

For My Father's Sake

God is concerned for his glory. He acts in salvation history for the sake of his Name, that he might be rightly magnified in the eyes of all people. This happens supremely in the glory and horror of the crucifixion, when God through Christ reconciles the world to himself. However, it is not only God the Father who acts for the sake of his own renown. Jesus—the God-Man, the mediator between God and man—perfectly obeys the Father's will so that his Father will be glorified in him. Christ seeks his Father's glory.

Of course, Jesus is inextricably bound up in the Father's glory. He is the "radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being" (Hebrews 1:3). We behold the glory of God the Father by witnessing the majesty of his Son. The radiance of the sun streams outward toward earth; likewise God's glorious light falls on its inhabitants in Christ. Moreover, just as God's glory involves the perfection of his character, so the emanation of God's glory in Christ involves his bearing "the very stamp of his nature" (RSV). The image is that of an impress on a coin, which corresponds exactly to the stamp on the die. F.F. Bruce, the great New Testament scholar, comments, "Just as the glory is really in the effulgence, so the being . . . of God is really in Christ, who is its impress, its exact representation and embodiment. What God essentially is, is made manifest in Christ. To see Christ is to see what the Father is like."¹ The light of God's glory shines on us, is made supremely visible to us, in Christ Jesus.

Thus, the glory of the Father and the Son remain indissolubly linked. To glorify the Son is to glorify the Father, and vice versa. Jesus himself says as much when disputing with an angry religious establishment. Insisting on his equality with God, he says, "Moreover, the Father judges no one, but has entrusted all judgment to the Son, that all may honor the Son just as they honor the Father. He who

¹ *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990): 48.



does not honor the Son does not honor the Father, who sent him” (John 5:22-23). Because God sent his Son into the world, his Son comes to honor his Father’s purpose—glorifying him in the eyes of all nations. Similarly, because Jesus is God’s envoy, one cannot honor God without honoring him; one cannot honor the King while crucifying his messenger.²

As the sent one, Christ conscientiously seeks to carry out his Father’s will (cf. John 4:34). At every step of his long journey to Golgotha, he pursues the Father’s glory with single-minded devotion. In this he sets us an example that we should do as he has done. And as he is the mediator between God and man, this is so especially for those of us who plead with God in intercessory prayer, a point to which we will return shortly. First, though, let us follow Christ on the road to Calvary and beyond, to see his passion for his Father’s glory.

The Glory of the Incarnation

From the very beginning, the theme of glory runs like a golden thread through John’s gospel. We read in his majestic prologue of the glory of the incarnation, “The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth” (1:14). In Christ, God “pitches his tent” among his people once more. For John’s Jewish audience, this imagery would immediately call to mind the Old Testament tabernacle, when God dwelt in the midst of the Israelites. Of course, in residing among his people, God reveals his glory to them. When construction on the tabernacle was completed, “Then the cloud covered the Tent of Meeting and the *glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle*” (Exodus 40:34). Now this same glory resides in Jesus, who has made his dwelling with us. Thus, when John links Jesus’ incarnation with glory, he most likely intends to suggest that Jesus is the fullest manifestation of God’s presence, being God incarnate.

² The glory of the Father and the glory of the Son are inseparable. Jesus glorifies the Father in his obedience, death, resurrection, and exaltation; but, of course, he wins glory for himself in so doing. As the triune Godhead, the glory they experience is a shared glory: “Now the Son of Man is glorified and God is glorified in him. If God is glorified in him, God will glorify the Son in himself, and will glorify him at once” (John 13:31-32; see also 8:54).

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Interestingly, when we behold the glory of the Christ, it is a glory filled with “grace and truth.” Commentators more or less unanimously agree that these words translate two theologically profound Hebrew terms, *hesed* and *emet*. *Hesed* captures the unfailing love, the covenant faithfulness of a gracious God. The other term, *emet*, signifies faithfulness, as in “true to my word” or “true to my marriage vows,” and not mere propositional truth. John almost certainly draws these terms from the passage in Exodus to which we have returned many times: “The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in *love* and *faithfulness*, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion, and sin” (Exodus 34:6-7). D.A. Carson concludes, “The glory revealed to Moses when the Lord passed in front of him and sounded his name, displaying that divine goodness characterized by ineffable grace and truth, was the very same glory John and his friends saw in the Word-made-flesh.”³ Jesus makes visible the invisible; he brings to light the goodness of God. “No one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son, who is himself God and is in closest relationship with the Father, has made him known” (John 1:18). We have not seen God, but we have seen his Son—and the sight is more than sufficient to reveal the awesome majesty of the eternal God. Little wonder, then, that Paul says God has “made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ” (2 Corinthians 4:6). If you want to see God’s glory, you need only fix your eyes on Jesus.

