

June 24, 2012

# *Living Out The Gospel In Real Life*

## *Father, Glorify Thy Name*

John 12:27 – 36

Two weeks ago, we looked at verses 12 through 26 and one of the things we saw in there was that to be a Christian, to be a follower of Christ means that **nothing else really matters unless it matters to Him**. We have not been saved just to be forgiven of our sins and go to heaven someday. The gospel is a radically God-centered, Christ-exalting, self-denying message that tells us that nothing we have or own or aspire to in this world is worth anything compared to the worth of Jesus. Followers of Jesus are those who want Him so much that they abandon everything else just to experience Him. Any risk you think you might make is worth the reward. Anything that you might consider dear and costly doesn't even weigh in the balance next to Him. And we don't find ourselves bemoaning the loss because the joy always outweighs the sorrow.

To those who want to know Him, like those Greeks who came to His disciples and said, 'We want to see Jesus' – to those who want to follow Him He says this: *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. He who loves his life loses it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it to life eternal. If anyone serves Me, he must follow Me; and where I am, there My servant will be also; if anyone serves Me, the Father will honor him.* John 12:24-26 Jesus says this is what it means to follow Me – **You have to die in order to live – you have to hate your life to keep it – you have to lose it in order to find it.**

Following Jesus is counter-intuitive. What Jesus demands will seem to be to your natural thinking the death of joy, freedom, options and potential. But strangely enough, it is actually the birth of your real joy and freedom and options and potential. What He is saying is that there is something so wonderful and priceless and joy-filling about following Him that everything else, every other relationship, every other treasure, every other ambition simply pales in comparison – in fact there are no real comparisons. Jesus is telling us that He is worth everything we can imagine. **He is not pointing to the fact that we lose everything – He is pointing to the fact that we gain everything!**

William Borden, heir to the Borden family millions, rejected a life of ease in order to bring the gospel to the Muslim people. Refusing to even buy himself a car, he gave away hundreds of thousands of dollars to missions. On his way to China to throw himself into ministry to the Muslims there, he stopped off in Egypt to study Arabic and minister to the Muslim population. After only four months of zealous ministry, he contracted spinal meningitis and died at the age of twenty-five. The epitaph on his grave in Cairo reads, **'Apart from faith in Christ, there is no explanation for such a life.'** In other words, William Borden had seen the priceless, joy-filling, wonder of Jesus and nothing else mattered. You couldn't explain William Borden by any other measure than He had money, position and power – but to him it was all worthless in the light of the glory of Christ.

I say glory because that is ultimately what this passage is all about – the glory of God, revealed in the glory of Christ. Jesus tells these Christ-seeking Greeks that *'The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.'* John 12:23. And then He says again in verse 28: *'Father, glorify Your name.'* John 12:28a. And the voice of the Father thunders in answer out of heaven: *'I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again.'* John 12:28b. But what is glory? What are Jesus and the Father saying here? Sometimes we throw that term around without any real comprehension of its significance or meaning. So we want to look at that this morning because this passage tells us really three things: **God is glorious – He must be given glory – and it's only by giving Him glory that we experience glory ourselves.** This is just a bite-size summery of the meaning of human existence: God is glorious – we need to give Him glory – and as we give Him all our glory we will experience glory ourselves.

First of all, **God is glorious**, and He has no higher purpose than to show you and I His glory and get us to experience it. The glory of God is the goal of all things. The created universe is all about glory. The deepest longing of the human heart and the deepest meaning of heaven and earth are summed up in this: **the glory of God.** The universe was made to show it, and we were made to see it and savor it. Nothing less will do.

*'Whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God'* 1 Corinthians 10:31. *'All things were created for God's glory'*. Isaiah 43:6-7. The great mission of the church is to declare God's glory among the nations. *'Declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous works among all the peoples!'* Psalm 96:1-3. God's intention in all of history is to show His glory in all the earth: *'And I will set My glory among the nations; and all the nations will see My judgment which I have executed and My hand which I have laid on them.'* Ezekiel 39:21. And the Lord gives Isaiah a prophecy about the culmination of all things and His glory is the central thought: *'For I know their works and their thoughts; the time is coming to gather all nations and tongues. And they shall come and see My glory. I will set a sign among them and will send survivors from them to the nations:...to the distant coast lands that have neither heard My fame nor seen My glory. And they will declare My glory among the nations.'* Isaiah 66:18-19.

