

Sam Low Glory?

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[0 : 00] New Year's Eve last year, Sal and I decided it would be a good idea to have some people over to our house and utilise the balcony that we have, which is a good entertaining area. And being who I am, at the last minute I decided that the best kind of drinks holder would be a fancy one from Bunnings that involves some construction.

So New Year's Eve I went and bought one of those, you know, those kind of fancy looking metal tubs with a frame that it sits on. Now, it's a fairly basic frame. It had a total of four screws that had to go into it and there was four other bits that kind of had to slot into holes.

So very complex. Anyway, being me, again, I decided that I would just get stuck into putting it together. Our guests were already there, so I didn't think too much details-wise.

I just constructed the thing, looked okay, put the tub on, put some ice in, put some drinks in. It was at that point that I noticed that there was a bit of play in this frame that was supposed to hold the drinks, to the point where, you know, you could kind of wiggle it in a circle.

And I figured that's probably not how it's designed. You know, and it may not last the whole night with a tub of drinks on it, but I figured I'll just leave it because, you know, it's too hard to fix it.

[1 : 12] And it wasn't until I came back to it later on, we had some more friends over later in the month. And I realised that, you know, had I looked at the instructions, that there was actually some design to this thing and it could be much, much more stable.

And so I went about removing the work that I had done in order to stabilise the structure that was there. This passage tonight is kind of like that moment where you realise, in spite of all these things that you've done and this work that you've done, there might be some deconstructing that needs to happen in order to get to a stable finishing point.

When we think about God and when we approach God and when we think about the way he works and what he's done in the world, we have a default setting for the way that we want to understand him. We take exciting memory verses like John 3.16 which say, for God so loved the world.

And so we just kind of stop there. That's enough for me. That's all I need to know. And so God is love and that's everything. And see, the problem is it's true. The Bible says that God is love and love is one of the main reasons he sends Jesus.

But it's not the whole story. And so the challenge for us tonight is that we've kind of built everything around the idea that God is just loving and it's just overwhelming and amazing and we might need to come back a step or two in order to get a more stable picture, a more accurate picture, a more satisfying picture of who God really is.

[2 : 42] So this passage in John's Gospel, chapter 17, and in fact the whole second half of John's Gospel is preparing for Jesus' death. It's marching towards Jesus on the cross.

And so it's about the same thing as John 3.16. But the focus in this passage doesn't seem to be God so loved the world, at least not in the same way.

So let's have a look at Jesus' prayer in those first few verses and see if we can grab what the emphasis is here. After Jesus said this from verse 1, he looked toward heaven and prayed, 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've brought you glory on earth by finishing the work you gave me to do.

[3 : 43] And now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began. Jesus' motivation as he comes to the cross is what?

Glory. The glory of his Father specifically. He is asking his Father to glorify him, but even that is so that he can glorify the Father more clearly.

The agenda for him in every request in this prayer, as he prays for himself at the beginning, as he prays for his disciples next, and as he prays for us last of all, is always that his Father would get glory.

It's actually the theme of the whole Bible. Everything in Scripture is guiding towards this agenda. In fact, it came up for us in our Frontline series that we did just recently.

If you're a guest, Frontline was a series looking at the way God puts dignity wherever we are, whether it's work or school or home, that he has put value there. And a verse that popped up time and time again was from 1 Corinthians, which says, whether you eat or drink, whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.

[4 : 57] And the reality is, at first glance, this idea of God's glory being the most important thing can almost feel like it's in tension with God's love for us that we just talked about from John 3.16.

It seems like a fair question to ask. Is God doing what he's doing because he loves us? Or is God doing what he's doing because he's really excited about his glory?

What's his agenda? How do I work it out? Is it for his sake or for my sake? And the temptation for us is because the Bible says both. And so the temptation is we focus on one and leave the other one behind.

So maybe we focus on the love of God and we kind of just ignore the big responsibility of trying to glorify God. And so that can play out by us being people who think, you know, God's loving. It doesn't really matter what I do. And so there's no real effort on our part to be trying to grow, to be trying to grow, to be more like Jesus. There's no real worry about whether there's sin in our life or not.

[6 : 04] Or there's the other extreme where we focus so much on the glory of God that following Jesus becomes this pressure, this standard that we've got to live up to. And we just go through lives feeling guilty, looking down on other people because they're not trying as hard as we are.

