

For the Glory of God Alone: Colossians 3:1 – 17

Over the last 4 weeks we have been working through the five great SOLAS of the Reformation, and thinking again about the glorious truths of the gospel that were rediscovered 500 years ago. Of course, Luther and Calvin and Zwingli and the rest of the early reformers would not have recognised these five key statements, they were devised much later, but they do sum up some incredibly important gospel truths and lay bare where the main battle of the Reformation lay. That's why we began with Scripture alone because it is only in the pages of the Bible that the great truths about how God's righteousness can be ours are set out for all to see. And over the last three weeks we have seen that God's righteousness, the ability for us to stand confidently before a holy God on the day of judgement without fear can only be ours by grace alone (because God in his mercy has done all of the work), by faith alone (because of the deadness of our hearts we can contribute absolutely nothing to our salvation), in Christ alone (because only through the perfect life and substitutionary death on the cross of Jesus Christ, the perfect son of God, can our guilt and sin be atoned for). I hope you found those truths encouraging because they are life changing when we understand them rightly.

And today we come to the fifth of those statements, the fact that God's righteousness can be ours by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, as proclaimed in the Scriptures alone, is for the glory of God alone. Soli Deo Gloria! To God alone be glory – that's our focus this morning.

And to help us grapple with this huge topic I want to answer three questions. What is the glory of God? How does the gospel demonstrate the glory of God? And how should we reflect the glory of God?

Firstly then, what is the glory of God?

I was speaking to my dad on the phone the other day and at the end of the conversation he asked me, rather randomly, who had painted the picture 'The Monarch of the Glen'? Well I didn't know, so I suggested he asked Siri or Google! But I don't care how powerful a computer you have, or what database you can search through, it is impossible to adequately describe or define the glory of God. But we should at least try, because unless we understand something of the glory and majesty of God, we will stand no chance whatsoever of responding to him in the right way. And given who God is, that is incredibly important.

Now God's glory is not an easy thing to pin down. Because glory is something God has, intrinsic to his being and something that God shows. So whilst the Bible speaks about God's glory being revealed through different means and experienced in various ways, fundamentally, God's glory is a revelation of who he is. *'The glory of God carries us to the heart of all that is essential to his being as God, his divine majesty, his sheer God-ness'*, as one writer puts it. We'll see in a moment, some of the ways in which God's glory can be seen, but fundamentally God is glorious because of who he is. He is infinite, without limitation. He is eternally self-existing, he depends on nothing else for his life and needs nothing else for his perfect contentment and joy. He is immutable, always consistent, never changing. He is omnipresent, being everywhere at the same time; omniscient, knowing and understanding all things; and omnipotent, having all power and all might and all authority to do anything he desires. Now we could spend weeks unpacking those amazing truths, but take even one and you see just how vastly different and superior God is to any of us.

Add to those things the characteristics of God, his unending love, his truthfulness, his holiness, his righteousness, his grace, his mercy, his creativity, his patience, his kindness, his generosity; and the picture we

get is of a God who has everything we desire and is everything we long to be. A God of absolute perfection, of ultimate power and unending love who was, and is, and is to come. That is our God. Are you getting a sense of his otherness and his beauty this morning? I hope so! That is the glory of God! His immensity, his power, his God-ness is his glory!

Now some people think in abstract concepts more easily than others, but God has not left himself without witness through creation and through history, so that his creations might see his glory revealed.

At many times in the Old Testament there were visible phenomena that accompanied the manifestation of God's glory. Think back to the mighty cloud that descended upon Mount Sinai and recall the glorious presence of God which filled first the Tabernacle and later the temple, remember how the people feared and cowered away when God thundered from the mountain top, remember how even the priests couldn't enter the temple because the presence and glory of God was so and you'll get a sense of just how overwhelming it is to be near to the glory of God.

But God's glory is also revealed through his name. Nehemiah 9 verse 5: *"Blessed be your glorious name and may it be exalted above all blessings and praise."*

But God's glory is also seen in his people: in Ephesians 3:21 Paul praises God that God's glory is seen in the Church as He brings people to himself.

