

Called to Glory

by Daniel Smith

This sermon emphasizes the importance of developing righteous character to glorify God. It delves into the source of God's glory being His character, the role of the Holy Spirit in transforming believers, and the call for individuals to cooperate with the Spirit in cultivating virtues like love, patience, and meekness in all circumstances. The sermon challenges listeners to prioritize spiritual growth and exemplify the divine nature of Christ in their daily lives.

Scripture: Exodus 24:16, Exodus 34:6, 2 Chronicles 7:1, Isaiah 60:19, 2 Peter 1:2, Romans 8:3, Ephesians 5:25, 2 Peter 1:4, Ephesians 3:20

Topics: "Righteous Character", "Spiritual Growth"

Description

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Transcript

Good morning. I greet you in the name of Jesus, our risen Lord, our Savior. I will make confession as the Ethiopian eunuch did.

I believe that Jesus is the Son of God. Amen. We live in an Ichabod world, don't we? Ichabod means no glory.

And, oh, I don't mean that the world is just void of glory altogether, but my, oh, my. I mean, women are claiming they have a personal right to kill a child because they don't want the child. And parents and teachers together are teaching children that they can choose what gender they want to be.

And there's lying, and there's cheating, and there's stealing, and there's murder. And, oh, my, oh, my. And, you know, it's not all just the big things, too.

I got an email at my business from an advertiser who wanted me to advertise with him. And I don't remember exactly the words, but it was something very close to the effect of, Daniel, why shouldn't you believe that 2023 is all about me? Well, if I adopted that frame of mind, I'm confident that I would contribute nothing to making this world any more glorious. Exodus chapter 24.

Israel's at Mount Sinai. And the Scripture says, beginning with verse 16, In the glory of the Lord abode upon Mount Sinai, and the cloud covered it six days. In the seventh day he called unto Moses out of the midst of the cloud.

And the sight of the glory of the Lord was like devouring fire on the top of the mount in the eyes of the children of Israel. What would it be like to behold the glory of God? What would it be like? It seems, perhaps, that the cloud covered the mount because the people couldn't handle the glory of God. And yet, still, when God called out to Moses, His glory appeared to them as a devouring fire.

The glory of God. What would it be like to behold the glory of God? The writer of this account, Moses, we suppose, and I expect, had to use terms that people are familiar with. That's the best he could do.

So he said it was like a fire, like a consuming fire. But what was it really like? I wonder. At the completion of the tabernacle, Exodus chapter 40 verse 34 and following, Then a cloud covered the tent of the congregation.

So Solomon has just prayed a dedication over the temple. And a cloud covered the, excuse me, this is the tabernacle, forgive me, this is not the temple. The cloud covered the tent of the congregation and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle and Moses was not able to enter the tent of the congregation because the cloud abode thereon and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle.

And then we can go to the temple. So that Solomon, it says in 2nd Chronicles 7 verses 1 and 2, When Solomon had made end of praying, the fire came down from heaven and consumed the burnt offering and the sacrifices, and the glory of the Lord filled the house and the priests could not enter into the house of the Lord because the glory of the Lord had filled the Lord's house. The glory of the Lord had filled the Lord's house.

Oh, what's that like? We who live in a pretty inglorious world right now, what is the glory of God like? It's a glory, the scripture says, which can and will fill the world, but as truly as I live, all the earth shall be filled with the glory of God. It's recorded in Numbers. Glory, the light of which can replace the sun.

As Isaiah said, he prophesied, the sun shall be no more thy light by day, neither the brightness shall the moon, neither for brightness shall the moon give light unto thee, but the Lord shall be unto thee an everlasting light and thy God, thy glory. And then John confirmed this, didn't he, in the revelation given to him, recorded in what we call the book of Revelation. And the city, this new Jerusalem that came down out of heaven, had no need of the sun, neither of the moon to shine in it, for the glory of the Lord did lighten it.

And the lamb is the light thereof. And so our God is glorious. Our God is glorious.

