

The 'glory' of Christ on the Cross (cf. 'lifted up' / 'glorified' – esp. John 17).

In his final prayer with his disciples, Jesus Christ prays for the mutual glorification of the Father and the Son. In John's Gospel, Jesus is glorified when he is lifted up on the cross at his crucifixion. John employs a double meaning of lifted up throughout the Gospel, demonstrating that the crucifixion is also the exaltation of Jesus. After presenting the historical, canonical and theological background I will outline an exegesis, describing Jesus' message and conclude with explaining how John intended the theme to be used and how it may be applied by the reader today.

Background

A. Historical Background:

Crucifixion was an ancient form of punishment or execution that was widely practiced in antiquity. The victim was nailed or bound to a cross, or sometimes a stake or tree, until dead. It was used by the Medes and Persians under Darius, the Assyrians and by Alexander the Great.¹ Josephus recorded its use during the Hasmonean dynasty and called it "one of the most barbarous actions in the world" (Ant 13.14.2).² The use and severity of crucifixion was increased under the Romans. Cicero called it a "most cruel and disgusting penalty."³ Crucifixion was the method of execution reserved for slaves (*supplicium servile*), traitors and the lowest classes.⁴ The cross was therefore a symbol of public humiliation and ignominy. Anyone who was crucified would have been considered the lowest of all to have suffered the shame and horror of such a brutal punishment. In Jewish thought, the crucified were considered to have been cursed by God (Deut 21:22-23; cf. 11QT 64:6-13).

B. Canonical Background:

Glory is the aspect of God that is worthy of praise, honour or respect. It is often associated with brightness or splendour in theophanies.⁵ The glory of God, his Shekinah שְׁכִינָה or divine Presence, dwelt or tabernacled with Israel during their

¹ John R. Donahue, "Crucifixion," in *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible* (ed. David Noel Freedman, Allen C. Myers and Astrid B. Beck; Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 2000), 298.

² Flavius Josephus, *Josephus: The Complete Works* (Nasville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1998), 433

³ Donahue, "Crucifixion," 298.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 298.

⁵ Darrell D. Gwaltney Jr and Ralph W. Vunderink, "Glory," in *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible* (ed. David Noel Freedman, Allen C. Myers and Astrid B. Beck; Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 2000), 507.

wanderings in the wilderness (Exod 25:8; 40:34). It descended as a cloud and was like a 'devouring fire' on Mount Sinai (Exod 24:16-17). The glory of YHWH filled the tabernacle (Exod 40:34-38) and when the Jerusalem temple was dedicated, the cloud of God's presence filled the temple (1 Kgs 8:11). God's glory is also present in theophany⁶ (Isa 6:3; Ezek 43:2-5). The most common Hebrew word in the OT for glory is *kābôd*, meaning heavy, weighty or burdensome. Other words used are *hādār* (splendour – e.g. Ps 90:16) and *hōd* (God's sovereignty – e.g. Ps 148:13).⁷ The Septuagint translates these words as *dóxa*, which is also the word used in the NT, and thereby adding the classical Greek meaning of reputation.⁸

C. Theological Context:

The eschatological hope in the OT was for the whole earth to be covered with the glory of YHWH (Num 14:21; Ps 72:19; Isa 60:1-3; Hab 2:14). Beale argues that 'The glory of God is the climax of the NT storyline,' and is 'the grand goal of the entirety of redemptive history.'⁹ The Biblical narrative is moving to a time when God dwells 'in a temple in a new creation.' The sin of God's people stops this movement, and a new eschatological move begins it again (e.g. Abraham, Israel, Moses, Solomon). This repeating cycle ends with the coming of Jesus. His ministry, death, resurrection, ascension and sending of the Holy Spirit inaugurates a new creation which will not end until Christ returns to create the new heaven and new earth.¹⁰ Carson notes that 'the primary meaning of 'to glorify' is 'to clothe in splendour'' (John 17:5).¹¹ Because of the fall Adam was clothed in 'garments of skin' (Gen 3:21) rather than 'garments of glory' (Apoc. Mos. 20:1-2; cf. Exod 28).¹²

Exegesis

Word Study - Glorified

John introduces the glory theme in the prologue to the Gospel. The Word, dwelt or tabernacled among the 'witnesses of the new exodus' just as God's Shekinah had

⁶ Theophany is the appearance of God, where God reveals himself to individuals or in a vision.

