

BROOMFIELD



PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH MINISTRY OF THE WORD

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The Fulfillment of a Ministry

"What's Next?" Syndrome

Christmas as a child brought with it what I have called the "What's Next?" syndrome. While you may appreciate the present you just unwrapped, nevertheless there are two more that you have wondered about for weeks. And so rather than being satisfied with the present you just opened, you lay it aside and wonder, "What's next?"

Early on in this church plant we talked about this syndrome and applied it to ourselves — for on account of the nature of church planting this syndrome is easily fallen into. For when the ministries to which a church commits itself start rolling off the press, there arises a corporate expectation that while what we are doing is great, "What's next?!"

Perhaps there may be some here who have raised this question about Broomfield Presbyterian Church. Over the past three years, God has done incredible things. Hasn't He? We began with a worship service attended by about 20 people. Today we are an organized church with three elders and four others on the leadership team. We have multiple evening services gathered around the city with more on the way. We have a fantastic educational ministry in which the entire congregation has participated. We have begun The LOGOS Institute and have affiliated it with Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary. We have a literature ministry. We are on the web. And the list goes on and on.

And yet, it has been a while since we "rolled out" a new ministry, so... WHAT'S NEXT?

This is such a dangerous question. It implies that our success as a church body is based in part upon another act, activity, or ministry. And that is why early on when we discussed the "What's Next?" Syndrome, we were careful not to confuse "growth" as a congregation with programs, progress, attendance, or ministries. Truly, these do not represent maturation on the part of a church.

And yet that raises the question what is maturation? And how is it to be measured? Is it determined by conversions? The nickels or noses gathered each week? The number of elders/leaders? Ministries?

This is such an important question because. It not only will determine what we consider to be a problem. But it also will dictate the direction of our ministry.

Thankfully, the passage at which we are looking this morning answers the question. As Paul brings this

Epistle to a close, He mentions the "riches of the glory in Christ Jesus" (verse 19), and he cannot help but to transition into doxology.

And yet, far from simply being a statement of praise, verse 20 is nothing less than a summary of everything Paul in this epistle has been laboring for on the part of the Philippians. A description of what constitutes the fulfillment of Paul's ministry among the Philippians.

The Passion

Philippians 4:20, "Now unto God and our Father **be glory**¹ for ever and ever. Amen."

This constitutes a prayer on Paul's part for God to be glorified. And the key in understanding Paul's prayer is wrapped up in the word *glory*. When we understand this term *glory* we begin to understand Paul's passion.

It is tempting here to think of this phrase *be glory* as saying that to God alone belongs all praise. And this is appropriate. However, it is only a fraction of the full implication of this phrase. As we have seen on numerous occasions, *glory* has the primary meaning of *weight, heaviness, or substance* in the Bible. Thus, as an exercise of the creature in relation to the Creator, this phrase conveys a two-fold activity. It not only implies ascription of due praise but also — AND PRIMARILY — it implies a life lived in light of the weightiness and substance of God's being.

And so, to say "to our God be the glory" is primarily to assert the longing for every creature to live in light of the substance and weightiness of God's being.

And yet, what does this mean?

Glory

Let me put it this way. The question of glory in the Bible is a question of influence. And more specifically it is this: by what are you influenced?

For example, if when you are on the JOB and your boss walks by and you sit up in your chair and act like you are hard at work, then at that moment it is your boss who is influencing you. And thus from the Biblical perspective it is your boss to whom you are giving glory. Or, if when you are DRIVING IN YOUR CAR you spot a policeman and immediately hit the brakes, then at that moment it is the policeman who is influencing you. And from a Biblical perspective it is to the police that you are giving glory. If when you buckle to peer pressure, compromise for the sake of another's opinion of you, or lie to protect yourself or your reputation then at that moment you are giving glory to things other than God.

In the Bible, this is what glory is all about. "To God be the Glory" is Moses standing before the most powerful man in his day, the Pharaoh, and yet neither faltering or stumbling because GOD is what "weighed heaviest" on his mind. It is Joshua leading the people of God — who were ignorant of warfare tactics and lacking weapons of war — into the promised land to do battle against fortified cities, and yet NOT flinching because GOD was his "peer pressure."

It is Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego refusing to worship Nebuchadnezzar at the cost of their lives, and

¹ δόξα doxa This is also rendered *be the glory* in NASB. Young's renders it *is the glory*.

yet NOT shrinking back because, through the eye of faith, they saw the greatness of the majesty of the One who went with them.

