

“The Story of Manna: The Purpose of God”—Exodus 16:6-7, 12

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[What follows is the transcript of a sermon. It was originally intended to be heard, not read, so the tone is more conversational than academic. It has only been loosely edited, so forgive any grammatical, syntactical, or spelling errors. If you have questions please contact Southern Oaks Baptist Church through their official website, www.welovethegospel.com.]

Take your Bible and let's meet together in Exodus 16...

When we began considering the story of manna from this chapter, I didn't expect it to take as much time as it has. In three sermons we have seen what these verses teach us about the problem of grumbling, the patience of grace, and then last week we considered the picture it paints of the Gospel. Today, we will add to that trio a fourth lesson related to the purpose of God in this miracle and then next week, believe it or not, there is still something very significant to consider that I've neglected to mention so far. This really is a story that has a lot to offer us.

The basic plotline is simple enough. God's wandering people get hungry and start complaining. God has mercy on them and provides them with a miraculous food called manna for them to eat each day. We have seen in this that there is no trial we face that is greater than God's capacity for grace. As Philippians 4:19 reminds God's people, "*God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus.*" But do you know what the next verse says? "*To our God and Father be glory forever and ever. Amen.*" And this brings us to the next lesson that Exodus 16 reinforces, which has to do with...

The Purpose of God

Why did God supply the manna and the quail for His grumbling people? Why show them grace in the wilderness on this occasion? We really don't have to speculate because the text makes the answer explicit. Look again at verses 6 and 7.

"So Moses and Aaron said to all the people of Israel, 'At evening you shall know that it was the LORD who brought you out of the land of Egypt, ⁷ and in the morning you shall see the glory of the LORD, because he has heard your grumbling against the LORD...'" (Exodus 16:6-7)

Then jump down to verse 12. The Lord says,

"I have heard the grumbling of the people of Israel. Say to them, 'At twilight you shall eat meat, and in the morning you shall be filled with bread. Then you shall know that I am the LORD your God.'" (Exodus 16:12)

So why does He provide for them? That they may know that He is the Lord. That is the language of glory. God provides because He is pursuing His own glory. He aims to glorify Himself in His kindness to us. He is providing for the Israelites that they may know that He is the Lord. And in this way He is bringing glory to Himself. Philip Ryken, the president at Wheaton College, explains,

"God's glory is his reputation. It is his honor, the weightiness of his character, the sum total of all his divine perfections. To know that he is the Lord, therefore, is to know him as the God of glory...His miraculous provision added to his reputation as the God who hears and the God who

cares. Every time God provides for his people, it is for the praise of his glory...Every time he provides, he adds a little more weight to his reputation.”¹

And, friends, this explains God’s interactions with us as well. Whether it is His ordinary providences in our lives, the extraordinary providences in the face of great danger, the provision of strength to resist some temptation or faith to believe His promise, all of these provisions and more are graces meant to help us see the glory of God, to see Him as the all-satisfying Giver of every good and perfect gift. We may fail to grasp the lesson, but it is the point of God’s provision in our lives.

God wants us to see Him as our ultimate satisfaction. He wants us to see Him as all we truly need. He wants us to live in such a way that, even when we lack some comfort, the world sees in us that God is truly enough. That He is more satisfying than manna in our bellies and resources the world says we need. God is worth more and proves to be more satisfying than all of those things. And when the world sees that in us, then our lives glorify God. As John Piper famously put it—“God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in Him.”

Think of it this way...What brings God more glory, you choosing not to sin out of some sense of duty or you choosing not to sin *because* you see Christ as more satisfying than the promise of sin? Take the sin of this text for example. Does it glorify God more for you to say, “I’m not going to grumble because the Bible says I shouldn’t even though I really want to” or to say, “I’m not going to grumble because that thing tempting me to complain is nothing compared to the sweetness of the God I have and the more I think on Him the more my complaint seems to melt away in the glory of His grace to me”? What glorifies God more? Obviously the latter.