And just in this constant cycle of feeling insecure about God's love because we're so focused on one half. Now, before we get on to kind of figuring out what do we do with these two things, we've got to be clear on what we mean when we talk about glory.

Glory is a great word. It's a Bible word. It's a good word. It helps us to understand who God is. But it's possible that it's a word that we throw out without thinking about it.

We use the word glory even when we're not talking about God. We use it when we're thinking about sports teams. There's the glory of victory. There's chasing the glory of a title.

There's the glory associated with someone's abilities or skills or intellect. It's kind of the ideas of honour, the ideas of respect that go with it. We look up to people for their glory.

[7 : 10] And so we want to think about glory as being a description of quality, of essence. So think about it this way. Outside on your way in, you saw a little snapshot of the incredible baking skills that Ash Quok possesses.

You may or may not have met Ash before. But there's a fair chance that even if you know Ash well, you may not have known that he possessed that incredible ability. I've known Ash for years.

And it's only a couple of months ago when he started working here and started bringing cakes to work, which has been fantastic, that I got this insight into this incredible ability that he had.

Now, whether I recognise or know he has that ability or not doesn't actually change or diminish the fact that he has that ability.

And just because I know that he has that ability doesn't actually enhance it either. That ability is there. It exists. It's part of who he is. What's going on when I encounter that ability?

[8 : 12] What's going on when you walk outside and take a bite into that cupcake, which you've just purchased to support him on his mission trip to Fiji? What's going on there? As you encounter his glory in baking, you glorify him.

You don't add to him. You don't give him something. But by experiencing his goodness, by the smile that's on your face, by the tears that are streaming down your face because your wallet is empty and you can't afford a second cupcake, you communicate something of how incredible Ash is.

And again, you're not adding to him. You're engaging with something that's already there. Now, of course, illustrations fail us when we come to God, but it helps us in this sense.

With God, we're not talking about some skill he's got in the kitchen. We're talking about his character. We're talking about what makes him him.

It gets expressed in the way he acts, but we're talking about who he is. He's unchanging perfection. And when it comes to glorifying God, we don't glorify him by adding to him.

[9 : 25] We don't glorify him by giving him something that he doesn't have. We glorify God by engaging with his majesty and his goodness and his compassion and his love.

We glorify God by experiencing his forgiveness in our own lives. We glorify God by displaying it because suddenly we are filled with joy and love and security and confidence that our creator loves us in spite of who we are.

We glorify God by giving it to him. We glorify God as we rejoice in his provision to us. We glorify God as we turn to him and acknowledge doubt and failure because we're secure in the love that he's shown us.

We glorify God as we glorify God as we joyfully sacrifice other things because he is so satisfying that we no longer need those things to be happy, to be content. We're not adding to him.

We're just experiencing all that he is and expressing that experience. We're just engaging with his goodness and that's having an overflow effect to the people around us.

[10 : 36] There's an American pastor by the name of John Piper and he articulates it quite succinctly. He says that God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in him.

Say that again. God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in him. It's not about giving something to God.

Glory is who God is and us getting to engage with that. And so what Jesus does when he prays for God's glory here is he's praying that God might be revealed.

That's the agenda for Jesus. For us to get a glimpse of God's goodness and love and majesty and forgiveness and holiness and compassion in who Jesus is and how he lives.

But the exciting bit comes that even for Jesus himself, living his life for God's glory is ultimately about living his life engaged with and encountering God's goodness.

[11 : 44] Does that make sense? For Jesus to live in a way that glorifies God, that reveals God, the way he does that is not by doing something extra.

But by simply encountering the Father's goodness to him. I mean, look at the way Jesus prays through this prayer.

He's praying that God would be revealed. He's praying that God would be revealed. He's praying having lived a life of perfect obedience to his Father. He's praying having experienced opposition. He's praying knowing that he's about to walk to the cross. And yet this prayer is just saturated with Jesus' awareness that the Father has been abundantly generous and loving in everything that has happened in Jesus' life.

Jesus will be given the highest place of honor through his death. It's Jesus who gets to be the one who glorifies the Father and reveals him.

[12 : 44] And so as Jesus reflects in John 17, look from verse 6. I pray for them.

Everything.

Everything. From the disciples that followed Jesus to the power to do miracles, every task that he was given, even the name that he had was a gift given by the Father.