Amen. But what makes him glorious? What's the source of his glory? And I think maybe a lot of us know this already, but to answer the question, I'm going to take us to a passage that I know this congregation's been to more than once in the recent past. Exodus chapter 34.

The account begins in chapter 33 when Moses says to God, Lord, show me thy glory. Moses was musing much as we're musing this morning saying, oh, what is the glory of God like? Show me thy glory, said Moses. And how did God respond? He says, well, Moses, you take two tablets and you come up on the mount and be ready in the morning.

I'm picking up in chapter 34 verse 2 of Exodus. And be ready in the morning and come up in the morning unto Mount Sinai and present thyself there to me in the top of the mount. And no man shall come up with thee, neither let any man be seen throughout all the mountain, neither let the flocks nor herds feed before that mount.

And he hewed two tables out of stone like unto the first. And Moses rose up early in the morning and went up unto the Mount Sinai as the Lord had commanded him and took in his hand the two tables of stone. And the Lord descended in the cloud and stood with him there and proclaimed the name of the Lord.

And the Lord passed by before him and proclaimed, the Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgressions and sin, and that by no means will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children and upon the children's children unto the third and to the fourth generation. And Moses made haste and bowed his head toward the earth and worshipped. Moses wanted to see the glory of God.

God passed by him and proclaimed His name. And so I will offer to you that I believe we can learn from this that the glory of God comes from who He is because when the Scripture says He declared His name, Scripture is saying He declared who He is to Moses. God's glory, the source of God's glory is His character.

I'm going to say character. I'm going to use that term. The source of God's glory is His character, His holiness, His righteousness, His mercy and grace and long-suffering and abundant goodness and truth is the source of God's glory.

Now, does that encompass all of it? I mean, can we understand all of God's glory and understand His character? I don't mean to say that there's nothing more to God's glory than His character. We know just from the accounts we've considered already that there is a manifestation of God's glory which is to us a physical manifestation which is beyond what our fleshly bodies are able to handle. So yes, there is more to the glory of God than His character alone, but it's rooted in His character.

It derives from His character. The source of God's glory is who God is as a person. When Isaiah had a vision of the Lord, it's recorded in chapter 6, and in that vision Isaiah records that the seraphims cried out one to another, holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts.

The whole earth is full of His glory, glory which emanates from His holiness. Holy, holy, holy is the Lord. The earth is full of His glory, glory which is emanating from that holiness.

When holy is repeated three times as it is here, the idea is perfect holiness, absolutely holy. And so the seraphims are crying out, God is perfect in His holiness. His character is pure and perfect in purity and holiness.

And in that absolute holiness we encounter unfathomable glory. Well here's a little thought that I will throw in. If the source of God's glory is His character, I'm using the word character.

If the source of God's glory is His character, and scripture tells us that Jesus is the brightness of the glory of God, and scripture tells us that, Hebrews chapter 1 verse 3, what does that tell us about the character of Jesus Christ? If Jesus is the brightness of the glory of God. So we've been considering God's glory. The immensity of it, the intensity of it, the source of it.

Let's continue a little further and consider this. We are called to God's glory. Do you realize that? We are called to God's glory.

You and I, each of His children, are called to glory. 1 Thessalonians chapter 2 verses 11 and 12. Paul is writing, he writes, as you know, how we exhorted and comforted and charged every one of you as a father doth his children, that ye would walk worthy of God who hath called you unto His kingdom and glory.

Who hath called you unto His kingdom and glory. But, in case you believe that we're called to behold God's glory, and not so much partake of God's glory, then consider 2 Corinthians chapter 3. Behold, we all with open face beholding, so we do behold as in a glass, God's glory, excuse me, the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image. From glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.

We're changed into the same image. As we behold as in a glass, the glory of the Lord. Why as in a glass? Well, we can't handle the glory of the Lord.

