

Glory of God and Our Influence

Matthew 5:16

There is a character in the movie *Beaches* played by Bette Middler. She is a rather self-absorbed person. At one point she realizes that she's been talking endlessly about herself, so she says, ""But enough about me, let's talk about you...what do YOU think of me?"

I don't know about you, but I have found myself to be rather self-absorbed at times during the last four months. Maybe it's because I don't have the variety of activities that naturally pull me out of myself and almost force me to think about others. It's easy for us to become fixated on what I think, what I feel, and what I want; it's easy to become fixated on the things we wish were better.

But there is another option - the one that we are going to explore for the next six weeks. That option is to become fixated on something that that CANNOT get better because it is already perfect. What I'm talking about is "the glory of God." The Bible talks about God's glory from Genesis to Revelation - 360 times altogether. By the time we get to the letters of Paul (after the death and resurrection of Jesus), he is writing churches and telling them that EVERYTHING they do should be motivated by the glory of God. Listen to 1 Corinthians 10:31.

31 So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.

When I read that everything we do - even routine things like eating and drinking - should be done "to the glory of God," several questions arise. What does that mean to do something "to the glory of God"? How do eat breakfast to the glory of God? What is the glory of God? What kind of people would be so passionate about the glory of God that it would consciously inform eating and drinking and whatever they do? Those are questions we're going to explore the next six weeks.

As an introduction to the topic of the glory of God, we are going to consider Matthew 5:14-16. In this passage Jesus challenges us as His followers to live our lives in such a way that we ***influence others to glorify our Father*** in heaven. It's important that we understand Jesus' challenge to us. He isn't merely challenging ***us*** to glorify God, although that's implicit in what He says; He is challenging us to live in such a way that moves ***others*** to glorify God.

Notice that Jesus begins with a statement in verse 14:

14 "You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden.

Jesus says to His followers collectively, as a people, "You are the light of the world." Throughout the Bible light symbolizes truth and purity and the very presence of God. Jesus is saying that His followers are now a community of people who radiate God's truth and purity and presence to the world. Certainly we do this individually also, but Jesus is stressing our corporate identity as "the light of the world."

It's striking that Jesus here tells His disciples that WE are the light of the world because elsewhere He said that HE is the light of the world. In John 8:12 Jesus says this:

12 Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."

The gospel of John masterfully explains that some people loved the darkness rather than the light; they preferred the life they were living to the one Jesus offered (see John 3:19-20). But Jesus' disciples prefer His light to the darkness; they step out of the darkness of sin and evil and into the light of Jesus' presence.

Jesus says that "whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life." He can say that because those who believe in Him are reborn and He now lives within them through His Spirit. Because the Light of the world lives within us, we are now the light of the world. This is our calling and our identity.

In the second line of verse 14 Jesus said:

14 ". . . A city set on a hill cannot be hidden.

With lamps burning in windows, a city on a hill would be seen for miles around. As well, Jesus makes a very obvious point in verse 15:

15 Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house.

The purpose of a lamp is to give light to everybody in the house; nobody would light a lamp and then cover it up with a basket or a bucket. We're all shaking our head in agreement, right? We're all thinking, "Nobody would cover up a lamp. That would defeat its purpose. A lamp is supposed to give light to all in the house!"

Now that we're all in agreement, let's consider Jesus' command in verse 16:

16 In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.

Jesus tells us three things in this verse that we need to understand in order to have the influence in this world that He desires.

First, ***live out your identity***. Jesus says to us as His followers, "Just as a city on a hill cannot be hidden and just as no one lights a lamp and then puts it under a bucket, let your light shine before others. Why? Because ***you are the light of the world***. This is your identity. This is what you are uniquely created to be: a light for the world to see."

Jesus isn't talking about some amped up version of yourself; He's not talking about being someone you're not. He's not telling us to pretend like you're the light of the world

even though you know deep down you've got nothin' that the world needs. No, He's saying the opposite of that. He is saying **be who you are!**

When we put it together, Jesus says to His followers, "Because *I* am the light of the world and because I live in you, **you** are the light of the world. . . .therefore let your light shine." Live out your identity.

