

Transition to Glory

John 17:4,5

It is the eve of the cross. Jesus knows this. He knows all that He will suffer and He knows the end of that suffering and the glory of His resurrection. He can in a sense stand outside of what He is living and know it all. He is also in the middle of what He is living and he cannot avoid the deep distress of doom and all of the feelings of dread and misery that burden Him. In the garden He has spoken with His followers to prepare them for the future that awaits beyond the immediate trauma of the cross. John 17 is Jesus' prayer from the garden. It is a prayer in which Jesus reaches out to the Father for strength and assurance and also in which he reveals to us something of His own journey and the purposes that God has had in all that Jesus said, did and would do.

Hear the words of Jesus, "I (speaking to the Father) have glorified You on the earth. I have finished the work which You have given Me to do. And now, O Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was."

It is an old story. God is the doer and man receives what God has done. What God has done shapes and defines the conditions in which we live. But, we have a way of diminishing God and seeing ourselves as self-existent. That is, we seem to accept the conditions of our lives as normal and lose any connection to the how and why of our own existence.

If we do see ourselves as dependent upon and indebted to the God who is our Creator then this is what it is for us as humankind to give glory to God. To give glory to God is to acknowledge Him and to know Him as the God He is. This is actually what we should aspire to. To do so is to reach our own potential as persons. It is what it is to be in harmony with the universe that God has made. It is what Jesus called the abundant life that he came to give to us.

Let me illustrate:

When God created the world, He made Adam of the dust of the ground and Eve, He made with Adam's rib. He placed them in the Garden of Eden, a place we would describe as a kind of paradise. They had no bills. They paid no taxes. Their food was free. And they had no need of clothes. It was the most simple of lives - no complications. Every detail of their existence had been imagined and then brought into existence by God. Their breath had been initiated by God's own breath. But how did Adam and Eve perceive their own existence? They accepted their reality without question. They knew God. He spoke with them. He placed only one restriction on their freedom. They could not eat of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. If they had been mindful of their Creator and considered themselves to be indebted to God and their existence to be dependent upon God then they would not have eaten of the tree. But, instead, they rejected God's gift and ate from the tree and they ruined everything.

God heard the cry of His people from the slave camps of Egypt and sent His servant Moses to deliver them from Pharaoh. It took the ten plagues to convince Pharaoh to let them go and even then he tried to change his mind. But, God saved His people. They crossed the Red Sea and went to Mt Sinai in the wilderness. There the people were gathered and after a great demonstration of His power, God spoke the Ten Commandments to them. Fearfully, they promised to do just as God commanded them. But, in less than 40 days they made a golden calf and worshipped it in defiance of the God who had delivered them from slavery and death. They were not mindful of their Creator and were not restricted by any sense of indebtedness to God. The very fresh experiences of the presence and power and grace of God were as if they had never been. They fled from the place of blessing and rushed into the courts of judgment. God's glory revealed and ignored.

On the day that Jesus was born, the angel appeared to the shepherds and declared, I bring you good tidings of great joy which shall be to all people. For there is born to you this day in the city of David, a Savior who is Christ the Lord. And the heavenly hosts filled the sky with their singing, "Glory to God in the Highest and on earth, peace, goodwill toward men." The Shepherds rushed to Bethlehem to the stable where Jesus was born and there they saw the Christ, God

become flesh and the one who would "finish the work that God sent him to do." From the manger scene these shepherds told everyone all about everything they had seen and heard. They had experienced God's glory, that is, God had by angelic means revealed to them His power and purposes and this reality had overruled all other considerations. What God was doing became the primary fact of their lives and the center of their consciousness. They gave glory to God and this is what He intends for all of us.

Think about it this way, did Adam and Eve regret eating from the tree and their expulsion from the garden? Did Israel regret the golden calf and their continuing rebellions and all the consequences that followed? Did the shepherds regret their midnight journey into Bethlehem and their own witness to all they saw that night?

But, most were not like the shepherds or the disciples for the witness of the Gospel is "He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him. He came to His own and His own did not receive Him."

God's glory was on display again as Jesus taught the Word, as He healed the sick, gave sight to the blind and raised the dead. The religious elite, unwilling to cede their power to God, opposed Him at every turn. Some came to Him for what they could get from Him. Some believed and left everything behind in order to follow Him. Of these, who had regrets and who did not?

So Jesus died on the cross for our sins, and this was strangely also a demonstration of God's glory because the cross revealed the depth of God's love for us and His willingness in Christ, to die for our salvation. It revealed the truth of His character for He is both just, and the justifier of all who believe in Jesus. But all of this could only be known through the resurrection. On the third day, He rose. The stone was rolled away so that the world could see an empty tomb. He appeared to Mary, to Peter, to the Emmaus disciples, to the gathered disciples in the upper room, repeatedly over the 40 days until His ascension and to as many as 500 of the brethren at one time. They were changed by these events in the most dramatic ways. Transformed from fearful to bold, from rivals to friends,

from doubt to certainty, from inconsistency to commitment, they changed the world.

We are now removed from the resurrection by some 2000 years. We can recite the facts without emotion. We are again faced with the old question. God's glory has been revealed. Every truth concerning Jesus is just as valid now as ever. Before Jesus, you could be a shepherd, out there in the middle of the night, one more all-nighter in a life full of the same, but, the intentions and purposes of your Creator have been revealed in the person of Jesus Christ who died on the cross for your sins and rose on the third day for your salvation and eternal life. You will choose either to be like the shepherds and disciples or you will be like those who saw God's glory but then turned back to live as if nothing of note had happened.

The resurrection is the watershed moment of history. It is also the watershed moment of your history. Having seen His glory, what will you do?