In any other way, while we are yet in the flesh, but we're told as we behold God's glory, muted, we might say. We're told that we will be changed into the same image. From glory to glory.

We're called to glory. We are called to become glorious. Do you feel very glorious? We're called to be glorious.

2 Peter chapter 1 verses 2 and 3. Grace and peace be multiplied unto you through the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord, according as His divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him that hath called us to glory and virtue. We might say, glory which shines from our virtue, because virtue is a matter of character, and the source of our glory is to be our character, just as the source of God's glory is His character. So we are called to glory and virtue, and I believe we can believe that it is our virtue that will be the source of our glory, and we're called to it.

So we're called to virtue. We're called to holy character. That has to do with who we are as a person, who I am as a person, who you are as a person, doesn't it? It has to do with how we think, it has to do with what kind of attitudes we have, and it has to do with how we live out our thoughts, how our attitudes affect our actions, our interactions with people.

It has all to do with that, doesn't it? So, how do we develop glorious character? How do we become glorious? Well, I think you know it. If not, you've guessed it. God has a plan, and He's been working it out for a long time.

Somewhere in the vicinity of 3,500 years ago, God gave to Moses what we know as the Law. The Law was God's pronouncement to His people of what is right, of righteousness. So that Moses said, Deuteronomy 6, 25, God has a plan.

And He started out by giving the Law, a righteous Law, and it was the righteousness of the people, of God's people. And the Law was ministered in glory. We already read that account, didn't we? Moses is on the Mount, and the people say, Moses, you handle this.

We can't bear the presence of God. It's too much for us. Moses, you handle this.

The Law was ministered in glory. Moses had to cover his face when he came down from the Mount, didn't he, for the glory that his very face had picked up from the glory of God. And the Law was the glory of

God's people.

The righteousness of God's people, it was the glory of God's people. In Deuteronomy 4, 5-8, Moses describes how the nations will glorify Israel because of the Law that Israel keeps. Now, he doesn't use the term glorify, but listen to what Moses says.

Now, listen to what Moses says. The nations have glorified, or Moses said, will glorify you as they behold and as they learn of your Law and recognize what a righteous Law it is. So the Law was given in glory.

It was the glory of Israel. The tablets that Moses brought down off the Mount were placed into the Ark of the Covenant. And the Ark of the Covenant, we might remember, was taken at one point.

It was taken out of Israel. And at that time, Eli was a priest, and when Eli learned that the Ark had been taken, and he learned also that his two sons had died in battle, Eli fell backwards and died. One of his sons, Phinehas, his wife, was expecting, and she bore a child, a man-child, here just about the same time.

And what did he name, what did she name him? She named him Ichabod. She named him No-Glory, and she said, why? She said, because glory of God has been removed from Israel. The Ark had been removed.

The Ark which contained the Law had been removed. The glory of God has been removed from Israel. It was Israel's glory.

The Law contained all the ingredients for holy character, but the Law didn't make the people of Israel holy. The Law didn't give the people of Israel holy character, glorious character. Why not? Isn't it because the Law was external to the people? And for the Law to change the character of the people, it had to be internalized.

And for the people to have an intrinsic glory, the Law had to be written on their hearts. Well, that's the next part of God's plan, isn't it? He shall make a new covenant, and His Law shall be written on His people's hearts. Enter Jesus.

Enter the Messiah. Jesus did two things, well, Jesus did a lot of things. But, as is pertinent to what I'm talking to you about right now, Jesus did two things.

One is, He showed us what glorious character really looks like. He gave us an example, so that we can be directed to that example when we're told in Philippians 2.5, let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, and then be given a summary of Christ's sacrificial life. So that we can be directed to that example when we are told in 1 Peter 2.21, for even here unto were ye called, talk about suffering, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example that ye should follow His steps.

And then we have described to us Christ's patient enduring of the suffering that He did endure through His trial and His crucifixion. So that we can be directed to the example of Christ when we're told in Ephesians 5.1 and 2, be ye therefore followers of God as dear children, and walk in love as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given Himself an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling Savior. Jesus, when He walked among us, showed us and taught us what glorious character really looks like.

