

July 8, 2012

Living Out The Gospel In Real Life

The Glory of Man or the Glory of God

John 12:29 – 43

We have been looking at the last bit of public ministry the Lord Jesus did before the cross in John chapter 12 for a few weeks now – and we should understand that after this, His public ministry is over. From now on He concentrates on His followers. For three and a half years He has been traveling all over the country, preaching that the kingdom of God had come – calling Israel to repent and turn – revealing to them that He was the Messiah, the Son of God, come to save them from their sins – and now He preaches His last public sermon. And it is crucial to understand what it is that He considers important last words.

Two weeks ago we saw that the goal of His ministry, the goal of His life was to glorify the Father. **'Father, glorify Your name'** He said. In fact, we could say that the whole meaning of human existence is summed up in three statements: **God is glorious – He must be given glory – and it's only by giving Him glory that we experience glory ourselves.** Firstly, **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.

Secondly, **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, infinitely superior, that is, the glory of God. **We were made by God to get our deepest joy and satisfaction – the very meaning of our existence, not from being superior ourselves but from enjoying God's infinite superiority.** All other experiences serve merely to point to this. God's is absolutely glorious in every way, which draws out from the human soul its deepest adoration and joy.

And thirdly, **it is only by giving Him glory that we experience glory ourselves.** 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 meaninglessness. 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.

And it is in the context of glory that we need to see this last public sermon of Jesus. Because the truth is, the unregenerate heart loves the glory of men rather than the glory of God. John tells us: *Nevertheless many even of the rulers believed in Him, but because of the Pharisees they were not confessing Him, for fear that they would be put out of the synagogue; for they loved the approval [glory] of men rather than the approval [glory] of God.* John 12:42-43 If you have an ESV translation, it properly translates the word 'approval' as 'glory'. The word in Greek is glory – **doxa** – same word translated glory, or glorify or glorified in the rest of chapter 12. The belief of these rulers had was essentially weightless – wasn't real, wasn't solid, had no weight to it – because they loved the glory of men, not the glory of God. And John is trying to tell us something here about that kind of belief. Belief that is not rooted in the very glory of God is instead unbelief. If we say we believe in God, we say we believe in Jesus, and yet have no desire for, have no appetite for, the glory of God – then what we really have is not belief, but unbelief. **The essence of living a Christian life is living for the glory of God.**

Let's see how this works here. Jesus had just ridden into Jerusalem on a wave of adoration and praise. Thousands were lining the road and waving palm branches and shouting hosannas and proclaiming Him to be the Messiah. And then Jesus begins to tell them about a grain of wheat falling into the ground and dying – and He begins to tell them that you have to die in order to live – you have to hate your life to keep it – you have to lose your life in order to find it. And then He points them to the glory of God and a voice thunders out of heaven – and they can't understand what it means. *So the crowd of people who stood by and heard it were saying that it had thundered; others were saying, "An angel has spoken to Him."* John 12:29

If your heart is not set on the glory of God, all you'll hear when He speaks is thunder and angels. You will either attribute the work of His hands to naturally occurring forces, or extraterrestrials. So Jesus tells them what just happened and points them to the glory of God: *Jesus answered and said, "This voice has not come for My sake, but for your sakes. Now judgment is upon this world; now the ruler of this world will be cast out. And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to Myself." But He was saying this to indicate the kind of death by which He was to die.* John 12:30-33. The Father had just thundered from heaven 'I have both glorified My Name and will glorify it' and Jesus interprets that glory in terms of judgment and the cross.

So how does God get glory from such negative things like judgment and the cross? And the answer is, that **God gets glory when His attributes are displayed.** We saw last week that the glory of God summarizes the value, the perfection, and the infinite significance of all of the attributes of God. So when God's love is displayed, God gets glory. When God's grace is realized, God gets glory. When God's mercy is understood, God gets glory. When we know His love, realize His grace, understand His mercy we give Him glory. When we understand truth, righteousness, wisdom and all those other things we give Him glory. **God gets glory when His attributes are displayed.**

And the greatest manifestation of the attributes of God in history took place on the cross. Was ever the love of God more clear? Was ever the wrath of God against sin more evident than at the cross when He killed His own Son? Was ever the justice of God more clear than at the cross when Jesus went to the cross to satisfy the wrath of God for you and me and everyone else who believes? Was ever the grace of God more clear than when He substituted Jesus for you? Was ever the mercy of God more clear than not giving you and I and every other sinner what we so richly deserved? Was ever the wisdom of God more clear than in such a master plan as that? Every attribute of God was concentrated in the cross. And in the cross and in that judgment, God was glorified.

