

God's Passion for His Own Glory

TEXT: Ex 9:13-16

PHBF 2.05.12

Scr. Reading: 9:13-16

GETTING OUT: Exodus, part 1

[SOS verses: Ex 15:1-13]

"God is love," amen? It's one of the greatest truths of the Bible, and it's certainly the most widely accepted. And that's good. For people to think God is good and loving is certainly better than for them to believe He is cranky and mean. At least they have grasped something wonderful and true about God.

Unfortunately, however, most people—Christians included—misunderstand what that fact about God means. They draw incorrect inferences from their knowledge that "God is love," and as a result, they misunderstand virtually everything else about Him. Let me explain...

Since the Fall, people have been universally self centered; we're all this way—some more than others but the difference is only a matter of degree. Pride and all the sins of the self-life—selfishness, self-pity, self-will, self-assertion, self-confidence, self-focus, self-promotion—are our common ailment. We are all the center of our own universe—or at least we want to be.

Making matters worse, we live in an age where God is inherently ignored and even belittled. Modernism taught us that we don't need Him. Post-modernism taught us we can't even be sure He is out there if we did need Him. Like smog, this mindset envelops the world in which we live. And even though Christians have access to the clean, crisp air of heaven through the Spirit and the word, the most we get is a breath here and a slight breeze there. Usually, the air we breathe denies God and exalts self.

Even among Christians, this tendency toward self-centeredness distorts how we interpret God's love. The Bible tells us "God loved the world" and "God is love." Without even batting an eye, we read these verses and our self-centered heart assumes these are ultimate statements describing the highest value in God's great heart. "God loves the world, God loves me, God is love; therefore, God's highest priority, His greatest joy, His driving passion must be me" (or, more humbly, "people").

Of course, there is nothing wrong with those biblical statements; they are unspeakably precious. Our problem is the self-centered lens through which we interpret them. We take "God is love" to mean "God loves more than He does anything else, and He loves people more than He loves anything else." And with that assumption, a whole host of texts in the Bible becomes unintelligible to us. Additionally, God's whole redemptive plan becomes distorted and imbalanced in our understanding.

- If God loves the world and wants our lives to be perfect, why would He even put that one tree in the Garden to begin with?
- After Adam and Eve fell into sin, why not send Jesus right away and fix the problem? Why wait thousands of years? And once Jesus did come, die for sin, and rise again, why put the world through another 2,000 years before bringing His kingdom?
- If God is love, why would He command Pharaoh to let the people go, harden Pharaoh's heart so he wouldn't, call that refusal "sin," and then punish him for it ...if God is love?

Let me answer those questions with some questions of my own, questions that force us to reflect a bit on our self-centered interpretation of "God is love":

- "God is love," certainly. But what if we were to ask what exactly He loves the most? Is it possible that He loves something else more than He loves people?
- Does God have to keep the Ten Commandments, specifically Commandment One: "You shall have no other gods before me"? Does God have to keep the Greatest Commandment—"Love God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength"? If not, wouldn't that mean God is an idolater?
- What if God's love is part of a larger set of qualities that arise from His holy heart, all of which are glorious and all of which are just as real as His love? What if, in addition to "God is love," God is also "a righteous judge" (Ps 7:11), "the King of all the earth" (Ps 47:7), "great" (Ps 70:4), "holy" (Ps 99:9), "the one you must fear" (Eccl 5:7), "an everlasting rock" (Is 26:4), "spirit" (Jn 4:24), "a consuming fire" (Hb 12:29), "light" (1 Jn 1:5)? How should these "God is ____" statements inform our understanding of God's love?

- What if redemption is only one part of His larger plan? What if God is up to something bigger than just loving on His fallen world? What if the central storyline of the Bible is more than just a love story?

Our text this morning will emphatically demonstrate that the Bible is a “glory story” more than a love story. It will demonstrate that God is not an idolater—He Himself “loves God with all His heart, soul, mind, and strength.” We will see that what God loves the most is the spread of His own fame and the full display of His own glory.

What does it mean to “glorify God” or do something to the “glory of God”? The term “the glory of God” is used 2 ways in the Bible. It is

- 1) His brilliant radiance (majesty) – the cloud filled the temple, “priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud, for the glory of the LORD filled the house of God” 2 Chr 5:14) and
- 2) His matchless worth (supremacy).

To glorify God refers to that latter sense—to display His matchless worth or to spread His excellent reputation. We cannot glorify Him in the other sense—no way to add to the beauty and resplendent light that surround Him. Rather, to glorify God is to live in such a way that positive attention accrues to God. This is abundantly clear from Exodus 9:16: “For this purpose I have raised you up, to show you my power, so that my name may be proclaimed in all the earth.”

WHAT IS GOD’S MOTIVATION FOR THE PLAGUES?

