

To the Glory of God and God Alone

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[0 : 0 0] so heavenly father as you speak truth to us this morning by your spirit we ask that by that same spirit you will open our minds and our hearts you will move us to abide in your teaching that we might be liberated from the self-centeredness of our culture and experience the perfect freedom of living for your glory in Jesus name we ask amen well who is at the center of your universe there was an advert by Burger King recently you might have seen it I've got it on the screen it said this have it your way you have the right to have what you want exactly when you want it because on the menu of life you are today's special and tomorrow's and the day after that and well you get the drift yes that's right we may be the king but you my friend are the almighty ruler see the world says that your life will be great if only you realize that everything needs to revolve around you that's what we're striving for and it's the path to misery and becoming deeply unattractive as people because the truth is we are not good enough to satisfy ourselves the more we focus on ourselves the more that we get frustrated and at the reformation this marvelous rediscovery was made that the whole of our lives is meant to be lived for the glory of God so our first point this morning this is a um if you found it helpful there's an outline inside the notice sheet the glory of God and our salvation so we had Psalm 8 read and if you look the start and at the end of Psalm 8 are the same Lord our Lord how majestic is your name in all the earth what's David doing the psalmist he is glorifying God that's what he's doing the glory of God is his brilliance his weightiness his majesty we're used to the phrase glory in in sport aren't we in football crowds glory glory glListeners glory glory glListenic now David the writer of Psalm 8 we'd say that he's giving glory to God how majestic is your name not that God is lacking glory until David says that no rather what glorifying God is it's about recognizing his glory acknowledging it and more than that. He's not recognizing it begrudgingly. He is celebrating it. He is enjoying the brilliance of God, God's majesty. And in Psalm 8, David sees God's glory in creation. He says, you have set your glory in the heavens. Just as we might do that, as we, perhaps if you go on holiday to the highlands or to the islands, and you're so amazed by creation that you ascribe to God glory, you say, God, you're brilliant for making Scotland so wonderful. Or you might just watch

Planet Earth box set in your armchair at home and think God is amazing to have made things like this. But David glorifies God not just for creation, but for salvation. And in fact, when he sees the vastness of our universe, he glorifies God that God would be concerned for such insignificant creatures like us. You see that in verse 3, if you just have a look. When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars which you have set in place, what is mankind that you are mindful of them, human beings that you care for them? You made them a little lower than the angels and crowned them with glory and honor. We know more about this now than David did, don't we? The universe is bigger than we can imagine. The sun is so big, over a million planet Earths could fit inside the sun.

And the sun is just one of 100,000 million stars in our galaxy, which is one of at least 100,000 million galaxies in our universe. And it's remarkable, isn't it? What lots of people around us who don't believe in God never seem to be willing to admit is that if that's how big our universe is and there's no God, we are a zero. Mankind is a zero. We are totally insignificant. And yet wonderfully, the Bible shows us God is there and he loves us. And that's what gives us value. In David's language, God is mindful of us. He cares for us. So that when David says in verse 4, verse 4, he says, what is mankind that you are mindful of them? What he really means is, who is God that he would be mindful of us? Who is God?

How majestic to have made all of this and be concerned for us. And so God's saving plan, the pact, if you like, that God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit made together to save a people for themselves, that pact, that plan and that work of salvation glorifies God. Last year at St. Silas, we worked through Ephesians as a big book for the year, if you like. And in chapter 1 of Ephesians, it goes through the amazing way that God has saved us in sending Jesus and sending the Spirit.

But three times in Ephesians 1, it says why God did it. Chapter 1, verse 6, to the praise of God's glorious grace. Verse 12, it's so that we might be for the praise of his glory. And verse 14, it's to the praise of his glory. And it's important that this is the climax of our series on the Reformation, because our last four sessions looking at the Reformation have been all about how God saves us by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. And there is a danger as you focus on that, that we start to think, we're a really big deal. And the focus is all on me and how God has saved me.

[6 : 22] But that's not why God saves us. He does love us, but his primary motivation in saving us is his glory, that we and every creature that he's made would know his brilliance for all eternity. And that's why he saves us by grace alone. You see, if our good works contributed in some way to us getting to glory and being with God forever, then we'd be in heaven thinking, yeah, it was kind of a joint effort, me getting here. You know, God was pretty good to make himself known and give me his law.

But I did quite a good job of it, actually, and that's why I'm in heaven. But this way, God saving us entirely as a free gift means all the glory goes to him.

That's the obvious implication of God saving work in history, so that almost every time the gospel is explained in the New Testament, almost immediately it starts talking about boasting. And I think the idea there is just that we'll all boast in something. We naturally want to boast in things.