That's one thing Jesus did in coming to us. The second thing Jesus did, as is pertinent to what we're talking about this morning, is He gave Himself as an atoning sacrifice, making it possible for us to receive

His Holy Spirit, by whom the law is written on our hearts, and we become sanctified. That's to say our character is made pure and holy, and we are made glorious.

How do we become glorious? By the work of the Spirit of Jesus, which is the Spirit of God in our lives. Here's what it says in the 8th chapter of Romans, verses 3 and 4, What the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin condemned sin in the flesh, that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. The law could not make any man holy, could it? Because the law was external to a person, and it needed to be internalized, and that's the work of the Spirit of God.

And so the righteousness of the law is fulfilled in us who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. 2 Corinthians chapter 3, verses 7 through 11 read this way, If the ministration of death, and that's referring to the law, calling it the ministration of death, why? Because by the law came condemnation, but the law wasn't able to bring salvation because it couldn't bring, it couldn't change the character of mankind. And so it says, If the ministration of death, written and engraven in stones, was glorious, as it was, so that the children of Israel could not steadfastly behold the face of Moses for the glory of his countenance, which glory was to be done away? How shall not the ministration of the Spirit be rather glorious? For if the ministration of condemnation be glory, much more doth the ministration of righteousness exceed in glory.

For that which was made glorious had no glory in this respect, by reason of the glory that excelleth. For if that which is done away was glorious, much more that which remaineth is glorious. And what remaineth is the Spirit of God given to us.

The ministration of the Spirit, so far exceeding the administration of the law which was glorious, as to cause us to see the law as having no glory at all. That's what this passage says. Consider Ephesians chapter 5, verses 25-27.

Husbands, love your wives. And yes, consider that. That's not my point here, but I don't pass over it quickly.

Husbands, love your wives. Even as Christ also loved the church and gave himself for it, that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, that he might present to himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that it should be holy and without blemish. Jesus wants to present to himself a glorious church, and when he says without spot or wrinkle, he's not talking about our clothing or our flesh, is he? But he's talking about our character.

He's talking about who we are as people. He's talking about our nature. And it says in the Scripture that our character, your character, my character, will be made holy and thereby glorious by the washing of the word of God.

Isn't that what this passage said? He gave himself for his church that he might sanctify and cleanse it by the washing of water by the word, that he might present to himself a glorious church. The washing of water by the word. Sanctified, cleansed, made pure and holy by the word of God, just as Jesus prayed, didn't he, in the 17th chapter of John, what we often call the high priestly prayer, and he said, Father, sanctify them by thy truth.

Thy word is truth. We're sanctified by the truth. How is that? Well, that is because what we do and how we live has everything to do with how we think, because God made us that way.

We're soulful people. We're controlled by our thoughts and all the emotions that build around our thoughts. We're controlled by what we believe.

That's part of our soul. And when the word of God changes what we believe, changes what we understand about life, changes how we think, changes it to make it right, then out of that come right living, holy lives, pure character, holy character. So we are sanctified by the word of God, and the Holy Spirit is the one who both opens our eyes to give us understanding of the word, he is our teacher, and enables us to keep the word, to practice the word.

He is our helper. We talked a little bit, at least in the group that met here in this room for Sunday school, we talked a little bit about the work of the Holy Spirit. And amen, it is the work of the Holy Spirit to teach us from the word of God, and to cause us to understand the word of God.

That is the work of the Spirit. And then, taking it further, He enables us, because He is our teacher and He is our helper. He's our... The New American Standard Bible, where King James says comforter, it says advocate.

The idea is one who is called alongside. Called alongside to stand beside you and be your help. And so He is our helper, and as we first learn the word of God from Him, then He enables us also.