⁷ Gwaltney and Vunderink, "Glory," 507.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 507.

⁹ G. K. Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology: The Unfolding of the Old Testament in the New* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011), 958.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 960.

¹¹ D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John* (Leicester: Apollos, 1991), 554.

¹² James L. Kugel, *Traditions of the Bible: A Guide to the Bible As It Was at the Start of the Common Era* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), 114-120.

tabernacled with his people in the wilderness (1:14a; cf. Exod 25:8; Sir 24:8).¹³ ¹⁴ The glory (*dóxa*) of the Word is revealed to be that of the Father (1:14b).¹⁵ Jesus demonstrates his glory in the signs he performs (2:11; 11:4, 40). John writes that ultimately Jesus will be glorified at the cross, which is how Jesus referred to his approaching death (7:39; 12:16, 23; 13:31-32).¹⁶ Carson explains, 'God's splendour is displayed in the perfect obedience of the Son's sacrifice.'¹⁷ In the Synoptics, Jesus is glorified in the Resurrection, but for John it is at the cross.¹⁸

Word Study – Lifted Up

John conveys two meanings of 'lifted up' (*hypsōō*) in his Gospel. Firstly, it refers to the method of crucifixion, Jesus was lifted up on the cross. There is an echo of the bronze serpent that was lifted up on a pole (Nu 21:4-9; cf. 3:14). The reference is emphasised in the Epistle of Barnabas:

And Moses made another representation of Jesus, showing that he must suffer and shall himself give life... Moses therefore made a graven serpent. (Epistle of Barnabas 12:5-7)¹⁹

Secondly it means to exalt (3:14; 8:28; 12:32, 34). Carson writes, 'The exaltation of Jesus by means of the cross is also the exaltation of Jesus on the cross.'²⁰ Beasley-Murray adds that the judgement of this world takes place when Jesus is lifted up (12:31-32).²¹ He is lifted up 'via the cross to the throne of heaven.'²² Isaiah also linked the double meaning of 'lifted up' with 'exaltation' when he prophesied about the suffering servant:

¹³ Behold, my servant shall act wisely;
he shall be high and lifted up,
and shall be exalted. (Isa 52:13).²³

¹³ The Word, *lógos λόγος*, is the pre-existent Jesus who is God incarnate (John 1:1-5).

¹⁴ Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary Volume One* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2012), 409.

¹⁵ Gwaltney and Vunderink, "Glory," 508.

¹⁶ Stephen Smalley, *John: Evangelist and Interpreter* (Exeter: Paternoster Press, 1983), 220.

¹⁷ Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 482.

¹⁸ Stephen Smalley, *John*, 221.

¹⁹ Kugel, *Traditions of the Bible*, 816.

²⁰ Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 345.

²¹ George R. Beasley-Murray, *John; Word Biblical Commentary 36* (Dallas, TX: Word, Incorporated, 2002), vol. 36, 213.

²² *Ibid.*, 214.

²³ Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 444.

A. John 17:1-5

Chapter 17 is at the end of the 'Farewell Discourse' in the upper room (John 13-17). The discourse covers the Last Supper, washing the disciples feet, Jesus' final teaching and his final prayer. This chapter was called Jesus' High Priestly Prayer by Lutheran theologian David Chyträus (1531-1600).²⁴ The naming reflects Jesus' role as an OT High Priest²⁵ offering intercession for his disciples. Others have preferred the title given by Brooke Foss Westcott (1825-1901), the Prayer of Consecration, which emphasises v. 19.²⁶ There are similarities to the final prayers of the patriarchs (e.g. Jacob Gen 49; Moses Deut 32-33; Abraham Jubilees 22:7-23),²⁷ and to the closing passages in wisdom writings (Prov 9:1-18; Eccl 12:9-14; Sir 51:1-30).²⁸ Although praying to the Father, Jesus is at the same time teaching his disciples. Cyril of Alexandria admires the smooth transition between Jesus speaking to his disciples and praying to the Father.²⁹