The Puritan Thomas Watson once said, “Till sin is bitter, Christ will never be sweet.” But I actually think he has that mixed up a bit. It would be better to say that until Christ seems sweet, sin will never seem bitter. We must perceive the sweetness of Christ—His kindness, His patience, His mercy, His love, and so on—for our sin, which we once thought so beautiful and attractive, to be exposed as putrid and bitter.² And when God provides and we see His glory and through that we desire to say yes to Him and no to sin, God is glorified. So He glorifies Himself through His provisions. And He glorifies Himself as His people learn to see Him as their sufficiency. In this way, God glorified Himself in the wilderness through the gift of manna and glorifies Himself in our lives through the various gifts of His grace.

Now having said that, we have to notice that the language used here—the language of glorification—is the same language that we have already seen over and over again throughout this book, often in reference to remarkably different circumstances. This same language, you will remember, was also used to explain why God was bringing plagues of judgment on Pharaoh and the Egyptians (cf., 7:17; 8:10; 9:14, 29; 10:2; 11:7; et al). We have seen that that was for the glory of God as well. Indeed, we have been forced into seeing this divine motivation in almost every chapter of this book to the extent that some scholars have suggested that it is the central theme of the book. God glorifies Himself in both His judgment and His mercy. As Ryken notes,

“If we learn nothing else from this book, we learn that we are saved for God’s glory. At every stage of Israel’s deliverance, God did what he did—and did it the way that he did—to receive all the glory and praise. However predictable it becomes, there is no more important lesson than this: God disposes all things for the ultimate good of his glory.”³

This has major implications for our lives and how we think about the purpose of our lives. What would happen if we began living as though our lives were about the glory of God? And if they are about the glory of God, then they must not be, first and foremost, about you. That’s one of those truths that should be obvious to us but is certainly not in our cultural environment. It’s not about you.

Does that sting the pride a little bit? But it is absolutely true, even if it goes against every fiber of our being. We have been conditioned to think of everything in reference to self. Ever since the Fall of Man, we have struggled to think of anything without self occupying the center of our perception. That includes how we view religion, in general, and Christianity, in particular. But at the end of the day, and even at the start, it's not about you. Period. Full stop.

What then is it about? It's about the glory of God.

What I would like to do with the rest of our time is show you that this is not just lesson that Exodus seems to press on us with every turn of page, but one that the Bible keeps before our eyes as well, from beginning to end. To that end, let me ask you a question: What comes to your mind when you think about the glory of God, I wonder?⁴ Maybe it's His mighty acts in history. Maybe it's His perfection. Maybe it's the vastness of His creation that attests to His wisdom and power. Maybe it's the full revelation of Himself in the person of Jesus. All of these certainly display God's glory in various ways and to varying degrees.

In the Old Testament the main word for "glory" comes from a Hebrew word for weight. It was used for things that possessed a certain heaviness, whether literally (in terms of their substance) or metaphorically (in terms of their importance). In the New Testament they use a Greek word, but they use it in much the same way to refer to one's worth, greatness, honor, and, as stated earlier, reputation. Very often when the words are applied to God, they have in view His majesty or supremacy.

When Paul was writing to the Romans, he states,

"Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!"³⁴ 'For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor?'³⁵ 'Or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid?'³⁶ For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen." (Romans 11:33-36)

Do you see what Paul is saying? Really a couple things. First of all, God doesn't need us for anything. He doesn't owe us anything. Don't think for a moment that God created humanity because He needed something from us. God is the only being who is actually self-sufficient. In eternity's past God existed and His existence was not contingent on anyone or anything. This is why the Bible begins the way it does—"In the beginning God..." Before there was any created thing, there was already God. Paul didn't just teach this truth to the Romans, he also said as much to the people of Athens...

"The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man,²⁵ nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything." (Acts 17:24-25)

God asked Job, in the Old Testament,

"Who has first given to me, that I should repay him? Whatever is under the whole heaven is mine." (Job 41:11)

A similar point is made in Psalm 50,

"For every beast of the forest is mine, the cattle on a thousand hills. I know all the birds of the hills, and all that moves in the field is mine. If I were hungry, I would not tell you, for the world and its fullness are mine." (Psalm 50:10-12)

Do you see what is being taught in passages like these? What could we possibly give to God that is not already His possession? All of His creation belongs to Him. He created it. God doesn't need us, therefore. He doesn't need any of His creation. Why then did He create us? It wasn't because He was lonely and needed a friend. No! God is Trinity. "The fact that God is three persons yet one God means that there was no loneliness or lack of fellowship on God's part before creation."⁵ He doesn't need us.