And when you realize how God saved us, you realize we can only boast in him. In other words, we glorify him. So Romans 11.36 says this, for from him and through him and for him are all things. To him be the glory forever. Amen. And ultimately, this is where history is heading. So in Habakkuk 2.14, God promises this about the future. He says, the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.

So this is where history is heading. Now, I don't know what you think about that, but you might be feeling a little bit uncomfortable with that idea. If you just think, if I said to you one day, I've got a new ambition, I've decided my new ambition for life is going to be, I'm going to live for my glory and I'm going to show everyone how brilliant I am. We wouldn't find that very attractive to hear someone say that. But we need to think that when it comes to God, there are things that are appropriate for God to do that are not appropriate if you're a creature. You know, it's not an ego if you actually are the center of the universe. It's only an ego if you think you are and you're not.

[8 : 39] And because God is the most brilliant being that exists, if he decided to live for anything else, it wouldn't be right. The only righteous thing for God to do and for any of us to do is to live to display the brilliance of God because that means we're living in line with the truth that he is brilliant. And more than that, because God is three persons, Father, Son, and Spirit, those three persons have lived in eternity in other person-centered love, focusing on the others, giving love and glory to the others. So in John 17, Jesus prays to his heavenly Father and he says this, and now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began.

So God the Father is the giving Father and he's giving glory to the Son and the Spirit as they in turn glorify him. So that God didn't create us because he was lacking glory. He created us out of an overflow of joy and love to share the glory of God, to know it and be satisfied in it.

And at the cross, God demonstrated to us and to all his creation the glory of who he is. He demonstrated his holiness and his justice because we know now that sin can't stand in God's presence. He couldn't just forgive sin without doing anything about it. He had to punish sin.

We see God's wisdom, that he could use the most grotesque evil that has ever taken place, the killing of the perfect man. He could use that for the most incredible, wonderful good.

We see his grace, his love, his power, his commitment to his people, his jealousy for his people, we see at the cross. We see his faithfulness to his promises and the whole of creation will marvel forever at God for what he did in saving us. That's our first point, the glory of God and our salvation.

[10 : 37] Secondly, the glory of God and our service. Now in the medieval church before the Reformation, people thought that our religious works were vital to making ourselves right with God and that the church leader was a priest to stand in the gap between God and his people and bring us back into God's grace. You'd fall out of God's grace and the priest would bring you back in by offering again on the altar the body and blood of Jesus as the bread and the wine were transformed. We looked at this last week. And you go to the priest for sacramental confession to be restored to God's grace. So that if you were really serious about God, you know lots of people around you were doing ordinary menial work, but if you were really serious about God and about less time in purgatory, you needed to become a priest or you needed to become a monk or a nun. Get out of the world so that you can focus on God. Now what we've been celebrating is that the Reformers went to the Bible and rediscovered the truth that any of us can be made right with God by faith alone. And we heard last week 1 Timothy 2, there is one God and one mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus.

But that means that the idea of your church leader as a priest is done away with. And it was replaced with this New Testament idea that's in the Bible of the priesthood of all believers. That every one of us is a priest. In that together, from the day you become a Christian, we're given by God the job of making himself, making him known to the world. We're a priesthood. 1 Peter 2 verse 9 says, But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.

So when people had talked about a vocation, they'd always meant a calling from God to be a priest or to be a monk or a nun. But Martin Luther and the Reformers, they kind of reclaimed the whole of life, all the offices of life, and all forms of work for Jesus. If you're a dad or a mum or a daughter or a friend or a teacher or a banker, these are God-given vocations in which to serve God.

So here's Luther quite provocatively contrasting serving God in working life with being a priest in the church at the time, a corrupt church. He says, When I speak of a calling which in itself is not sinful, I do not mean that we can live on the earth without sin. All callings and estates sin daily. But I mean the calling God has instituted or its institution is not opposed to God. For example, marriage, manservant, maidservant, lord, wife, superintendent, ruler, judge, officer, farmer, citizen, etc. I mention as sinful stations in life, robbery, usury, public women. And as they are at present, the pope, cardinals, bishops, priests, monks, and nuns who neither preach nor listen to preaching. For these callings are surely against God where they only say mass and sing and are not busy with God's word so that an ordinary woman may much sooner enter heaven than one of these. So there he is, provocative. But you see his point, if God wants us to live our lives loving our neighbors, we're better off doing that out there in the world than cloistered up, offering mass every day in a monastery. And Martin Luther walked his talk about this. As Europe was being turned upside down by his ideas, there were 12 nuns from a convent who got in touch with Martin Luther asking him if he would help them escape. And he found a merchant who delivered herring to the convent. And on the 4th of April, 1523, the nuns escaped by hiding among the empty fish barrels with this merchant. And Luther got them out. And of course, then they needed looking after out in the world. So he managed to arrange husbands for all these women, except one. There was one, the ringleader, Katerina von Barra, who he couldn't find anyone willing to marry. So Martin Luther married her. And in the end, they were a decent match. Katie managed the farm and brewed beer and ran a hospital and entertained guests for him and bore him six children. And he called her the morning star of Wittenberg because she got up at 4 a.m. every day. And he called her the boss of Zulstorf after the name of their farm. And beyond his own life, Luther's ideas reformed

