



John 17:1-5

When Jesus had spoken these words, he lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said, “Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you, ² since you have given him authority over all flesh, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him. ³ And this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. ⁴ I glorified you on earth, having accomplished the work that you gave me to do. ⁵ And now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed.”

There are certain words we use in Christianity that we get so used to hearing we never really think about what it means. Inigo Montoya [famously made the same observation](#). ☺

The word in question is glory or glorify. We use it all the time. We say we want to bring glory to God through our lives. We use it frequently in our Christian vernacular but do we really know what it means?

In his high priestly prayer—again, this is the longest recorded prayer of Jesus and it took place the day before his crucifixion. In this prayer, Jesus used the word five times in the first five verses. And glory is the only thing that he asked for himself in this 26 verse long prayer. He asked for one thing: “glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you...”

If you recall, the outline of Jesus’ prayer is very simple.

1. Jesus prays for himself (1-5)
2. Jesus prays for his disciples (6-18)
3. Jesus prays for the church (19-27)

In this section Jesus prayed for himself but he only asked for one thing—glory for himself and His Father. Before we answer the what question about glory we need to answer the when questions. There are some very important questions related to timing. Jesus asked that he be glorified and in verse five he talks about timing of this prayer request.

Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed.

We learn at least two things from this verse. One, Jesus was with the Father “before the world existed”. That’s why he is praying that his full glory be returned to him. Two, while he was on earth he did not have the same kind of glory. Or put another way, Jesus himself is saying that he is equal with God but while he was in the flesh on earth, some of the glory that he shared for all eternity was no longer a part of his existence.

Let’s deal with the deity of Christ first. There are many ways to invalidate the Christian faith and chief among them is to deny the deity of Christ. But neither John the gospel writer of Jesus himself will allow that to happen. John laid down this truth in the first words of his gospel. “In the beginning was the word and the word was with God and the Word as God.” Jesus is the Word and the Word is God. That is as clear as day.

One of my favorites is from chapter eight where Jesus said to the Pharisees, “before Abraham was, I am.” Before Abraham existed, Jesus existed. Not only that, but Jesus used the title that God used in the burning bush. I am. It is a statement of self-existence. It is a clear statement of deity.

And then we have this John 17 passage. “glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed.” Jesus was pre-existent with the Father and shared the Father’s full glory. There is no question that Jesus claimed to be fully God.

But we also have to answer the question why he was praying for a return of his glory. What happened to it in the first place that he prayed for it to return? The simple answer is that he willingly laid it down. He gave it up. After all, who is going to take Jesus’ glory from him. It’s inconceivable that anyone would have the authority or power to take some of Jesus’ glory from him so it has to have been something he willingly laid down. And this is exactly how it is described in Philippians 2.

Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

The key phrase in this passage is the word “emptied himself.” Everyone agrees that when the Word became flesh, something was different about him. He changed slightly. As the apostle Paul wrote, “He emptied himself.” He gave up something. The Greek word for emptied is kenos and this is where we get the theological term the kenosis theory. You may or may not have come across it but it is an enormously important doctrine to understand. Here’s why.

We are told that Jesus emptied himself so that must mean something. The word can mean hollow or void. Here is the word used in Mark 12. This is what happened to the servant to went to check on the unworthy tenants. “They took him and beta him and sent him away empty handed.” When he took on flesh, Jesus emptied himself. Something was different. That the kenosis. But if we take the kenosis, the emptying too far, we reduce the deity of Christ. Jesus was full man but if he emptied himself of too many divine attributes, he would cease to also be fully God. Therefore, how you define the kenosis is extremely important lest you stumble into heresy.

And this heresy does still exist today. Bill Johnson of Bethel Church in Redding California has written that Jesus “laid aside his divinity as he sought to fulfil the assignment given to Him by the Father.”¹ According to Johnson, Jesus “performed miracles, wonders and signs, as a man in right relationship to God, not as God. If He performed miracles because He was God, then they would be unattainable for us. But if he did them as a man, I am responsible to pursue His lifestyle.”² So this heresy is still active today.

One’s viewpoint on the kenosis is always brought up during an ordination council. I have sat on one for over ten years and we always ask candidates about the kenosis. I was asked during my own ordination council. I’ll tell you later how I answered the question, “What did Jesus give up?”

In 1873, Charles Wesley composed one of his 6000 hymns. Can you imagine writing 6000 hymns? That is an average of one hymn every day for over sixteen years. One of his most popular hymns is And Can it Be? The third verse is brought up as potentially controversial.

He left His Father’s throne above
So free, so infinite His grace—
Emptied Himself of all but love,
And bled for Adam’s helpless race:
'Tis mercy all, immense and free,
For O my God, it found out me!

What do you think of the third line? “Emptied himself of all but love.” Clearly, Wesley was thinking about Philippians chapter two when he wrote this line. Some have strongly criticized this hymn and call it bad theology because it seems to empty Christ of his attributes of deity. Taken at face value, we would have to reject this one line as clearly heretical because if Jesus did empty himself of all but love, he would have ceased to have been God. And if he was not God, he could not have paid for our sins on the cross. So words mean something. But on the other hand, that may not have been Wesley’s intention at all.³ He may have just been relying on poetic license to convey the enormity of Jesus’ sacrifice. Unless we could interview Charles Wesley—and we will see him one day—we won’t know for sure, but it does help us to understand the kenosis question.

