

Signs of Glory

Studies in John's Gospel

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Study 1

Signs from God

Introducing the Studies

The glory in John's Gospel that we will be considering is the glory of God's Son, seen in the person and ministry of Jesus of Nazareth. Although the Son has glory of Himself, the glory revealed through Jesus of Nazareth was the glory the Father gave Him and so it was actually the glory of the Father (John 8:54; 14:13; 17:1, 4, 10, 22). So all of the signs Jesus did were a revelation of the life love and Kingdom of the Father.

By saying 'signs' of glory we don't imply that the glory manifested by Jesus was essentially hidden, leaving only fragmented tell-tale signs here and there. It is true that the signs Jesus did needed to be read, but John insists that where there was a heart to know then the fullness of the grace and truth of the Father was clear (1:14).

Many see the first half of John's Gospel as the 'book of signs'. Some select eight, others seven. However, John maintained that the signs he included were just a small selection from the vast flood of signs that Jesus did, *Therefore many other signs Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; (20:30), see too, And there are also many other things which Jesus did, which if they were written in detail, I suppose that even the world itself would not contain the books that would be written (21:25)*. In the latter reference John seems to be saying something similar to Isaiah, *The whole earth is full of His glory* (see Isaiah 6:3). We note as well that the signs Jesus worked revealed the inglorious state of the religion of the day. So along with the grace of the Father there was the judgement of God upon the perverting of all He had revealed through the Law and the Prophets.

The signs we will consider are:

1. The water turned to wine (2:1-11)
2. The nobleman's son healed (4:46-54)
3. The healing at Bethesda (5:1-18)
4. Feeding the 5,000 (6:1-14)
5. Walking on the sea (6:16-21)
6. Healing the man born blind (9:1-12)
7. Raising of Lazarus (11:1-44)
8. The miraculous draught of fish (21:5-11)

Of course the greatest manifestation of the glory of Christ and the glory of the Father happened on Calvary and in the resurrection and ascension. (17:1, 5, 24). The Father of glory raised Jesus from the dead, and the risen Lord was taken up to glory (Ephesians 1:17ff and 1 Timothy 3:15, 16). The glory of the cross is behind every other sign we will consider, for apart from the cross the power displayed in the signs would mean nothing in the eternal perspective.

The goal of the Signs in John's Gospel

John's purpose is clear. In recording the signs of Jesus he desires that his readers,

May believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God, and that by believing you may have life in His name (20:31).

However, as we consider the signs and the warnings Jesus gave about our attitude to sign-seeking and faith, we will see that the presence of a sign, wonder or miracle does not necessarily or automatically produce faith. As with Pharaoh signs may produce an increasing hardness of heart towards God, *Then the magicians said to Pharaoh, "This is the finger of God." But Pharaoh's heart was hardened, and he did not listen to them, as the LORD had said (Exodus 8:19).*

From near the beginning of history people have wanted God to prove Himself by performing signs. Sin's guilt brings a terrible new image of God. This image perverts our comprehension of God in every way resulting in a crippling fear that God will not deliver what we need and prove Himself to be unloving, uncaring or incapable. Trust is given over to deep suspicion and anger. To require God to prove Himself, as if He was the One who was tardy about revealing Himself is gross arrogance. This blind arrogance is most seen clearly when His true image, clear Word, His Beloved Son appeared in our flesh, full of the Father's grace and truth and we rejected Him out of hand. The whole heart of humanity towards the Father must be recapitulated. It must be taken through the cross and recreated by the love shown there. This must be the greatest miracle.

Signs are for reading and understanding. How do we know if they have been read truly? When those who see them believe in Christ as the Father's Messiah and know Him as the Father's true Son, which is to know that we are joint heirs of all the Father's riches with Jesus. These are not hidden mysteries available only to the few who have spiritual powers to crack the code. Why some see through the signs to the truth portrayed and others refuse is a mystery of providence and grace. What we do know is that where signs are received in humble eagerness to submit in love to Christ then the signs breed and multiply faith. Where hearts are hard, challenging God to overpower their indifference or scepticism with miracles that will compel faith, then the signs are not read and faith is absent. Faith cannot be compelled by raw power, even by God Himself. The glory of the Father is His holy love. Where that love is received through the works of Christ, hearts are constrained into love for the Father. For the works of Christ were not simply testimonies about the Father, but the actual works of the Father Himself (9:3; 10:32).