He helps us to be able to put that word that we learn into practice. Jesus wants to present to Himself a glorious church not having spot or wrinkle. He wants us to be holy and thereby glorious in character, and He's given us His Spirit to get there.

You know, Jesus said, didn't He, it is better for you that I leave. Why? Because on His leaving then the Spirit can be given to us. And it's absolutely not just critical for us, but it is so much God's plan that we would receive His Holy Spirit.

But let's consider that idea further. Consider what's really happening as we travel this road to glorious character. See, what's really happening is we are becoming partakers of the divine nature.

Isn't that right? Isn't that what's really happening? We're becoming partakers of the divine nature. 2 Peter 1, Grace and peace be multiplied to you through the knowledge of God and Jesus our Lord, according as His divine power hath given to us all things that pertain unto life and godliness through the knowledge of Him that has called us to glory and virtue. Remember these verses? Whereby are given to us exceeding great and precious promises, that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world.

You see, God's plan is not to make us glorious because He likes glorious things. God's plan is not to make us glorious for our sakes. God's plan is to make us glorious.

Well, let me put it this way. God's plan is to reproduce in us His nature, His character, so that He is glorified as His glory is seen through us. Called to glory? Yes, we are.

We're actually called to God's glory because we are called to become partakers of God's own nature, the divine nature. When we receive the Holy Spirit, we are receiving the Spirit of God. And we haven't, with the Spirit of God, yet taken on all of God's nature, all of His character, but it is the work of the Spirit to bring us there.

God's plan is to glorify Himself by reproducing His nature in us. As you and I take on and exhibit the holy character of God, God is glorified. Your good character glorifies God.

Your good character pleases God. Your good character gives witness to the power of Jesus Christ and, by extension, the truth of the Gospel. And that's God's plan.

Christianity isn't just about whether you will go to heaven or you will go to hell. It's about God establishing His kingdom and reproducing His character in people, in His church, in His children. As parents, parents in the flesh, talking about us here, we have that work, don't we? We work to reproduce our character in our children.

And sometimes we recognize, oh, there's flaws in my character, and we don't want to reproduce those. Regrettably, often we do. God wants to reproduce His character in us, in His children.

And that's His plan. The calling out of Abraham, the giving of the law, the coming and death of the Messiah, the impartation of the Holy Spirit, all work to that end, that God would be glorified as He reproduces His character in people, in the church, in you and me. Ephesians 3, verses 20 and 21, Now unto Him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think according to the power that worketh in us, unto Him be glory in the church by Jesus Christ through all ages, world without end.

Amen. And amen. May God be glorified by our, His church's, exhibition of His holy nature throughout all ages.

Just earlier in chapter 3 of Ephesians, verses 8 through 11, Paul writes this. Paul says, Unto me who am less than the least of all saints is this grace given that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ and to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God who created all things by Jesus Christ to the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God according to the eternal purpose which He purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord. So it's been God's eternal purpose, it was His purpose from the beginning that He would create in us, recreate in us, His own character and that His wisdom, not wisdom only, but His power and His love and His glory would be seen in the church to the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God.

We are a chosen generation, we're a peculiar people, we're a holy nation that we should show forth the praise of Him who has called us out of darkness into His marvelous light. Read glory. That's what it's talking about, God's marvelous light.

That's what it's referring to, isn't it? God's glory. And He's called us into His marvelous glory. You're called to glory not for your sake, not for glory's sake, but for God's sake, to the praise of His glory.

Okay, we've covered a lot of theology, which we need to do because we need a foundation, we need a right foundation, we need to understand things correctly. But let's talk a little bit about some practical matters. First is the matter of your part in all this.

You see, the Holy Spirit will minister to you the cleansing water of the Word. He's your teacher. And He will enable you to practice what you learn.

He's your helper. But you have to cooperate. That's your part.

You have to cooperate. You have to choose to learn from the Word. If you will apply yourself to learn from it, the Holy Spirit will be faithful to teach you.