So if Jesus did not empty himself of all but love, of what then did he empty himself? In my opinion, the answer is found right here in Jesus’ prayer. *Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed.* Jesus gave up his full glory. He didn’t actually empty himself in the full, literal sense of the word. Paul could not on one hand claim

that Jesus is fully God and then somewhere else claim that he emptied himself of all of his divine attributes. That is nonsense. But if we take Jesus at his word here, we understand that in some sense, his full glory was limited while he was on the earth.

Can you think of a time when more of Jesus' glory was seen when he was still on the earth? Matthew 17:2—*And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became white as light.* I believe that the transfiguration was a revelation of more of Jesus' glory. Jesus' body was sort of a veil that hid his full glory and on the mountain, Peter, James and John saw a little more of it. It still may not have been his full glory because I'm not sure he would be asking for it for it here otherwise.

So what stood between Jesus' prayer and the Father granting this prayer of asking for his full glory? What stood between Jesus and the restoration of his full glory was the cross. I love how DA Carson puts it. "The hideous profanity of Golgotha means nothing less than the Son's glorification."⁴ In other words, Jesus' path to answered prayer was through great suffering. He obviously knew this which would have made the knowledge of his return to His Father all the more sweet.

Jesus' experience perfectly mirrors our own spiritual journey. Our suffering makes eternity all the more sweet. This is very clear in 2 Corinthians.

So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal (2 Corinthians 4:16-18)

Jesus had to go through suffering to get his full glory and you and I need to go through suffering to obtain an eternal weight of glory. But what if this eternal weight of glory that Paul described is actually Jesus himself? Could Jesus be the eternal weight of glory? I think it's quite possible, especially as you see what Jesus prayed in verse 24. This is jumping ahead to the section where Jesus prays for the church but it also very relevant to the first part of Jesus' prayer. *Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am.* This is a stunning prayer. Jesus is asking for us—for those who believe in him—to be with him. Now you might think this is redundant because that's what it means to be a believer, right? Why would Jesus have to ask the father for something which was already guaranteed in the first chapter of John?

"But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God." All who believed will have eternal life and will be with Jesus, so why did Jesus pray for this outcome? I don't think it is a request as much as it is a laying down of his heart. It's similar to the prayer for his full glory to be returned. If Jesus had not prayed this prayer, would he have received his full glory after his resurrection and ascension? He is not asking that the Father do this but rather he is pouring out his heart and telling his Father what he wants more than anything. He laid aside some of his glory. He emptied himself. He was away from the Father and was about to have the wrath of his Father laid upon him. That's suffering of the highest degree so

naturally he was looking forward to returning to His Father and the restoration of his glory. He prayed for his glory as the attitude of his heart, not as a request per se. And I think the same is true when he prayed for his us to be with him. He wasn't asking, he was expressing his desire.

But look what he prayed next. *Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory that you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world.* Here's the end goal of Jesus' prayer—not only that we would be with him but also that we would see his glory. Can you see more clearly what Jesus' glory represents? Jesus' glory is Jesus' utter perfection. The disciples and the world has never seen Jesus' full glory. The closest thing to it was at the transfiguration, which completely freaked them out. But one day, we will be in the presence of Jesus and see his glory. This is why I think the eternal weight of glory in 2 Corinthians 4 may be Jesus himself. I can't prove it, but it makes sense to me.

Jesus wants us to be with him. He literally prayed that we would be with him. Remember last week I said that the fact that Jesus even prayed is an amazing truth. He not only prays, he prays for us. He not only prays for us but in this prayer, he expressed his deep desire that we would be with him. Jesus *provided* the way to come to him, but he also *wants* us with him. And he wants us to see his glory because his glory is bound up with his person. His glory is his majesty and utter perfection. He wants his glory restored so that he can share it with us. I'm not saying that is the only reason, but it is his stated reason. What can Jesus give us that is greater than himself?

But Jesus is not merely rejoicing in his own glory but also the glory of his Father. *I glorified you on earth, having accomplished the work that you gave me to do.* The restoration of his glory also brings glory to his Father—"glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you."

Do you want me to tell you how I answered this question during my own ordination council? Of what did Jesus empty himself? I said that he laid aside his full glory. To this day I'm not sure how I came up with that answer because I was not at all prepared for the question. Nowadays we ask the candidates ahead of time to make sure they include the kenosis in their ordination papers.

So I got the question right from a theological perspective. And we need to do so. Theology drives behavior. Theology comes first but behavior and experience must follow close behind. So how do we experience the glory of God rightly? What does it mean to glorify God? Let me ask this question. Through my good works and obedience to Christ, can I increase God's glory? Is there anything we can do? Of course not. God is infinitely perfect in every way and he cannot improve. He cannot grow. We cannot add to his glory.

Glorifying God is to be caught up in the wonder of Jesus. Jesus knows that the greatest thing that he can give us is himself, that's why he wants us to be with him and to see his glory. So glorifying Jesus is enjoying Jesus. This is wonderfully expressed in Psalm 96.

Oh sing to the Lord a new song;
sing to the Lord, all the earth!
2 Sing to the Lord, bless his name;
tell of his salvation from day to day.

3 Declare his glory among the nations,
his marvelous works among all the peoples!

Once you enjoy God above all things, you can't but help to tell the nations, to tell others about who He is.

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¹ Bill Johnson, When Heaven Invades Earth, 79.

² Bill Johnson, When Heaven Invades Earth, 29.

³ <http://baptistbulletin.org/the-baptist-bulletin-magazine/emptied-himself-of-all-but-love/>

⁴ Carson, D. A. (1991). [*The Gospel according to John*](#) (p. 554). Leicester, England; Grand Rapids, MI: Inter-
Varsity Press; W.B. Eerdmans.