

*God's Ultimate End—His Own Glory*  
Ben Reaoch, Three Rivers Grace Church  
Sunday, October 31, 2010  
Reformation Sunday  
Ten Year Celebration for Three Rivers Grace Church

This is a very special day for us as a church. It is Reformation Sunday, which makes it an exciting day to celebrate our theological roots which come from the great revival that we call the Reformation—the amazing movement of the 1500s in Europe when God used men like Martin Luther and John Calvin to expound the Scriptures and preach the glorious Gospel of Jesus Christ. It was a remarkable thing that God was doing in those days, and the ripple effects are still very evident today. And we want to see those ripple effects intensify and turn into tidal waves in our day right here in Pittsburgh. The truths that the Reformers defended and heralded, we want to see those same truths embraced today in our city. They can be summarized in the five *solas*, those five Latin phrases that articulate what the Reformation was all about. *Sola Scriptura*—Scripture alone is our authority. *Sola Fide*—It's by faith alone that we are justified. *Sola Gratia*—by grace alone. *Solus Christus*—through Christ alone. *Soli Deo Gloria*—all to the glory of God alone. These truths are at the core of who we are as a church, and therefore Reformation Sunday is very meaningful to us.

But not only that, this Reformation Sunday (2010) marks the 10 year anniversary of when this church was formed. It was in the fall of 2000 that a group of believers gathered to start a new church, a God-centered church, a church founded on these biblical doctrines that were at the heart of the Reformation. We stand here today, 10 years later, amazed at God's faithfulness to this church. This is a day for rejoicing. This is a day to praise God for what He has done. He has been abundantly gracious to us. He has sustained us. He has blessed us beyond what we could ask or imagine.

As the elders thought about how to mark this day in a special way, we thought about having a guest preacher come. And we even invited someone, but he wasn't able to make it. So I thought of another guest preacher who can share with us this morning. The only problem is that he is no longer living. He went to be with the Lord in 1758 at the age of 54. But he lives on in his writing. His name is Jonathan Edwards. He was a man who cherished the same things the Reformers did, and the same things that this church was founded on. So it's fitting for us to hear from him on this memorable occasion. Unfortunately you'll have to settle for my delivery, my gestures, my voice, and to a large extent

my wording of things, but it's Edwards' message that I'm going to preach this morning. It comes from a book he wrote entitled *A Dissertation Concerning the End for Which God Created the World*.<sup>1</sup> To shorten that title, and to give the answer to the question that Edwards is asking, I've given this message the title: God's Ultimate End—His Own Glory. End means goal. It's the point of everything. It's the purpose toward which everything is moving. The ultimate end / goal / purpose for which God created the world is His own glory. To say it another way, God does everything He does for His own glory. He is passionate about His own glory. He loves His own greatness. He is the happiest Being in existence, and nothing fuels His happiness more than the beauty of His own glory.

The entire sermon this morning will be an unpacking of that reality. The reason I want to focus on this theme is because it is the essence of what we are about as a church. God is God-centered, and we are to be God-centered. There are a lot of things we could do as a church. There are a lot of different activities we could be involved in, a lot of programs we could start, a lot of things we could teach. But I want us to be shaped and guided by this central reality of the universe. God has an ultimate goal toward which He is exerting all of His omnipotent energy, and I want us to be a church that is in line with that goal. If God is most passionate about His own glory, then by all means we should be passionate about His glory, too. By the end of this sermon I hope we'll all have a clearer understanding of what that means.

Here's the outline. First we'll look at several passages of Scripture that demonstrate this truth that God's ultimate end is His own glory. Second, we'll briefly define glory. And third, we'll see the connection between God's ultimate end and our ultimate end, which is the same.

### **God's Ultimate End: Biblical Support**

Edwards illustrates this point from a multitude of texts, and he categorizes these texts in some very insightful ways. First we should notice that when the Bible says God does something "for His own sake," it is the same as saying that He is doing it "for His own glory." "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." (Isaiah 48:11, ESV)

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<sup>1</sup> For an accessible publication of this work, along with helpful notes and an introduction, see John Piper, *God's Passion for His Glory: Living the Vision of Jonathan Edwards with the complete text of The End for Which God Created the World* (Wheaton: Crossway, 1998). My quotations will be from this publication.

Second, we see that the good things God created, He created for His glory. "I will say to the north, Give up, and to the south, Do not withhold; bring my sons from afar and my daughters from the end of the earth, everyone who is called by my name, whom I created for my glory, whom I formed and made." (Isaiah 43:6-7, ESV) God created a people for Himself, and He saved them and sustains them, and it is all for His glory.

