

“Glorified!”

John 13:31-35

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I come to you this morning with a bit of a puzzle, something I’m trying to figure out, and the answer is not immediately obvious from our John passage this morning. It has to do with the word *glorify*. In the space of just two verses, that verb appears five times: “now the Son of Man has been glorified;” “God has been glorified in him;” “God has been glorified in him” (again); “God will also glorify him in himself;” and “God will glorify him at once.” Jesus is saying that *he* has been glorified, and that *God* has been glorified, and that God will glorify Jesus again. Right? There’s a *past* and a *future* element to this glorification. When did it happen, first? When, in the story, does it happen again? Will it happen in *our* future, as well? What does it mean, anyway – to *glorify* God, to *glorify* Jesus?

But wait – there’s more. We’ve got two verses with all sorts of glorification going on. Then Jesus moves on to remind his followers that he’s not going to be with them, in person, much longer. (This story takes place during the Last Supper, just after Judas has walked out of the room.) Then Jesus stresses to his disciples that they must love each other. He goes from the subject of *glorification* to the subject of *love within the Christian community of faith* in pretty short order. Are those two subjects completely unrelated, or might they have something to do with each other?

So we have here a rather enigmatic, puzzling passage. Not unlike some other passages in John’s gospel, that have hidden mysteries just waiting to be revealed. There *are* answers to these questions I have been asking. But we have to dig a little deeper to discover them.

So let’s back up, all the way back to the beginning of John’s gospel. Remember this line? “And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father’s only son, full of grace and truth.” (John 1:14) John is talking about Jesus, of course. *Jesus* became flesh and lived among us; we have seen *Jesus’* glory. Jesus had a brightness to him, a radiance; a special kind of renown; a greater degree of magnificence. But this glory was not immediately apparent to all people. When, in the following chapter, Jesus shows up at the wedding in Cana and turns water into wine, John tells us that this was “the first of his signs,” and that he “revealed his glory.” (John 2:11) Jesus would continue to perform a variety of signs and wonders – miracles – throughout his ministry, and every time he did so, he *revealed his glory*, the glory that he already had when he came into this world.

Yet when we get to chapter 7 in John’s gospel, we find this surprising statement: “Jesus was not

yet glorified.” (John 7:39) Jesus already had glory; he had it since the day he arrived on this plane of existence; he has been revealing it whenever he performed miracles – but now John is telling us that he has not yet been glorified. He already *has* glory, but he’s going to get even *more* glory later on. Somebody is going to give it to him. Somebody is going to *glorify* him. Who is going to do that?

Well, it’s not human beings. Jesus says so himself, back in chapter 5: “I do not accept glory from human beings.” (John 5:41) He says that quite clearly, without qualification. *We can’t give glory to Jesus*. That might sound surprising. Don’t we honor him? Don’t we worship him? *Isn’t he the Son of God?* Yes, yes, and yes. But we cannot *glorify* him. We can try – but evidently we are actually not *able* to do so. The glory that Jesus receives comes not from us – but from *God*. “It is my Father who glorifies me,” Jesus says (John 8:54). Jesus can’t even give himself glory: “If I glorify myself, my glory is nothing.” (John 8:54) The *only* glory that Jesus receives come to him from *God*. Nobody else can give it to him!

So there comes that moment when Jesus says, “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.” (John 12:23) This is just a few days before his crucifixion, after he arrives in the vicinity of Jerusalem. He says something similar when he is praying on the eve of his death: “Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son so that the Son may glorify you.” (John 17:1) “Glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had in your presence before the world existed.” (John 17:5) God is about to glorify Jesus, given him an even greater glory than what he already had. When does that happen? Is it when Jesus dies? Is it when he is resurrected? John does not answer that clearly. John 12:16 says: “His disciples did not understand these things at first; but when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered that these things had been written of him and had been done to him.” The light bulb went off for the disciples after Jesus had been raised from the dead, like that moment when Thomas sticks his finger in Jesus’ side and exclaims, “My Lord and my God!” (John 20:28). Unfortunately, that doesn’t really help us answer the question. Some people think God glorified Jesus when Jesus died; others think it happened when Jesus was raised. Certainly no living human beheld Jesus in his full glory until after he was raised. But what about the spirits of the dead? There’s a line in 1 Peter 3:19 that says “He was put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the Spirit, in which also he went and made a proclamation to the spirits in prison.” This is where the idea comes from that Jesus descended into hell, to the abode of the dead, what the Hebrews had called “Sheol,” so that he could deliver them from their captivity to death and be raised to new life. That event happened between Jesus’ death and his resurrection here on this earth. I’m inclined to think that those spirits beheld the *glorified* Jesus. So I’d lean in the direction of saying that the moment when God glorified Jesus was at the moment of his death – when he breathed his last, when the curtain of the temple was torn in two, when the soul of Jesus, the incarnate Word which had, for a time, been encased in flesh, returned to the spiritual realm from which it had come. God glorified Jesus when he died the sacrificial death on the cross that gave all of us new life and hope.

