

Glory Alone (Evening Service)

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Preacher: Rev. James Wagner

[0 : 00] Now, while you remain standing, let us pray. This is one of Thomas Cranmer's creations of prayer.

It's the prayer that's assigned for Trinity Sunday and on theme for our message tonight. Almighty and everlasting God, who has given unto us your servant's grace, by the confession of a true faith, to acknowledge the glory of the eternal Trinity, and in the power of the divine majesty to worship the unity, we pray that this holy faith may evermore be our defense against all adversities, who lives and reigns one God, world without end. Amen.

Please be seated. Let me say I am really impressed to see so many of you here this evening on this long weekend before, in some ways, the pastoral year begins, the academic year begins.

And not only that, because it's actually so warm tonight as well. I see a number of you fanning yourselves. Wish I could be doing the same thing. But we come to the end of a sermon series called Sola Power.

And I promise I won't issue you an exam. I'll let you leave tonight, even if you don't know all of the five solas. I'll mention them at the beginning, but not at the middle, nor at the end.

[1 : 46] But let me just kind of name them now, and then I will again as well. So the first one was grace alone. The second is Christ alone. The third was scripture alone.

The fourth being faith alone. And the final one now being glory alone, or what some call soli deo gloria, SDG for short. This last pillar of our solar power series, soli deo gloria, is the most important one.

And we've saved the best for last. And that is because that all of them are related and dependent upon one another. But this one, gloria, actually seems to hold them all together.

If there were no glory, then we would tend to lean on one of the other solas. And in the process of that, making them out to be something of an idol.

It would work a little bit like this. If it were grace alone without the glory of God alone, we would tend towards something called antinomianism. Which is kind of an anti-law, or against kind of God's commandments and sin, all the more that maybe grace might abound.

[2 : 55] If it were Christ alone, not with the glory of God alone as well, then we might lose sight of focusing on the divinity of Christ, losing the humanity of Jesus.

And if it were only scripture alone, then we would tend towards the direction of a kind of a trinity that would be the Father, the Son, and the Holy Scriptures, not including the Holy Spirit.

And if it were faith alone, not including the glory of God alone, then we would lose sight of the fact that it's love, which is greater than these, faith and hope, where love actually runs through faith and hope, as it were, banks.

But no, tonight we actually have the glory of God alone. This glory of God is the goal, the end, the purpose, the climax of what our faith, Christianity, is all about.

And insofar as that's the case, it's the glory of God that protects us from idolatry. It preserves the connection between God and us, between God and all of his creation, where the glory of God is like the sun in our solar system with everything rotating around it.

[4 : 06] And so the medieval church lost touch, connection with God, the trinity and Christianity. Outward, there was appearance in the church of glory. There was wealth.

It was weighty. There were systems, structures. It was powerful but impotent to change lives. And inwardly, it was insecure and corrupt and stuck and lifeless, unable to change lives.

We're all actually in need of reform, though. Not just back then, but here as well. Us individually, our congregation, locally in this city and nationally as well.

So today we turn to this fabulous text, John chapter 17, starting with the first verse on page 903. And this is a prayer. It's a glorious prayer.

Some people call it Jesus' high priestly prayer. But it's also kind of a prayer of consecration of Jesus' before his death. And here we hear about, we hear about throughout the other Gospels, Jesus praying.

[5 : 07] But here in this particular incident, we actually hear Jesus' words in his prayer. If you ever wondered what Jesus was praying, you'll look no further than this prayer right here, where we see exactly what it is that Jesus prays.

And what is it that Jesus is praying about? Jesus is praying about unity. His unity with the Father, but also the unity of disciples with Jesus. But the unity is based and grounded on the glory of God. And this is vital to understanding our God, his glory in Christianity. Bruce Milne in the book, Know the Truth, wrote this about God's glory.

I'm going to kind of capture this in your mind, present this to you. He said this about God's glory. His, that is God's glory, carries us to the heart of all that is essential.

To his being as God, his divine majesty, and his sheer Godness. That's the glory of God.

[6 : 10] And this prayer puts on display the character of God's glory. Does it five times as the word in some form, glory is mentioned throughout these five verses.

A glory that's of two kinds, which run throughout all of Scripture, but are also here in these five verses. These two kinds of glories are this, quite simply. One is power, and the other is the superiority of God.

