

Glory to God

Trinity CRC, February 9, 2020AM

Vision: ... *for the glory of God* (Part 1/intro)

Revelation 4

Rev. Richard deLange

I heard a 15-minute talk by a delightful young woman. It was called “Why I Left an Evangelical Cult”. Dawn grew up as a child of the 1970’s Jesus movement. Her grandfather and father subsequently started a cult, loosely based on evangelical Christianity, called *The Assembly*. But it had a lot of rules added to the gospel. Dawn describes her feelings about being part of this group at age 5 and connecting on the street corner with an older lady.

Picture Dawn, a 5-year-old dressed conservatively, standing close to her dad as he shouts on the street corner to all by-passers, “Repent!” He goes on to warn them about the evils of our society—free sex, alcohol and drug abuse, greed and more. Dawn describes understanding at this young age that her father raised the ire of people with his condemning talk. Little Dawn knew the truth of the English proverb, “you can catch more flies with honey than with vinegar.” It is much easier to get what you want from people by being polite rather than by being rude and condemning.

What impacted me about her story was an older lady who took the time to connect with little Dawn. Maybe this lady was an x-cult member herself. Maybe she just hated street preachers and the feelings of condemnation that came from them. Or maybe she was a Christian grandmother who saw a little child looking afraid while her daddy was shouting at by-passers. Whoever she was, that lady decided to connect with a little girl on the street whom she did not know. However, she did know little Dawn was currently locked in a cult with no means of escape—even though this child didn’t yet realize there was anything to escape from. But this grey-headed lady, as Dawn remembers her, took time to intentionally connect with a little girl in a pink-stripped dress with a white purse. While Dawn’s dad preached condemnation, this lady gave that little girl hope for a better life: “Some day you will grow up and you will realize that you can leave all this.”

I don’t know who the lady was. Let’s just say she was a Christian grandmother. And if that’s the case, I’ll use her as an example of someone who intentionally connected with this little girl. And we’ll say, “for the glory of God.”

Doing what we do—as individuals or as church—for the glory of God is the heart of Christianity. If we’re not doing things for God’s glory, we’re on the wrong track. That’s why it’s not only good but important that as a church we agree that whatever we’re doing is for the glory of God. And that’s why our new vision statement ends with saying “for the glory of God.” Our church wants to intentionally connect with God, intentionally connect with each other and intentionally connect with our neighbours for the glory of God! That last phrase is our focus this morning.

We'll get our focus on the glory of God before going back to explore the other parts, which Pastor Michael will do in the next few Sunday morning sermons.

What's God's Glory?

So, what is the glory of God? What are we declaring when we say we want to do everything for the glory of God? We say it easily and often but what does it mean?

Boys and girls, if I ask you to describe something like a ball, you can probably do that easily, right? A ball is a round (sphere) thing that you throw back and forth with your friends. There are all kinds of balls. A basketball is about 20cm round, made of leather or rubber and most commonly orange in colour. You pump it up with air so you can bounce it while you run and then shoot it into a basket or hoop to score a point. A soccer ball is about the same size but usually black and white and you kick it across a field into a net. A baseball is the size of a large apple and you can throw it back and forth between friends or teammates. You can also throw it toward a person with a bat and they will try to hit the ball as far as they can as it comes toward them. What other balls are there? Lots of different kinds. But we can describe them all and how to use them quite easily.

Now try to describe glory. That's not as easy because glory isn't something you hold in your hand. You can't touch it. You can see it in some ways but it's hard to describe.

Some people say it's like trying to describe beauty. How do you describe beauty? 10 times of our 10, I'll say if you want to see beauty, look at my wife! (She asked me to say that! No, she didn't!). I would say my daughter is a beauty. I could look around here and point at other people and say, "There's a beauty!" but that would probably get weird 😊. We all have a picture of beauty in our minds but putting it into words is harder. It's not that beauty isn't real. It's very real. We can see it but it's not as easy to describe as a ball.

What about glory? Author John Piper said, "I believe the glory of God is the going public of his infinite worth. I define the holiness of God as the infinite value of God, the infinite intrinsic worth of God. And when that goes public in creation, the heavens are telling the glory of God, and human beings are manifesting his glory, because we're created in his image, and we're trusting his promises so that we make him look gloriously trustworthy."

In Revelation 4 we get a picture of what going public with God's holiness and worth looks like—or what glorifying God is like. We get a picture of God's glory that would be hard to explain without the vision John tells us about. The Apostle John is having a vision where he's brought into the throne room of heaven. And the One sitting on the throne is—in a word—glorious. You can't describe God's glory

except with other images: precious stones like jasper and carnelian which were worn by human kings like the King of Tyre (Ezek 28:13). There's a spectacular rainbow resembling another precious stone—emerald—encircling the throne. Around the throne are smaller thrones representing the servants of God in heaven and on earth (Old and New Testament leaders) with pure white clothing and shining gold crowns. There's thunder and lightning and blazing flames. The brightness and majesty of the place is unmistakable. It's all pointing to God's glory as something far, far greater than words can describe. This picture is worth a thousand words or more.