Jesus announces that the 'hour' has now come. This is the time when Jesus had predicted he would depart this world and return to the Father (2:4; 4:21, 23; 8:20; 12:23, 27; 13:1). It was the time for the mutual glorification of the Son and the Father. Carson explains that the petition is asking for a reversal of the 'self-emptying entailed in his incarnation' (Phil 2:5-11).³⁰ Jesus glorifies the Father by completing the work that he had been given to do.³¹ This was to make the Father known to the world,³² and to offer eternal life to those who believe.³³ Beale writes, 'Jesus' entire life and ministry were for God's glory.'³⁴ The cross finished the work that the Father had called Jesus to do (19:30)³⁵ and it also revealed who Jesus was (8:28).³⁶ In

²⁴ Craig S Keener, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary Volume Two* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2012), 1051.

²⁵ The Aaronic High Priest was clothed in garments of glory (Exod 28:2).

²⁶ Beasley-Murray, *John*, 294.

²⁷ Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 551.

²⁸ J. Martin C. Scott, "John," in *Eerdmans Commentary on the Bible* (ed. James D. G. Dunn and John W. Rogerson; Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2003), 1201.

²⁹ Archbishop Cyril of Alexandria, *Commentary on the Gospel According to St John: Volume II* (London: Walter Smith, 1885), 478.

³⁰ Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 554.

³¹ Cyril of Alexandria, *Commentary on the Gospel According to St John: Volume II*, 491.

³² Anthony J. Kelly and Francis J. Moloney, *Experiencing God in the Gospel of John* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2003), 334.

³³ Scott, "John," 1201.

³⁴ Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology*, 960.

³⁵ Keener, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary Volume Two*, 1055.

³⁶ Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 345.

adding the inscription to the cross, Pilate ironically proclaimed that Jesus was 'King of the Jews' (19:19-22), in contrast to the Jewish leaders who gave glory to Caesar (19:15). Barclay comments that Jesus 'glorified God on the cross by rendering the perfect obedience of perfect love.'³⁷ Jesus asked to be restored to the glory he had shared with the Father before the world began (1:1).³⁸

B. John 17:6-19

Jesus then goes on to pray for his disciples. In his prayer, Jesus explains that his disciples were given to him (vv. 6-10). Jesus is glorified in his disciples (v.10) in the same way that the Father is, when they carry out the work that they are called to do (cf. 2 Thess 1:12).³⁹ Jesus' public ministry is about to end, but the disciples will continue his ministry. In continuing his work, the disciples (and therefore all followers of Jesus) will glorify Jesus. Keener also points to Jesus being glorified in the sufferings of his disciples (21:19) and in their triumph over suffering (11:4).⁴⁰ Since Jesus knows that they will face suffering when he is no longer with them, he prays for their protection as he sends them into the world (vv. 11-19).⁴¹

C. John 17:20-26

Jesus concludes the prayer by extending it to cover all followers who may later believe in him because of the works of the disciples. His primary concern here is for unity among his followers (v. 21). Although not mentioned in this prayer, John's letters reveal deep divisions within the Johannine communities. Beasley-Murray believes that John would have the struggle for unity in mind when he wrote the Gospel.⁴² The appeal for unity is a reflection of the unity between Father and Son, in order to be a sign to the world. Cyril describes this as 'a bond of love, and concord, and peace, to bring into spiritual unity those who believe.'⁴³ Carson notes the disagreement in opinion about the glory given by Jesus in v. 22. He suggests it is for

³⁷ William Barclay, *The Gospel of John, Volume 2; The Daily Study Bible* (Edinburgh: The Saint Andrew Press, 1975), 207.

³⁸ Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 557.