European society around the word of God. That's key for us. It's not just, these aren't just Luther's ideas. This is what the Bible teaches us. It was just Luther who pointed it out. So in Psalm 136, verse 25, we read that it's God who gives food to every living thing. So Luther points out, how does God do that? It means that the simple farm girl who is milking the cow is one of the fingers of God. God is feeding you through her work. Or Chris, my Romanian migrant worker friend who fills sandwiches for pre-packed sandwiches in a factory and puts the toppings on frozen pizza in a factory. God is using him to feed people. Or Gary, who spends days at a time driving across Europe in trucks. However mundane the world might think that work is, God is loving other people through them. Or in Psalm 147, verse 13, we read that God strengthens the bars of your gates. It's a picture of the protection that God gives you in the society you live in. But how does God do that? How does God strengthen the bars of our gates?

[16:34] Well, he does it through security services, through the army, through the police, through politicians, through lawyers, through judges, through social workers. If you work in a job that contributes to the stability of society in Scotland, God is loving other people through you. If you think about cleaning your flat at home, whether you do it or you pay somebody else to do it, whether you've got a cleaner, you just think, what would happen if it never happened? What would happen if nobody ever cleaned your flat? What would happen? You would die. Eventually, you would catch a disease and you would die, right?

So we might not value the job of cleaning the loo at home, okay? But it's one of the ways that God is keeping you alive is through that work. So that unless your job is inherently sinful, we can say that all kinds of work are God's work and a work where God is using us to love his creation. And of course, if you're in a role where you manage other people in the workplace, how you treat them as a servant leader is one of the ways that you love them as your neighbor. God loving them through you.

And we need to rediscover that reformation today, don't we, in church? Here are three implications of that. One is that we need to break down the kind of working class versus professional job divide in churches. Where we are right now in the West End of Glasgow, we pedestalize jobs that are high paying and that are obviously changing the world in a big way. We pedestalize those jobs.

But a lot of that is basically just class snobbery. And the Bible says all of that should be gone. Jesus worked with his hands. God works through people who work with their hands.

And we should honor and respect and value practical jobs, blue collar jobs, every job, including people who work at home, looking after children instead of going out to work.

[18 : 39] Second implication, we need to break down the divide between sacred and secular jobs. So don't mishear me. In Scotland, we do urgently need more people to go into church work to be paid gospel workers. Because the most loving thing that you could ever do for somebody is share the gospel with them. Bring God's word to them. We do need that. But wherever God calls you today, he can use you mightily in his service. In Genesis, he uses Joseph to save the nations from famine by making him prime minister. So if you've got a job, you don't just glorify God in your secular job by the money that you earn to give away and the times when you share the gospel with people.

You don't just glorify God through that. Rather, God is using you in your work to glorify himself and love his people. It's a hugely empowering thing to grasp about your working life.

But it's also extremely challenging because it means God is just as interested in how you do your work on a Monday morning at 11 o'clock than what you're doing on a Sunday morning at 11 o'clock.

Whether you're scrubbing the floor at home or you're doing the accounts at work, the writer Abraham Kuiper put it like this. He said, there is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is sovereign over all, does not cry, mine.

So that brings us to our third implication. If your job is that significant to God, it leaves you asking, how do I do that job in a way that pleases him? 1 Corinthians 10, verse 31, so whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.

[20 : 33] Now, how we work that out in different areas of work is really exciting. If you work in a line of work or an industry where you know there are other people at St Silas who have a similar type of work to you, wouldn't it be exciting to arrange a breakfast one weekend where you get together as people who work in education or work in engineering or work in medicine to support each other and talk about some of the challenges you're facing and pray for each other in your secular vocations. It's exciting.

