

## Responding to the Glory

Jonathan K. Dodson | John 17:1-8 | April 23, 2017

Over the last three chapters, Jesus prepares the disciples for his departure. But now, in this quite famous passage, he turns from teaching to prayer. His prayer is first, an intimate address to the Father, then a stirring request for the disciples, and finally a prayer for those who have not yet believed. We'll focus on his address to the Father. It's glory broken down in three directions: Glory down, Glory up, and Glory in.

### Glory Down

With arms outstretched and eyes lifted up Jesus prays, “[Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you](#) (17:1). A prayer for mutual glory. The Father to glorify the Son, and the Son to glorify the Father. Shared glory. And as Jesus approaches the hour of his passion, his final sufferings for humanity, he naturally reflects on his life up to this point saying, “[I have glorified you on earth](#)” (4). Jesus has brought glory *down*. He makes glory practical. But before we can get to the practical, we need to understand why Jesus shares in the glory of the Father. Jesus gives two reasons. He says, “[since you have given him authority over all flesh](#)” (17:2). The first reason Jesus is worthy of glory is because of his **authority**. His authority is over all flesh. A funny term, but it's used to trigger a memory from the book of Daniel. Where beastly authorities “*devour all flesh*.” These beasts represent kingdoms, governments, that oppress humanity, until a little tiny kingdom plucks them up by the roots. This kingdom is led by a man described as the Son of Man. His clothing is white as snow, his hair pure wool, and his throne constructed from fire. The Son of Man is given *everlasting dominion*—authority—over all peoples, nations, languages. He is given this authority by the Ancient of Days. Jesus is stepping into this prophetic stream and saying, I'm the Son of Man, my Father the Ancient of Days. And I should be glorified because I have been given authority over “all flesh.” I've come to overturn all the oppressive authorities. You should glorify me because I'm the one true authority. This is why Jesus can say glorify me. But in a culture of distrust, we find it hard to welcome authority. We've seen authorities devour flesh: Jews, Tutsis, African-Americans. We don't trust institutions, politicians, even pastors, so when it comes to someone like Jesus claiming divine authority, our default setting is to *distrust*. But have you noticed that oppression thrives in an atmosphere of distrust? Jihadist groups consolidate power by breeding suspicion of the West. They eliminate fellow Muslims who disagree. Persecuting dissidents, they promise change with power. Commenting on our recent election, David Brooks noted: “distrustful politicians were elected by an increasingly distrustful nation.” But what happens if we distrust everything? We end up with nothing, not truth, no hope, no security. We eliminate the hope Jesus extends, when he says he's brought his authority to topple kingdoms. So why should we trust *him*? Because of how he uses his authority, “[to grant eternal life](#)” (2). The second reason Jesus shares in the glory of the Father is how he makes glory practical. What's **eternal life**? “[And this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent](#)” (3). Jesus says eternal life isn't merely something we enter into at the moment of death; it's knowing God in this life. That's immensely practical. What person is worth knowing forever? Well, it would have to be someone endlessly fascinating, tirelessly good, unendingly faithful, always just. I'm willing to bet you haven't

found that person, but think what would change if you did. You'd be less prone to criticize because you've found someone more loving. We'd be less prone to oppress because we found someone so powerful. We'd be less prone to lose our cool because we've found someone so patient. More prone to love because we've found someone so sacrificial. This week I went on field trip to Houston with fifty 5<sup>th</sup> graders. As a chaperone to three kids, one of kid was telling me about a summer camp he went to. He said, I didn't really like it because they made us sing to God every night and listen to someone talk about him. I mean I believe in God, but I just think you should keep him on the side. Ever feel like that? Should we keep Jesus *on the side*? I thought and said, If God is the most important person in the world, do you think he should be more than on the side? There's only one person worth knowing forever. The most important Person. And that Person uses his authority over all flesh to allow them to tear his flesh to pieces. Why? So we can know *him*. *Eternal life is knowing the only true God and his Son Jesus Christ. That's glory on earth Jesus the Son of Man.*