So, again, why then did He create us if He didn't have to or didn't need us in any sense? He created us for His glory. That's what Paul was trying to get across in the Romans passage we read. "*For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen*" (Romans 11:36). And, by the way, that is the turning point in the book of Romans. For eleven long chapters Paul has been unpacking the glories of God as seen in the Gospel and showing how the aim of the truths of the Gospel makes sense out of all Scripture and all history. Then in chapter 12 he pivots from theology to application (as he so often does in His letters).

So all that rich theology and talk about history and the Scriptures and the Gospel for eleven chapters is summed up in 11:36 with that statement that all of it is for the glory of God. Then, and only then, once we get that, He begins to talk the personal life applications of such things starting in chapter 12 and for the rest of the letter. Do you see that? It's all for God's glory, chapters 1 through 11. "*Therefore,*" chapter 12, "*present your bodies as a living sacrifice...*" Why? Because if everything exists for God's glory, then that includes you. So offer your life up for His glory. That's what your life is meant for. God's glory.

Humanity is created in the image of God (Genesis 1:26-28). This fact alone tells us that our lives are meant to point to and make much of another, the One in whose image we have been stamped. And, yes, when the first humans chose to sin against God in Genesis 3, the purity and clarity of that image is tarnished. Sin doesn't remove the image of God (cf. Genesis 9:6; James 3:9), but it does distort it. It does influence our capacity to glorify God actively and intentionally in the unique ways for which we are created.

How encouraging it is, then, for us to discover that the redemption that Jesus came to bring progressively reverses this distortion. Paul taught that through faith in Christ, trusting in His death for our sins and resurrection for our future hope, we are granted salvation. In this salvation, we are given a new nature, "*which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator*" (Colossians 3:10). Wayne Grudem explains this verse like this:

"As we gain in true understanding of God, his Word, and his world, we begin to think more and more of the thoughts that God himself thinks. In this way we are 'renewed in knowledge' and we become more like God in our thinking. This is a description of the ordinary course of the Christian life."⁶

Of course, this is a process. It's part of Christ's redeeming work. It's what we sometimes refer to as sanctification. And this sanctification involves restoring in us what was lost in the Garden of Eden. Elsewhere Paul says of Christians,

"And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is Spirit" (2 Corinthians 3:18)

As we grow in Christian maturity we are growing in our likeness to God. His image is being restored in us. Our character is increasingly shaped by His character and, in this way, we image Him the way we were intended. In fact, Paul even describes the goal of our salvation in similar terms.

“And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son...” (Romans 8:28-29)

Do you see God’s agenda for your life and redemption?

There is a great book by Tim Chester called, *You Can Change*, that I would highly recommend for those of you that are seeking to change certain things in your life. In the book, Chester writes,

“What does it mean for us to be a new creation? It means we’re re-created in the image of God. It means we’re given new life so we can grow like Christ. And being like Christ means being like God, reflecting God’s glory as God’s image.”

So there is a chunk of the book that works through how we were created in God’s image, how there is a sense in which that image is affected because of sin, how God has an agenda for our change, how that agenda involves being re-created through faith in Christ, and how that re-creation involves the Gospel’s work in our lives. He writes,

“Jesus came to remake us in God’s image. Jesus took our brokenness, our hatred, and our curse on himself on the cross. He took the penalty of our sin and in its place gave us a new life and a new love.”⁷

For the first time since the Fall, we are able to actively and intentionally live our lives for the glory of God. In Christ, we have had that capacity restored. By the power of God’s Spirit who indwells God’s people, we can live for God’s glory.

How? How do we live for God’s glory? What kinds of things can we do to glorify God? Ask that question in many Christian settings and you’ll likely get answers like worship, or sharing your faith, or doing good works, or forgiving people, etc... Those are all good answers. But notice they’re all “spiritual” sounding answers. Thus they’re too narrow. The reality is that God calls us to glorify Him in all that we do.

After a discussion on how to glorify God in a particular set of circumstances, Paul says to the Corinthians,

“So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God” (1 Corinthians 10:31).