But at its most general, the basic answer to that question of how you work in a way that pleases God is this. Do your job well and be godly. So first of all, do it well. Tim Keller has a great illustration of this. He says, imagine you're an airline pilot and you become a Christian and you start thinking, well, but how do I do my airline pilot job in a way that really glorifies God?

Well, land the plane, okay? And land it in a way they can use it again. It's obvious, isn't it? To glorify God, land the plane and don't wreck the plane and God will be glorified if you do that for him. So do your job well. But also don't forget to be godly. God cares more about character than competence. He knows how incompetent we are. He wants us to grow in godliness. And in the last couple of months, I've talked to a couple of people who are in work situations that are really difficult.

And sometimes you just can't win in a workplace situation. And there's been a couple of situations where I've realized the person in that situation feels guilty before God that they're not doing the job perfectly well. And we need to be liberated from that. And remember, we're not letting God down if we're doing our best, but we're just not, our job is not going brilliantly well. That is not letting God down. But we are letting him down if we sin because of the pressure, if we become a workplace bully or a liar or a gossip because God wants our character more than our competence.

So we thought a bit about the glory of God and our service. We thought about the glory of God in salvation. And thirdly, we're just going to think about the glory of God as our satisfaction.

[23 : 03] The great news for us is that God wanting to work through us and have us live for his glory actually is the best thing that we could do to please ourselves. There was one of the fruits of the Reformation was the Westminster Catechism, which is like a question and answer thing about the Christian faith that was produced to help people get to grips with the Christian faith.

And the first question in the Westminster Catechism is this, what is the chief end of man? And the answer is the chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy him forever. And it was writers like Jonathan Edwards, the 18th century preacher, but more recently C.S. Lewis and John Piper as well, who talked about how actually those things are more connected than you might realize because the more that we enjoy God, the more we give glory to him. If people look at you as a Christian and you are just as frustrated with your life and just as discontent and just as much on the treadmill of trying to get pleasure as everybody else, it doesn't really say much for the God you worship. But if people look at you as a Christian and there's something different about you, whereas everyone else is just always chasing after the next thing and more materialistic or more miserable and discontent, and they see in you that you are satisfied. Even though you don't have much, but you have God, it speaks to everybody about the wonder of what God is like. So that God is most glorified in us when we're most satisfied in him. The chief end of man is to glorify God by enjoying him forever.

So it's important that we remember that. C.S. Lewis quotes on there, the Scotch Catechism says that a man's chief end is to glorify God and enjoy him forever.

But we shall then know that these are the same thing. Fully to enjoy is to glorify. In commanding us to glorify him, God is inviting us to enjoy him. And thinking about our lives like that can liberate us from the other wrong way to go with our thinking about work. We shouldn't make too little of our secular work, and we should value it as a way of serving God. But in our culture today, lots of people make too much of their working life. Work has become a place for self-fulfillment.

And even in jobs where you could do the job really directly thinking, I'm doing this job to love my neighbor, like engineering or medicine, often people are doing them for self-fulfillment.

[25 : 40] And we encourage our children to go after those jobs for what they can get out of it themselves. My wife Kathy is a GP, and she talks about during her training in London, one of the guys training her winning an award, and him saying to the class, the thing is, it's great, isn't it, because it's all about the glory. That's what we're all in it for, isn't it? We're all in it for the glory.

And of course, he meant his own glory. Now, ultimately, if you chase after work like that, it's deeply selfish, but also it won't fulfill us. And instead, we're given an alternative here, a liberating alternative, to be distracted by the glory of God. Fix your eyes on who God is, and what he has done, so that you have a renewed and exciting purpose for your work, and a passion for the ways that you can glorify God through it. You do your work to feel God's pleasure as he sees you working for him. Like Bach, the great composer, whose whole life was shaped by Luther's theology. And so you can see on the screen, we've got a picture there, just on the right there, of how Bach used to sign off his pieces of music, solely deo gloria, glory to God alone.

One of his greatest works was Jesus' Joy of Man's Desiring. He was distracted by the joy of knowing Christ, so that his whole passion in his work was to use the gifts God had given him to glorify his heavenly Father. Let's pray together.

Father God, we praise you for the depths of your wisdom and knowledge in salvation. We marvel at your unsearchable judgments, your eternal plan to reconcile the world to yourself, through the wicked work of men and demons who killed the Messiah.

We marvel that you would use that work to save us. And your power and love, raising Christ from the dead, sending your spirit to open our blinded eyes, bringing us to him that we might enjoy full atonement.

[27 : 47] And so, Father God, we pray that you would help us now, in view of your mercy, to live a life dependent on your grace, where whatever we do, we do it all for your glory.

We ask in Jesus' name. Amen.