It is Stephen standing before the religious leaders of His day and powerfully witnessing to the truth, and YET holding fast to God's word, though his life was in peril because he beheld the glory of GOD and it was that which moved him.

It is the apostles, prophets, and countless saints throughout all of church history who² were tortured, not accepting their release; experienced mockings, scourgings, chains and imprisonment; were stoned, sawn in two, tempted, put to death with the sword; went about in sheepskins, in goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, ill-treated, wandering in deserts and mountains and caves and holes in the ground and yet NEVER fell back because of the weight and magnificence of their God and Savior, Christ Jesus, who had called them and sent them out into the world as His servants!

This family of God is what is behind Paul's prayer in our passage. It is the longing for God to be exalted by His people submitting to and living in light of His greatness.

Practically speaking in our passage, "to our God be the glory" is the longing for the Philippians who were divided, self-centered, persecuted, fearing for their future, not giving preference to one another, in need of the mind of Christ, in need of a heart of humility, anticipating difficult days ahead, to be freed from the fear of man, the longing for man's praise and the hope of a safe tomorrow and so to be moved in all things by the character of their God!

This family of God is what constitutes the fulfillment of everything that Paul has been laboring for in this epistle! And this must be what constitutes the fulfillment of everything that we commit ourselves at BPC—being moved by the majesty of God's glory!

The central issue when it comes to life is: How big is God? How big is your problem? How big are you?

The Twelve Spies

When Moses led the people of God to the Promised Land the first time, he sent twelve men to spy out the land. They returned to give their report. The central issue revolved around the glory of God. Ten spies said that the land was filled with giants and that God was not big enough to deliver them.³ Two saw the glory of God and knew that "the nations are like a drop from a bucket, and are regarded as a speck of dust on the scales" (Isaiah 40:15).

Romans 8:38-39, "For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Exodus 15:11, "Who is like unto thee, O LORD, among the gods? who is like thee, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders?"

The question I ask you, brothers and sisters, is this: How big is your God? Can God be trusted? Even though life is not turning out as you expected? Even though your future is tentative at best? Even though

² Compare Hebrews 11:35-38

³ Compare Numbers 13:32

your sin is great and your commitment is small? Is not God's grace greater than your sin?

Is God able to be trusted? When the chips are down? When you are wounded in His service? When the bullets are flying?

“To our God be the glory!” reflects a conviction which says, "YES! God is able to be trusted, AND I WILL TRUST HIM!"

Our Father

And yet, that is only part of the picture.

Paul does not simply say “to our God be the glory.” Rather, he writes this: “to our God AND FATHER be glory.” This brings us to the Person whom Paul wants to be glorified.

The title *God* in this context references the sovereignty and transcendency of the Lord. He is the Creator — as such, He is the Master, Overseer, Mover, Upholder, First Cause, and Judge of creation. He is the one with whom all have to do!

The term *Father* on the other hand is intimate. In fact, recall in John. 5:17 when Christ referred to God as "His Father" the Jews wanted to kill Him because "He was making Himself equal to God" (John 5:18). See, there is an intimacy built into this word.

When used by Christ in reference to God, it stresses the fact that Christ is God AND enjoys a love relationship with the Father. Right before Christ died, He prayed this:

John 17:5, “And now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was.”

Yet, when Christ urged His disciples to pray, "Our Father"⁴ it stressed that as children of God we are the beloved of God. We are His people AND He is our personal God!

Think of it in this way: When a person enters into a saving relationship with Christ, something radical happens — they become the children of God.

John 1:12-13, “But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.”

An Intimate Relationship

How intimate is this relationship?

Galatians 4:6, “And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father.”

The term "Abba" is akin to our term, "Daddy." It would have been one of the first words spoken by a baby,

⁴ Compare Matthew 6:9

"Abba"- "Daddy." As such it stresses an intimacy and care unequalled in the rest of creation.

That family of God is the idea here. When it came to the summary of everything Paul was teaching in this epistle, Paul longed not only for the Philippians to be moved in all things by the character of their God — trust, follow, and serve Him — but also for them to be moved by a Being who has deigned to relate to them as their Father!

What a fantastic passage!

Yes, God is our Sovereign Lord who is in absolute control of all things. But don't miss it — He also is our "Daddy" who ever and always has our best in mind!

People of God Encouraged

The year was 597 BC and God's people have been devastated. For not only have thousands of Jews been brought into exile, but the implication is that the Lord has failed to protect them. And yet in the midst of their devastation they received a word of encouragement from the Lord.