### Glory Up

Next, Jesus prays: "Now, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed" (5). It's shared glory again, but this time it's positional not practical. It's the glory Jesus had before he lifted a finger. It's glory he has before the world existed. Glory up. This sits in stark contrast to the Greek and Roman gods who fought among themselves for distinction. Here's a deity who shares his glory, the glory he had *with you* before the world. This the **glory of love**, not the glory of victory. You can feel Jesus' longing and affection for the Father jumping off the page. He yearns to be back by his Father's side to revel with him in their shared gloriousness. When I sat in the stark white pre-op room, gown and surgical cap on, I longed for my parents. So I gave them a call and explained that even though I told them to wait till later in the day, would they come to the hospital now, 5am, and wait with me. I longed for their comforting presence. The glory and safety of their love before I went under the knife. Jesus, in the waiting room before his crucifixion, cries out for the glory of the Father, to be restored to that blissful estate, just to be in his presence. Shared glory. He goes on to describe *why* he should be restored to the glory he had before the world existed: "I have manifested your name to the people whom you gave to me out of the world" (6). This is a fulfillment of what Jesus promised to do at the outset of this Gospel: "No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known." Jesus has manifested God on earth. You want to know God? Look at me, Jesus says. I make him known. I reveal his glory. I manifest his *name*. A name is synonymous with character. More than a burning bush, or fire in the sky, Jesus reveals the nature and character of God. What kind of character? Here we see an exceptional combination of authority and submission. Have you noticed, all along the prayer, that Jesus has taken a place of deference to the Father? The Son of Man: given all authority (2); sent by the Father (3); accomplishing all the work given him to do (4); climaxing with verse 7: "Now they know that everything that you have given me is from you." Jesus delights in drawing attention to the Father, in submitting to his authority. The Father gives the command and the Son follows, without a hint of envy or scorn. The Trinity gives us a pattern of authority and submission, *without a whiff of inequality*. No competition, no inferiority. And he does it, on the way to the cross. An example and *enabler* of our obedient



submission to God, very different people harmoniously working together to reflect something greater than themselves—the glory from above.

## Glory In

We've looked at *glory down*, the practical glory of Jesus using his authority to give life. We've considered *glory up*, the positional, diverse yet harmonious glory shared between the Father and the Son. And now the *glory in*. How should we respond to this glory? Jesus tells us how, "[I have given them the words that you gave me, and they have received them and have come to know in truth that I came from you; and they have believed that you sent me](#)" (8). How to respond to Glory? Jesus gives two ways: receive and believe. **Receive** what? Words. He repeats it several times. Words are essential to knowing the most Important Person in the universe. Observation is not enough. If you think about it, that's how we know a person. Say you're at a party and you're attracted to someone across the room. The rest of the night you always know where they are, but you're never brave enough to go talk to them. You get home and describe them to your roommate. How will the roommate respond? "Well, are you going to talk to him?" Why? Because no matter how attractive a person is on the outside, you don't know who they are until you listen to them talk. Until they reveal who they truly are *with words*. We don't really know a person until we've listened to their words. It's the same with knowing God. We have to hear, receive, God's words. Are you receiving God's words? It can be hard when we're distracted by so many other words: relational, educational, digital. Hearing requires silence. Read God's words, and as you do, ask the Holy Spirit to draw your attention to who God is, look for God's character and respond. And share them with others. His words are how we introduce people to the most important person in the world, the gateway to life eternal. The other way to respond is to "believe that God sent him." Receiving the words is not enough. **Belief** is required. And belief is more than agreement; it's trust. We have to say to Jesus, I trust you. With everything. And that's hard in a culture of distrust. But actually we're all quite good at trusting. We trust Google and Apple with our information, banks to pay our bills, schools to teach our kids. And we trust ourselves to decide who to trust. So maybe, as JKA Smith puts it, "[it's not a matter of whether we trust but whom](#) we trust." Wouldn't it be great if some reliable person, a person of character and glory told us how to truly live? Someone whose words are utterly trustworthy, who backs them up with their every action? Listening to Jesus prayer, I'd say he's just the kind of person you want to trust. Will you receive his words and take his glory in? This is eternal life, to know the one true God and Jesus Christ whom he has sent. The most Important Person in the world.