Clearly, then, it’s not just the “spiritual” activities in our lives that God means for us to do for His glory. It’s every activity in our lives. Eat to the glory of God. Drink to the glory of God. Whatever you find yourself doing, do it to the glory of God. Your doing was meant to glorify Him. All of our doing should have that conscious aim. The Bible applies this principle to many areas of our life (I’ll include some example in the footnotes).⁸

Christians exist to glorify God in everything that we do.⁹ We are to glorify God. But let’s be clear about something. When we say that we can live in a way to glorify God that does not mean that we make Him glorious. He already is perfectly glorious. He couldn’t be more glorious than He already is in Himself. We are to glorify God in the sense that we acknowledge His glory. We point to it. We make much of Him. “To give glory to something means to deem it impressive and to attribute worth to it as something

that possesses significance and importance.”¹⁰ We magnify His glory so that other people will notice it (cf. Psalm 34:3; 69:30; Luke 1:47).

One writer gives a helpful illustration to this effect, when he distinguishes between the magnification of a microscope and the magnification of a telescope.

“God’s goal at every stage in creation and salvation is to magnify His glory. You can magnify with a microscope or a telescope. A microscope magnifies by making tiny things look bigger than they are. A telescope magnifies by making gigantic things (like stars), which look tiny, appear more as they really are. God created the universe to magnify His glory the way a telescope magnifies stars. Everything He does in our salvation is designed to magnify the glory of His grace like this.”¹¹

This is why every aspect of your salvation, it seems, is said to be for God’s glory in Scripture. Let me give you some examples.

God’s free choice to save us: *“In love⁵ he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will,⁶ to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved.”* (Ephesians 1:4-6)

God’s creating initiative: *“...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)

The Incarnation of Christ: *“For I tell you that Christ became a servant to the circumcised to show God’s truthfulness, in order to confirm the promises given to the patriarchs, and in order that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy...”* (Romans 15:8-9)

Propitiation (God’s wrath toward us being removed): *“[Christ Jesus] whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God’s righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.”* (Romans 3:25-26)

Our Sanctification: *“And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, so that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that come through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.”* (Philippians 1:9-11)

The Consummation: *“[Those who do not obey the Gospel, cf. previous verse,] They will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might, when he comes on that day to be glorified in his saints, and to be marveled at among all who have believed, because our testimony to you was believed.”* (2 Thessalonians 1:11-12)¹²

This last verse reminds us of the choice that is before us in this life. In a commentary on Ezra, James M. Hamilton, Jr. writes,

“[This world] is still the stage God has built. He still wants it filled with His glory. Rebels will give Him occasion to display the glory of His justice. Those who trust in Jesus will experience the glory of His mercy. So the question is not *whether* you will glorify God but *how*.”¹³

Is that not what the Book of Exodus has been teaching us? That's certainly how Paul took it (cf. Romans 9). And that's the point being made in 2 Thessalonians, which I read moments ago. But the larger point I'm making is that these verses illustrate that God saved you *not* to make much of you, but to make much of Him. You are redeemed for His glory alone. And we, as a people, were redeemed for His glory alone! That's why we exist.

So let me close our time, by noting three things. First, we have not even scratched the surface of this theme in Scripture—that we exist for the glory of God. If you are a seasoned reader of Scripture, you know this. But hopefully we have seen enough to reinforce in our minds that God's glory is the purpose of your existence and salvation.

Second, by way of personal application, you need to ask, "Do I live like this is true?" Let me give you an example of where to probe in your own heart. Think about how you respond to frustrations and frustrating people. How do you react to them? What would happen if we lived our lives like we really believed that whatever we do should be done for the glory of God? What if in our frustrations we paused and asked, "What reaction would bring the most glory to God?" But that's not what we tend to ask, is it? Not typically. Not most people. Not even many Christians. In our flesh we instead often react based on what will bring the most glory to self. What will make me look best? What matches my preferences and serves my conveniences? But what if the next time we were faced with a choice, we stopped trying to keep God at arms length and we asked instead, "God, in this choice that I'm facing, what decision would bring You the most glory?" and then acted accordingly. It would change things. Those are questions that get your life on track with God's will. Does your life communicate to people in the world that it's not about you? Or do you still believe that it is?