The Matter of Glory

Our images of what is glorious may vary enormously. We speak of glorious sunsets, glorious triumphs over adversity, in warfare, or on the sporting arena. The Scriptures tell us that God is glorious and that His glory is something that His children will share in. *Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to make you stand in the presence of His glory blameless with great joy Jude (1:24).*

The primary word for glory in the OT is *kabod* which has the sense of being laden with riches (Genesis 31:1), power (Isaiah 8:7) and honour and high position (Genesis 45:13). God's glory is proclaimed by everything He has created. Yet the creation and all that is in it cannot be the summation of God's glory. These things can declare that He is glorious (Psalm 19:1, 2), and be filled by His glory (Isaiah 6:3), but His glory is beyond and above them all (1 Timothy 6:15-16). However, in Christ the fullness of God dwelt in bodily form (Colossians 2:9).

God is always gloriously present to His people and to His creation. His presence is glorious because He comes laden with riches. *You hide Your face, they are dismayed; You take away their spirit, they expire and return to their dust (Psalm 104:29).*

God's presence formed the context for all that occurred in the Garden and the early family (Genesis 3:8; 4:16). His presence was crucial for life and true wisdom. The glory of His presence was known only in communion with Him by the reception of all His blessings freely given. The flood of His promises and blessings left humanity with no excuse in their passion to leave Him and live apart from His glory. To go out from His presence was to enter a frightful place, given over to the excesses of sin and its ensuing restless aggravation and violence. But even in Cain's absence from God's presence, God signed him lest the terror of what he had introduced to the race when he murdered Able, escalate into unbridled destruction.

Israel always spoke of God's signs and wonders done in Egypt. They read the signs as a continual reminder of His sovereign election and intervention on their behalf. But what they often failed to read from the signs was the glory of God's presence. This meant that their religion became formal and legal and their hearts were immediately distracted to find 'communion' with something or someone else. They sought to find another source of glory where none existed. The glory of God's presence was the source of all they were and all they would become.

God's call to Moses had been a call into His counsel, into communion (Ex 3:12). His promised sign to Moses was that He would lead out His people to this same holy mount and enclose them in the same glorious Presence, *You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings, and brought you to Myself* (Exodus 19:4). Many of the other familiar signs given to Israel also confirmed the glory of His presence. They were grace gifts to sustain and enlarge their trust.

- **The Sabbath** was God's sign to Israel of His nearness in the communion of rest (Exodus 31:17).
- God's **covenant sign of the bow** given to the whole earth (Genesis 9:13), and **circumcision, the sign to Abraham's children of the covenant of grace** (Genesis 17:1) were signs of His holy love.
- **Israel's Temple communion**, the shadow of His future presence in Jesus of Nazareth, Immanuel, God with us, was God's sign to them, a sign in which they participated, of the day when the whole earth would be filled with the knowledge of the Lord.

So we are saying that for Israel to read the signs of God was to see, delight and trust in His glorious presence. In that communion they experienced true freedom, true wisdom and true vocation with a view to the eternities.

In His Son Jesus of Nazareth the Father's glorious presence is most brilliantly signed. *"Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves know.."*

The incarnate, Beloved Son was announced with glory (Luke 2:9, 14, 32), came revealing glory (John 1:14 – 18), and ultimately opened the eternal glory of the Father to all believers (John 17:22, 24; 2 Corinthians 3:18).

Glory in John's Gospel

Apart from the classic passage on the glory of Christ in John 1:14-18 there are many other references to glory in John. They are included below for your reflection. It is obvious to the casual reader that the glory which Christ revealed is far different to any popular view of what it means for a human being to be glorious. His glory was vastly different to the glory of the religious leaders of His day. So far had they moved from the hope of glory that they were offended when God tabernacled amongst them. They were entrenched on religion as the 'way of glory' not the 'way of the cross'. Gerhard

O. Foorde in *Being Theologians of the Cross*, uses Luther's Heidelberg Disputation to draw out the gulf between the two ways of understanding theology. The way of glory begins with man in control, setting out on a grand and glorious quest for God. "We came from glory and are bound to glory. Of course, in between we seem somehow to have gotten derailed – whether by design or accident we don't quite know – but that is only a temporary inconvenience to be fixed by proper religious effort (p.5). This always leaves man believing that they are in control. It must then seek to make its message attractive to the supposed free will. The theology of the cross assumes that the will is bound and must be set free. The cross alone does that. The leaders of Jesus day were so infatuated by their glory road that when the true glory came they called it demonic. Their way of glory proved most inglorious.