[Reread 9:13-17.]

Notice the three purpose statements. The first is in verse 14 signaled with the conjunction “SO THAT” (“so” NIV): “I will send all my plagues on you... so that you may know there is none like me in all the earth.” The second is in verse 16: “For this purpose I have raised you up, to show you my power.” And the third is also in verse 16: “so that my name may be proclaimed in all the earth.”

What is God’s motivation for the plagues? Why did He harden Pharaoh’s heart and then use plagues and the Red Sea miracle to liberate Israel? After all, He could have softened Pharaoh’s and got the people released with no confrontation at all. Or He could have used a wall of darkness

and had the Israelites slip away during the prolonged night. He could have used virtually anything. So why this means specifically?

According to this passage, God’s primary motivation for the plagues is to draw the attention of everyone in the story and everyone who hears this story to Himself. Israel’s redemption and Egypt’s judgment are means to an end, namely, the end where angels and other people and all creation “know there is none like Him in all the earth” (v 14), “are shown His power” (v 16a), and “hear His name proclaimed in all the earth” (v 16b).

All through the plague narrative, we hear God saying: “then they shall know that I am the LORD.”

Exodus 7:5 *The Egyptians shall know that I am the LORD, when I stretch out my hand against Egypt...*

Exodus 7:17 *By this you shall know that I am the LORD: ...I will strike the water that is in the Nile, and it shall turn into blood.*

Exodus 8:22 *I will set apart the land ...where my people dwell, so that no swarms of flies shall be there, that you may know that I am the LORD*

Exodus 14:4 *I will harden Pharaoh's heart, and I will get glory over Pharaoh and all his host, and the Egyptians shall know that I am the LORD.*

Exodus 14:18 *And the Egyptians shall know that I am the LORD, when I have gotten glory over Pharaoh, his chariots, and his horsemen.*

Friends, He could not be more explicit about His intentions and His driving motivations. God’s purpose for this whole deliverance plan is radically God-centered. Even the mysterious hardening of Pharaoh’s heart has this God-centered purpose. Notice especially 10:1-2:

Exodus 10:1-2 *Then the LORD said to Moses, "Go in to Pharaoh, for I have hardened his heart and the heart of his servants, that I may show these signs of mine among them, ² and that you may tell in the hearing of your son and of your grandson how I have dealt harshly with the Egyptians and what signs I have done among them, that you may know that I am the LORD."*

We will never understand why God hardened Pharaoh’s heart as long as we mistakenly believe that His strongest motivation and His highest goal is to love on people. But if we come to understand that God’s strongest motivation and His highest goal is to spread His own fame, then and only then will all the pieces fall into place.

God wants to get people talking—not about the weather, not about their newest aches and pains, not about their jobs or their political views or their newest gadgets. He wants to get His people talking for generations about Himself! And when He took counsel with Himself in eternity past about the best way to do that, He selected a 400-year sojourn in Egypt, cruel bondage, oppression and infanticide, a divinely instigated stubbornness in the king, and a series of 10 impossible-to-ignore plagues.

Did it work?

Exodus 15:14-15 *The peoples have heard; they tremble; pangs have seized the inhabitants of Philistia.¹⁵ Now are the chiefs of Edom dismayed; trembling seizes the leaders of Moab; all the inhabitants of Canaan have melted away.*

Joshua 2:10 *For we have heard how the LORD dried up the water of the Red Sea before you when you came out of Egypt, and what you did to the two kings of the Amorites who were beyond the Jordan, to Sihon and Og, whom you devoted to destruction.*

1 Samuel 4:7-8 *the Philistines were afraid, for they said, "A god has come into the camp." And they said, "Woe to us! For nothing like this has happened before."⁸ Woe to us! Who can deliver us from the power of these mighty gods? These are the gods who struck the Egyptians with every sort of plague in the wilderness...*

Nehemiah 9:9-10 ⁹ *And you saw the affliction of our fathers in Egypt and heard their cry at the Red Sea,¹⁰ and performed signs and wonders against Pharaoh and all his servants and all the people of his land, for you knew that they acted arrogantly against our fathers. And you made a name for yourself, as it is to this day.*

(cf. also Is 63:11-14)

IS HE ALWAYS THIS WAY?

We are quite comfortable talking about our duty to glorify God. But we are much less inclined to talk about God's design/determination to glorify God. We put God at the center of our obligations, but we're reluctant to put Him at the center of His own affections. We tend to think of God as us-centered. His main goal, we might say, is to redeem us or to fix the sin problem or to save sinners. But the plague narrative shows that God is passionate for His own glory. Is that how the Bible describes His ultimate goal all the time?