Jesus’ earliest followers—those who awaited the redemption of their people from the yoke of Roman oppression, who worshiped the Christ as a mere babe—could not have missed this truth. When an angel proclaims the Savior’s birth, the glory of the Lord shines around the shepherds outside Bethlehem and terrifies them (Luke 2:9). Moments later, a great company of angels bursts forth in praise, saying, “Glory to God in the highest” (v 14). Stunned, the shepherds scurry off to Bethlehem to

³ *The Gospel According to John*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids/Leicester, Eerdmans/Apollos: 1991): 129.

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see what all the fuss is about. After beholding the Christ, the shepherds return to their flocks, “*glorifying and praising God* for all the things they had heard and seen” (v 20). From the moment of his birth, Christ brings glory to the Father.

Years later, when Christ prepares to enter the ministry, the theme continues. Jesus himself recognizes his work—preaching good news to the poor, proclaiming freedom for the captives—as being for God’s glory. To announce the beginning of his ministry, he opens an Old Testament scroll and reads from the prophet Isaiah (Luke 4:18-19). He reads the first two verses, according to Luke, though the oracle continues in intriguing ways:

The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me,
because the LORD has anointed me . . .
to comfort all who mourn,
and provide for those who grieve in Zion—
to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes,
the oil of gladness instead of mourning,
and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair.
They will be called oaks of righteousness,
a planting of the LORD *for the display of his splendor.* (61:1, 2, 3)

In doing the work of the Lord’s Anointed, Christ clothes his people with praise instead of despair, such that they exhibit the very splendor of God. Christ redeems a people for the Lord that he might be glorified, that in them he might display his wondrous beauty.

As Jesus ministers God’s grace to God’s people, he fulfills Isaiah’s prophecy fully. When he heals, he does so for the glory of God, that God’s goodness, mercy and power might be visible. So, for example, when the foolhardy disciples inquire about a man born blind, wondering who sinned to cause his affliction, he replies, “Neither this man nor his parents sinned . . . but this happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life” (John 9:3). His words seem to echo his Father’s words to pharaoh



centuries earlier: “But I have raised you up for this very purpose, that I might show you my power and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth” (Exodus 9:16). When God works mightily in human history, his power, works, majesty, glory become visible—and his name is exalted. Jesus seeks the display of God’s perfections in his ministry for the same purpose.

This happens most famously, perhaps, at Lazarus’ tomb. When news first reaches Jesus and his disciples of Lazarus’ mortal illness, Jesus responds, “This sickness will not end in death. No, it is *for God’s glory* so that God’s Son may be glorified through it” (John 11:4).⁴ (Of course, in the death and raising of Lazarus, Jesus prepares his people for the fuller glory of his own death and resurrection.) True to his word, Jesus raises the dead man—the sickness does not ultimately end in death—and God receives his due glory. Standing before the tomb, speaking to a struggling Martha, Jesus says, “Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?” (v 40). The one who is the Resurrection and the Life resurrects a man to new life *so that* his Father will be glorified. Such is the tenor of Christ’s earthly ministry: for the glory of God alone in the salvation of his people.

The Will of Christ, the Glory of God

Jesus successfully glorifies God in all that he does because he has submitted his will completely to the Father’s. Indeed, when speaking to the crowds, Jesus had affirmed this as his purpose: “For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me” (John 6:38). In contrast to the religious leaders of his day, Jesus does not seek the praise of men, but God alone. He says to the religious establishment,

⁴ No one who reads this account can miss the surprising movement of the story. Jesus, prompted by his profound love for Lazarus, Martha, and Mary, *waits*: “Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. Yet when he heard that Lazarus was sick, he stayed where he was two more days” (11:5-6). Why does Jesus wait—and how is that a demonstration of his love? God’s love for his glory drives his love for his people. Here we see a corollary point: if God is truly the greatest good in the universe, then the more his children grasp of his glory, the more complete will their joy be (cf. John 10:10). So the most loving act Jesus can perform is to ensure his beloved friends understand the weight of God’s glory as fully as possible. For that reason he waits an extra two days.

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I do not accept glory from human beings, but I know you. I know that you do not have the love of God in your hearts. I have come in my Father's name, and you do not accept me; but if someone else comes in his own name, you will accept him. How can you believe since you accept glory from one another but do not seek the glory that comes from the only God? (John 5:41-44)

Because he has set his heart on God's glory only, he remains steadfast in his commitment to carry out God's purposes on earth.