So what is glory? What are we saying when we say 'God is glorious'? The original meaning of glory has to do with physical heaviness or weight – glory has to do with weightiness. For example, if you go to the **ocean** or the **mountains**, you experience their glory – they have an innate heaviness or weightiness – they are literally glorious. When you stand on the shore and see the waves crashing in on the shore, or you go up to Paradise on Mt. Rainier and look at the grandeur of that massive mountain, one of the things you experience in relation to their weightiness, is your own weightlessness. In the face of such glory, your own existence seems flimsy and insubstantial.

But glory obviously is not just about physical weight. When the Bible talks about glory it is also talking about value, importance. And the glory of God is about His infinite worth, His inestimable value. Something has glory because it has value, it has import, it makes a difference, it has impact. In a very practical sense, suppose you have a decision to make and you get advice from others, there is usually one that you consider has more glory, more weight, more worth, than the others and when they speak you listen. Their opinion matters to you – it carries weight – it has glory. Have you ever been in a situation with others where you'd like to think you matter, but when you speak, nobody listens? What you experience at that point is weightlessness. You don't carry any weight – you don't matter – there is no glory.

Glory is weightiness, it's importance, it's impact, it's lasting, it has substance and greatness and value. The Bible says in a thousand different ways that God is glorious, but even to try to describe the glory of God is like trying to capture the Pacific Ocean in a cup. You get a little, you get a taste, but most of it spills out. Words just can't carry the weight of His glory. ***We could say that the glory of God summarizes the value, the perfection, and the infinite significance of all of the attributes of God.*** We could say that it sums up who He is, in the awesome brightness and weightiness of all His perfections. It isn't just that God is holy and loving and wise and strong and all the rest, but that in His holiness and love and wisdom and strength and all His attributes combined, He is unique – He is without comparison. He is one of a kind – there is no one like Him. God's uniqueness as the only God—His God-ness—makes Him infinitely valuable, infinitely weighty, infinitely glorious.

The glory of God is the way you describe the infinite beauty and the infinite greatness of the One who created everything else. In other words, it is the beauty and the greatness that exists without origin, without comparison, without analogy, without being judged by any outside reference. His is the all-defining absolute original of greatness and beauty. The glory of God's greatness is such that in comparison all other greatness is simply trivial. The glory of His beauty is such that next to His beauty all other beauty is hideousness. Nothing compares. Everything we call great and holy and loving and wise and strong derives from that glory. All created greatness and beauty is derivative, and while it points to God's glory, it cannot reproduce it. The glory of God is a way of saying that there is objective, absolute reality to which all human admiration, wonder, awe, veneration, praise, honor, acclaim, and worship is pointing. In fact when the glory of God shows up in the Old Testament – it just lays men out. When the glory filled the temple during Solomon's dedication service the Bible says that the priests just couldn't stand – it was too weighty to bear. ***That's the first thing – God is glorious.*** He has the glory, He has the impact, He has inestimable value, He has what lasts, everything else is inconsequential, everything else is weightless – God alone is glorious.

Therefore, the second thing we see in the text is that **He must be given glory** – He must be glorified – the fact that He alone is glorious demands it. The truth is that we were made in such a way that we find our deepest pleasure in admiring what is infinitely admirable, that is, the glory of God. And we do that primarily in two ways – or at least we see two ways here in the text – ***Obedience and Adoration.*** That's how we see this played out in the text. Obedience and Adoration.

Jesus' ambition was to glorify His Father – but that didn't come without cost. In verse 27 we hear Him struggle with this: *"Now My soul has become troubled; and what shall I say, 'Father, save Me from this hour'? But for this purpose I came to this hour.* John 12:27. Jesus realizes what this death involves. He's been speaking about His death and as the words are flowing out of His mouth, the thoughts are beginning to dive deep into His soul and beginning to twist and tear at His soul. And while He understands that His death means salvation for men, and that is joy to Him, He also realizes that His death means curse and pain and sin for Him and that is agony to His soul. Jesus did not approach the cross indifferently. He did not walk to Calvary without feeling. He did not finish His course in some detached way. He felt the agony of the decision, just as He was to feel every single pain on the cross and every bit of the curse of sin.