³⁹ Keener, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary Volume Two*, 1057.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 1057.

⁴¹ Brother John of Taizé, *The Adventure of Holiness: Biblical Foundations and Present-Day Perspectives* (New York: Alba House, 1999), 91.

⁴² Beasley-Murray, *John*, 307.

⁴³ Cyril of Alexandria, *Commentary on the Gospel According to St John: Volume II*, 546.

all believers and not just the original disciples.⁴⁴ Jesus gives the glory to believers in order that they may glorify God, following the example of Jesus, even to the point of death (21:19).⁴⁵ Keener notes how the world is divided, but that Jesus called his believers to be one with him and the Father in order to be a sign to the world.⁴⁶ The glory of this 'perfect communion' is not to be turned inward, rather it is to witness to the false glory of the world (cf. Hab 2:14).⁴⁷ The prayer is itself a witness to the reader of the divine unity present between the Father and Son.⁴⁸

Homiletics

A. Are we in unity with all believers – what would that look like? Jesus prayed that the believers may be one. John was perhaps conscious of the divisions he saw in the church. There are just as many if not more divisions among believers today. Unity does not necessarily mean institutional uniformity. There is great richness in the diversity of our traditions. But there must be something that we as individual believers could do to foster greater unity between Christians. The reason for unity is clear, so that the church may be a witness to the world, by demonstrating, being a living example of, the unity between Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Earlier in the Gospel Jesus said:

'A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another' (John 13:34–35).

B. Are we glorifying Jesus by carrying on his ministry? The disciples glorified Jesus by continuing his ministry. After Jesus had finished his earthly ministry they continued to carry out the works that he did. This task has passed through each generation of believers that followed and now remains today until Jesus returns (Matt 9:37-38; John 4:35). Jesus promised to send the Holy Spirit to help his followers do the works that that he did (14:15). Because he was returning to the Father he said his followers would actually do 'greater works' than he did (14:12). As believers we should look for ways to carry on the ministry of Jesus using the talents we have been given (15:8).

⁴⁴ Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 559.

⁴⁵ Keener, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary Volume Two*, 1063.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 1061.

⁴⁷ Kelly and Moloney, *Experiencing God in the Gospel of John*, 347.

⁴⁸ John of Taizé, *The Adventure of Holiness*, 90.

C. Are we glorifying God in what we do now? The answer to question 1 in the Westminster Larger Catechism states, 'Man's chief and highest end is to glorify God and fully to enjoy him forever.'⁴⁹ The prayer of Jesus in John 17 advocates the same aim for humanity, that is to glorify God in all that we do. This then becomes the imperative for all believers who seek to follow the teachings of Jesus. It is all too easy for us to enjoy ourselves and Creation more than we enjoy God. But to be fully human is to be clothed in the garments of God's glory. Creation is to be enjoyed, but God is to be glorified and enjoyed more. If this is the goal of the entirety of redemptive history then we should ensure that we glorify God in all that we do.

D. Are we obedient to our calling? Jesus was obedient to the point of death on the cross. The exaltation that Jesus received was not that which the world gives. To be obedient we must first listen to God to discern our calling. Then through prayer and with the counsel of other believers we should work out our calling with 'fear and trembling' (Phil 2:12). At all times trying to emulate the example of Christ's humility. Jesus calls his disciples to take up their cross and follow him (Matt 16:24-26). By completing the work that we are called to do we will glorify Jesus and the Father.

Conclusion

In John's Gospel Jesus is glorified by his death on the cross, and restored to the pre-incarnation glory he had in the beginning. The cross, a symbol of public humiliation reserved for the lowest and cursed, became the instrument through which Jesus was glorified. Jesus was physically lifted up at the crucifixion and was also exalted. In completing the work set for him, Jesus glorified the Father. He prayed that his disciples would likewise glorify the Father and the Son and so too would all believers who were to follow. Jesus prayed for the unity of all believers in order that they may demonstrate the glory of God to the world. John's message can be applied to believers today.

⁴⁹ Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology*, 961.

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