You have to choose to be not a hearer only, but also a doer of the Word. And if you choose to put into practice what you learn from the Holy Spirit, the Holy Spirit will be faithful to help you, and enable you to put into practice what you have learned. But you have to choose to learn.

And you have to choose to put into practice. You have to cooperate. And the Holy Spirit will do His part.

If you never try to learn from God's Word, you never will. If you never try to practice God's Word, you never will. And your character will be no more glorious than your unbelieving neighbors.

The trouble is, when our character... When we claim Christ, but we have not allowed the Holy Spirit to make us glorious, the problem is that it doesn't just fail to glorify God, but it actually brings reproach upon the name of God in the eyes of unbelievers, doesn't it? When unbelievers see believers who claim to be Christians, but they're acting worse than the other believers that they know, that doesn't just fail to bring glory to God, that brings reproach upon the name of God, doesn't it? Jesus said, all men will know you are my disciples by your love one for another. Love being the essence of godly, holy character. What will all men know by our lack of love? So, you forgot to get hot dogs for your Labor Day picnic, and you go to the store, and there's one pack of hot dogs left in the refrigerator case, and you see another person heading for it.

What will you do? You have a choice to make. Will you be glorious, or might you bring reproach upon the name of God? When your child is being stubborn and rebellious for the umpteenth time in the last twenty minutes, what will you do? Will you be glorious, or might you bring reproach upon the name of the Lord, even in the eyes of your child? When your wife, men, when your wife serves you dinner late, and she serves something you don't like, and you've already had a hard day full of hardships and people problems, will you be glorious? Of all the words you spoke, any one of you, of all the words you spoke yesterday, how many of them gloriously ministered grace unto the hearers? How many of them might have brought reproach upon the name of God? The Holy Spirit will make you glorious. You have to cooperate.

God never takes away our free will. Well, that was the first matter. You have to cooperate.

Second matter is this. Many of you will look at your circumstances and say, you can't grow spiritually in your marriage, in your church, in your job. Many of you are spiritually frustrated in the literal sense of that word.

Frustrated means being kept from accomplishing something. You're spiritually frustrated, many of you, by your circumstances. It need not be so.

You can develop patience and meekness and love and gentleness in every circumstance. You can develop glorious character in every circumstance. In fact, the Scriptures suggest the harder the circumstances, the greater the trial, the greater the work of righteousness that the Spirit of God will do in you.

Doesn't the Scriptures tell us that? There's hope in that. I hope you see it. There's victory in that.

I hope you recognize it. The development of godly character is spiritual growth, and it will affect your marriage, your church, your job, every other aspect of your life. It will.

Too often it's not your circumstances that are prohibiting your spiritual growth, but it's your lack of spiritual growth that's prohibiting your circumstances from getting any better. Some of you have been waiting for someone to do something that will allow you to fulfill your calling, and perhaps the problem is that you're not fulfilling your primary calling, which is to be conformed to the image of Christ. Some of you ask, what can I do to glorify God? You can let him develop love and joy and peace in you.

Some of you ask, what can I do to further the kingdom? You can be an example of long-suffering and gentleness and goodness. Some of you ask, how can I benefit my family, my church, my neighbors? You can be a wellspring of faith and meekness and temperance. Some of you ask, what am I able to accomplish in my life? Well, you can attain unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.

Some of you ask, what do I have to offer anybody? You can offer them the witness of the character of Christ, the divine nature which this world, every person in this world desperately needs, and desperately needs to see. There is an exceeding glory in righteous character, a glory that cannot be approached by any or all of the other glories in this life. Well, I conclude with this thought.

Many have said, and it is said in many of the confessions that have been written and carried through history, many have said that the chief end of man is to glorify God. I offer you today, offer to you that your greatest means of glorifying God is your own righteous character. I don't say it's your only means, but I say your greatest means of glorifying God is your own righteous character as you allow God by His Spirit to conform you to the image of Christ, reproducing in you His own holy and glorious character.

May the Lord perfect our understanding of these things.

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