Third, it's significant to note that Christ's ultimate end was the glory of God. "Now is my soul troubled. And what shall I say? 'Father, save me from this hour'? But for this purpose I have come to this hour. Father, glorify your name." Then a voice came from heaven: "I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again." (John 12:27-28, ESV) Also in the High Priestly prayer Jesus said, "Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you." (John 17:1, ESV)

Related to this, the next observation is that the whole work of redemption is for the glory of God. "[Christ Jesus], though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, *to the glory of God the Father.*" (Philippians 2:6-11, ESV) "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, *to the praise of his glorious grace*, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved." (Ephesians 1:3-6, ESV) And then the phrase, "to the praise of his glory," appears in verse 12 and 14. All of redemption is ultimately about the glory of God. Christ's incarnation and obedience and suffering and death and exaltation, and from predestination and election to adoption and sanctification, it is all for God's glory.

Next, it is also seen in Scripture that God's glory is His ultimate end in both His wrath and His mercy. "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, in order to make known the riches of his glory for vessels of mercy, which he has prepared beforehand for glory—" (Romans 9:22-23, ESV) God's glory is made manifest both in His

just punishment of unrepentant sinners and in the mercy He bestows upon those who repent and believe.

And finally, the natural world that God created is also for the display of His glory. "O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth! You have set your glory above the heavens." (Psalm 8:1, ESV) "And one called to another and said: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!"'" (Isaiah 6:3, ESV)

That's a broad overview of some of the ways that we see in Scripture that God does everything He does for His own glory. Now what does His glory mean?

### **The Meaning of Glory**

The Hebrew word, *kabod*, is translated as glory, and it signifies something that is heavy, weighty. And things that are weighty are such because of density and magnitude. The Greek word in the New Testament is *doxa*, and it continues the same sense as *kabod* in the Old Testament.

There are four definitions of glory that come from the different ways that these words are used in the Bible. First, it can refer to internal excellence. God is glorious in Himself. Second, glory can also refer to the shining forth of that internal glory. "And an angel of the Lord appeared to [the shepherds], and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with fear." (Luke 2:9, ESV) That is the emanation or communication of God's internal glory. Third, glory can refer to the beholding of God's glory. "But truly, as I live, and as all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the Lord . . ." (Numbers 14:21, ESV) In other words, as Edwards expounds this verse, "all the inhabitants of the earth shall see the manifestations I will make of my perfect holiness and hatred of sin, and so of my infinite excellence."<sup>2</sup> And fourth, glory implies praise and adoration, rejoicing in God's perfections. "You who fear the Lord, praise him! All you offspring of Jacob, glorify him, and stand in awe of him, all you offspring of Israel!" (Psalm 22:23, ESV)

Do you see the range of meanings, which are all closely related? God's glory is His internal excellence. But that glory goes forth, it goes public, it is put on display. And it is seen and known. And not only seen and known, but rejoiced in. That leads to the final point.

### **Our Ultimate End: God's Glory**

Our ultimate end is the glory of God. We've seen that God's ultimate end is the glory of God. That is His purpose and goal in everything that He does. And the revealed will of God,

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<sup>2</sup> Page 238.

given to us in the Bible, is clear that we are to have the same purpose and goal. That is why we are here. "So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God." (1 Corinthians 10:31, ESV) "As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace: whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies—in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen." (1 Peter 4:10-11, ESV) We are to pray, "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name." (Matthew 6:9) We are to be like the apostles who often expressed their delight in the glory of God. Like Paul did in Romans 11:33-36, "Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways! "For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor?" "Or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid?" For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen."

We are to live for God's glory in everything we do, we are to serve in a way that brings God glory, we are to pray for God's Name to be glorified, and we are to delight in His glory. God's glory is the reason we exist. His glory is to be our ultimate aim and purpose.

Now the question is, Are we talking about two things or one thing? God's glory and us glorifying Him—Are those two distinct things or two aspects of the same thing? Let me give this to you in Edwards' own words. "These, at first, may appear to be entirely distinct things: but if we more closely consider the matter, they will all appear to be ONE thing, in a variety of views and relations. They are but the emanation of God's glory; or the excellent brightness and fullness of the divinity diffused, overflowing and, as it were, enlarged; or in one word, existing *ad extra* (meaning "toward the outside," external). God exercising the emanation or communication of his fullness: for this is the effect, viz. his fullness communicated, and the producing of this effect is the communication of his fullness; and there is nothing in this effectual exerting of God's perfection, but the emanation of God's internal glory."<sup>3</sup>

So there is God's internal glory, the glory of who He is in Himself. And then there is also His external glory, as His greatness is put on display and His creatures behold His glory and rejoice in it. These are two aspects of the same thing. "God's internal glory or fullness existing in its emanation"—that is the

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<sup>3</sup> Page 243.

chief end of all creation, that is God's ultimate end in all that He does.

