

Sermon 104: Romans 9:22-23: The Glory of God in Election

OUTLINE

The glory of God in the Scriptures

The glory of God in election

INTRODUCTION

What is the chief end of man? To glorify God and enjoy Him forever! We all know these well-worn words and resonate with the truth that they teach. Any person who has the Spirit knows that the glory of God is our highest pursuit and happiness. But let me rephrase that question as John Piper has done to prepare us for the text before us. 'What is the chief end of God?' Your answer to this question will reveal what lies at the centre of all of your thinking. Our man-centred instincts want to say something like, 'God's greatest motive in acting is our salvation.' But this is only a secondary motive, here is the answer John Piper suggests, 'The chief end of God is to glorify God and enjoy Himself forever!' Does that sound odd to your ears? Does that sound self-seeking and vain? Have you thought about what the Bible says God's highest motive is? Above all things God seeks His glory and finds His greatest delight in glorifying Himself. God is not somehow deficient, inadequate or insecure that He has to promote His own glory as we sinners often do. No, for God to deny Himself would be idolatry. God's truthfulness demands that He acknowledge His own infinite majesty as most worthy of praise and adoration. God's goodness demands that He insist upon our highest happiness being found in Him the highest good. God's righteousness requires that no other sit upon the throne to rule the universe but all subject themselves to His perfect, loving, gracious, wise and holy rule. God's insistence upon being God results in our greatest happiness, for there is no other who can satisfy us like Him. Therefore God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in Him. The most loving thing God can do is insist upon being our God. It is when we have most fully embraced God as our God and are fully satisfied by Him then we overflow in praise of His glory and God is most glorified in our joy. Today we want to drive this point home, that all God does He does for His glory, and this includes all that He does in election.

Romans 9:22-23, '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, 23 in order to make known the riches of his glory for vessels of mercy, which he has prepared beforehand for glory.' Paul has stated that God's faithfulness to Israel has not failed because God in His sovereign act of electing love chose only to save some of Israel and not all. Paul defends God's power to save by limiting its scope. Paul anticipated objections on the basis of justice and free will but he explicitly and without embarrassment stated the case of God's sovereignty in ways that we would be too embarrassed to do. We have been confronted with our inability to judge God on these matters being finite and not having all the facts. We have seen that the issue is not one of justice but mercy because we are all sinners and none deserve to be saved. We have observed how God is equally sovereign over salvation and hardening but works in different ways, either directly or indirectly. We have had to

learn our place as creatures in all our thinking about God. And in our last sermon we sought to offer some lines of biblical thought that would alleviate the tension in this issue and at least change our questions. We examined the teaching on God's two wills, that He wills on thing in His eternal plan which may contradict what He commands and we need to have a nuanced view of His will that we do not fall into a reductionistic error. We highlighted the reality of concurrence to show that God is sovereign even over sin and evil but is not the author of sin, nor does He violate the will of the creature, nor does He bypass secondary means. This has left us with a number of questions that we cannot answer, but we have come to a place of contentment as we have said all that the Scriptures say on the machinations of election. Today we want to look at Paul's last answer to the objections raised, we want to see the highest and best answer which should silence all our questioning. God hardens and elects for the glory of His own name!

Let me outline what I am and am not going to do in this sermon. I am not going to rego over all the ground we have already covered reapplying the truths we have already learned. I am simply going to state now what we cannot deduce from this text. When it says that God prepares the vessels of wrath for destruction there are certain doors that are closed to us. First door we feel tempted to go through; God did not make man sinful but good so God is not the author if sin, we are. Second door, the language of 'preparing' sounds very hands on but we have already shown that God is sovereignly in control by indirect means but still sovereign, so He does not violate the will of the creature. Door three, the sinner is finally judged for their sin as the legal ground for the eternal damnation not election. Door four, the unembarrassed language of God's control and the logical deductions we seek to force from them that make God look bad, e.g. that God makes us to destroy us to make Himself look good. These are illegitimate conclusions that should be stopped before they start as we do not have all the info, nor are we in any position as creatures to reproach our maker. God is good and does good and the language stating God's sovereignty is not to be used as an attack on His goodness, this says more about our anti-God bias than God Himself. There we go, we have decluttered the text of the controversy and now we can get the kernel of Paul's thought which is this: God's motive in both election and reprobation, in saving and hardening is the glory of His name. In judgement upon the sinner we see God's patience, His power and His wrath. In His saving of the sinner we see the riches of His glory, His grace, mercy and love.