God's glory is seen, understandably, in heaven: Speaking of the new creation the apostle John writes this in Revelation 21 verse 23: *"The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light and the Lamb is its lamp."*

God's glory is revealed in the whole world: Isaiah 6:3: The angels around the throne cried *"Holy! Holy! Holy! The whole earth is full of his Glory!"* and perhaps easiest for us to grasp, God's glory is revealed through his works in creation. Psalm 19 verse 1 tells that *"The Heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands!"*

But most perfectly of all God's glory was revealed to us in Jesus Christ. We read these verses last week. Hebrews 1 verse 3: *"The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being; sustaining all things by his powerful word."*

Throughout history and in various ways, the glory of God has been revealed and if we are to live rightly in God's world, and approach him rightly through faith then we need to stop and contemplate the glory of God. God is not our mate or our pal. He is awesome and mighty.

Sometimes when I'm standing on the edge of a cliff looking out over the ocean, seeing the vastness of the sea, I get a sense both of my own smallness and insignificance, and the greatness and glory of the God who created everything I can see and far beyond. Perhaps that sense comes to you when you gaze up at the stars, stand on a mountain, or kneel at the communion rail, or hear a glorious piece of music. Wherever it is, we need to make sure that we recognise how glorious and great God truly is.

But we need to see more than God's size! Like Lucy in the Lion the Witch and the wardrobe we need to realise that God isn't safe, like a tame tabby cat; he's a roaring lion, a consuming fire, a holy and righteous God, all-powerful and glorious before whom we rightly need to be afraid.

The second question: how is the glory of God revealed in the gospel?

Over the last few weeks we've seen how the Reformation truths point to the fact that the righteousness of God can be ours by God's grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. So despite our sinfulness and God's holiness, Christ's death on the cross in our place makes it possible for us to be saved and approach this Holy and glorious God with confidence. How? Because Jesus pays the punishment we deserve so that through faith in Christ's finished work alone, we might receive Christ's righteousness as a gift of grace.

Now that is a wonderful thing, but where did that faith start? Was there some spark of life still in us that enabled us to respond to God's offer of forgiveness in Jesus? Well, two weeks ago George when reminded us that we are saved by faith alone, he made it clear that we are totally and utterly unable to do any works that contribute in any way at all to our salvation. There is a huge price to be paid, and we are paupers. But more than that, we are not just poor but dead. Spiritually speaking, before we are in Christ, we are spiritually dead, people who neither know God nor desire him in any way.

So how did faith begin in us? Well the Bible tells us that faith too, was a gift of God! **Ephesians 2:8** tells us that *"It is by grace you have been saved, through faith--and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— not by works so that no one can boast."*

In Christ, God did all the work to deal with our sin, but he also opened our eyes and drew us to himself, and without that divine work we would not have responded to his gracious offer.

If you have trusted in Jesus Christ as your Lord and Saviour, you did not accept God's offer because you thought more carefully than other people because you are more spiritually sensitive than other people, because you were better or more moral or more open to God than other people. God did all the work! He drew you to himself; he opened your eyes to see your plight, he allowed you to hear the gospel message, he planted the seed of faith, and then by his Spirit he fanned that faith into flame until you came to Christ. God did all the work. You did nothing, because you could do nothing. And neither could I when God saved me.

So, who should get the glory and the praise for saving helpless sinners? Evangelists? Pastors? Authors? Musicians? The writers of the Bible itself? Us? No no no no no! God did it all, and so he alone deserves the glory and the thanks and the praise! How does the gospel reveal the glory of God? The gospel reveals the glory of God because everything to do with our salvation is a gift of God. He does all the work. We do nothing, except receive.

Finally, how should we reflect the glory of God?

The shortlist for the BBC's sports personality of the year award came out this week. On the list are men and women who have achieved great things this year; breaking records, winning medals, claiming world titles. But when it comes time for the winner to receive their award you can bet your life that they will stand up and thank their parents, their coaches, their teammates and everyone else who helped make their success possible. And it's right that they do, because they could not have done it alone.

And so for us, having been saved by God's sovereign work, the very least we should do is to make sure that people realise that the fact that we are Christians, the fact that we have been forgiven, adopted into God's family, given his Holy Spirit, and promised eternal life has absolutely nothing to do with us. All the glory, not some of it, but all of the glory, all of the praise all of the thanks needs to go to God. He did it all.

