

## *Glorifying God • John 1:14*

In 1990 Secretary of State James Baker took on an expanded role in New York City when, at the Security Council meeting of the United Nations, he functioned as our ambassador. In a sense, he was serving as the United States ambassador to the United Nations and to the world. In many regards it was an historic event because the Security Council voted 12-2 to authorize the use of whatever means necessary to liberate the country of Kuwait from Iraqi forces. What is particularly interesting and significant is the importance that brought to the power and prestige and influence of the United States. For Secretary Baker and for this country it was a time of great triumph and an expression of great strength.

Meanwhile, on the far side of the world, another ambassador, W. Nathan Howell, the United States ambassador to the country of Kuwait, and a handful of American diplomats were holding out under the worst of circumstances. They were surrounded by the enemy. Their water and electricity had been cut off in a climate where dehydration is a danger and air conditioning is a must. They had been deprived of their families, a normal diet and everyday communications. They were living without the protection of United States Marine guards that normally would be there. They were faced on a daily basis with the constant threat of a horrible and hostile death.

Why were they there? They were not there to issue passports or answer questions from tourists or process visas or to do many of the things ordinarily done in an embassy by an ambassador of this country. They were there for the sole purpose of making the United States of America look good.

In both cases, in both places, they were ambassadors of the same nation who were seeking to make the United States of America look good . . . one in the midst of strength and the other in the midst of weakness.

In 2 Corinthians 5:20 St. Paul told Christians of every time and place, *“We are therefore Christ’s ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us.”* As ambassadors of Jesus Christ our primary job is to make God look good, some of

us in the midst of strength and some in the midst of weakness. Or, to say it another way, we are ambassadors who are called to glorify God.

That is not a difficult thing to do. God is worth being made to look good because God is good. God is glorious! The record of those who have experienced God leaves little doubt.

Early in the Old Testament Moses encountered God on Mt. Sinai. When he came down off the mountain those who saw him were astounded because his face glowed with the reflected glory of God Almighty.

In the New Testament Peter, James and John, three disciples from Jesus’ inner circle of friends, glimpsed the glory of Jesus and heard the voice of God from heaven. It was such an extraordinary experience that the historian says they fell on their faces in terror. They had experienced the glory of God.

Those who were poor and sick and hated were talked to by Jesus and felt his touch and, although they had been encouraged to keep it secret for at least a little while, they could not contain their experience. They told their friends and anyone who would listen about what they had experienced.

On the road to Damascus St. Paul encountered the risen Christ and was blinded by the brilliance.

Angels and other heavenly creatures never tire nor cease to be amazed at God’s great glory. After a million years they still are enthralled with him and they still sing and shout God’s praises.

The glory of God is an extraordinary thing, far beyond any adequate definition. Yet there is a sense in which “glory” is the best word that we have to describe the essence of who and what God is. Glory means brightness, brilliance, majesty, magnificence, exaltation and excitement.

Even though we know from the start that our comparisons are faulty, we still try. We say that the glory of God is pure light, more brilliant than the core of the sun. We say that the glory of God is infinitely powerful, a billion times greater than all the nuclear weapons that have ever been exploded.

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Yet, we know that these analogies from physics are inadequate, for he is a personal God. The glory of God is holiness so pure that there is not the tiniest taint of evil. The glory of God is love so intense that not even the worst sinner can escape it. The glory of God is compassion, tenderness, kindness and gentleness . . . and more.

So we take the grandest superlatives that we can come up with and the best that we have makes us sound like stuttering parakeets trying to describe the glory of God. The glory of God is simply beyond our comprehension. It is God—ininitely better than our best and bigger than our biggest. It is no wonder that the Bible says that no one can see God and live.

But just when we were about to give up, losing all hope of comprehending the incomprehensible, God became human. The Bible says, “*God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son.*”

Jesus embodied God. John 1:14 tells us, “*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.*”

In Jesus God’s glory was seen and in Jesus God looked great! He lived with and like the poor. He hurt with the hurting. He used his extraordinary power to heal the sick. He took sides with those everyone else turned against. He volunteered to die on a cross as a sacrifice for sinners. And he shocked history with his resurrection. He brought the indescribable glory of God within human sight and grasp and relationship.

I could go on forever and ever saying how glorious God is, but forever wouldn’t be long enough. So, let’s talk about what we can do for this glorious God . . . and that is, we can glorify him.

In the simplest of definitions, glorifying God is making God look good. It is not making him good; he is that already. It is enhancing his reputation. It is showing and telling others just how good and great he is.