Consider these two illustrations. First, a fountain. Think of a fountain that is bursting forth with fresh, clean, cool water. The water in the fountain is the internal fullness of the fountain. But the water as it flows out of the fountain we would also consider to be something of the fountain. It is the emanation of the fountain's internal fullness. And then the receiving and enjoying of the fresh, clean, cool water is also something of the fountain. It is an indication of the fountain's fullness, that it flows out and refreshes and revives.

A second illustration is the sun. The sun is intensely bright and hot, and it is so internally. But then the beams of sunlight that emanate from the sun are also something of the sun. The brightness and heat extends out with amazing power, and it is seen and enjoyed by those who have eyes to see its brightness and can feel the warmth of its rays. That enjoyment reflects back to the greatness of the sun.

Here are Edwards' words again. "In the creature's knowing, esteeming, loving, rejoicing in, and praising God, the glory of God is both exhibited and acknowledged; his fullness is received and returned. . . . The refulgence shines upon and into the creature, and is reflected back to the luminary. The beams of glory come from God, are something of God, and are refunded back again to their original. So that the whole is of God, and in God, and to God; and he is the beginning, and the middle, and the end."<sup>4</sup>

Is the connection becoming clearer for you? God's ultimate end (His ultimate goal and purpose) is His own glory. And the way He achieves that end is by putting His glory on display for the enjoyment of His children. And thus it is for our good and for His glory at the same time. God's glory and our good are not at odds. They are not two distinct aims that compete with one another. They are but two aspects of the same goal.

Let me try to spell it out a little more directly. To behold and delight in the glory of God is the greatest gift we could ever receive. Each of us has a hunger and thirst to behold greatness. We are searching for satisfaction, and real satisfaction will only come in beholding that which is truly great. And there is nothing greater than God in the universe, therefore to see Him and know Him and be in His presence—that is the thing we all need, even if we don't realize it. That is the greatest good imaginable. This happens when a person is regenerated. God changes a person's heart so that they have new affections, new tastes, new desires. A person is given new eyes to see that the things of this world are less glorious, and God is most glorious. Repentance, then, is

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<sup>4</sup> Page 247.

turning away from pursuing our satisfaction in the less glorious things of this world, which is sin. And the other side of that coin is faith, which is turning to Christ and pursuing Him as our ultimate satisfaction. He died for our sin and rose on the third day, and by faith in Him we are forgiven. This is most definitely for our good!

At the same time, it is unto the glory of God. Because what happens in the life of the person who has been regenerated, who is repenting of sin and trusting in Christ? Their life becomes a testimony to the surpassing value of knowing God. When individuals are consistently laying down the things that this world says are so important, and instead pursuing God, that says something about what they value. And when we are willing to lay down the comforts and pleasures and amusements of this world in order to follow Christ and become servants like He was, then it makes a striking statement about the infinite greatness of God. It glorifies Him. Our good and God's glory are not two things, but one. As God's glory goes forth and changes our lives, we receive immense benefit. And as we are changed our lives reflect back the goodness and mercy and grace and love of God.

The last few paragraphs of the *The End for Which God Created the World* speak of the fact that we will enjoy the glory of God forever and ever in heaven. And our joy in Him will be ever increasing throughout eternity. What an amazing thought! God's greatness is infinite. It is never-ending. It will never be exhausted. There will never be a time in heaven when we sigh and say, "I think I've seen everything there is to see here." There will always be more. We will continue to enjoy God's glory, and God will continue to be glorified in our enjoyment of Him, forever.

I hope these truths will grip us and shape us as individuals and as a church. I hope you can hear this God-centered focus in our mission statement, which says that "We exist to delight in the beauty of God's greatness, to proclaim the truth of God's Word, and to ignite a joyful passion for the Gospel of Jesus Christ among all the peoples of Pittsburgh and the world." We want the ultimate purpose of this church to be in line with God's ultimate purpose for all things—to magnify the worth of who God is, to glorify Him, to reflect His greatness. We do this by delighting in who He is and by seeking to spread that joyful passion to others. We want this whole city to see the glory of God. This is why we exist. This God-centered focus is the foundation that this church was founded upon 10 years ago, and it's the vision that carries us into the next decade and beyond. May this church be a faithful witness to the glory of God and the wonder of the Gospel, and may God use us as a means of reformation and revival in the years to come.