So that satisfies our questions about the glorification of Jesus. He had glory from the beginning; God gave him more when he died to set us free. But what about the glorification of God? That’s a piece of this too. “God has been glorified in him.” (John 13:31) God is receiving glory through Jesus. How exactly does that happen? In his lengthy prayer in John 17, Jesus says this: “I glorified you on earth by finishing the work that you gave me to do.” (John 17:4) So the things Jesus did brought glory to God. When Jesus calls Lazarus back to life, for example, that brings glory to God. “This illness does not lead to

death,” Jesus had said; “rather it is for God’s glory.” (John 11:4) Jesus’ miracles bring glory to God.

But we can glorify God too. There are examples of this in various places throughout the Bible – “I give thanks to you, O Lord my God, with my whole heart, and I will glorify your name forever” (Psalm 86:12); “the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen” (Luke 2:20); “immediately he regained his sight and followed him, glorifying God” (Luke 18:43); “if any of you suffers as a Christian, do not consider it a disgrace, but glorify God because you bear this name” (1 Peter 4:16); and so on. Lots of examples of folks like us glorifying God, for the great things God has done.

But John says there’s something else we can do that glorifies God. “My Father is glorified by this,” says Jesus, “that you bear much fruit and become my disciples.” (John 15:8) It’s not just when we praise God for all of God’s goodness that we glorify God. It’s also when our lives take shape as disciples of Jesus Christ, as we devote ourselves to doing the kinds of things that Jesus himself did and that he taught his followers to do. So we can give glory to God in two different ways. The first is by praising and extolling God’s greatness. That’s the easier one. The harder one is to say, “Jesus is my Lord, and I’m going to try very hard, with God’s help, to do the things he wants me to do.” To walk in his ways. To spread his love. To reach out with compassion and mercy to the hurting and the downtrodden and the lost. To share the good news about what he did for each one of us. All those things bring glory to God.

So let’s circle back to the passage we started with this morning. “The Son of Man has been glorified, and God has been glorified in him.... God will also glorify him in himself and will glorify him at once.” God has given glory to Jesus (before he came to this earth), and Jesus has given glory to God (through his works here on earth). God glorifies Jesus a second time, when he dies. So far, so good. Then Jesus jumps to this: “I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.” It’s a final, farewell commandment: love your fellow Christian sisters and brothers. It’s one piece of what it means to be a disciple of Jesus. It’s part of what Jesus had in mind when he said, “My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples.” When we follow Jesus, when we do the things he tells us to do, and – in this passage – *when we genuinely love our fellow Christian sisters and brothers*, we bring glory to God. We might not always agree with each other; sometimes we might get annoyed at each other; sometimes we might not even like each other very much; there might be times when one of us unintentionally hurts another; but always – *always* – we *must love* each other. Look around. Is there someone you have trouble loving? Jesus says: “You *have* to love that person.” You don’t have a choice in the matter! Not if you’re trying to be sincere in your Christian walk. It’s not a suggestion. It’s a *commandment*. If there’s a fellow believer somewhere – anywhere! – that you have trouble loving – well, there’s something for you to work on. Something for you to pray about. A part of your life where you need to *grow*.

When you get to the point where you *can* love that person – it doesn’t just help your relationship with them. It isn’t just an indication to the world that you are a follower of Jesus Christ. It does something else as well. *You do something else as well. You bring glory to God! You glorify God.* You make the brightness and radiance of God shine even brighter than it did before.