

To the Praise of His Glory

I'm guessing that in a group this size, and because of where we live, that a number of you have never seen the Grand Canyon. Now, for those who have never seen it I could try to help you understand what the Grand Canyon is like by describing it to you. I could give you dimensions and colors and such things. I could show you pictures and videos and all of that would be helpful. But there is no substitute for seeing it yourself. I've seen it several times and it boggles my mind every time. It is more vast and beautiful than words or pictures can express. One really needs to experience it to have some comprehension of it.

This year for Advent, we are focusing on the glory of God. And if it is true that words and descriptions come up short in describing the Grand Canyon, words and descriptions alone surely come up short when describing the glory of the God. We need to experience it to have some comprehension of it. Thankfully, God entered into our world to give us that experience.

At Jesus' birth the angels cried out, "Glory to God in the highest" (Lk 2:14) and John says that the Word became flesh and dwelt among us and that we beheld his glory (Jn 1:14). Jesus' incarnation was a profound expression of God's glory. This Advent, we want to look at the glory of God as seen in Jesus' incarnation with the hope that we would become more captivated by God's glory and therefore more motivated to live in ways that are consistent with the glory due to Him.

Now, before we look at this I wanted to say a couple of things about God's glory. God's glory is not a specific attribute. Rather, it applies to all of His attributes. It applies to the greatness of His entire nature. The word that is usually translated "glory" in the OT literally means weighty. It can have the sense of honorable, dignity, or a high position. God's not a lightweight. He is weighty in his honor. The New Testament word that is translated "glory" conveys the meaning of brightness, splendor, magnificence, and fame.

God Acts for His Own Glory

Okay, so with that I think the place to start is with a big picture idea about God's glory and that is this – God acts for His own glory. Scripture makes plain that God is working out His plan and the purpose of His plan is ultimately about His glory. God acts for His own glory.

In Isaiah 48, God says this to His chosen people, Israel:

*⁹ "For the sake of My name I delay My wrath,
And for My praise I restrain it for you,
In order not to cut you off.*

*¹⁰ "Behold, I have refined you, but not as silver;
I have tested you in the furnace of affliction.*

¹¹ *“For My own sake, for My own sake, I will act;
For how can My name be profaned?
And My glory I will not give to another.*

Israel had been rebellious. And yet how God dealt with them was all about His own glory. He says, *For the sake of my name. For My praise. For My own sake I will act. My glory I will not give to another.* God acts for his own glory.

We see this all over Biblical history. When God called Israel it was that they might be to the praise of His glory (Is. 49:3; Jer. 13:11). God rescued Israel out of Egypt for His glory (Ps. 106:7-8). God restored Israel from exile for His own glory (Ezek. 36:22-23, 32). When Jesus was sent into the world, it was for the Father’s glory. When Jesus died it was for the Father’s glory. When Jesus comes again, it will be for the Father’s glory (Matt. 16:27). Jesus called His followers to live in a way that gives God glory (1 Cor. 10:31). God acts in history for His own glory. And this is such a foundational truth to understand.

Now, if we don’t think carefully about this idea that God is always acting for His own glory it might sound a little off to us, right? It can sound self-centered that God acts for his OWN glory. Aren’t we taught to act for the good of others instead of ourselves? How can it be right then that God seeks for His own glory in this way? It’s a good question; I’m glad you asked.

I like what John Piper says about this question. He says . . .

God is the one being in the universe for whom self-exaltation is not the act of a needy ego, but an act of infinite giving. The reason God seeks our praise is not because he won’t be fully God until he *gets* it, but that we won’t be happy until we *give* it. This is not arrogance. This is grace. This is not egomania. This is love.

(<https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/is-jesus-an-egomaniac>)

We were created for God and our joy is fulfilled only when we give God the praise and glory due His name. If we choose to exalt in our heart anything other than God, then we are giving an exalted status to something that is lesser; to something that is not infinite. That thing becomes an idol. But if we make God the highest thing in our life then we are rightly related to our Creator and we will find our joy made full. And God is seeking this for us. It is an act of grace and love that He acts for His own glory.

As I’ve meditated on this truth this week God has surfaced one significant implication for me. I share this because I assume that at times this will be important for many of you as well as for me.

I give intellectual assent to this idea that everything is about God’s glory. In my mind I believe that I live in a world in which it is all about God. History is theocentric – God is at the center. He is the hero of the story. I affirm this truth in my mind, but the reality is that at times in my heart even though I would never say it, I really do believe this world is about me and that God exists

to make my life better or more comfortable. And so when hard things happen in my life or when things work out differently than I think they should, I can tend to wonder what God is up to and I can begin to ask questions in my heart like, "When is this going to be over? When are you going to provide? God, why don't you change this situation?" These are really man-centered questions. These are questions that express that I think God ought to be working things out for my desires and comfort.

Do you relate to these kinds of questions? Are you asking God these kinds of questions right now? I wanted to suggest that when you or I are going through hard things it would be better to ask a God-centered question like, "God, how are you working in this situation for your glory?"

I realized this week that in a situation that I'm facing that I have never asked this question. I've been asking the man-centered questions. But as I've been thinking about this God-centered question I've sensed that it might totally reframe how I look at and experience this hard thing. It actually helps me loosen my grip on what I think God MUST do. It opens my heart to the reality that there might be more going on than I could ever imagine through the hard things in my life.

Over and over in biblical history more was going on than what the people involved knew at the time. God was acting for His own glory:

- When called Abraham away from the comforts of home to go out to a place he did not know it was for God's own glory.
- When God allowed Israel to go into captivity for 400 years this didn't know it was for His own glory.
- When God allow Daniel to go into captivity he didn't know that it would be used for God's own glory.
- When the persecution arose against the early church in Jerusalem they didn't know that it would work out for God's glory.