Tim Challies writes,

"The simple fact is, you are not the point of your life. You are not the star of your show. If you live life for yourself, your own comfort, your own glory, your own fame, you will miss out on your very purpose."¹⁴

Finally, by way of corporate application, we as a church need to ask, "Do we operate like these things are true?" The reason I'm bringing all of this up at this point is because your ministerial staff believes that we need to seek to ensure that we don't lose focus as a church. We need to be about what God is about. We need to have a biblically informed vision and priorities. Which is why, after months of wrestling with and praying through passages like the ones we have considered today, we agreed upon a statement a couple years ago that we believe will help us stay focus and evaluate the ministry we do as a church. Why does Southern Oaks exist?

"We exist to glorify God through Gospel-transformed lives."

And if that is true, then how do we fulfill it? How do we demonstrate the change of the Gospel in our lives to the glory of God? The three GCs. That's our plan. With the help and power of God's Spirit...

"We do this by actively embracing Gospel-Centrality, the Great Commission, and the Great Commandments...."

But...Let me say this...if we don't get what we talked about today right—that we exist to glorify God—we're not going to get church and ministry right. It's not going to happen. The desire to see God glorified in all things needs to be our chief aim. If that's not settled in our minds, we won't get the rest of these things right. We want Southern Oaks Baptist Church to be a church that is about glorifying God above all

else. We want that to be our DNA, which will only happen to the extent that it is part of your own personal DNA.

If you leave this place and choose to live a life that is self-exalting, you are choosing to live a life that is God-belittling. So I say again: It's not about you. It's about God and His glory.

Let's pray...

¹ Philip Ryken, *Exodus: Saved for God's Glory* (PTW; Wheaton: Crossway, 2005), 428. For what it's worth, our mission statement at Southern Oaks is an attempt to take serious this idea we encounter through out Scripture and keep us focused on what really matters. The first line reminds us that "We exist to glorify God..." That's why we exist, corporately and individually.

² David Strain. "Bread of Heaven – Part 1," preached on March 22, 2015, to First Presbyterian Church of Jackson, MS, and accessed at the following website: <https://www.fpcjackson.org/resource-library/sermons/bread-of-heaven-part-1>.

³ Ibid.

⁴ This section is heavily influenced by the work of Tom Ascol, both in content and the progression of thought. Ascol wrote an article for *Founders*, called "All to the Glory of God". The article struck me as very logical in its unfolding and I could think of no better way to structure my own thought. See <http://legacy.founders.org/main/wp-content/uploads/fj56.pdf>.

⁵ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 161.

⁶ Ibid., 444-445.

⁷ As of January 9, 2016, both quotes could be found at <https://www.crossway.org/blog/2016/01/you-can-change/>

⁸ As it relates to our inner lives and the use of our bodies, we are told, "*Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.*" (1 Corinthians 6:19-20). As it relates to your praise, God's people are told, "*The one who offers thanksgiving as his sacrifice glorifies me...*" (Psalm 50:23); or "*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); or, again, "*Ascribe to the LORD, o heavenly beings, ascribe to the LORD glory and strength. Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name; worship the LORD in the splendor of holiness.*" (Psalm 29:1-2). As it relates to the good works you have opportunity to do in your daily life, Jesus instructs, "*...let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.*" (Matthew 5:16). As it relates to the suffering we experience in this world because we are followers of Christ, Peter says, "*...if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in that name.*" (1 Peter 4:16). Even as it relates to our dying, Jesus sets us an example, "*This he said to show by what kind of death he was to glorify God. And after saying this he said to [Peter], 'Follow me.'*" (John 21:19). We could keep going, but you get the idea.

⁹ Ascol, "All for the Glory of God."

¹⁰ Charles L. "JR" Vassar Jr., *Glory Hunger: God, the Gospel, and Our Quest for Something More* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2015), 15.

¹¹ John Piper, *The Dangerous Duty of Delight* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah, 2001), 17.

¹² Ibid., 17-18.

¹³ James M. Hamilton Jr., *Exalting Jesus in Ezra and Nehemiah* (Christ-Centered Exposition Old Testament Commentary; Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2014), 15.

¹⁴ Tim Challies, *Do More Better: A Practical Guide to Productivity* (Minneapolis: Cruciform Press, 2015), 11.