He has come in his Father's name⁵—as his agent, his instrument of grace in the world. As such, he does not live by his will, but by the Father's. Like an ambassador sent from a foreign government, he refuses to set his own course, but instead does as his Father pleases (cf. 5:19). How different would Christ's life have been had he sought glory from others and not his Father! We also are to live by Another's will (Matthew 6:10; Colossians 3:17). Jesus' life sets the pattern for all who bear his name. As Andrew Murray said, "All seeking of our own glory with men makes faith impossible: it is the deep, intense self-sacrifice that gives up its own glory, and seeks the glory of God alone, that wakens in the soul that spiritual susceptibility of the Divine, which is faith."⁶ Jesus, as the Pioneer of our faith (Hebrews 12:1), has blazed the trail of self-sacrificing, God-glorifying living. Nowhere is this so evident as in the hours leading up to his death.

The Glory of the Crucifixion

The night before Calvary, when wrestling in prayer in the garden of Gethsemane to prepare himself for the cross, Jesus submits his will absolutely to the Father's. Overwhelmed in body and spirit, he leaves his disciples behind to watch for him. Then, "Going a little farther, he fell to the ground and prayed that if possible the hour might pass from him. 'Abba, Father,' he said, 'everything is possible for you. Take this

⁵ Of course, we are to pray in Christ's name, just as Christ came in the Father's name. To this subject we will return in chapter seven.

⁶ *With Christ in the School of Prayer: A 31-Day Course in Christian Prayer with Note on George Muller*, Scotts Valley reprint (London: James Nisbet, 1887): 52.

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cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will” (14:35-36). “How strong was his temptation to say ‘amen’ after ‘take away this cup from me,’ rather than go on to ‘nevertheless not what I will, but what thou wilt’ (14:36, KJV), we shall never know,” reflects J.I. Packer.⁷ We will never know because he did not end his prayer after expressing his desire, but pressed on to submit it to the Father. More than anything else, Jesus longs to do his Father’s will—and is willing to endure torture, humiliation, death, even separation from the Father to accomplish it.

John shares a similar episode from Jesus’ life, one which confirms that he submits to the Father’s will precisely in order to glorify him. Speaking of the approaching hour of his death, he prays suddenly, “Now my heart is troubled, and what shall I say? [Father, save me from this hour! But]”⁸ it was for this very reason I came to this hour. Father, glorify your name!” And God the Father confirms that Christ’s purpose has been served. He replies, “I have glorified it, and will glorify it again” (John 12:27-28). Christ overcomes the temptation to abandon the cross by seeking his Father’s glory. As John Stott notes, “God’s purpose of love was to save sinners, and to save them righteously; but this would be impossible without the sin-bearing death of the Saviour. So how could he pray to be saved from ‘this hour’ of death?”⁹ He places God’s plans above his own desires, God’s will and purpose above his own comfort. In response, God promises that he will glorify himself in his Son’s death, resurrection and exaltation. Christ undergoes the horror of Golgotha that he might win glory for his Father.

Do our lives have anything of Christ’s self-sacrificing, God-glorifying focus? Do we long for God’s will to be accomplished or our own? God’s purpose, as we have seen, is to glorify himself among the nations as he forms a people for his name. If this end were accomplished, would we submit ourselves to

⁷ *Knowing God*, 20th Anniversary ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1973): 192.

⁸ Following D.A. Carson, I have adjusted the NIV translation to see this sentence as a positive prayer and not a hypothetical question, which makes better sense of the preceding sentence, “Now my heart is troubled.” If able to dismiss the alternative so flippantly, in what sense was he genuinely troubled? See D.A. Carson, *The Gospel according to John*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Leicester/Grand Rapids, MI: Apollos/Eerdmans, 1991): 440. Cf. Mark 14:33-36.

⁹ *The Cross of Christ* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1986): 77.

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self-sacrifice, loss, and death? Our lives and prayers, like Christ's, should reflect a spirit of submission to God's will, no matter the personal cost.

Christ, Our High Priest

At the end of his life, Jesus prayed for his disciples—not only the Twelve, but all who would follow him throughout the centuries—in what is now known as his High Priestly Prayer. He begins, unsurprisingly, with a plea for the glory of the triune God:

Father, the hour has come. Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you. For you granted him authority over all people that he might give eternal life to all those you have given him. Now this is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent. I have brought you glory on earth by finishing the work you gave me to do. And now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began.

(John 17:1-5)

Jesus' time on earth begins and ends with a passion for God's glory. Though he marches on to excruciating suffering and ignominious death, yet he longs to see his Father glorified, even as the Father will glorify him.

The glory he brings to God comes via his sacrificial work, a work he says he has finished. In eternity past, God granted him authority over all people for a purpose: to give eternal life to those the Father gives to him. God's plan from before time has been the redemption of a people for his name; when the plan is accomplished, God is rightly glorified—and Jesus, as the agent of the atoning work, with him.

