

Glorifying God

John 17:1-5

You might be struck by the similarity between Jesus' garden prayer and His mountain prayer (The Lord's prayer in Matthew is part of Jesus' sermon on the mount). The mountain prayer begins, "Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name..." This prayer begins with Jesus lifting His eyes toward heaven and saying, "Father, the hour has come. Glorify Your Son, that Your Son also may glorify You." In each prayer the Father in heaven is addressed by the Son with a concern that the Father be honored (hallowed and then glorified). In this new prayer the glorification of the Father is seen as connected to the glorification of the Son.

To be glorified is to be lifted up so that honor is attached to the one who is glorified but, in the context of Jesus, the Son of God and God the Father in heaven to be glorified is more than just the receiving of honor. It must be a specific kind of honor or it would not be honor at all. To honor or glorify God is to see and recognize God as the God He is. From the Scriptures we might think of the voice of God speaking from the burning bush to Moses, "Do not draw near this place, take your sandals off your feet, for the place where you stand is holy ground." Or, we might think of the people gathered before the Lord at Mount Sinai, "Then it came to pass on the third day, in the morning, that there were thunderings and lightnings, and a thick cloud on the mountain; and the sound of the trumpet was very loud, so that all the people who were in the camp trembled. And Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet with God, and they stood at the foot of the mountain. Now Mount Sinai was completely in smoke, because the Lord descended upon it in fire. Its smoke ascended like the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mountain quaked greatly. And when the blast of the trumpet sounded long and became louder and louder, Moses spoke and God answered him by voice..." There was no doubt of the glory of God on that day. His omnipotence was demonstrated so that all present were awestruck and even terrified by His overwhelming nearness.

Elijah had a similar and yet quite different experience of God's glory. After calling down fire from heaven (demonstrating God's glory to an unbelieving nation) he fled from Jezebel who had sworn to kill him down into the desert. The Lord spoke to Elijah and told him to "stand on the mountain before the Lord and behold the Lord passed by, and a great and strong wind tore into the mountains and broke the rocks in pieces before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake; and after the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire; and after the fire, a still small voice. So it was, when Elijah heard it, that he wrapped his face in his mantle and went out and stood in the entrance of the cave. Suddenly, a voice came to him and said, "What are you doing here, Elijah?"

Yet another vision of God's glory was that of Isaiah. "In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lifted up, and the train of His robe filled the temple. Above it stood seraphim; each one had six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. And one cried to another and said, 'Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of His glory!' And the posts of the door were shaken by the voice of him who cried out, and the house was filled with smoke. So I said, 'Woe is me, for I am undone! Because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King; the Lord of hosts.' The one of the seraphim flew to me, having in his hand a live coal which he had taken with tongs from the altar. And he touched my mouth with it and said, 'Behold this has touched your lips; your iniquity is taken away, and your sin is purged.' Also I heard the voice of the Lord saying, 'Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?' Then I said, 'Here am I! Send me.'"

In these experiences of the glory of God, He is seen making Himself known as the God He is in ways and to individuals as a means of furthering His purposes. He is other than and more than His creation. He controls the elements that control us. He is not of this world or limited by it in any way. He is deeply engaged in the goings on of our world. He is sovereign and yet He limits Himself to act in ways that influence the free will of His creation. These are some of the observations

that we could make of these occasions when the glory of God was clearly demonstrated.

So, when Jesus prayed, "...Glorify Your Son, that Your Son also may glorify You," He prayed this on the eve of the cross. We would not be likely to (on our own) associate the cross with the vision of Isaiah, Elijah's still small voice, Moses' burning bush, or with the fireworks and theatrics of Mount Sinai. But Jesus prayed "Glorify Your Son."

Was Jesus glorified on the cross? Was He lifted up and seen as the God He is?

On the one hand this would have seemed to be the opposite of what happened. Jesus was subject to the whims of men and made Himself powerless before them. When they wanted to, they spit on Him. When they wanted to, they struck Him. They blindfolded Him and then struck Him and taunted Him asking, "Who struck you?" For, if He were God, He could have said, but Jesus did not open His mouth. When Herod ordered it, they put a purple robe on Him. When Pilate ordered it He was scourged with whips. When the soldiers chose to do so, they twisted a crown of thorns and put it on His head. At Pilate's word, he was condemned to death and delivered to be crucified. They placed the placard on the cross, "This is Jesus the King of the Jews." They drove the nails into His hands. They walked by and mocked Him, "You who destroy the temple and build it in three days, save Yourself! If You are the Son of God, come down from the cross..." In all of this, Jesus appeared to be less than God, subject to the whims of others, a victim of a corrupt temple and the influence of local politics upon the "mighty" Roman Empire.