God was working in all of these things for His own glory. And God continues to work for His own glory right now in our history. He is acting for His glory in your life. Now, I'm not saying that when evil happens in the world that God caused it, but I am saying that over all things God is working for His glory.

And so let me suggestion that when you are facing hard things or when things don't work out in the way that you think they ought to learn to pray, "God help me to understand what you're doing for your own glory in this situation." Learn to pray, "God, be gloried in this situation."

God is always acting for His own glory. And at the very heart of God acting for His own glory is what He HAS done and IS doing in salvation history. God acts for His own glory in salvation history.

God Acts for His Glory in Salvation History: Old Testament

As we think about salvation history in the Old Testament it is centered on what God was doing in and through the nation of Israel. God acted for His own glory in His redemption of Israel.

We could look at a lot of different passages, but the book of Isaiah is one in which the glory of God in salvation history is a prominent theme. One of the main issues dealt with in the first part of Isaiah is whether or not Israel would declare God's glory to the nations or would they be seduced by the glory of the nations such that they abandon God (The New International Commentary on the OT, 689). And, of course, we know that they were seduced by the glory of the nations. They abandoned God and did not proclaim His glory. And so God disciplined them by sending them into captivity. But eventually God restored them for His glory.

In Isaiah 44:21-23 God says:

*²¹ "Remember these things, O Jacob,
And Israel, for you are My servant;
I have formed you, you are My servant,
O Israel, you will not be forgotten by Me.
²² "I have wiped out your transgressions like a thick cloud
And your sins like a heavy mist.
Return to Me, for I have redeemed you."*

God tells this rebellious nation sent into captivity that they are His servant and that He will not forget them. He wipes out their transgressions; their sins. He says that He has redeemed them. This is part of Israel's salvation history. God goes on in verse 23:

*²³ Shout for joy, O heavens, for the LORD has done it!
Shout joyfully, you lower parts of the earth;
Break forth into a shout of joy, you mountains,
O forest, and every tree in it;
For the LORD has redeemed Jacob
And in Israel He shows forth His glory.*

What God did in Israel's salvation calls for the heavens and the earth to praise God, because *in Israel [God] show[ed] forth His glory*. And ultimately, in Isaiah 66, God says that he will use the restored remnant of Israel to proclaim His glory to the nations (66:18-20).

God acted for His own glory in Old Testament salvation history. We see that in the history of Israel. But the greatest display of God's glory is found in New Testament salvation history. The greatest display of God's glory in salvation history is in what God has done through sending His Son to earth. This is what we celebrate at Advent.

God Acts for His Glory in Salvation History: New Testament

Again, we could look at a lot of different passages to see this theme, but I want to focus on Ephesians 1. We see here that God acts in our salvation for His glory. I want to start reading in verse 3:

³ *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ,*

This is a kind of summary for what will follow. At the heart of how we have been blessed is what God accomplished for us in Christ. Verse 4:

⁴ *just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him. In love ⁵ He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will, ⁶ to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved.*

In Christ, we have been chosen by God to be holy and blameless (v. 4). Through Christ, we are adopted (v. 5). All of this, Paul says, *it to the praise of the glory of His grace.*

Verse 7:

⁷ *In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace ⁸ which He lavished on us. In all wisdom and insight ⁹ He made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His kind intention which He purposed in Him ¹⁰ with a view to an administration suitable to the fullness of the times, that is, the summing up of all things in Christ, things in the heavens and things on the earth. In Him ¹¹ also we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will,*

Now, I know that sometimes we can get tripped up on issues surrounding predestination and God's electing, but simply hear what Paul is telling us about how God has acted for His own glory. Before the world began, before we had done anything to merit anything from God, God chose us. He predestined us for adoption. He determined that in Christ, we would be redeemed (v. 7); we would be forgiven (v. 7); and given an inheritance (v. 11). And in verse 12, Paul tells us why. He says that all of this was . . .

¹² *to the end that we who were the first to hope in Christ would be to the praise of His glory.*

Our salvation, completely initiated and carried out by God's own will, was for His own glory. In Christ we are *to the praise of His glory.* And then He goes on and says:

¹³ *In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation—having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise,* ¹⁴ *who is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of God's own possession, to the praise of His glory.*

Our salvation met our own needs in a deep and profound way, but at the heart of it was God's own glory. God works in salvation history for His own glory. It is all *to the praise of His glory*.

As a believer in Jesus Christ, you are to the praise of God's glory. Later in this Advent series Steve will talk about what God's glory means for how we live our lives, but the point here is simply to know that what God has already done in saving you is for His glory.

A couple of weeks ago I was out for a walk late in the afternoon and there were these two burning bushes that the sun was hitting. The red from these bushes was unbelievably brilliant. I literally stopped and just soaked it in for a while. It was nature revealing God's glory. Those bushes were not working at revealing God's glory. They just were. And in the same way, you as one whom God has saved reveal God's glory. You just do. As the heavenly hosts look at what God has done to save you, you are to the praise of His glory.

Do you still struggle with sin? Of course you do. Are there ways that you are broken? Yes, we all are. And because these things are true we can tend to think that we are worthless until we get our acts together. But that's not true. Even with our struggles with sin and with our brokenness, we are to the praise of God's glory. God has chosen you. He has adopted you. He has redeemed you. He has forgiven you. He has given you an inheritance. None of this based on you earning it or deserving it. He just did it. And that displays His glory in a most profound way. And the initiation of all of this was the incarnation – Jesus born into this world.