God's glory in the scriptures

The glory of God is the supreme goal of the bible, it is the supreme goal of the gospel, it is the supreme goal of Jesus mission, of our lives and should be at the centre of all of our thinking. Here are a few of the lines of thought in the bible which place God's glory in the centre. We see in the life of the Son of God that God's glory was the supreme goal for which He lived and died. We see that Jesus came not to represent Himself but came in His Father's name to represent the Father, John 5:43a, 'I have come in my Father's name, and you do not receive me.' Jesus manifested the glory of God the Father's name to His disciples, John 17:6, '"I have manifested your name to the people whom you gave me out of the world. Yours they were, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word.'

Jesus laid down His life for the glory of the Father, listen to Jesus facing the fear of death and subjecting this strongest of human fears to the glory of God in John 12:27-28, "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. 28 Father, glorify your name." Then a voice came from heaven: "I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again."

The gospel is all about the glory of God. Did you know that God forgives your sin when you trust in Christ for the glory of His name? Romans 3:25-26 tells us that God is zealous to guard His honour, the glory of His justice even while He is forgiving sins, '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. 26 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.' He is zealous for you to know that His justice and righteousness are not overlooked in your salvation. God has not tripped over Himself, and denied Himself in some wild gesture of love to save you. He sent His Son to pay for your sins in order that His holiness, His righteousness, and His justice might be satisfied and put on display. It is because God is zealous for the glory of His justice that you can have assurance of your salvation in that God has most certainly forgiven your sins. Think of the wonderful promise of 1 John 1:9, 'If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.' Our sins are forgiven not only because God is faithful to give grace to the humble, but also because He is just. If you are clinging to Christ for salvation, God must forgive your sins because He is just. If Christ is the one you are pleading as your substitute for sin and He has died to pay in full all that you owe then you had better be sure that God has forgiven you, for He is just. Payment has been paid in full and He because of His perfect justice will acknowledge the debt as settled by Christ. John highlights that we have been forgiven for the sake of God's name, 1 John 2:12, 'I am writing to you, little children, because your sins are forgiven for his name's sake.' God's zeal for His own glory gives us assurance of salvation.

When God saved Israel out of Egypt it was for the sake of His name, Psalm 106:7-8, 'Our fathers, when they were in Egypt, did not consider your wondrous works; they did not remember the abundance of your steadfast love, but rebelled by the sea, at the Red Sea. Yet he saved them for his name's sake, that he might make known his mighty power.'

When God sent Israel into exile because of their sin it was because He was zealous for His glory, Ezekiel 36:20-23, 'But when they came to the nations, wherever they came, they profaned my holy name, in that people said of them, 'These are the people of the LORD, and yet they had to go out of his land.' 21 But I had concern for my holy name, which the house of Israel had profaned among the nations to which they came. "Therefore say to the house of Israel, Thus says the Lord GOD: It is not for your sake, O house of Israel, that I am about to act, but for the sake of my holy name, which you have profaned among the nations to which you came. 23 And I will vindicate the holiness of my great name, which has been profaned among the nations, and which you have profaned among them. And the nations will know that I am the LORD, declares the Lord GOD, when through you I vindicate my holiness before their eyes.'

When God returned His people back from the land after exile into Babylon it was for the glory of His name, Isaiah 43:9-11, "'For my name's sake I defer my anger, for the sake of my praise I restrain it for you, that I may not cut you off. Behold, I have refined you, but not as silver; I have tried you in the furnace of affliction. 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.'

The various people in the Bible realised that this was God's concern and this shaped the way that they prayed, listen to Daniel asking for God to restore Israel to the land, for the sake of His name, Daniel 9:19, 'O Lord, hear; O Lord, forgive. O Lord, pay attention and act. Delay not, for your own sake, O my God, because your city and your people are called by your name.'" When Jesus taught the disciples how to pray He taught them to say, 'Hallowed be Thy name.'

The making of Israel into a people was for the glory of God, Jeremiah 13:11, 'For as the loincloth clings to the waist of a man, so I made the whole house of Israel and the whole house of Judah cling to me, declares the LORD, that they might be for me a people, a name, a praise, and a glory, but they would not listen.'

The saving of a multitude of people from all nations is for the glory of God, Psalm 86:9, 'All the nations you have made shall come and worship before you, O Lord, and shall glorify your name.' Listen to what James says about the salvation of the Gentiles in Acts 15:14, 'Simeon has related how God first visited the Gentiles, to take from them a people for his name.'

God has created all things for the glory of His name and so whether we eat or drink we are to do all things for His glory.

The glory of God in election

That is a smattering of the hundreds of verses that show God's glory to be the centre of all things; we want to see now how Paul's teaching on election glorifies God. The English translations of v22-23 put Paul's thoughts in the form of a hypothetical question, in the Greek the construction is more certain and runs more like an unfinished thought. The English translations have 'what if...' but the Greek has 'but if....' If we were to translate it literally it would sound something like, 'But if God, desiring to show his wrath and to make known his power, has endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, 23 in order to make known the riches of his glory for vessels of mercy, which he has prepared beforehand for glory—(this is where Paul's thoughts ends), and he doesn't go on to add the obvious conclusion which would be something like, '—what can we argue in response/how can you say He can't do it,' etc. Instead Paul lets the obvious answer hang in the air as he moves on to speak of the grace of God resulting in salvation in v24.

