

To the Glory of God Alone

Psalm 115: 1-8

Luke 2: 8-20

Pray- Glorious God, source of all light, by your Word you give light to the soul. Pour out on us the spirit of wisdom and understanding that our hearts and minds may be opened, that we may see a glimpse of your Glory today. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

There's a story I heard about a newly minted military officer who has just taken command of a military base. A young private knocks on the door. The officer wants to look important, establish his credentials, so he picks up the phone and pretends he's finishing off a conversation. *'Yes, General. You can rely on me. I'll get right on it. Goodbye, Sir'*. He hangs up the phone and turns to the private- *'Okay, lad, what do you want?'* The young soldier looks confused. *I'm here to connect your phone line, sir...*

There is little in life more unattractive than somebody who is anxious to be glorified, to be noticed as important. It's something particularly unappealing when it's blatant or forced. We tend to think of people who insist on their own glorification as tyrants or fools, dictators or clowns- Kim Jong Un, or Kanye West.

And so we might find it difficult that the God of the Bible insists upon his own glory. He commands his people to worship and respect him above all else. The first of the Ten Commandments- you shall have no other gods before me. *I do all things*, says God through his prophet Isaiah *'for my own sake- I will not give my glory to another.'*

Why does God insist on this? What is going on when God says 'give me the glory'? It might even come across like God has got some unmet needs or a weak ego, or that he was rattling around in an empty universe, and needed to create some minions to worship him and pander to his ego.

That's not the story the Bible tells. The bible tells us that God is perfectly happy within himself, having existed eternally, in joyful perfect community- *that's what the doctrine of the Trinity tells us*. The creation, far from being a response to a lack or a need on God's part, is an overflow from his happiness.

The heavens, we read in Psalm 19, declare the Glory of God. Presumably, the person who wrote that didn't have the same picture we do of the sheer, ludicrous scale of the universe. If the heavens are only there to impress us, to show *us* the glory of God, why the need for –at current reckoning- 13 Billion years' worth of history, and such a vast, uninhabited space, ten billion trillion

stars- with just one tiny dot of human existence? If the creation is just for us, why so much wasted space and time? The universe is created to show God's glory, for him to enjoy. The heavens give us an inkling of his size and majesty, but they are not primarily there for us. The millions of galaxies that we've never even seen. They are for him.

God's glory is the shining forth of his intrinsic worth and beauty. God is perfectly happy, perfectly self-satisfied, and entirely self-sufficient. When we talk about the Glory of God, we're not talking about something he possesses, that's different from his own essence. God's glory is the radiance of his worth and beauty and greatness of himself.

And when we glimpse even a shred of this, our response is to enjoy it. We do this with anything we find glorious. We talk about sporting moments or mountain views or passages of music because we can't keep it to ourselves.

Let's think to our shepherds in the reading from Luke. They get a glimpse of the Glory of God- their chilly, lonely night interrupted by a choir of angels, celebrating the birth of Christ. *'Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favour rests'*. The shepherds rush down to find the new born King, and their response is to share that glory with others- verse 17 'they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child' and verse 20 'they returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen'. They didn't need to be told to do that. Didn't need cheerleaders. Praising and glorifying God was their natural response to their glimpse of God's greatness.

So what has this to do with our Reformation series? Why do we proclaim 'to the Glory of God alone?' How does it link back the other four Solas? This links because God's glory is shown not just through the creation of the universe, but by God's saving acts, by reconciling the world to himself through Christ.

To maintain that salvation is by faith alone, grace alone, and Christ alone- without any merit on our own part- ensures that all glory belongs to God. Likewise, scripture alone- no tradition, no human authority supplementing or overruling the Bible, protects the Glory of God over human conceit. As Christians, each of us are trophies of God's goodness and grace. We cannot boast. Paul reminds a church in Corinth this- not many of you were wise, influential, noble- he chose you because you were foolish- to shame the wise! He chose the weak- to shame the strong- so that none may boast before him. Jesus is your righteousness, your holiness, your redemption- *let him who boasts, boast in the Lord*. As a society of pardoned rebels, rescued and revived through his grace alone, we are a trophy of God's grace.

Our salvation is a display God's glory, so that our lives might be too. How is that possible? We glorify God by enjoying his glory. John Piper '*God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in him*'. The way we glorify God is we find our hope, our worth, our security, our joy in Christ Jesus. We show his worth by obeying, by being willing to follow his way no matter what the cost. When we do that we are saying 'this is how great God is!' My money, my reputation, my time, is worth nothing compared to him!

And yet- we don't. Augustine said to God '*you have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they find rest in you*'. But our nature is, even as Christians- that we still choose the restlessness and hunger of chasing after that which is not God. That's where the Psalm for this morning comes in- the warning that those who chase after mute, useless, wooden idols- that is, anything that isn't the God himself- end up becoming like them. A warning for all of us, to heed God's commandments and make him the centre of our lives.

But a final piece of good news; if you're a Christian, you have the highest possible joy awaiting you; because one day you will see Christ in his true glory. And that glory that Jesus shares now, he will share with each of us. 1

Thessalonians; '*He called you to this through our gospel that you might share in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.*'

1 John 3:2 *When he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is*'; Jesus' glory in front of us, but Jesus' glory within us as well, knowing eternal joy with our father in heaven. The life-shattering truth of the Gospel is that we get God, through God, to the glory of God. My hope and prayer is that these reformation Solas would not just be something we study for these few weeks but instead the beating heart of our church, and our community here in South Sutton.

Glorious God, glorify your name in us. Show us your power and beauty, so that we might love not just the world you made, but instead we would direct our love and worship back to the source of all goodness and life, to yourself. We ask that you would direct us back, again and again, to your glorious Gospel. We ask that as we bring forth the good news of your son Jesus, that it would be your name that is lifted high, your worth that is elevated, your glory that is enjoyed. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.