Not a duty, not a responsibility, not a job description to be satisfied. Even in the cross, Jesus is honored. Jesus is praying here as he gets ready.

The hour has come. So Father, glorify me. He's praying, God, put me on the cross. Because even that is a gift. Even that is the path by which you're going to honor me as the Son of God.

[14 : 17] And you're going to exalt me and give me the name that is above every name. Jesus knows that even in the cross, he will be revealed to be the one who takes away the sin of the world.

In his death and resurrection, he will be shown to be the king who rules over all creation. The point of all this, the reason we need to understand this is that we need to understand that the call and command for us to give glory to God, for you to, whether you eat or drink, do it all for the glory of God, that call and that command is actually a call and command for you to experience the glory of God.

And remember, the glory of God is his goodness. It's his love. It's his mercy. It's his compassion. What might at first feel like a burdensome instruction, if you're going to be a Christian, you must glorify God, is actually, if you're going to be a Christian, you must be loved by God.

That's what the instruction is. Those two things sit perfectly together here. When God calls us to glorify him, he's calling us to be stars, not suns.

He's not calling us to somehow produce something from within ourselves that will help other people see God. He's saying, be a star. Get yourself in a position where the sun's light reflects off you.

[15:47] And so for you to do the reflecting, the showing of God, you've got to be in a position where you're getting absolutely smashed by the light of the sun, where you're getting overwhelmed by it.

When I was growing up, it was really easy to tell whether or not I'd been in the sun because I had two colours, sunburn and peeling. Being one of five kids, I managed to avoid the sunscreen drill fairly regularly.

And I just loved being out in the sun, swimming, surfing, doing whatever. And so I was always glowing red. And I didn't have to tell you where I'd been. I didn't have to explain that the reason I was red is because I'd been in the sun.

That's how it works. You know, you see sunburn, you assume sun. That's what God is asking us to do when he says, glorify me. He's saying, be sunburned by my goodness.

He's saying, be so loved by me that you can't help but people just see this thing about you that's different. They see this security and this peace, this joy that comes from being loved by the creator of heaven and earth so incredibly.

[16:57] The two temptations we talked about earlier, they miss this. See, if we focus just on the glory and the command and the responsibility to point to God and miss his incredible love, we're actually shrinking down God anyway because we're missing out on this huge part of who he is.

We're reducing him to just being somebody who gives us tasks to do. And likewise, if we're over here just enjoying the love of God and don't see anything that he's put in front of us to do, don't feel any need to try and live out holiness, we've actually reduced God down.

We've misunderstood that he is holy. And that in his holiness and in his majesty, he has found a way to love us in spite of who we are.

I've had multiple conversations with people recently here and outside of here as well. People who walk into church often, read their Bible by themselves often, go to Bible study, whatever it is, and whenever they do, the overwhelming sense for them is that they've just gotten in trouble.

Maybe that's how you feel when you walk into church sometimes. Maybe that's how you're feeling right now. Now, you walk in here and you just get told you need to do these things better. You're not trying hard enough.

[18:16] You're not doing a great job at glorifying God. When people look at you, do they really see God? And you just feel this sense like you're getting in trouble time and time again. And let me be clear, if that's what people are hearing as preachers, we need to be careful about what we're saying because that's not the message of the Bible.

But is it possible that the reason we sometimes hear that is because our starting point is that we've got this vision of God that says, God has requirements for me.

And sure, he's loving, but that's somewhere over there. Our starting point is to only get half of the picture, to separate out the love of God and the passion for his glory to such an extent that we can't actually be loved and have God want us to do something.

Whereas that's not what is going on here in John 17. They're perfectly together. And the answer is not that we should just stop talking about the things that Jesus demands in the Christian life.

I mean, even in this passage, this incredible prayer, Jesus demands a bunch of stuff of his followers. He sets out a bar of what he's aiming at for his people. Remember, he's actually praying aloud here in chapter 17.

[19:32] So that his disciples can eavesdrop, can learn and be encouraged. There's a clue there in verse 13. He says, I'm coming to you now, but I say these things while I'm still in the world so that they, the eavesdropping disciples, so that they may have the full measure of my joy within them.

And with the disciples eavesdropping, he prays that they might be sanctified, that they might be getting more holy, that they might become more like Jesus.