Power like that of gravity, or importance, or value, which some like C.S. Lewis called the weight of God's glory. And the second one, superiority, which is to do with honor, or prestige, or this high regard, which others like Richard Bauckham would call the visible splendor of God's glory.

So these two senses of God's glory are not competitive then, but complementary. There's this tension, and at the same time, a unity that draws out and presents the glory of God.

A little bit like Jesus Christ, who is fully human and fully divine. One person, this unity between the two. And so we have these two dimensions of God's glory.

[7 : 18] His power, and His superiority. And so tonight, I want to look at these two aspects of God's glory, which is His alone, or only, or exclusively, our Lord's.

So the first one, the power of God's glory. The glory of God is often referred to, as I said just a second ago, as His weight. But when we hear that word weight, we might think mass, or measurement.

And that's very scientific, but misleading. We might better think of it in these terms, like that of might. Weight, with respect to God's glory, is more like power, or impact.

And now we associate weight, though, with force, or pressure, or a push. But the glory of God is a power, a might, that actually pulls, or lifts, or draws us up into the greatness of God.

And God's glory, then for us, then almighty, or He is all-powerful. Now we live in a world that is addicted to power. It's most obvious in political systems.

[8 : 26] But we also know there's power dynamics in our personal relationships, as well as between professionals in the business world, in the marketplace. And so, political, personal, professional relationships include power, but the power of God's glory is unique.

The power of God's glory is related to us in the first two verses of John, chapter 17. Look down with me halfway through the first verse. Jesus prays, Father, the hour has come.

Glorify Your Son, that the Son may glorify You, since You have given Him authority over all flesh, to give eternal life to all whom You have given Him.

The timing of Jesus' prayer at this point in the Gospel of John reveals to us the power of God. Up to this point, Jesus repeatedly says, My hour has not yet come, but now the hour has come.

The atmosphere is charged with the grandeur and the glory of God. Something powerful is about to happen like never before, and the context of this is the cross, the death, the crucifixion of Jesus.

[9 : 45] And Jesus is making this quite explicit. He's creating a sense of expectation and anticipation. But our Lord then gives this explanation.

He declares the Father has given Him authority over all flesh. His authority or power, unlike human power, is for what? To give eternal life.

Any human power or glory we know is quite temporary. Think of champions or elites in their profession. Their glory doesn't actually last that long.

Only until the next season, it seems. But Jesus' power is used to give life that's everlasting. That's how glorious God's power is.

And it comes at a great cost to Jesus through His death. And this power of Jesus points us definitively to the cross. And there is this paradox in this about God's glory because it took all Jesus' power to die.

[10:54] Think about that. The use of our own power just to live and to continue on. Sometimes to survive, sometimes to thrive. But Jesus' power was displayed actually on the cross by God's glory.

The cross then is the way that the Son will glorify the Father and the Father will glorify the Son. The power is unlike any other kind because we think of glory as winning or conquering.

But God's glory is through the losing and being conquered, being put to death of Jesus Christ. And there is something about this glory through the Son's dying that then invites us, draws us, pulls us up into the glory of God so that we might trust and believe in Him for eternal life.

So the glory of God has this dimension of God's power, but it has another dimension as well. And the second one is the superiority of God or what some call the visible splendor of God's glory.

In other words, God's glory is in this respect superiority outstanding or excellent or unique or unlike any other thing in the world. God's glory is superior which is why the reformers added to God's glory only.

[12:15] And this glory is not just surpassing all others but in a class all by itself. This glory of God isn't a kind of a comparison with others.

There are no other glories to compare it to. And the glory of God is distinguished not just in some ways but in all ways in every ways and the glory of God isn't just the best available.

It's the only glory that's available. Well, this this superior glory of God is then expressed by Jesus in His own use of the word only.

Jesus' burden is that we would know the Father and in His words Him only. Look down with me at verse 3. Jesus continues in His prayer and says this is eternal life that they know you the only true God.

So which were the idea of God's glory of that being superior to any other glory in the world comes from. And it's so that, listen, that we don't just see this glory of God that He's the only true God but that we know He is the glorious one.

[13:30] Jesus here is emphasizing knowledge of the one and only true God which is glorious. The one who Jesus will glorify and who will glorify Jesus.

No one we know can compare to this only true glorious God. But think of someone just for a minute with me. Someone that you know really well.

Jesus is guaranteeing that you can actually know God even more. Think of this someone that you know really well who may be just a bit short of glorious, okay?

