

HOW TO DO GOOD SO GOD GETS THE GLORY

Part II

August 3, 1980 (Morning)
Bethlehem Baptist Church
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In the year AD 42 Herod, king in Judea, killed the apostle James with a sword. When he saw it pleased the Jews, he threw Peter, another apostle, in prison. The night before Herod was about to dispose of him an angel of the Lord woke Peter and led him out of the prison unharmed. After going to the house of Mary, the mother of John Mark where the disciples were praying for him, Peter left town.

The next morning Herod was enraged that Peter was gone and had the guards put to death. Then he left Judea and went down to the coastal town of Ceasarea where a very strange and terrible and instructive thing happened. Herod had a grudge against the people of Tyre and Sidon - we don't know why. But at the same time he had them over a barrel because they were dependent on him for food. So holding the purse strings like he did, Herod enjoyed making himself scarce and watching the people be pinched. It gave him a great sense of power to have others so dependent on him.

So the people of Tyre and Sidon tried to get an audience with King Herod by going through his personal chamberlain named Blastus. This attempt succeeded and a day was appointed for King Herod to make an appearance and an oration. The rest of the story is very brief, It is recorded in Acts 12:21-23: "On an appointed day Herod put on his royal robes, took his seat upon the throne and made an oration to them. And the people shouted: The voice of God and not of man! Immediately an angel of the Lord struck him because he did not give God the glory and he was eaten by worms and died."

Not everyone who tries to deceive God like Ananias and Sapphira in Acts 5 drops dead on the spot. Not everyone who fails to give God glory like Herod is eaten by worms. But God has brought such judgments upon some in this life to warn us all that in the age to come there is a judgment which will be infinitely more severe upon those who have not lived for God's glory.

Last Sunday we saw from Isaiah 43:7 that God's great goal in creating and governing the world was to be glorified. That is, He created us for His glory. Not to increase the beauty of His perfections or fill up some emptiness in God, but rather to display His glory in the way we live and to win praise for Himself. Isaiah 48:9-11 drove the shaft of God's glory deep into our minds:

"For my own sake I defer my anger, for the sake of my praise I restrain it for you that I may not cut you off. Behold I have refined you, but not like silver; I have tried you in the furnace of affliction. 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." To maintain the honor of His name and display His glory -- these are the driving motives in all that God does in history in the church and in individual lives.

At the end of last week's message two crucial questions remained: 1) How

do we bring our lives into alignment with this goal of God to glorify Himself? -- a tremendously crucial question in view of what God did to Herod when he failed to give God glory but took it for himself. 2) The second question was: Why is it loving and not selfish for God to seek His own glory in all He does, especially since we are commanded not to seek our own glory among men? Since we don't want to treat the Lord's table in a hurried or pressured way, I have decided to answer only the first question today and the second one next Sunday.

The three small texts that were read earlier from Matthew (5:14-16), 1 Peter (4:10,11), and Romans (4:20) contain the answer to how we must live so as to be at one with God's purpose and not at cross purposes with Him.

Jesus said in Matthew 5:16, "Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven."

Three observations go a long way to answering our question. First, Jesus clearly commands that the goal of our lives should be so to behave that God gets the glory. Live so that men will see your life and give your Father in heaven glory, not you. So it should be very clear that glorifying God is not merely an act of worship on Sunday. It is a peculiar kind of living.

Second, in order for God to get glory from the way we live we must be engaged in good deeds. It is not so much by avoiding gross sins that God's people display His glory, but rather in the pursuit of good deeds, acts of generosity, works of kindness, ways of love. Since it is God's goal to be glorified in His people and since Jesus says this happens when His people do good deeds, we would expect the Bible to tell us that God's goal in redeeming a people is that they might do good deeds. And this is exactly what we find. Paul says in Titus 2:14 that Christ "gave Himself for us to redeem us from all iniquity and to purify for Himself a people of His own who are zealous for good deeds." Christ died that we might do good deeds and so bring glory to our Father in heaven.

God created us for His glory, says the prophet. We bring Him glory through our good deeds, says the Lord Jesus. So we are not surprised when we hear the apostle say, God created us for good deeds. Ephesians 2:10: "We are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good deeds, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them." Created for His glory, and created for good deeds, because it is by our good deeds that God gets glory.

One final observation from Matthew 5. It is possible to be a kind of do-gooder that brings no glory to God. There are philanthropists and benefactors and others who for one reason or another spend time and money to alleviate suffering, but who may not even believe in God let alone do it all for His glory. So when Jesus says, let your light shine that men may see your good deeds and glorify God, the light must include more than the mere action of the good deed. You are the light of the world! (5:14) Not just your bodily motions but your attitude and your motivation also. There is a spirit from which the good deeds must flow if they are to bring God glory and so be pleasing to Him. That is why I entitled the sermon for this morning, "How to do good so God gets the glory."