Of course, the glory God receives from the elect is tied to the revelation of his character. The eternal life given by Christ is knowing God fully—and being known by him. Alone among all pretenders, he is the only true God. What higher blessing could there be than knowing him and his Son sent to earth? Those who know God in this way—his holy splendor, his enduring love, his continuing



faithfulness—glorify him. As we know God through the Christ—the supreme revelation of God (cf. John 1:18)—Jesus has brought God glory on earth by finishing the work he had to do.

In this work, Jesus stands in the line of Moses as its triumph and fulfillment. As high priest, he is the supreme mediator between God and humanity (1 Timothy 2:5). A faithful mediator like Moses will wrestle in prayer with God for the sake of his people, “striving with him for the forgiveness of his people,” putting “his own life at risk for the sake of sinful Israel. ... These Old Testament passages provide the background for the christological development of the New Testament in picturing Jesus as the true mediator between God and man.”¹⁰ Moses risked his safety by standing between God’s wrath and his faithless people Israel, especially after he “disobeyed” God’s command to leave him (Exodus 32:10-11). But with Jesus there was no risk. There was only the certainty of his sacrificial death for the glory of his Father and the redemption of his people. This is intercession.

In this prayer, Jesus prepares us for his resurrection and ascension and their connection to God’s glory. As Andrew Murray notes, “The ground on which he asks to be taken up into the glory he had with the Father, is the twofold one: he has glorified him on earth; he will still glorify him in heaven. What he asks is only to enable him to glorify the Father more. It is as we enter into sympathy with Jesus on this point, and gratify him by making the Father’s glory our chief object in prayer, too, that our prayer cannot fail of an answer.”¹¹

The Glory of the Ascension

Christ’s pursuit of God’s glory does not cease with death. On the third day, in accordance with the Scriptures, Jesus is raised “through the glory of the Father” (Romans 6:4).¹² Once risen, he sets about his

¹⁰ Brevard Childs, *The Book of Exodus: A Critical, Theological Commentary*, Old Testament Library (Louisville, KY: Westminster, 1974): 599.

¹¹ *With Christ in the School of Prayer*: 51.

¹² God’s glory that raises Jesus to life is the glory of his power made visible to his people, as in the account of Jesus’ revivifying Lazarus (John 11:23, 40).



Father's business again—appearing in the flesh to the faithful, strengthening the faith of the doubting, explaining the Scriptures to the confused.¹³ After a time, he departs to rejoin his Father in heaven; he is “taken up in glory” (1 Timothy 3:16).

But what does Jesus do once taken to glory? Having sat down at the right hand of the Father (Hebrews 1:3), has his purpose changed?

Surely not. Before his death, resurrection, and ascension, Jesus took time to prepare his disciples for his departure in what is usually called his Farewell Discourse (John 13:31-16:33). At one point in this extended discourse, Jesus says, “And I will do whatever you ask in my name, *so that the Father may be glorified in the Son*” (14:13). Once he has ascended to the right hand of the Majesty, he will continue his work as faithful mediator between God and humanity. When the saints offer prayers to God in Christ, he will hear and answer them so that God will receive glory. While this truth will have tremendous implications for our own prayer lives, suffice to say for now that Jesus continues to seek his Father's glory even after he has ascended to heaven.

Indeed, Jesus also indirectly glorifies God by empowering the communion of the saints to do so. As Christians, whatever we do, we are to “do it all for the glory of God” (1 Corinthians 10:31). This is impossible for us, of course, in our fallen state. Our hearts are evil (Jeremiah 17:9); even our righteous acts—when done in the flesh—are filthy rags in the sight of a holy God (Isaiah 64:6). There is no one righteous, no one who seeks God (Romans 3:10-11). A bleak situation—but one into which Jesus Christ pours his redemptive blood.

According to Peter, we are “being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God *through Jesus Christ*” (1 Peter 2:5). A few verses later, Peter makes explicit that these spiritual sacrifices are for the glory of God: “But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, *that you may declare the praises of him who called*

¹³ Cf. 1 Corinthians 15:5-6; John 20:27; 21:15-17; Luke 24:26-27 and others.



you out of darkness into his wonderful light” (v 9). In Christ we are created anew to bring glory to God the Father—whether living holy lives among pagans that “they may see your good deeds and glorify God” (2:12), speaking his words and serving with his strength among the brothers “so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ” (4:11), or suffering without fear or shame as you “praise God that you bear his name” (4:17). The continuing ministry of Christ among the believers brings fresh praise to a worthy God.¹⁴

¹⁴ These are, of course, only examples of how Christ empowers his people to live fully for the glory of God. It is our reflection on the cross of Christ that allows us to do everything for his name’s sake: “do it all for the glory of God” (1 Corinthians 10:31; see 1 Corinthians 1-3). And the peace and message of Christ, our living by the name of Jesus, drive our gratitude, community, worship—“singing to God with gratitude in your hearts” (Colossians 3:17).
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