He prays three times that they might be one, that they might be unified. I mean, is there a bigger challenge than that for Christians? I mean, do you hear that?

That call to be one, and then sit there and think, God, are you serious? I have to love these people? All of these people? I mean, it's almost like Jesus is just turning the knife, just giving them one last

shame rebuke prayer.

Have you ever done this? You might be holier than me. It's the rebuke prayer that comes out in Bible study sometimes, maybe even at the front of church. It's the prayer where, you know, you've told a secret to your friend who's in your Bible study group, and they've told everyone.

[20 : 47] And so you're angry. You're hurt. And so you pray a holy prayer like this. Say, dear God, I pray for those among us who are untrustworthy.

I pray that they might know how bad that is. I pray that they might repent of their sins, that they might confess and beg forgiveness from you and from the people they've hurt.

I thank you that I'm not like them. In Jesus' name. I'm sure you don't do that, but maybe you do something kind of similar.

The prayer where you're just letting people know that actually they're not really living up to the standard that God set. It's almost like that's what it feels like here. Throughout this gospel, the disciples have been shocking.

They've competed for the position of most honour and respect as Jesus' followers. We know that now, thousands of years later, as the church, we don't do a great job at being one, being unified.

[21 : 58] And yet Jesus puts this on the agenda right here. He prays for it over and over and over again. And then he just adds salt into the wound by saying, you know what?

That oneness is going to be the way that other people come to follow Jesus. So now it's not just us having bad relationships with one another, but it's other people's salvation. That's a lot of pressure. Now there's no question if we're going to live for the glory of God, if we're going to reveal him, if people are going to see him in the way that we live, then there's going to be some effort required. We're going to have to fight for it.

We're going to have to battle temptation. But what this passage does, what this truth does, the way that glory and joy, glory and love can be brought together, is that it rescues us from the most difficult question for anyone who wants to follow Jesus.

That question is, will I live for God's glory or will I live for my joy, for my satisfaction? Now I don't mean the big overarching philosophical life question, which path am I going down?

[23 : 10] I'm in the moment, 50 times a day, what am I going to do right here? I'm driving in the car and someone cuts in on me. Do I, you know, one finger salute them and thank them for giving me plenty of notice that they were going to come in?

Do I sit on the horn? Do I, you know, express my displeasure through expletives out the window? Or do I contain myself and be happy that that road user is making the most of the small gap between me and the car in front?

In that moment, is it about my joy or is it about doing what I know God calls me to? For me personally, I shared this morning and I'll share again, for me, this moment, there's lots of them but one of them is when I get home every day.

I'm tired, I'm tired all the time but when I get home after work, I'm tired and I'm about to open the door and it's a moment of will I walk in and find some energy to play with my boys?

Find some energy to have a conversation with my wife about what she's done today and give her a chance to interact with an adult for a few minutes? Or will I do what deep down I'd really just love to do, find an excuse to be by myself for 10 minutes?

[24 : 25] Need to go to the toilet for 10 minutes? Lock the door, hide away from the rest of them? I've got to make the call. Do I do what I know God wants me to do in that moment or do I do what I think is going to make me happy?

That's the tension that we feel as a Christian. That's that pressure and that burden that can make us feel so guilty. But what this does is actually rescue us from that question.

It takes that question away. Instead of there being a dichotomy between, a gap between, an opposition between glorifying God and me being satisfied and happy and getting what I want, what this passage does is actually draw those things together.

See, for Jesus, obeying his Father fully, even to the point of death, was his delight. It was the thing that gave him greatest joy.

because in it, in choosing God's will for him, in obeying, he experienced his Father's love. Even the sending of Jesus to the cross was an act of love from his Father for him.

[25 : 32] It was his Father taking him through the cross so that he might be lifted up and so that at his name every knee might bow and every tongue confess. even for us in this passage.

Did you notice that as Jesus prays for unity, how do we get there? Let me read again verse 20 to 26. Unity is clearly the goal.

He prays it over and over that we might be one just like Jesus and God are one. So it's not just even we have to be nice to one another anymore. The bar has been raised even higher. We've got to love each other so selflessly and serve each other so continuously that it's like God.

And so you know if you thought you were doing okay sorry you can't give that tick anymore. The bar is up here but notice how we get there. Verse 20. My prayer is not for them alone.

I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message that all of them may be one Father just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me.