To answer that question we turn to 1 Peter 4:10,11. Probably no other New Testament book besides James reflects an acquaintance with the teachings of Jesus as clearly as 1 Peter. In 2:12 Peter gives a loose quotation of Matthew 5:16, "Maintain good conduct among the Gentiles so that in case they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation." But in chapter 4 verses 10 and 11 Peter shows more explicitly what it is about the good deeds of Christians which makes them a means to God's glory.

He says:

As each has received a gift, employ it for one another as good stewards of God's varied grace: whoever speaks (let him speak) as one who utters oracles of God; whoever renders service (let him render it) as one who renders it by the strength which God supplies, in order that in everything God might be glorified through Jesus Christ. To Him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

Here we have one of the clearest answers in the Bible to the question: How do we serve or do good so that God gets the glory. The answer is, in order for God to get the glory we have to do good as one does it who is depending on God's strength. Not mere good deeds but good deeds done in a spirit that comes from a joyful dependence on God's help -- this is what glorifies God.

Picture two people this afternoon pondering whether to come help clean the church tomorrow night. One is young and healthy and says, "O, I suppose I'll go. Be worth a few brownie points with the leaders. Maybe they'll have some snacks. Besides, I'm pretty good at that sort of thing, maybe I can give the rest a few pointers." So he comes and he grumbles about the tools, he criticizes the way things are planned, he talks on and on about his abilities and his experience and in general exudes a spirit of vanity. But he works. He may even get more done than some others. Some employers may want such a man if they judge him solely by his efficiency or productivity. But God looks on the heart and takes the whole man into account. And His assessment is: I have received no glory from this supposedly good deed of service; for it was not done in reliance on my power. There was not about it the spirit of joy and gratitude and humility that comes from being borne along on the wings of mercy.

But there is another person this afternoon who is planning his Monday night. He is older and has been quite ill lately -- a good deal of pain and stiffness in the knees. Time was when he worked hard in the church and loved every minute of it and never made a big to-do about inconvenience or sacrifice. "O," he thought to himself, "How I would love to help out on Monday night. I could encourage some of the downhearted maybe. Or maybe just keep the coffee poured." So he prayed. And lo and behold Monday morning there was no pain and no stiffness. So he came. With bells on. He did what he could with a rag and broom and he did it well. But above all he exuded a joy and a sense of gratitude for life and strength that cheered everyone and pointed them to God. He knew that what strength he had was a precious gift of God and his whole bearing and demeanor gave God the credit. That's what it means to let your light shine.

But now here's the hooker. Everyone of us owes every ounce of strength we have to God, just as much as that sick man did. We owe every fiber of intelligence to God and the slightest resolve to do good is a gift from Him. Apart from Him we are all cripples. And worse than cripples. We would fly into nothingness without His sustenance, and we would degenerate into devils without His grace. If the totality of our dependence on God would hit us full force, O, how differently we would live and do good. We would "serve as one who renders service by the strength which God supplies." We would not boast in our achievements, nor criticize the speck in our brother's eye, nor grumble about inconveniences, nor be presumptuous in any way, as if even existence itself could be taken for granted! No, a person who truly owns up to the fact that he exists by the Word of God, that all his strength and moral resolve is a gift of God, that person will have a spirit of joy and gratitude and lowliness. And in serving this way God gets the glory.

O, how I want to make sure that the image in your mind of how to glorify God is not wrong. For many it's like waking up in the morning, looking up to God and saying, "You are worthy to be glorified today, Lord, and I will do my best." Then they look over and on their Bible is a big block of lead with shoulder straps. And on the block is inscribed: "The duty to glorify God all day." They strap it on, muster their strength and resolve and head off to glorify God.

If that image or one like it is the way you feel about glorifying God please look and see that 1 Peter 4:11 shatters such an image. May I suggest a more Biblical image? There is a man and I know him well (he is the husband of my wife and father to my sons) who wakes up in the morning and looks up into heaven and says, "You are worthy to be glorified today, Lord, but there is in me - that is in my flesh, no good thing. I have no strength, no wisdom, no resolve to do good but what comes undeserved from you, O God. And I love you. It would be to my greatest fulfillment, my highest pleasure, my richest treasure,

my popcorn and my chocolate ice cream if at the end of this day I could believe that someone has come to cherish Your power and wisdom and love more intensely because of me. God, let it be."

And then he looks over and on his Bible there is this strange contraption of straps like a harness. And on the back of this harness there is a rope attached that runs up through the roof and into heaven. And he gets up, straps on the harness, gives a little jerk, leans into it, and God supports him all day. On the broad brown leather strap across the front you can see the lettering: "My harness is easy and my burden is light."

God gets glory not from our heroic exertion but from our reliance upon His strength - when we serve as one who serves with the strength which God supplies.

God's will himself to glorify
Is not a weight
to make us sigh
For it is wings
to make us fly.

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