Second, Jesus says *live out your identity through your good works*. Notice that Jesus doesn't command His disciples to get busy and do a bunch of good works. Rather, for Jesus it was a **given** that His disciples would do good works. You cannot be a genuine disciple of Jesus and not do good works. You can admire Jesus and not do good works. You can "go to church" and not do good works. You can read the Bible and not do good works. But you cannot follow Jesus and not do good works. Why? Because by definition a disciple of Jesus is actually learning from Him how to live as He lived.

Paul spoke about good works in a similar way. In Ephesians 2:8-9 Paul writes that we were saved by grace (it's a gift) through faith (our confidence in Jesus' death and resurrection), **not** as a result of works (so nobody can brag about their salvation). In verse 10 Paul emphasizes our identity as a new creation and says this about good works:

10 For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

In the Greek New Testament, the first word in the sentence is "His" (as in "God's"). It's as if Paul is saying, "**His/God's** workmanship - that's what we are. . . we have been **created by Him** in Christ Jesus for good works. . . which **God** prepared beforehand. . . ." Do you see how our good works are an expression of God's work in us and God's design for us? When it comes to good works, our part is to "walk in them." Again, our good works are an expression of our identity: our good works reflect the fact that we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus.

Of course there might be seasons of discouragement or disobedience when our good works are lacking. But if you have been saved by grace through faith, good works are an expression of your identity - of who you are.

Third, Jesus tells us, *live out your identity through your good works for God's glory*. We finally get to the word "glory." Jesus tells us, ". . . let your light shine before others so that they might see our good works and **glorify** your Father who is in heaven." If someone "glorifies God," it obviously doesn't mean that they **make** God glorious; it means that they **acknowledge** how glorious He already is.

The term glory is notoriously difficult to define. I'll begin about "glory" now, but we'll add to our understanding each week in our teachings. In the Old Testament, if something had glory, it was weighty, in the sense of being substantive. In saying that God is glorious, Scripture is saying that He is not a "lightweight" in any sense; He is weighty and substantive in all His attributes and actions.

The glory of God is also associated with His radiance/brilliance/splendor. Many times the glory of God was manifested as a blinding light or fire (Exodus 24:7, 33:22, etc.). Matthew 17 describes the “transfiguration” of Jesus; we’re told that “his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became white as light” (v. 2). They were given a brief glimpse of His glory (which was also the glory of God the Father - see John 1:14).

In numerous places in the OT, God’s glory is associated with His holiness (another difficult term to define). In Isaiah 6, for example, the seraphim (flaming angels!) cried out, “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts” - the Lord is in a category all His own when it comes to moral perfection and beauty; no being can compare to Him. “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his **glory!**” The glory of God is the display of His holiness (see also Leviticus 10:3). The glory of God is the manifestation of God’s moral perfection and beauty.

Back to Matthew 5:16. . . The idea is that our good works would be so compelling that they convince people to acknowledge how glorious God is; they would see our works and conclude that He is incomparable in His moral perfection and beauty. More specifically, Jesus says that they would acknowledge the glory of our “Father in heaven” (they see the family resemblance).

People often notice the contrast between this command in Matthew 5:16 to shine so that others **will see** your good works and the warnings in Matthew 6 where Jesus says to practice our righteousness in secret for God’s eyes only. The difference is that in chapter 6 Jesus warns against seeking glory for ourselves whereas here He is telling us to seek glory for God.

Putting it all together, Jesus is telling us. **Live out your identity through your good works for God’s glory.** Jesus is raising the astounding possibility that our lives will be so radiant (even glorious) and compelling that some people will conclude that **God** is glorious! If Jesus hadn’t made this connection between our lives and God’s glory, it would be the height of arrogance for us to do so. But that’s the vision Jesus is casting in this verse.

I think you’ll agree with me that if we are going to be the type of people whose lives naturally convince others to glorify God, we will need to be passionate about the glory of God. We will need to be convinced on a heart level that God is infinitely perfect and beautiful in every aspect of His being - so convinced that we are enamored with Him and His ways. When we are that passionate about the glory of God, we take our eyes off of ourselves (what I think, feel, and want) and we become fascinated with Him and what he thinks, feels, and wants. What I’m telling you and what I’m telling myself is that the believer’s antidote to being self-absorbed is to become passionate about God’s glory.

The next 5 weeks we are going to explore what this means and how we might live this out. Next week we’ll explore the glory of God in creation and the effect it should have on us.