Jesus says, *And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to Myself.* And when we see Him on the cross and we are drawn by the Father, and we accept Christ's death on our behalf, God is glorified in us. So if Christ didn't die, we couldn't give God glory. Since He did die, all kinds of men from every tribe and nation and tongue and people through all the ages glorify God. God gets glory in His judgment on the cross. The world and every man in it will be judged with what they do with the cross of Jesus Christ. If you deny Jesus Christ and refuse to believe in His death for you and refuse to receive Him as Savior, you judge yourself and sentence yourself to an eternity without God.

And now not only is the judgment of this world taking place, but Jesus says *now the ruler of this world will be cast out.* The history of Satan is a constant pattern of being thrown out. He gets thrown out of everywhere. Before creation he is thrown out of heaven; at the cross he was thrown out of his seat of power over all who believe; in Revelation 12:9 he is thrown down to the earth; in Revelation 20:3 he is thrown into the abyss; and finally he is thrown into the lake of fire in Revelation 20:10. And in this we see the glory of God displayed yet again.

But the crowd didn't see His glory: *The crowd then answered Him, "We have heard out of the Law that the Christ is to remain forever; and how can You say, 'The Son of Man must be lifted up'? Who is this Son of Man?"* John 12:34. They reasoned that He couldn't be the Messiah because He was clearly saying that He would die. They didn't misunderstand His words here – they simply didn't understand the Scriptures. They based their opinion on several passages of Scripture that seemed to say that the Christ was to remain forever, but they totally missed the fact that first He had to die. Even to this day, religious Jews don't know what to make of Isaiah 53 – the Suffering Servant passage. In their minds this cannot refer to the Christ. It never occurred to them that their whole interpretation of Scriptures concerning the Messiah might be wrong.

In many ways, their interpretation of the kind of Christ they see in the Scriptures is like the people today who say, 'My god would never...' fill in the blank. Jesus Christ, the long-awaited Messiah, stood right in front of them and they had the gall to say 'My Christ would never die'. They made up a Messiah in their own image. That is what people do today – the God of the Bible is too awesome – too fearful – too terrifying – for sinful men to approach. Deep down in our souls we have a dread knowing that one day we will have to answer to someone for what we've done. We have a sense that there is somehow an ultimate judgment – an ultimate justice that must be satisfied. So we simply prefer to make a god that is more palatable – more comfortable – more to our liking – a god who winks at sin. Which is precisely why we must come to terms with the God of the Bible – not the god of our imagination. And this is what men are unwilling to do. **We must see the glory of God and love and treasure that glory** or we run the risk of doing just what these people did.

And Jesus' answer to them was that the day of grace is passing. You only have a little while, He says, believe while you have the time. *So Jesus said to them, "For a little while longer the Light is among you. Walk while you have the Light, so that darkness will not overtake you; he who walks in the darkness does not know where he goes. While you have the Light, believe in the Light, so that you may become sons of Light." These things Jesus spoke, and He went away and hid Himself from them.* John 12:35-36. There is an urgency in the voice of Jesus here. This is it. This is final. Jesus is the light and He's only got a few hours left and then darkness.

And the darkness of fear and the darkness of sin and guilt and utter aloneness will be permanent when He's gone. Some people might say, "Well, it's too bad about Israel. It's a good thing for us though because there's no pressure on us, we can come whenever we want. The light's always around." But it isn't. The truth is God's Spirit will not always strive with you. There may come a time when you've heard it so many times, when you've rejected Him so many times and hardened your heart so many times and refused to surrender, that God stops calling you all together and it's all over with. Jesus said, *"No man comes to Me except the Father draws him."* And if God ever stops drawing, it becomes impossible to come to Jesus Christ. Grace passes. It passed for the world of Noah's time. It passed for Israel. It passed for nations throughout the Old Testament. And it can pass for an individual in our world today.