And He wasn't contemplating ditching the whole thing. When He asked the question, it was rhetorical – 'Should I ask the Father to save Me from the cross? Never! That is the entire reason I came – the cross is why I've come in the first place.' And that is **obedience**. In its essence, obedience to God is to glorify Him. It is treating God with the weight He deserves. God's purpose for Jesus coming to earth was to put Him on the cross, and Jesus' obedience to the death gave glory to His Father. **Obedience is a glory issue**. Obedience is not just a matter of doing what is right – it's a matter of whether or not you are glorifying God. Disobedience at the root is a refusal to give God His due. Are you obeying God out of a sense of doing what is right? If that is the case you've missed it. Or maybe you obey because the consequences of not obeying are bad. And you've missed it there too. Obedience is all about the glory of God. When we disobey Him, we are treating other things as more weighty than Him. He becomes weightless and other things become weighty to us.

Jesus was saying in effect here – 'I'd rather not go to the cross – but Father Your glory is at stake here – the pain I'll endure is light compared to the weight of Your glory'. When we see the glory of God, there are resolutions that happen in our souls – there are changes that happen – you turn corners, you give things up and you start doing things you've never done – you realize you've never treated this seriously – never given it the weight it was due – you've never seen the glory of it. And obedience becomes adoration of the glory of God.

In obedience we glorify God indirectly, but **adoration** is where we glorify Him directly – that is we tell Him about His glory – we proclaim it – we sound it out. That is what Jesus says – 'Father, glorify Your name'. He is glorifying God in adoration and this is crucial. This is the hallmark of what it means to be a Christian – this is what it means to really be human. Mental health experts who don't know anything about Christianity or care much about Jesus, will tell you that one of the signs of mental health is the ability to praise – the ability to find praiseworthy things. The person that goes into any situation, any job, any event, any relationship and can find nothing to praise but everything to complain about finds his humanity drying up – and bitterness taking root. To be able to praise, to be able to adore is the essence of what it means to be human. And the Bible says you must adore God, you must praise Him.

And a lot of people get upset at that. They say things like 'God must be a real ego-maniac, He's always telling people to praise Him'. And if you ever meet anybody who is constantly looking for 'atta-boys' and praise and adoration, you find them nauseating and obnoxious and you don't want to be around them. But let's leave God out of this for a moment and look how we glorify anything else. We glorify things that are above us – they're superior to us – they eclipse our abilities in profound ways. Tell me this, would you want to watch a football game where all the players were no better than you? Or watch a movie where the actors could act no better than you and were no better looking than you? Or go to a museum to see pictures by painters who could paint no better than you?" Why are we willing to be exposed in all these places as utterly inferior? How can we get so much joy out of watching people magnify their superiority over us? The biblical answer is that **we were made by God to get our deepest joys not from being superior ourselves but from enjoying God's superiority**. All these other experiences are parables. God's superiority is absolute in every way, which draws out our deepest adoration and joy.

And finally, not only is God glory and must be given glory, **it's only by giving Him glory that we experience glory ourselves**. In his book, *Seeing and Savoring Jesus Christ*, John Piper writes: *'We are all starved for the glory of God, not self. No one goes to the Grand Canyon to increase self-esteem. Why do we go? Because there is greater healing for the soul in beholding splendor than there is in beholding self. Indeed, what could be more ludicrous in a vast and glorious universe like this than a human being, on the speck called earth, standing in front of a mirror trying to find significance in his own self-image? It is a great sadness that this is the gospel of the modern world. But it is not the Christian Gospel... The Christian Gospel is about "the glory of Christ," not about me. And when it is—in some measure—about me, it is not about my being made much of by God, but about God mercifully enabling me to enjoy making much of him forever.'*

When Jesus said, 'Father, glorify Your name', the Father thunders from heaven this response, '*I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again.*' When Jesus gave God the glory, the Father glorifies the Son by thundering from heaven – a celestial affirmation. The Father was glorified by the revelation of His Son on earth, and says that He will again be glorified when He is raised from the dead. But in that glorification of the Father, the Son Himself is glorified. Back in verse 23 Jesus began by saying, '*The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.*' The Bible teaches us that if we glorify God, if we give His desires, His will the weight and import they are due – if we fall into the ground and die to our own desires and will – then not only is God glorified but we will finally get the glory we always wanted. **If we stop seeking our own glory, we will find glory.**