Jeremiah 29:5-10, "Build ye houses, and dwell in them; and plant gardens, and eat the fruit of them; Take ye wives, and beget sons and daughters; and take wives for your sons, and give your daughters to husbands, that they may bear sons and daughters; that ye may be increased there, and not diminished. And seek the peace of the city whither I have caused you to be carried away captives, and pray unto the LORD for it: for in the peace thereof shall ye have peace.

"For thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel; Let not your prophets and your diviners, that be in the midst of you, deceive you, neither hearken to your dreams which ye cause to be dreamed. For they prophesy falsely unto you in my name: I have not sent them, saith the LORD. For thus saith the LORD, That after seventy years be accomplished at Babylon I will visit you, and perform my good word toward you, in causing you to return to this place."

Family of God, this too is part of God's plan! As the people of God in a foreign land, we are to endeavor to thrive and flourish where ever we are — for a very important day is coming! And when that day arrives, in the words of Isaiah "you will go out with joy, and be led forth with peace; the mountains and the hills will break forth into shouts of joy before you, and all the trees of the field will clap their hands" (Isaiah 55:12).

Though He is our God, He also is our Father who in and through all things is working His plan for our benefit! That's the climax of Jeremiah 29.

Jeremiah 29:11, "For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the LORD, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end."

And thus brothers and sisters when we come to our text and read, "to our God and Father be the glory," we must see that there is an intimacy here. Yes we long to be a church which is moved and influenced by the great "I AM!" But we must also be a church which is moved by "The Eternal Father"⁵ who left His throne, became man, lived on our behalf, and died for us and thus delivered us from our sin!

We must ever and always live in light of redeeming grace. Christ's sacrifice must move us! His work must

⁵ Compare Isaiah 9:6

be our passion! His grace must be our message!

Now when this occurs, do you know what will happen?

The Unveiled Face

2 Corinthians 3:18, “But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.”

This is an important passage when we speak of the longing for God to be glorified. It is important because it indicates the result. Notice the text — picking up on the idea of the veil which blocks non-believers from understanding God's plan of redemption in Christ, Paul wrote, “But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord.” In Christ we are, as it were, gazing into a mirror. Now rather than seeing our own reflection, at times we can see the reflection of another — the Lord Jesus Christ!

Now do you know what happens when Christ's glory is reflected in us? Do you know what happens when we live to give glory to "our God and Father?" We are “changed into the same image from glory to glory.” As children of God, the more we are moved by God's character, the more His image becomes that of our own.

What Paul is teaching in 2 Corinthians 3 is the way that God has ordained for His children to grow in Christ. As we glorify Him in our thoughts, words, or deeds, His image is burnt into our being such that we grow more and more in Christlikeness. And this family of God is what the ministry is all about — being conformed to Christ!

- It is God's plan for us in Salvation. God “predestined [us] to become conformed to the image of His Son” (Romans 8:29).
- It was the goal of Paul's labor on this earth. Paul said that he was to labor “until Christ is formed in you.” (Galatians 4:19)
- It is what defines legitimate church growth, Ephesians 4:13.
- It will be that which will occupy us for the rest of eternity. "Now to our God and Father be the glory **forever and ever. Amen**" (Philippians 4:20). (Or loosely, "for all ages following each other in endless succession.") Truly the activity which will occupy us for all eternity will be growing in our ability to praise Christ AND reflect Him in our being!
- It was Paul's passion when it came to the Philippians, Philippians 3:8-11.

Truly, "to our God and Father be the glory" is the objective of all ministry. Yet sadly, that is not what is valued today. The bottom line when it comes to success in a church in our times is measured by the nickels collected and the noses gathered. It is also gauged by the number of programs in which the church is actively engaged. The fact of whether the people are growing or not is not an issue.

The fulfillment of every ministry; the end of every service; the purpose of any office is for this: that the congregation might grow deeper and deeper in its love for Christ and its ability to serve Him.

How does this occur? By sheer effort? Through determination and will?

As we gaze upon the greatness of God through His word we see that God is indeed big and we are indeed small. Yet, God has deigned to love us. We must learn to trust Him and follow Him wherever He leads. This will be what transforms us “into the same image from glory to glory” (2 Corinthians 3:18)!

Family of God, this must be the focus of this and all ministries. This must be the basis for what we consider to be success. This must be what we labor for in and through all things.

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About the Preacher

Greg Thurston preached this sermon on May 30, 2004. Greg is the preacher at Broomfield Presbyterian Church.