The living creatures and elders are described in majestic detail. What's super noteworthy is that they are all worshiping God and declaring his holiness and worth and glory. They are shouting publicly, if you will, that God is great, awesome, majestic. They worship with all their heart, with their bodies. The living creatures—echoing images from the books of Isaiah and Ezekiel—are covered in eyes that can't get enough of God's holiness and majesty. They are reduced to nothing but worship. There's nothing better that one can do in the presence of such a glorious God! Worship him! He is worthy. He is all-powerful. He is holy. And so they just shout and sing it out. You and I need to imagine just how glorious this choir must have been. Unlike anything John ever heard before and would ever hear again in this life. Perfect worship for a perfect, holy, majestic God. The living creatures were

⁸ *saying:*

*“Holy, holy, holy
is the Lord God Almighty,
who was, and is, and is to come.”*

The song of these living creatures is simply an act of adoring praise. I think we are meant, reading this passage, to see with the writer that all creation is dependent on God and worships him in its own way. The animal-like creatures do it one way. Then the contrast with the twenty-four elders is more striking. Creation as a whole simply worships God but the humans who represent God's people here *understand why they do so*. Listen:

¹⁰ *They lay their crowns before the throne and say:*

¹¹ *“You are worthy, our Lord and God,
to receive glory and honor and power,
for (or because) you created all things,
and by your will they were created
and have their being.”*

You are worthy, or you 'deserve', they say, 'to receive glory and honor and power, *because* you created all things.' This distinguishes humans from other creatures. Humans are given the capacity to reflect, to understand what's going on. And, in particular, to express that understanding in worship, says one author. Giving glory to God is a conscious decision to make God's greatness public. This is saying there's no one or nothing better than our God. No one or nothing more

worthy of our praise, of our best worship. No one more holy and mighty than you, God, and we want to shout with all of creation that you're the King of all. But more than that, we offer our lives—our all—to you because you deserve it all! All glory to God.

Everything for the glory of God means taking God public. Letting our lives reflect—as much as we can—the amazing majesty, awe and glory of God for all to see in us as image bearers of God.

Refocused by Christ

Our ability to do all things for the glory of God is a result of hearts and lives redeemed and transformed by Jesus. We know the sin we've been delivered from through Jesus' work on the cross and his victorious resurrection and ascension. We know we are fully and wonderfully saved by the grace of God alone. So now we just want to express our thanks in a life of praise. We want more than just our lips to glorify God. We want to do everything to the honour of God. This is what "for God's glory" is all about. That's the picture of Revelation 4. Creation and humanity doing their utmost to exalt God because everyone knows that nothing in all of creation comes close to God's greatness.

Because of what Jesus has done for us—the one who in Revelation 5 is declared worthy—we are moved with gratefulness to make him great in the world. To glorify his name! Every Christian is called to do this in every part of our life. But it's not like it's an obligation that feels heavy and onerous. It's not one more thing to add to the "To Do" list. It's something that effects everything we do because it flows out of God's grace to us. We've been saved, loved, changed and empowered by a holy and majestic God so we want our life to reflect how great he is and how good he's been to us.

We glorify God when we play hockey by letting our skill reflect God's creativeness and beauty. We pray, "Lord, let my body and my skills glorify you! Let people see a little bit of you in me so that they are attracted more to you."

We glorify God when we care for our little ones with loving devotion. We aren't just changing diapers; we're serving babies created in the image of God and brimming with potential to be vibrant servants of Jesus in this world. We're showing others that serving like Jesus served us, serving to bring glory to the Father in heaven is not a chore but a privilege. We're not looking for recognition or even Facebook likes. We're focused on honouring the God who became one of us in order to raise us to new life and fill our lives with eternal purpose.

We glorify God in our workplace by respecting all those we connect with. We do our work to the best of our ability so that people can see we are doing it out of love for Jesus, rather than a paycheque alone. We intentionally try to let our

work attitude honor the one who gave us the job. And, similarly, we want to use our talents to make God look great in this world. I'm not just hammering nails into wood. I'm building a house that I want someone to feel good and secure living in. It'll give them a sense of comfort and security because I built it like I was making it for Jesus to live in.

And, so, as a church, we have a vision to intentionally connect with God, each other and our neighbours for the glory of God. It takes intentionality. But it is birthed out of faith in Jesus who has transformed our hearts and is changing our lives. The focus is all on God's glory. He's done everything for us. Now we offer our lives to his praise and glory in this world. We join the heavenly choir while here on earth. Our praise might not be as perfect as theirs yet, but we want to do our part in glorifying God for who he is and what he's done in redeeming us through Christ.

And here's an important thing to remember: This all flows from our time in worship where we recount together the power, majesty and glory of our God. God's glory propels us with love and faith to go out into the world and let his glory shine through us. Think of how we love to sing *Ere zij God* or *Glory to God* on Christmas Day. Why is that? Because God is worthy. As we sing of his worthy and glory, we remember why we are living and are encouraged again to live for God's glory.

When the grandmother knelt down to a frightened little 5 year-old girl and said, "One day you can be free," she was loving her neighbour. She wasn't doing it for personal gain. She had nothing to gain from this act of love. She was doing it for the love of the girl. Such an act brings glory to God. It pointed the little girl to search later in her life for the ultimate source of freedom which we know is found in Christ. A couple of words of encouragement changed a life and brought glory to God.

Christ's life changed our lives because he too had the glory of God in mind. Do you remember what Jesus said in his prayer before going to the cross? He said to his Father,

Jn 17:4 I have brought you glory on earth by completing the work you gave me to do.

Jesus brought glory to the Father on earth as it is in heaven. By of his grace to us, it is now our desire to glorify God. And with Christ's power in us, we make it the goal of our whole lives to bring glory to God as well—as individuals and as a church.

To God be the glory!