Paul's thinking is right in line with what the rest of the bible says about God's motive for doing anything. God's sovereignty in hardening some and having mercy on others results in

God showing His wrath, making known His power, revealing His patience, making known the riches of His glory, and displaying His mercy.

Lets begin by highlighting how God's patience is shown in how God deals with the elect and the reprobate. We see that God endures with much patience those who are going to be judged. Paul in the context has alluded to Pharaoh and no doubt this example would be at the forefront of his mind. In Exodus we see that God hardens Pharaoh's heart not only once, but in order that 10 great plagues might be poured out upon Egypt. They were a terribly idolatrous nation who oppressed the people of God and had stored up much wrath for themselves. We see that God intends to make an example out of Pharaoh that His wrath and power might be more fully displayed. But God's patience with sinners must be marvelled at. Go back to Eden when Adam and Eve in perfect bliss decided that God was not enough and His gifts were not enough they wanted to be like God Himself. When they sinned God would have been within His rights to judge them to eternal punishment wiping out the whole human race right there and starting again. Just this one sin was enough to fully condemn them. But no God was gracious and gave the promise of a Saviour to be born of a woman who would crush the serpent's head. Then when Cain killed Abel, or Lamech invented polygamy, when the world went terribly sinful that God would have been within His rights to wipe it out, He saved Noah in the flood to start again. We see the Tower of Babel, the multiplying of idols, all of history is just a canvas where we see the endless multiplying of sin and God restrains His hand of wrath. Not punishing sin as it deserves every day when He is angry with the wicked He gives the sun and rain and good gifts of creation and does not pour out His wrath. When His people were bogged down in false religion by the time of Christ and had killed John the Baptist Jesus absorbs the wrath of God and more time is given for men to be saved, more time is given for men to hear the message of God's grace in Christ and God enables this message by His Spirit to go out into all the world into those very nations who were running after idols. One day when we get to heaven and we see God in all His glory that like Isaiah we will feel all our praise to be from unclean lips, we will never say, 'God was not patient enough!'

God's wrath is also seen in election as He sovereignly passing over some for salvation and leaves them in their sins to be condemned for them. If not for sin we would not know the awful reality of God's holy indignation against sin. If it were not for sin we would not see God turn against even His own Son when our sin is reckoned to Him. The Son in whom He delights becomes the criminal whom He hates as God pours out His holy justice on our sin upon the cross. There is no part of God that is not absolutely beautiful, and His wrath, His holy anger, His righteous indignation is a pure and praiseworthy thing.

God's power is shown in His control and triumph over evil. Pharaoh was not only humbled but was utterly humiliated and destroyed in the Red Sea. Sin is under God's control, all things come to pass according to His will, and one day when He finally eradicates sin that it can never ever raise its head or do any damage ever again, the amazing strength of His power to save, to undo all wrong, and to seal us into eternal fellowship which can never be broken by anything. The devil, sin, death, unbelief, pain, sickness, lies, decay, and all other effects of sin will suffer such a defeat as to never recover!

But verse 23 is the high point of Paul's point. God seeks to manifest the riches of His glory towards wretched sinners in His grace and mercy and love in Christ. Of all the things that God seeks to put front and centre, His glorious grace takes centre stage. Turn to Ephesians. In chapter 1 Paul is rehearsing the staggering riches of God towards us in Christ. Look at v3-6, '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, 4 even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love 5 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.' God's electing purposes were to bring about the riches of His glorious grace. We see in the very next verse that our redemption and forgiveness are measured out to us according to this great grace, v7, 'In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace.' Verses 11-13 go on talking about how our inheritance and salvation and the gift of the Spirit is for the praise of His glory, 'In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will, 12 so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory. 13 In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, 14 who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.' And if that were not enough Paul goes on to pray that we might have eyes to see how rich God's grace is towards us, v16-20, 'I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers, 17 that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, 18 having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, 19 and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might 20 that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places.' Paul continues speaking how God has saved us by grace to magnify His riches towards us, 2:7, 'so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.' God's purpose in Christ is to declare not only to us but to the angels the glory of this grace, 3:10, 'so that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places.'

There are many questions around the doctrine of sovereign election, but let them all fade away as you focus not upon the controversies and mysteries, but upon the grace of God towards you in Christ. You did not deserve to be saved, and God has saved you to the uttermost in His grace, praise be the glorious riches of His grace.