And John says, in spite of the light, in spite of all the signs that many saw that pointed to Jesus as the Messiah – these guys persisted in their unbelief: *But though He had performed so many signs before them, yet they were not believing in Him.* John 12:37 And then he goes on to give us the explanation: *This was to fulfill the word of Isaiah the prophet which he spoke: "Lord, who has believed our report? And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?" For this reason they could not believe, for Isaiah said again, "He has blinded their eyes and hardened their heart, so that they would not see with their eyes and perceive with their heart, and be converted and I heal."* John 12:38-40

This is a hard explanation. But we have to deal with it or remain in our unbelief. John's argument for their unbelief comes straight from their own Scriptures – the Old Testament. First of all he explains **their unbelief by saying that it was directly related to the fulfillment of Scripture:** *This was to fulfill the word of Isaiah the prophet which he spoke...* They didn't believe because Isaiah prophesied that they wouldn't. John takes this seven-hundred year old prophecy and says: 'This is for today'. And then he emphasizes the point: *For this reason they could not believe.* They didn't believe because the Bible says that they wouldn't believe. But John doesn't stop there, he goes on to say something even more staggering: *He has blinded their eyes and hardened their heart, so that they would not see with their eyes and perceive with their heart, and be converted and I heal.*

So what is John's point here about Israel's unbelief? And why does he press the point? **John's point very simply is that God planned their unbelief.** You cannot take anything other than that away from this text. We may not like it – we may think it's unfair – we may think a lot of things – but one thing we cannot do is ignore it. And here we must understand two realities. The first is **the sovereignty of God** – that is God plans and carries out His perfect will as He alone knows is best, over all that is in heaven and earth, and He does so without failure or defeat or fault. And the second is **the responsibility of man** – that is, he alone is responsible and accountable to God for either accepting Christ or rejecting Christ. Another way to say that is on the one hand God has foreordained all things – and on the other hand, God commands all men every where to repent.

God's planning the unbelief and blindness and hardness of Israel does not take away or contradict their personal responsibility or their guilt for this unbelief. Remember back in John 3, Jesus said *'Whoever believes in Him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God.'* John 3:18 Therefore, the unbelief of Israel is a culpable unbelief – a guilty unbelief. **Our** unbelief is a guilty unbelief. Man's responsibility to believe in Jesus, on the one hand, and God's sovereignty over who believes in Jesus, on the other hand, are both true, whether we can understand it or not.

And John makes the point and presses the point because it is a glory of God issue. This is what he says: *These things Isaiah said because he saw His glory, and he spoke of Him.* John 12:41 John says Isaiah said this because Isaiah saw the glory of God and it pointed to Jesus. John pulls out two texts from Isaiah to make this point. In 12:38 he quotes Isaiah 53:1, and in 12:40 he quotes Isaiah 6:10. Isaiah 53 as we already mentioned is the description of the Suffering Servant who is Jesus. And the two verses that follow the one John quotes go like this: *He has no stately form or majesty that we should look upon Him, nor appearance that we should be attracted to Him. He was despised and forsaken of men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; and like one from whom men hide their face He was despised, and we did not esteem Him.* Isaiah 53:2-3

So the point is that Isaiah prophesied that this Suffering Servant would be rejected. Israel would not believe in Jesus. Which is why John says *Lord, who has believed our report? And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?* Why did they not believe, even when the power of God – the arm of the Lord – was on display? Because He had no form or majesty that we should look at Him. As a man he was simply not the stuff of which Messiah's are made – **He was not the kind of Messiah they wanted.** And then John quotes Isaiah 6:10 which follows this vision Isaiah had of the glory of God. *In the year of King Uzziah's death I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, lofty and exalted, with the train of His robe filling the temple. Seraphim stood above Him, each having six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. And one called out to another and said, "Holy, Holy, Holy, is the LORD of hosts, the whole earth is full of His glory." And the foundations of the thresholds trembled at the voice of him who called out, while the temple was filling with smoke.* Isaiah 6:1-4

