

First Presbyterian Church of Hanford

“GLORIFIERS”

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Text: PHILIPPIANS 2:5-11 NRSVUE

Today we stand before one of the most profound and exalted passages in all of Scripture—the great Christ hymn of Philippians 2. Here, Paul urges us: "Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus." What mind is that? It is the mind of humble, self-emptying love. At the heart of this hymn is the Greek word *kenosis*—the "emptying" or "pouring out" of the Son of God.

This is the mystery of the Incarnation: the eternal Son, who was in the very form of God, did not cling to His divine privileges. He poured Himself out, taking the form of a servant, becoming fully human—entering into this simulation we call life on earth, with all its fragility, suffering, and limitation. God became man. The Creator stepped into the creation He had made.

And notice the stunning conclusion: when every knee bows and every tongue confesses that Jesus Christ is Lord, it is "to the glory of God the Father." Honoring Jesus as God does not diminish the Father; it glorifies Him. As the great theologian Karl Barth so memorably put it, "There is no God behind Jesus." Jesus is the self-revelation of God. There is no other God lurking in the shadows to be discovered. When we honor Christ, we give glory to the Father. This is the heartbeat of our faith.

The first question of the Westminster Shorter Catechism asks: "What is the chief end of man?" The answer is clear and beautiful: "Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy Him forever." But what do these words really mean? What is glory? What does it mean to

glorify God? How do we do it? And why does it matter so deeply?

WHAT IS GLORY?

Glory, in Scripture, is light—radiant, overwhelming, divine light. Think of Moses coming down from Sinai with his face shining so brightly that people could not look at him. Or imagine staring at the sun and then seeing the afterimage linger in your vision. God's glory is like that: it remains, it impresses itself upon everything it touches.

In the Hebrew Old Testament, the word for glory is *kabod*, which literally means "weight" or "heaviness." God's glory is substantial; it has weight. When the glory of the Lord filled the temple, the priests could not stand to minister because of the weight of that presence (1 Kings 8:10-11). Glory is not a thin, fleeting thing; it is the manifest presence of the infinite God.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO GLORIFY?

To glorify is to shine light upon something, to direct attention to it. Think of a searchlight piercing the night sky or a flashlight illuminating a path. The Hebrew concept of *Shekinah*—the dwelling glory of God—carries the sense of awe: "God is here!" It evokes shock and awe at His nearness.

But here is the key: we do not produce glory. Glory originates from God alone. We reflect it. In the art of the medieval and Renaissance periods, halos around saints did not mean they had innate holiness; they depicted the glory of God reflected upon them. Like a mirror, we catch and return the light that comes from the Source.

HOW DO WE GLORIFY GOD?

We are either glory-givers or glory-takers. Every human heart hungers for glory. From the very beginning, the serpent tempted Eve with the promise of stolen glory: "You will be like God" (Genesis 3:5). That was blasphemy, and it is the same temptation we face today. Men and women chase worldly status, fame, power, and approval—harvesting personal glory to impress others. But all such glory is stolen, and stolen glory can never satisfy the soul.

The Christian gospel declares: All glory belongs to Christ alone. Not to the world, not to the self, and not even to the Church as an institution. This was a distinguishing mark of the Protestant Reformation—we refused to seek glory for the Church itself, as some traditions have done.

We do not manufacture glory to give to God. Martin Luther, commenting on the first three petitions of the Lord's Prayer ("Hallowed be Thy name, Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done"), said something profound: You do not command a stone lying in the sun to become warm; it becomes warm by the nature of things. So it is with us. When we empty ourselves back to God—when we humble ourselves, pray "Thy will be done," and live in obedience—we simply reflect His glory naturally.

This happens in everyday acts of faithfulness: feeding the poor, visiting the sick and imprisoned, loving our neighbor. We do not do these things to earn glory; we do them because Christ has poured out His glory into us, and it overflows. All credit goes to Him.

WHY IT MATTERS

Why does this matter so urgently today? In our culture, we are witnessing a dangerous shift: the attempt to glorify collective humanity in place of God. Some theologians, like Hans Küng in his influential book *On Being a Christian*, have argued that God's ultimate concern is humanity and human flourishing, so the Church's primary focus should be humankind. In this view, God is

folded into human needs, and theology can easily slide into politics.

This reverses the order. Yes, God is glorified when we care for the poor and promote justice—but that is the cart, not the horse. The horse is God's glory; human flourishing follows.

Last century, at a major World Council of Churches conference, a large banner hung behind the rostrum: "God is other people!" We can understand the sentiment figuratively—as a reminder to love our neighbor—but it went too far, collapsing God into humanity. The keynote speaker, before speaking, took a marker and added a comma: "God is other, people!" That small mark was a supreme correction.

All true theology begins with the acknowledgment of a transcendent Lord who needs nothing from us. His glory would not be diminished one whit if He had never created the cosmos, the earth, or us. The center of theology—and of reality itself—is God's glory.

So we return to the Westminster Catechism: The chief end of man is to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever. This is our purpose, our joy, our fulfillment.

Brothers and sisters, let us have the mind of Christ. Let us empty ourselves of self-glory, reflect His light, and live lives that declare: All glory to God the Father, through Jesus Christ the Lord. Amen. †