King David wrote in Psalm 34:3, “*Glorify the Lord with me; let us exalt his name together.*” And, in more words, he wrote in poetry in Psalm 63:2-8:

*I have seen you in the sanctuary  
and beheld your power and your glory.  
Because your love is better than life,*

*my lips will glorify you.  
I will praise you as long as I live,  
and in your name I will lift up my hands.  
My soul will be satisfied as with the  
richest of foods;  
with singing lips my mouth will praise you.  
On my bed I remember you;  
I think of you through the watches of  
the night.  
Because you are my help,  
I sing in the shadow of your wings.  
My soul clings to you;  
your right hand upholds me.*

Based on these and many other Bible words, the authors of the Westminster Shorter Catechism wrote: “The chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy him forever.”

Let’s start putting all of this together, for when we do it leads to powerful and profound truth. First of all, God is great. God is good. God is glorious. Next, we are the beneficiaries of God’s greatness, God’s goodness and God’s glory. And third, our greatest calling in life is to glorify God . . . to make God look good.

This runs counter to what many people would say life is all about. Our greatest goal in life is not primarily to be happy, healthy, wealthy, successful, important, powerful or famous. The greatest goal of life is to enhance the reputation of God.

There are many ways to glorify God. Different people do that in different ways. David glorified God with his music. Jesus glorified God with his miracles. Peter glorified God with his death.

We are better at understanding how God can be glorified by music and miracles than by death. Let me quote to you the words of Jesus from John 21:18-19:

*“I tell you the truth, when you were younger you dressed yourself and went where you wanted; but when you are old you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go.” Jesus said this to indicate the kind of death by which Peter would glorify God.*

Do you know how it is said that Peter died? Because of his loyalty to Jesus Christ he was sentenced to death on a cross. When he discovered that he was to be crucified he requested that he be cru-

cified upside down because he said he was not worthy to die in the same manner as Jesus had. To his last day and even through his death he enhanced the reputation of God.

So, you see, God can be glorified by the way we die.

The purpose of the Christian life is to show the greatness and goodness and glory of God in every situation—when promoted to become the chief executive officer of the company and when fired from the job; when having a baby or when losing a baby; when getting married or when facing a divorce; when rich and when poor; when healthy and when sick. In every circumstance we are called to glorify God . . . as his ambassadors claiming victory and as his ambassadors when under siege and threatened with defeat.

It is the Christian’s extraordinary privilege to experience God and to glorify him in 10,000 different ways for the whole world to see . . . and for God to see as well.

Now there may be some who wonder what all of this talk about glorifying God has to do with this building. But the far better question is what does this building have to do with glorifying God?

We are here today to dedicate this Worship Center to God and to his glory. Not to our comfort. Not to music or to preaching or to entertainment. We set this building apart for the purpose of making God look good, of making God look like God, of helping us and others sense the glory of God. If those who come through these doors say that the organ was melodious or the music was magnificent or the sermon was eloquent then we have tragically failed. But if those who come here say, “God is magnificent!” then we have succeeded in glorifying him!

Leonardo Da Vinci, the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> century Italian artist, is perhaps best known for his masterpiece called The Last Supper. The painting depicts Jesus at the center and his disciples on either side of him at the Passover Supper on the eve of Jesus’ crucifixion. Most people would probably recognize the painting. But Da Vinci was not the only artist to paint the Last Supper.

It is said that when one painter had nearly fin-

ished the masterpiece, he invited a trusted friend to come and preview it before a public unveiling. His friend stood there enthralled by the artist’s powerful work. Not a word was spoken. When the artist broke the silence and asked what he thought the man pointed to the chalice on the table and said, “The cup! The cup is magnificent. It is bright and brilliant and masterful. The cup is the center of the painting.”

With that the artist picked up his brushes and, to his friend’s amazement, painted out the cup in the center of the painting. As he did so, he turned to his friend and explained that Christ was most important, not the cup. He said, ‘Nothing should detract from nor upstage the Lord! Not the cup, but the Christ.’”

And so may it always be for this place. Let this place never take attention away from the Lord. Here may people not see the cup but the Christ.

And so may it always be for all of us. Let us never take attention away from our Lord. Whether living or dying, in triumph or tragedy, difficulty or

delight, prosperity or poverty . . . may our lives glorify Jesus Christ who lived and died and lives again for us.

May both this place and this people glorify God! Not the cup, but the Christ! Amen.

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