

To Be Loved by God

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Open with me this morning to Ephesians chapter one, starting in verse three and reading through to verse fourteen. This is our primary passage for the morning, but since it is going to take me some time to get there, I want to read it as a way of preview. I've no doubt that it will be more beneficial to our souls if we begin with God's words rather than with my own. Follow with me as I read from the New American Standard.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before Him. In love He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved. In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace, which He lavished upon us. In all wisdom and insight He made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His kind intention which He purposed in Him with a view to an administration suitable to the fullness of the times, that is, the summing up of all things in Christ, things in the heavens and things upon the earth. In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will, to the end that we who were the first to hope in Christ should be to the praise of His glory. In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation – having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of God's own possession, to the praise of His glory.

If you were here when I taught in April, you will remember I argued that the call to be a Christian is the call to never sacrifice. I defended that rather provocative premise by saying if you look at your union with Christ as a sacrifice rather than a reward, you do not honor God and you probably will not survive the fight of faith. If you think in terms of what you give up rather than in terms of what you gain, you falsely magnify your own devotion and piety while totally minimizing the unspeakable worth of eternal fellowship with God. To help illustrate I asked questions like, "Is it a sacrifice to give up the lesser to receive the greater? Is it a sacrifice to give up blindness to receive sight? Is it a sacrifice to give up cancer to receive the cure? Is it a sacrifice to give up the passing pleasures of sin and their yield of eternal damnation to gain everlasting joy?" No. In the end, the Christian life is not a sacrifice and even though it cost you everything in this world, and yea even your very life, the return is Christ and that is gain!

As I reviewed that last message in my head, I was struck with the thought that it was essentially a portrait of a believer's love to God. We do not express love to God by patting ourselves on the back and saying, "Oh, I've given up so much to follow you." No, rather we say, "There is nothing in all the universe which compares with the surpassing worth of knowing you!" We express our love to God by being satisfied in Him, by remembering that He is the benefactor, we are the beneficiary and counting fellowship with Him not as sacrifice but as gain!

So, if this is how we express our love to God, by being satisfied in all that He is, how does God manifest His love towards us? What does God's love look like in the life of the believer? That's what I want to talk about this morning, the love of God. Specifically, how can a God who is so completely and irrevocably committed to His own glory still have room to love me and to love you...we who trample upon the very thing which is most precious to Him, namely His own glory?

There is a real tension that is implied in the statement I've just made and I hope you feel it. The tension is this. On the one hand, we know that God loves us. The Bible is clear. God is love. For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son. We love Him because He first loved us. On the other hand the Bible also teaches that God is uppermost in His own affections. In fact, there isn't a more God-centered being in the whole universe than God Himself. God loves His own glory and he guards it jealously so that everything God does is for the magnification of His own glory. I hope you know that. Many believers don't.

Here's a quick survey of this often overlooked biblical reality.

Isaiah 43:6,7 - God created us for His glory.

Bring my sons from afar and my daughters from the end of the earth, every one who is called by my

name, whom I created for my glory.

Jeremiah 13:11 - God chose Israel for His glory.

I made the whole house of Israel and the whole house of Judah cling to me, says the Lord, that they might be for me a people, a name, a praise, and a glory.

Exodus 14:4 - God rescued Israel from Pharaoh for His glory.

And I will harden Pharaoh's heart, and he will pursue them and I will get glory over Pharaoh and all his host; and the Egyptians shall know that I am the Lord.

Ezekial 20:14 - God spared Israel in the wilderness for His glory.

I acted for the sake of my name, that it should not be profaned in the sight of the nations in whose sight I brought them out.

Isaiah 48:9, 11 - God is patient for His glory.

For my name's sake I defer my anger, for the sake of my praise I restrain it for you, that I may not cut you off. Behold, I have refined you, but not like silver; I have tried you in the furnace of affliction for my own sake, for my own sake, I do it, for how should my name be profaned? My glory I will not give to another.

Ezekial 36:22 - God restores Israel for the sake of His glory.

Thus says the Lord God, it is not for your sake, O house of Israel, that I am about to act, but for the sake of my holy name.

Isaiah 43:25 - God forgives sin for His glory

I, I am he who blots out your transgressions for my own sake, and I will not remember your sins.