[26 : 39] So the oneness will draw others in. Then verse 22. I've given them the glory that you gave me that they may be one as we are one. I in them and you in me so that they may be brought to complete unity.

Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me. So catch the logic here. This passage is dense and confusing and sometimes you've got to read it and re-read it and re-read it but what's going on here is Jesus says I want them to be one.

I want them to be unified just like we're unified. I want them to be in us and with us. I want them to experience all your goodness and here's why. Because that unity will be the evidence of what he talks about in verse 23.

He says they may be brought to complete unity then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.

So it will be the evidence that we have been loved by God. So therefore if it's the evidence of that thing it's also the result of that thing.

[27 : 49] If the evidence of God's love for us is unity the path to unity is God's love for us. Do you understand what this is? What this means is when you open scripture when you open the Bible when you sit in a sermon when you're in Bible study and you begin to feel this pressure to live up to a standard really the instruction every instruction in scripture could be boiled down to you've got to live for the glory of God.

And what that means is you've got to live encountering the glory of God. That's the instruction. The incredible responsibility of trying to show God to the world is actually an invitation to see and savour and experience God in your own life.

It's to be so filled with God's love that it fills you up and overflows to the people around you. We have a vision statement here at St. Paul's. We exist to know Jesus treasure Jesus and represent Jesus for God's glory and the joy of all people.

Temptation would be to see God's glory and the joy of all people as separate things. But that's the point of what's going on here. When God is revealed, that is joyful.

When God gets glory, the way that's going to happen is us enjoying him. Us being loved by him. Us being sunburnt by his goodness and his compassion and his kindness and his provision.

[29 : 28] What Jesus is trying to help us understand in this prayer is that in the cross, God's passion for his glory and his love for you are together in perfect unity.

It's not a competition. We shrink God when we separate them out and settle for one or the other. What Jesus does for us here is draw them together and say, yes, God loves you incredibly.

Enough to send his son that you might be forgiven even though you don't deserve it. Yes, God is passionate about his glory and wants you to be his representative.

But the way he makes you his representative is by loving you and sending Jesus and continuing to love you daily, continuing to provide for you.

Remember the star. Remember that image. You are not called to generate light. You are not called to add something to God.

[30 : 35] You are called to open yourself up and drown in his goodness to the point where it overflows and flows to other people. Today, God's trying to lift the burden from you.

If following him is something that feels like incredibly hard work, it feels like just this tension between am I loved or am I not quite there yet, the message today is the means by which you glorify God is you just get loved by God.

You encounter his love for you in Jesus. You come to the cross every day and be reminded that I don't deserve it but God loves me anyway. You come to the cross every day and you realise that

his love is not just sufficient to meet you where we're at in your inadequacy, but his love is abundant and excessive and generous.

Not only does he forgive you, he draws you into his family. How do you glorify God? Soak in all his goodness.

The instruction in every sermon, the correction, the rebuke and they're there and they'll come.

When they come we must hear come back to Jesus.

[31 : 58] Come back to the love that God's got for you. The need for rebuke is the evidence that maybe we've stopped soaking in the goodness of God. We've begun to focus on the things we need to do or say or think but the encouragement here is if you want to glorify God, if you want to point other people to him, enjoy him yourself.

And the only place to do that is Jesus and his death, his resurrection, the concrete, immovable illustration and example of how God loves you and why God will love you for all eternity.

Let's pray. Father God, we want to acknowledge that sometimes following you does feel tiring.

Sometimes following you we feel like we're continuing to fail and we attempted to give up.

Sometimes we do feel this burden and guilt when we gather as your people when we open your word.

But God, we want to ask that you would give us eyes to see Jesus first and Jesus most. Even as we hear the rebuke, may that be an opportunity for us to again taste and experience your love afresh.

[33 : 22] even as we recognise where we fall short and where we need to grow and where we repeatedly fail, might it be an opportunity for us to again experience that you love us unconditionally, that your love is irreversible, it's eternal, it's not going anywhere.

God, fill us with your love in such a way that we are secure, we are joyful, that people see peace and joy in us that draws their attention to you. even as we face situations and circumstances that in the world's eyes leave no room for joy or peace, may we continue to enjoy your goodness, may we continue to delight in trying to obey you knowing that you have designed good things for us, may we continue to rejoice in the immovable hope that we have in Jesus, so that this world might know that there is nothing better than you.

Amen.