Our fate would have been sealed if he had gone that way. The eternal destiny of the entire human race depended upon that moment. "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.... And what shall I say? 'Father, save me from this hour'? But for this purpose I have come to this hour. Father, glorify your name." Then a voice came from heaven: "I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again."

To God be the glory forever and ever! Amen.

© Dr. James C. Goodloe IV, Pastor
Grace Covenant Presbyterian Church
1627 Monument Avenue
Richmond, Virginia 23220
www.grace-covenant.org