2 Thess. 1:9,10 - Christ returns for Gods' glory

Those who do not obey the gospel will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction and exclusion from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might, when he comes on that day to be glorified in his saints and to be marveled at in all who have believed.

Romans 9:22,23 - God's wrath is poured out for His glory

Desiring to show his wrath and make known his power, he endured with much patience the vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, in order to make known the riches of his glory for the vessels of mercy which he prepared beforehand for glory.

The God-centeredness of God is a staggering thing, and problematic to many people. God's constant demands for praise, particularly in the Psalms, is what C.S. Lewis described as one of his chief stumbling blocks. Before he was saved, Lewis compared God to a vain old woman pining away for compliments. Just consider Christ's high priestly prayer in John 17 where He prays for all of us who will come to faith in Him. He prays in verse 24.

Father, I desire that they also whom You gave Me may be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory which You have given Me;

Now imagine if the Pastor were to get up in the pulpit this morning and pray, "Lord, I just ask that you would give this congregation eyes to see my glory, that they may behold me in all my splendor!" Such self-absorption would be contemptible. Surely someone so consumed with himself would be incapable of truly loving anyone else. And yet Christ prays as such, that we might see His glory. Do you see the tension?

Why would such a request be despicable for any of us to make and yet perfectly righteous for Christ? The reason is simply this, God is the only one in all the universe who is deserving of glory. If He were to glory in anything else, He ceases to be God and all is lost. The perfection of God demands that He delight in that which is perfect, and that is Himself.

So we've established that God's delight in Himself is absolutely righteous and absolutely necessary. For Him to place His affections anywhere else would be idolatry. Still, we are left with the question, how is a God so completely devoted

to Himself still able to love us? The answer is this, the free and unmerited love God has for us does not compete with His glory, it heightens His glory. And we are the ones He has granted to behold it! He has put His glory on display for us, and this is good news because we were created to be satisfied in beholding the glory of God. Every time God acts to magnify His own glory, He acts in love, and we've already seen that God does everything to the praise of His glory.

There is a reason people find more fulfillment at the Grand Canyon than they do in front of the mirror. There is something in the human soul which longs to behold majesty and glory. There is something in the human soul which longs to feel small in the shadow of something big. The soul begins to find something in the Grand Canyon that it can never find in the mirror.

With that said, I hope that you can begin to see how, one, a self-delighting God can still love us, and, two, how the fact that God always acts for His glory is indeed an act of love. Still there is another question we must answer and that is "How is God's love to us expressed?"

There is no shortage of people in this world, both Christians and non-Christians, who have put God on trial for the sufferings of this world. "If God loves me, why do I hurt, why do I suffer, why do I cry?" The problem we have is that we have come to understand love as being made much of. That's what it means in the world. If someone loves you, they exalt you, they lift you up, they make you central. But, if you try to pile that definition of love onto God it simply will not work because the expression of God's love towards us is not in making much of *us*, but rather in eliminating the obstacles which keep us from making much of *Him*.

So now let us consider again Ephesians chapter one. The number one obstacle that keeps us from seeing and delighting in God's glory is the fact that we are born in rebellion. We are at enmity with God, on track to behold His wrath and not His glory. Christ died in our place to overcome this legal obstacle, but there is a second and no less substantial obstacle that remains. We are all "dead" in our trespasses. We can't see and respond to the glory of Christ's sacrifice because we are stone cold dead, spiritually. But, for those of us who believe, God has chosen us in eternity past, and has at the appointed time made us alive that we may come to Christ though we were dead. He has given us the eyes to see what we never otherwise could see. Both of these glorious miracles are found in Ephesians one, so let's look closely, and try to navigate through all these long sentences and clauses. Is God's love, as it is revealed in Scripture, such that He is working to make much of us, or such that is working to free us to make much of Him?

vv. 3,4

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love,

Ok, who is being made much of in these verses? Blessed be God because of what He has done in Christ. Who chose who? Did God choose us or did we choose God? God chose us. He gets the glory.

vv. 5,6

having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He made us accepted in the Beloved.

