

## Study 6. The glory of the cross

Martin Luther, in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, observed that the Church wanted their edifice, the Church of their making, to be the glory of God. Luther opposed to this 'a theology of the cross'. The Church always tends to glory in itself rather than in God. Luther explains that God says what he wants to say under the appearance of its opposite. If he wants to show us his glory, he presents it to us under the appearance of shame. This is shockingly, but wonderfully so when we come to the cross on which Christ was killed, but in which, he revealed his glory. If we want to see the glory of God, we will need to be looking here.

Paul says that the world crucified 'the Lord of glory' (1 Co. 2:8). That is, Jesus is characterised by glory but we kill him because we are blind to this. God is revealing his wisdom and power in this death (1 Co. 1:17—2:5). This is close to saying it is the revelation of God's glory. Therefore, it must remain central to our proclamation. Our greatest need is to stand before God without boasting (in ourselves), and boasting only in the cross of Christ. It is wrong for us to boast in what has no glory—that is, ourselves without the grace of God, but right and necessary that we should boast in what does have glory—that is the cross.

By this wisdom of the cross, we have Christ as our righteousness, sanctification and redemption (1 Cor. 1:30). This wisdom of God is planned for us so we will come to our full glory (1 Cor. 2:6-16). As we have seen already, God is not interested in display for its own sake but in bringing us into the enjoyment of all that he is and the employment of all that we are in him. It is this that God reveals by his Spirit, that is, the glory planned for us, the depths of God that provides it. All this is his glory. We have the mind of Christ, seeing what is truly glorious as he sees and proclaims it to us.

Jesus takes us to the heart of the glory of his cross, in John's Gospel. He saw his coming sufferings on the cross as the revealing of glory (12:23-24, 28, 32). So here is the meaning of 'we beheld his glory...full of grace and truth' (1:14).

*He shows* that glory comes from God, and his life consists in seeking the glory of his Father (5:41; 7:18; 8:50, 54). In contrast to this, we seek glory from one another (5:44; 12:42-43). This completely contorts what a human being is—the image and glory of God. In fact, it leads to our killing the Son of God (5:18, 44).

*Jesus says* that God is seeking his glory and that he is the Judge (8:50). The Jews are on shaky ground because the one glorifying Jesus is the Judge. Clearly, God glorifying him is important to Jesus, and he looks forward to the time when this will happen (2:4; 7:30). Only then will the Spirit come (7:39) and the truth be revealed (12:16). This hour finally comes, the time for him to be glorified (12:23) and Jesus likens it to a seed dying in order to bear fruit. He says it is the same for us. We cannot bear fruit while clinging to glory in this world. This glory will start with his death, then, his rising and ascension.

Whatever glory had already been revealed in Jesus, he now asks for the Father's name to be glorified in him, and in an act of judgement (12:23-33). It is as though he prays Moses' prayer: 'Show me your glory!' And the Father says that he has, and that he will glorify him again. Jesus explains to the mystified crowd that the judgement of the world is about to happen, and that the prince of the world will be cast down. The glory of God is compromised if sin is unjudged and if Satan reigns (through the power of sin—8:34). On the other hand, if these two things happen, Jesus will draw 'all men', people of all nations, to himself, clearly, to the glory of God.

So how is the world judged? Jesus says the judgement of the world is that light has come into the world and men loved darkness rather than light (3:19). This seems ominous, but the

context says that God is about saving the world, and that whoever does what is true comes to the light. More is involved than mere exposure and condemnation. Jesus also says (12:31) the prince of the world will be cast down, and that in being lifted up he will draw men to himself. This is not only a judgement declared but carried out. Jesus will remove Satan from power so that he can no longer condemn and control his former subjects. We may say that Jesus will stand in the path of God's judgments (Is. 26:8). They will fall on him (Is. 53:5-6, 8-10, 12). Then, his people will not come into judgement (John 5:24) but come to him from all nations. Clearly, this accomplishment is the revelation of glory, but there is more.

*Jesus shows* that his glory lies in seeking God's glory alone. He is troubled at the prospect of what lies just ahead, but does not ask to be spared. Rather, he says, 'Father, put your glory on display' (v. 28 *The Message*). What is at stake here is not just our need for salvation, but also, the need for God's glory to be upheld, and for this man to uphold it by his own choice. Everything depends on this. In effect, Jesus says: 'My Father is righteous and holy (Jo. 17:11, 15). I know this. The world needs to know this. I sanctify myself so they may be sanctified (Jo. 17:19). I will stand here seeking only the glory of God.'

This is the glory for which God has made us, and in Jesus, true humanity stands tall, not only for himself, but for us, to make atonement for us before his holy Father. Jesus was as interested, or more interested, in us knowing that he loved the Father than in our knowing that he loved us (John 8:28; 14:31). There is now a true humanity in which we may live. In such a down to earth way, God displayed his glory, very much, among us.

P. T. Forsyth says much about this in his book *The Cruciality of the Cross*. Here is a sample.

Christ's first business in saving was to honour the Father's holy love. He saved man because He first saved God from being mocked by man. His submission to judgment was not simply His experience of doom and suffering as incidents of life, but His submission to them as God's purpose for Him, and His confession of them as expressions of the holiness of God and of His power to make man's wrath praise Him. ... It was the power so to deal with man's wrath against God as to accept God's wrath against man, and make sin farther the purpose it seemed to foil. The necessity of Christ's death was created more deeply by God's holiness in Him than by the perversity of the men it exasperated. No one could reveal a holy God by any amount of suffering or sacrifice which did not recognise this element of judgment,—did not atone. ... the revelation came and could come only in the form of Atonement' (pp. 209f).

The book of Revelation recounts several songs of praise that have to do with 'the Lamb'. The fact that this term occurs 30 times in the book betrays the fact that he is its key character and responsible for the actions described there (eg. 7:17; 17:14). In chapter 5, glory is ascribed to him (ie. the glory he has is recognised and acknowledged in worship). In being killed, he has purchased people for God and made them to be a kingdom so that they will reign on the earth (5:8-14). His people wash their robes in his blood (7:14). Clearly, the image of a lamb is not auspicious, particularly as it is described in chapter 5, as a lamb just slain. But then, this Lamb is simultaneously, the Lion of Judah, the Davidic King and Messiah, and the glory of his reign is not the authority he now wields but what he has done as Lamb.

Finally, glory is ascribed to God because it is time for the marriage of the Lamb to his bride who has made herself ready, clothed with her righteous acts (19:5-9). Both God and the Lamb are identified as the temple in the eternal City of God; God is its glory and the Lamb is its light (21:22-27). It is into this light that the nations bring their glory—nothing unclean, only those who have life through the Lamb.

The world's glory will ultimately be nothing other than what is illuminated by the Lamb. The glory of the cross is the glory of the man who hung there, destroying the stronghold of Satan and bringing his people to share with him in his glory.