But as those of you who are parents or grandparents no, there is a huge difference between our children saying thank you and **being** thankful. Anyone can say the words; showing real thankfulness is an ongoing action. And in the same way, if we have received such a great salvation from such a glorious and generous God, then our thankfulness should overflow in many, many ways.

That's why we had the reading from Colossians chapter 3 this morning. Paul is writing to those who have been saved by Christ and raised with Christ and set free by Christ and adopted through faith in Christ into God's family. And he is writing to explain to them what their thankfulness should look like. And part of his argument, is that as members of God's family who will, one day, share in the glory of God, we need now to be reflecting God's glory to the world.

So, in verses 1 to 3 he calls for a new mindset. We are to set our hearts, our desires, as well as our minds and wills, on things above. Spiritually speaking, Paul says, we are now with Christ in glory, where we will be for all eternity. So, he says, don't waste your time chasing after things in this world which will ultimately be swept away. Have a new mindset, cultivate heavenly desires, seek after more of God's glory, because you will be sharing it for all eternity.

In verses 5 to 11 that new mindset, that new heart, means that Christians should live and act in a different way to the world. We were once, Paul says in Romans, objects of God's wrath, deserving his punishment, but since we have now been saved, and washed clean, forgiven of our sin, we should not live like that anymore. We are to kill off, therefore, the things that belong to our earthly nature because now we have a heavenly nature. The earthly nature Paul speaks about isn't the same as our human nature, as if we could rise above those things. No, our earthly nature spawns those desires and actions that run counter to God. But since we have been rescued by God, given the gift of faith and all the blessings that come with it, we are to live holy lives, not engaging in sexual immorality or being lustful or greedy. The way we speak is to be different too: because God is pure we are to fight, with God's help, to rid ourselves of anger and rage and malice and slander and swearing. We are to speak the truth, because God speaks the truth. And we are not to discriminate against people of different nations or backgrounds or social class because none of those things matter to God.

As well as putting things off we are to dress ourselves in a new way of living. Verses 12 to 14 give a wonderful description of the kind of attributes in which we need to grow if we are disciples of Jesus. And all of these things are attributes of God, aren't they! Who has more compassion or kindness and patience than God? Who was more humble and gentle than the Lord Jesus? Who is more willing to forgive than our God? And whose love is greater than our Father in heaven, who out of his great love sent Jesus to be our Saviour?

Verses 15 to 17 tell us that whether it be at church where we can encourage one another through our singing, or words or actions, or out in the workplace or at home or walking the dog or helping a neighbour, we are to do **all** things in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him. We are to live lives of thankfulness, of love, of service everywhere because that is how God treated us.

Our creator, our sustainer, saving God is utterly glorious, and perfect in every way. God's glory has been revealed through the world, through his works of salvation, most perfectly in the Lord Jesus and through the gospel itself. And as a response to God's gracious and generous mercy to us, our only response must be to seek to bring glory to him, to seek to reflect more of his glory to the world in our character and lives.

And the wonderful thing is that when we do that, when we make our lives about him and not about us, we will find greater peace and joy and contentment than in anything else. You see creation is not about you, or about me. God did not create the world for our benefit and he did not save us because we were so valuable. All of God's actions are for his greater glory, because he alone out of everything in the universe deserves praise and glory and honour.

And when we realise that, when we see our insignificance compared to the majesty of God; when we see that through salvation, through creation and through our lives God is to be praised and glorified, then we bring ourselves in tune with God's eternal purposes and find ourselves living as it were going with the grain of how God made us to be. And it is there, when we are living in the way we were designed to live; loving God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength; serving him, making him known in the world and giving God alone the glory, that we ourselves find the greatest joy.

The Westminster confession of Faith puts it this way: God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in him. God is most glorified in us (getting the glory he deserves) when we are most satisfied in him. And as we are more and more satisfied in God, so God gets the glory he deserves.

Johan Sebastian Bach often wrote three words at the end of his composition: Soli Deo Gloria. He knew that his prodigious talents were ultimately for the glory of God. And that how we need to live too.

Let's take the time to contemplate God's glory so we see him as he is and respond rightly too him. Let's thank him for his grace and favour shown to us in the wonder of his sovereign work in saving us; and then let's seek to live lives to the glory of God alone!