The "in love" at the end of verse four should really be attached to the thought in verse five. God predestined us according to His will. It is not those who are adopted who choose their parents, it is the parents who choose who they will adopt. God chooses, He gets the glory. And why does God choose us for salvation, so we will be glorified? No. He chooses us to the praise of the glory of His grace.

v. 7

In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace

In *Him* we have forgiveness...

v. 8

which He made to abound toward us in all wisdom and prudence,

...which *He* made abound...

v. 9

having made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He purposed in Himself,

...according to *His* good pleasure...

v. 10

that in the dispensation of the fullness of the times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth – in Him.

...that *He* might gather together.

v. 11

in Him also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will,

Yes, it is we who obtain the inheritance, but it is according to the counsel of His will.

v. 12

that we who first trusted in Christ should be to the praise of His glory.

Why are we redeemed? To the praise of His glory!

v. 13

In Him you also trusted, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise,

Ok, finally something we do. We trust. But is there any glory in trusting? And how did we come to trust? We heard the gospel. And how did we hear the gospel? God sent it to us. And what is our guarantee that we will be glorified? Is it us? No, it is by the Holy Spirit.

v. 14

who is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory.

Why are we redeemed again? To the praise of His glory.

Do you see it? Do you see that God's love for us is not such that He is making much of us, it's such that He's adopting us into His kingdom that we might make much of Him, the very thing we were created to do?

Why is it so important that we understand this? Because life is hard, and we are fragile people. If you expect God to express His love to you by making much of you, what will you do when suffering comes, and it will come. Will you throw up your arms in despair and say, "God doesn't love me!" or, "I gave my life to Him and this is how He treats me!"?

I notice that the older I get, the more vulnerable I become...to suffering. You get married, you're more vulnerable. Start having children, more vulnerable still. The more you have, the more you hold dear, the more subject you are to being hurt, bad. When you think of the suffering that Christians have endured historically, and today in most parts of the world, it makes you tremble. It makes me tremble.

There is a book, a devastating book, *Jesus Freaks*, by Voice of the Martyrs. I revisited it while preparing for this message, as a reminder of how many Christians have lived and brutally died (or worse) for their faith.

One particularly chilling account centers on a Soviet pastor who was arrested, tortured and imprisoned for his allegiance to Christ. When he still refused to denounce his Savior, they began torturing members of his congregation.

One man from the church was brought in to have his eyes gouged out, and his tongue cut off while his pastor watched in agony. When the pastor still would not curse Christ, they killed the church member before the pastor's very eyes. I ask you, was God making much of that pastor, at that moment? Was he exalting him and making everything go well for him? No.

It is a simple fact that the more you love people, and the more people you love, the more vulnerable you become. That does not mean that we should cease loving, but we had better know what the love of God really is or our faith will never survive. If we domesticate the attributes of God into something more palatable to our finite human minds, we will quickly find that we are left with a god that scarcely resembles the sovereign being found in Scripture, and a god that can offer no assurance in the times of greatest peril.

There is a worship song which has become popular recently. I know of at least a few artists who perform it, and it is on a CD I have. It's lyrics read:

Above all powers, above all kings - Above all nature and all created things - Above all wisdom and all the ways of man - You were here before the world began

Above all kingdoms, above all thrones - Above all wonders the world has ever known - Above all wealth and treasure of the earth - There's no way to measure what You're worth

Crucified laid behind a stone - You lived to die rejected and alone - Like a rose trampled on the ground
- *You took the fall and thought of me — Above all*

This song starts out very well, but the last phrase, "You took the fall and thought of me...*above all*"!? That is a serious, and I would argue, heinous claim. If God thinks of me above all else, above His own glory, He is hateful. Why? Because I was made to be satisfied in His glory, not my own. And this is precisely why the gospel of self-esteem is so dangerous. When the trials come, such faith will crumble. If all you know of God's love is His making much of you, then your faith is as good as dead. You will have no hope, no security, no stronghold to the loss of home, job, liberty, spouse, or family.

If man is uppermost in God's affections then human suffering cannot be reconciled. *But*, if God is uppermost in God's affections...and if He does all to the praise of His glory...and if we can only be satisfied in His glory, and if our suffering magnifies His glory, then may we suffer with joy, knowing that we are well loved, even if we lose our head.

Let's pray.