We were created for God's glory:

Isaiah 43:6-7 *Bring my sons from afar and my daughters from the ends of the earth,... whom I created for my glory.*

God called Israel for His glory

Isaiah 49:3 *"You are my servant, Israel, in whom I will be glorified."*

God spared Israel in the wilderness for the glory of His name

Ezekiel 20:13-14 ¹³ *The house of Israel rebelled against me in the wilderness. They did not walk in my statutes but rejected my rules... "Then I said I would pour out my wrath upon them in the wilderness, to make a full end of them."¹⁴ But I acted for the sake of my name, that it should not be profaned in the sight of the nations, in whose sight I had brought them out."*

God gave Israel victory in Canaan for the glory of His name

2 Samuel 7:23 *And who is like your people Israel, the one nation on earth whom God went to redeem to be his people, making himself a name and doing for them great and awesome things by driving out before your people, whom you redeemed for yourself from Egypt...?*

Jesus sought the glory of His Father in all He did:

John 7:18 *The one who speaks on his own authority seeks his own glory, but [I] seek the glory of him who sent [me]...*

Jesus said that He answers prayer so that God would be glorified:

John 14:13 *Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son.*

Jesus is coming again for the glory of God:

2 Thessalonians 1:9-10 ⁹ *[Sinners] will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might,¹⁰ when he comes on that day to be glorified in his saints, and to be marveled at among all who have believed...*

Jesus' ultimate aim for us is that we see and enjoy His glory:

John 17:24 *Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory that you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world.*

We are commanded to do everything for God's glory:

1 Corinthians 10:31 *So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.*

All are under judgment for dishonoring God's glory:

Romans 1:21 *For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened.*

God chooses and saves His people for His glory.

Ephesians 1:5-6 *he predestined us¹ for adoption through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, ⁶ to the praise of his glorious grace...*

God forgives our sins for His own sake:

Isaiah 43:25 *"I, I am he who blots out your transgressions for my own sake, and I will not remember your sins."*

Even in wrath God's aim is to make known the wealth of His glory:

Romans 9:22-23 ²² *What if God, desiring to show his wrath and to make known his power, has endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, ²³ in order to make known the riches of his glory for vessels of mercy, which he has prepared beforehand for glory -*

In the New Jerusalem the glory of God replaces the sun:

Revelation 21:23 *And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and its lamp is the Lamb.*

God's plan is to fill the earth with the knowledge of His glory:

Habakkuk 2:14 *For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD as the waters cover the sea.*

Everything that happens will redound to God's glory:

Romans 11:36 ³⁶ *For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen.*

God could not say it more emphatically:

Isaiah 48:9-11 ⁹ *"For my name's sake I defer my anger, for the sake of my praise I restrain it for you, that I may not cut you off. ¹⁰ Behold, I have refined you, but not as silver; I have tried you in the furnace of affliction. ¹¹ For my own sake, for my own sake, I do it, for how should my name be profaned? My glory I will not give to another.*

HOW IS THIS GOOD?!

1. It demonstrates that God really is love!

Our hearts long to experience glory. We were made for it. Our greatest happiness is found, not when someone is making much of us, but when we are caught up in an experience of overwhelming glory. It can be glory of any kind: the mountains, a symphony, an amazing feat of physical skill or strength... Our longing for glory is an echo of our longing for God! He is glorious, which simply is another way of saying, He is joy, satisfaction, and delight! How many of us resonate with Moses' request:

Exodus 33:18 *Moses said, "Please show me your glory."*

Or David's:

Psalms 27:4 *One thing have I asked of the LORD, that will I seek after: that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the LORD and to inquire in his temple.*

Psalms 63:1-2 *O God, you are my God; earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you; my flesh faints for you, as in a dry and weary land where there is no water. ² So I have looked upon you in the sanctuary, beholding your power and glory.*

So to hear that God is passionately committed to spreading His glory is good news! It means He is committed to the very thing that will satisfy my soul, which is the most clear demonstration of His love! When God gives us Himself, He gives us the very thing that will bring us greatest joy, healing, and wholeness. His commitment to exalt His glory in my life is an expression of His love for me!

John 11:4-6 *But when Jesus heard it he said, "This illness does not lead to death. It is for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it." ⁵ Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. ⁶ So, when he heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was.*

2. It provides the strongest possible motivation for love, sacrifice, and Christian devotion.

This strengthens our resolve to love others – for God's glory, not out of guilt or even compassion. Our love for people is undergirded by our passion for God—even when they are annoying, unlovely, ungrateful. Jesus was motivated by people's needs, but that was always secondary. His primary motive was to glorify God and honor His name.

3. It saves us.

2 Corinthians 4:4-6 ⁴ *In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. ⁵ For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. ⁶ For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.*

Salvation is the opening of blind eyes to the glory of God and the transformation of our hearts to make us fall in love with what we see.

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