Maybe it's a spouse. If you think of your spouse that way. Maybe it's a significant other. You have high regard for that person. Or a parent that we do all we can to honor or even colleagues that we work with.

Someone famous maybe. Jesus is saying the Father and He are supremely glorious to any other glory that we might attach or affix to someone else.

[14:30] And the reason is that we might know Him as the only true God. And why or how is that? You might ask.

Look at me further with verse 4. Jesus states this, having accomplished the work that you gave me to do. That's how this glory is actually achieved that we might know no God.

Jesus' work is to do for us you see what we cannot do for ourselves. And Jesus is about to glorify the Father by forgiving us and freeing us from sin through His death on the cross.

That work is Jesus' death in our place so that we might behold the glory of the Lord and know that our sins are forgiven and that we're freed for service in His kingdom.

But it gets even better than this. Jesus saying having accomplished the work. You notice that actually He hasn't actually accomplished it yet. He will die and accomplish it but He will continue accomplishing that work as it were.

[15:38] Continuing to forgive us of our sins freeing us for service in His kingdom. His death forgives us and spurs us on to become like Christ.

And that's glorious. But it's not just a display of God's glory as some people are akin to describing God's glory. We'll say that God's glory is His character on display.

Jesus has taken a display. He has made declaration of God's glory. But through the cross Jesus takes it to a different level where He demonstrates God's glory in the flesh. This glory you may remember that was spoken to Moses at Mount Sinai when Moses wanted to see the glory of God and God said you will not see my glory and live but I'll show you my end. The tail kind of the afterburner of my glory and when He does that then He makes this declaration. He says that Lord Lord gracious and merciful slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. [16:56] A declaration. But Jesus takes the glory of God and doesn't just declare it on the cross He now demonstrates it. This is God's pattern of revealing Himself to us.

He'll tell us first and then He'll show us. He'll declare it and then He'll demonstrate it. And that's what happens through Jesus' work on the cross as He glorifies the Lord.

It may be a little bit difficult to understand but think of it in this way. This is the Labor Day weekend. Maybe not this weekend in Vancouver but maybe kind of past Labor Days or maybe not even in the recent past but distant past.

There would be demonstrations on this day or demonstrations about labor and labor movements and maybe even protests with respect to that. Well Jesus' death on the cross is a counter protest to our protest of His law and His love in our life.

As in sin we rebel and reject God's law and love in our life then God comes to earth and flesh in Jesus Christ with a counter protest of our protest.

[18:08] But as you know as some counter protests go badly and people die with meaningless deaths it's not the case in Jesus' counter protest His protest against sin and evil and Satan.

This death of Jesus this counter protest of His is full of meaning full of love full of the superiority of God and the glory of the Lord whom draws us actually into that splendor of His glory.

That's what the demonstration the work of Christ achieves through the cross in our life. So where does this lead us? How do we then respond actually to this glory of the Lord?

Our Christian life is actually pretty simple in some respects. It has two aspects to it. One of worship and one of witness. the glory of the Lord actually as we're drawn into His presence by His power according to His superiority as we're lifted into His presence then we worship Him.

We worship Him in spirit and in truth. And the goal and the end and the climax of that all is the glory of the Lord. Last week if you were here you would have celebrated communion.

[19:24] And it used to be in the communion service before Cranmer translated it into English and then edited it and brought to the English speaking language the communion of sorry the service of Holy Communion.

Cranmer placed the Gloria which he would have sung at the end. So after coming into worship and confessing your sins and God's presence becoming real to us through the preaching of the word and the receiving of communion then we're actually led to this climax of God's glory.

That's what worship is and worship is all of life. All of our life is actually to the glory of God. Not just when we gather here for worship but every day of the week our lives are to be lived to God's glory. His power and His might. But also worship then leads to witness in the world in which we live in. Sometimes at this service usually at the morning prayer service there is a general thanksgiving that's said and we pray the aspiration of that we would show forth God's praise not only with our lips but with our lives.

And as we behold the glory of the Lord as we're brought into His presence then we witness in the world in which we live in. We witness to one another. We testify to who God is not only with our lips but in our lives as we give praise and honor and glory and power to the Lord.

[20:56] So this is the last sola of the series. It is by God's grace. It is in Christ. It is through the scriptures. It is for faith but is always and forever to the glory of God.

And to the glory of God be this in all of our lives as we pursue Him and as He draws us in to His great glory. Amen.