We were made to know and experience and treasure the glory of God above all things, but when we trade that treasure for trivial substitutes, everything becomes chaos and meaningless. The sun of God's glory was made to shine at the center of our universe, and when it does, all the stars and galaxies and planets of our lives move in stately order and are glorified as a result. But when we trade His sun for lesser suns, everything comes apart. The deepest longing of the human heart is for glory – or more precisely, it is to know and experience the glory of God. We were made for this as Isaiah says, '*Bring My sons from afar and My daughters from the ends of the earth...whom I created for My glory.*' Isaiah 43:6-7. Or as Paul tells us in Romans that we were '*...prepared beforehand for glory.*' Romans 9:23. If we see this, if we truly grasp this – nothing can touch us – nothing can rock us – nothing can stumble us. Death and disease, tragedy and loss, heartbreak and offenses merely become the means to see and experience and savor more of God's glory.

When we say, 'Father, glorify Your Name' we are saying that we are giving Him the glory that is due His Name in obedience and adoration. It means that we acknowledge His glory by living as though His perfections are as serious and significant and weighty as they really are – so that our lives become a mirror reflecting His glory. It means that nothing horrifies us more than the thought of bringing dishonor to His glorious Name, and nothing delights us more than to feel His pleasure as we live to the praise of His glory. It also means that we declare His glory among the nations, inviting others to join us in glorifying God. This will consume and define every aspect of our life and witness as well as our worship.

We need to see and experience and savor the glory of God in our lives. Too many times the gospel is reduced to a self-centered message of life enhancement where God is relegated to a means to prosper me and make me happy. The result is consumer oriented worship that magnifies my worth and my glory. It results in self-help discipleship that leaves vast areas of the soul untouched, instead of a call to lay every area of life on the altar to be consecrated to Him and to be conformed to His image. Evangelism becomes an invitation to sample a product rather than a royal summons to bow in humility before a sovereign Savior, and we reduce the Good News to mere good advice.

If the glory of God is our supreme passion, it will change the way we live. If His glory is our goal then we will have an unquenchable passion to see Him receive the glory that is due His Name from every tribe, tongue, people and nation. Everything else becomes a means to that end. We won't be content unless His glory is proclaimed, reflected, upheld and adored among the people to whom He has called us. The task is not about us, and it's not even ultimately about the nations. The focus is on Him. A passion for the glory of God will change the way we treat our families, the way we entertain ourselves, the way we spend our money, the way we relate to others, the way we treat our bodies, the careers we choose, the hobbies we enjoy – it will change the way we eat and drink.

It will even change the way we pray. Charles Spurgeon once wrote of prayer, "*The motive is this, 'Oh! that God could be glorified, that Jesus might see the reward of his sufferings! Oh! that sinners might be saved, so that God might have new tongues to praise him, new hearts to love him! Oh! that sin were put an end to, that the holiness, righteousness, mercy, and power of God might be magnified!' This is the way to pray; when thy prayers seek God's glory, it is God's glory to answer thy prayers.*" C. H. Spurgeon

David Brainerd was a young man in colonial America whose passion was to spread the glory of God to the Delaware Indians of New Jersey. Although his ministry lasted little more than three years when he died at the age of twenty-nine of tuberculosis, its impact on future generations has been huge. His diary reveals a young man intensely committed to the glory of God. As he lay dying in Jonathan Edwards home, he told Edwards: '*I do not go to heaven to be advanced but to give honor to God. It is no matter where I shall be stationed in heaven, whether I have a high seat or a low seat there...My heaven is to please God and glorify Him, and give all to Him, and to be wholly devoted to His glory.*'"

*O Father of glory, this is the cry of our hearts—to please You before we please anyone else, to live so that our lives are a testament to Your glory, to get our deepest joy from beholding Your glory and to be wholly devoted to Your glory, so that we are changed from one degree of glory to another, until, in the resurrection, at the last trumpet, we are completely conformed to the image of your Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord. Until then, we long to grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord, especially the knowledge of his glory. We want to see it as clearly as we see the sun, and to savor it as deeply as our most desired pleasure. O merciful God, incline our hearts to your Word and the wonders of your glory. Wean us from our obsession with trivial things. Open the eyes of our hearts to see each day what the created universe is telling about your glory. Enlighten our minds to see the glory of your Son and open our lips to proclaim Your glory to the nations until Your glory fills the earth and every knee bows and every tongue confesses that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father, Amen.*