And Isaiah was undone in the presence of God's glory: *Then I said, 'Woe is me, for I am ruined! Because I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts.'* Isaiah 6:5 The initial response to the vision of God's glory is a crushing sense of doom. Our awful sin is laid bare before a holy and righteous God and we are undone. But therein lies the glory – He takes the coal from the altar and touches all those places in us that sin has twisted us and deformed us and made us ugly and burns it away and forgives and cleanses us. So after the angel takes the coal from the altar and touches Isaiah's lips and takes away his sin, he hears the Lord saying, 'I have a message for the people of Israel – who will go and give it to them?' And Isaiah jumps up to volunteer. And then God tells Isaiah that when he preaches this gospel, the people will not believe. Nobody will listen. They would in fact be blinded and hardened. Why? Because they did not want to hear of such majesty and glory and power and holiness.

They didn't want a Messiah that wasn't a conquering hero – they didn't want a Messiah that was despised and forsaken of men – they wanted someone that would come in power and glory and sweep the Romans off the face of the earth – along with all the other unclean Gentiles – they wanted a Messiah made in their own image. And if that is what they got, they would be the ones in charge, they would be the rulers, not the ruled. They would get the glory. And that was **the root of their unbelief – they loved the glory of men rather than the glory of God.** Oh yes, John does say that some believed: *Nevertheless many even of the rulers believed in Him.* But we have seen this kind of belief before. It was not a saving belief – it was not a saving faith, because John goes on to say: *but because of the Pharisees they were not confessing Him, for fear that they would be put out of the synagogue; for they loved the approval [glory] of men rather than the approval [glory] of God.* John 12:42-43

The root of unbelief is to love the glory of men rather than the glory of God. It is to treasure what men say and do rather than what God says and does. Remember two weeks ago when we saw that glory is something that has weight and significance and value? And when you've seen the glory of God, you have seen that God is the most important thing in your life. A Christian is someone who has seen that God is the most important thing in his or her life. A religious person finds God important – but He's merely an addition. A religious person prays, but usually only when they are in trouble. God is seen as life-enhancement – things go better with God. A religious person will end up making God in their own image.

But the Christian is one who says, 'I have to examine my life – I have to reassess my priorities – reconfigure my wants and needs – I have to reorganize my schedule to make sure that God occupies the first position – not the second or third.' The Christian is one who says, 'Does God's glory, His will, His way, motivate my every moment – does it drive the way I work, the way I relate to everyone?' 'Is God the center of my thinking, is He the defining force behind the way in which I use my possessions – the way in which I use my money?' 'Is He at the center in the way I think about life and my world view and politics? Is He the center of everything? I have to put Him right in the middle of everything. And as Tim Keller puts it 'I have to get Him out of the suburbs of my life and put Him downtown'. The Christian is one who says, 'I love the glory of God. His glory means more to me than anything else.'

Let me ask you – what are you living for? Are you living for the glory of God or the glory of man? Do you take God into account in the ordinary affairs of daily life? Do you take more pleasure in obedience to God and His word than you do in satisfying yourself? Is His name, His reputation, His honor, His will, His pleasure, His plans, more important to you than your own? My prayer is that we would be a people that love the glory of God more than the glory of man.

O Father of glory,

Grant us to know and love and treasure Your glory more than anything. Teach us that there is one thing that deserves our greatest care – to glorify the One who gave us life and show forth His glory in the world. Don't let us live for ourselves without regard for Your glory. Wean our hearts from the pursuit of the riches, honors, fame and pleasures of this life, and grant us grace to know that nothing will satisfy the cry of our hearts apart from a life lived for Your glory. Let nothing in our lives be disconnected from You. Make us conscious all the time that everything gets its proper meaning from how it relates to Your glory. Glorify Yourself and we will rejoice because to bring honor to Your name is our sole desire. Grant that we who have seen Your glory would long that others might know it, feel it, and rejoice in it, until the whole world is filled with Your glory we pray in the glorious name of Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.