It is against this theology of glory that Christ's signs are pitched. The battle is however not theological but a battle for life. John said that his object was trust in Christ with a view to life. This life was a participation in the glorious life of the Father and His Family. All other theologies were theologies of glory leading the devotees further into death and dead things, albeit brilliantly. The allurements of theologies of glory far out shine in human terms the glory to be seen in Jesus of Nazareth.

John 1:14

And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His **glory, glory** as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth.

John 2:11

This beginning of His signs Jesus did in Cana of Galilee, and manifested His **glory**, and His disciples believed in Him.

John 5:41

"I do not receive **glory** from men;

John 5:44

"How can you believe, when you receive **glory** from one another and you do not seek the **glory** that is from the one and only God?

John 7:18

"He who speaks from himself seeks his own **glory**; but He who is seeking the **glory** of the One who sent Him, He is true, and there is no unrighteousness in Him.

John 7:39

But this He spoke of the Spirit, whom those who believed in Him were to receive; for the Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet **glorified**.

John 8:50

"But I do not seek My **glory**; there is One who seeks and judges.

John 8:54

Jesus answered, "If I **glorify** Myself, My **glory** is nothing; it is My Father who glorifies Me, of whom you say, 'He is our God';

John 9:24

So a second time they called the man who had been blind, and said to him, "Give **glory** to God; we know that this man is a sinner."

John 11:4

But when Jesus heard this, He said, "This sickness is not to end in death, but for the **glory** of God, so that the Son of God may be **glorified** by it."

John 11:40

Jesus said to her, "Did I not say to you that if you believe, you will see the **glory** of God?"

John 12:16

These things His disciples did not understand at the first; but when Jesus was **glorified**, then they remembered that these things were written of Him, and that they had done these things to Him.

John 12:23

And Jesus answered them, saying, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be **glorified**."

John 12:28

" Father, **glorify** Your name " Then a voice came out of heaven: "I have both **glorified** it, and will **glorify** it again."

John 12:41

These things Isaiah said because he saw His **glory**, and he spoke of Him.

John 13:31

Therefore when he had gone out, Jesus said, "Now is the Son of Man **glorified**, and God is **glorified** in Him;

John 13:32

if God is **glorified** in Him, God will also **glorify** Him in Himself, and will **glorify** Him immediately.

John 14:13

" Whatever you ask in My name, that will I do, so that the Father may be **glorified** in the Son.

John 15:8

"My Father is **glorified** by this, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be My disciples.

John 16:14

"He will **glorify** Me, for He will take of Mine and will disclose it to you.

John 17:1

Jesus spoke these things; and lifting up His eyes to heaven, He said, "Father, the hour has come; **glorify** Your Son, that the Son may **glorify** You,

John 17:4

"I **glorified** You on the earth, having accomplished the work which You have given Me to do.

John 17:5

"Now, Father, **glorify** Me together with Yourself, with the **glory** which I had with You before the world was.

John 17:10

and all things that are Mine are Yours, and Yours are Mine; and I have been **glorified** in them.

John 17:22

"The **glory** which You have given Me I have given to them, that they may be one, just as We are one;

John 17:24

"Father, I desire that they also, whom You have given Me, be with Me where I am, so that they may see My **glory** which You have given Me, for You loved Me before the foundation of the world.

John 21:19

Now this He said, signifying by what kind of death he would **glorify** God And when He had spoken this, He said to him, " Follow Me!"

Our Response

Let us not be like those of whom Jesus said, *Truly, truly, I say to you, you seek Me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate of the loaves and were filled* (John 6:26). In the presence of the Father's glorious giving their focus was on their bellies, not Him. To be fascinated by miracles and seek to build up a portfolio of proofs that will convince the world that Jesus is truly God's Son would be a folly. John's, as with our Lord's intent would be for us to see the stunning glory of the Father, fall on our faces in the grace of seeing Him truly and be filled by His riches. Then we too will become witnesses to Father's glory.

Recommended reading

God and Man in Signs and Wonders, Geoffrey C. Bingham, New Creations publications, Blackwood SA, 1988.