

WHERE IS GOD GOING?

The Goal of God and the Leaders He Calls

In the first session, we defined spiritual leadership as: "Knowing where God wants people to be and taking the initiative to use God's methods to get them there in reliance on God's power." This implies that God has a goal that he would like his people to be moving toward. In order for anyone to fulfill the calling of Christian leadership he must know what God's goal is and make it his own. Therefore, here in our second session, the question we must ask is: Where is God going? That is, what does the Scripture reveal to be God's over-arching aim in all that he has done throughout history and in all that he plans to do in the future? We simply cannot be confident and effective leaders if we do not have a firm conviction about where God is heading and therefore where we should be going and where we should be directing others.

But I must admit to you that the question of God's goal in history is not of interest to me simply because I have to talk to you about leadership. It is important to me simply because of what it means to be a child of God. It is a very arrogant and ungrateful son who has no keen interest in the goal that lies most heavy on his father's heart. The faithful son longs to know and understand his father's deepest intentions, so that he can bring his thoughts and affections and actions into alignment with it.

Or to put it another way, you don't really know a person (God) until you know what moves him most deeply. It makes no sense to say we know God when we are not acquainted with his strongest desire and with the goal that guides all his action. But if we don't know him, then we can't worship him, and we can't imitate him. In other words, if we are to be faithful children of our heavenly father who worship him and imitate him as we ought then we must answer the question: What is the supreme goal of God in history? So I hope that even those of you who may not feel the least inclined towards assuming positions of leadership will see the relevance of this session for you if your aim is to be a faithful son of the heavenly father.

A FUNDAMENTAL ASSUMPTION

When I aim to find God's aim or goal in history I am assuming that God is ultimately in control of all that happens in the world; that he is the author and director of this great drama we call history; and that he designs and disposes all things for the accomplishment of that ultimate goal. So let me at the very outset try to provide a brief biblical basis for this conviction.

According to the prophet Isaiah, the very fact that God is God means he has had a determinate purpose in history from the very beginning and that this purpose cannot be frustrated: "I am God and there is no other; I am God and there is none like me, declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done, saying, 'My counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish

all my purpose '" (Isaiah 46:9,10).

The prophet Jeremiah in his Lamentations over fallen Jerusalem reflects on God's capacity to wield the nations and concludes that no human commands are ever executed unless the Lord ordains it: "Who has commanded and it came to pass, unless the Lord has ordained it? Is it not from the mouth of the most high that good and evil come?" (Lam. 3:37,38, cf. Isaiah 45:1-7).

The performance of God's purpose among nations and rulers which the prophets make so plain in the Old Testament is just as plain in the New Testament. The early church gathered together in Jerusalem and prayed this: "Truly in this city there were gathered together against thy holy servant Jesus, whom thou didst anoint, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, to do whatever thy hand and thy plan had predestined to take place" (Acts 4:27,28). God had a plan and a goal in all that happened to Jesus.

Similarly, when we come to the end of the New Testament and to the end of history in the Revelation of John we find God in complete control of all the kings who wage war. In chapter 17 John speaks of ten horns and a beast and the harlot. These are ten kings, the antichrist and Rome. In verses 16 and 17 we read, "And the ten horns that you saw, they and the beast will hate the harlot; they will make her desolate and naked and devour her flesh and burn her up with fire, for God has put it in their hearts to carry out his purpose by being of one mind and giving over their royal power to the beast, until the words of God shall be fulfilled." Just like Proverbs 21:1 says, "The king's heart is a stream of water in the

hand of the Lord; he turns it wherever he will."

We should not get the idea from these texts, however, that God superintends only the affairs of kings and princes and military leaders. No, he is just as much God over individuals as he is over nations. At the end of the story about Joseph being sold into slavery and then rising to prominence in Egypt, Joseph says to his brothers, "As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result to preserve many people alive" (Gen. 50: 20). The evil intentions of men never frustrate the decrees of God.

It was probably stories like this and many such experiences in his own life that led the writer of the Proverbs to say, "Many are the plans of a man's heart, but the counsel of the Lord, it will stand" (Prov. 19:21). Or as he says in another place, "The dice are cast in the lap, but every decision is from the Lord" (Proverbs 16:33, cf. 16:9; Jer. 10:23).

These, then, are just some of the passages of scripture to the effect that God is ultimately in control of all that happens and that he designs and disposes all things in accordance with his plan or goal. Or to use the words of Paul in Ephesians 1:11, "He accomplishes all things according to the counsel of his will." Therefore, I feel amply justified in searching the scriptures for God's goal in redemptive history, for now I know that he is in sufficient control over what happens in the world. There must be some rhyme or reason to it all. There must be some aim or goal, since surely God is not a God of confusion or a God who has no idea why he made the world or what he is doing in it.

CLARIFYING SOME TERMINOLOGY

As we undertake now to survey the high points of God's action in history, we will be looking for those portions of Scripture which make explicit what God's purpose has been in what he has been doing in the past and what he plans to do in the future. In advance I will say that the conclusion I have come to is that God's aim or goal in all that he has done is to display his glory for the enjoyment of his people. Or to put it another way, his aim is to see to it that the earth becomes filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord and that a people be redeemed who will enjoy this glory forever and ever.

But before we look at the text to support this conclusion I should say a word about the Biblical terminology. The term "glory of God" in the Bible refers in general to the beauty of God's manifold perfections. It is an attempt to put into words what God is like in his magnificence and purity. It refers to his fullness of all that is good. The term might focus on his different attributes from time to time, like his power and wisdom and mercy and justice, because each one is awesome in its magnitude and quality. But in general God's glory is the perfect harmony of all his attributes into one infinitely beautiful being.

Another term which signifies almost the same thing is "the name" of God. For example, when Scripture speaks of doing something for "his name's sake" it means virtually the same as doing it for his glory. The "name" of God is a

reference to who he is in all his perfection. And that is what his glory refers to also. "Glory" simply specifies more clearly the nature of God's being while the term "name" leaves that nature unspecified. For our purposes the important thing to know is that the goal of doing something "for God's glory" and the goal of doing it "for his name's sake" are the same goal.

In what follows, then, I will try to give a brief survey of the history of redemption which we find in the scriptures focusing on those high points of God's activity where his purpose is made explicit by the biblical writers.

CREATION

Genesis 1:26,27 Then God said, 'Let us make man in our image, after our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.' So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.

The story of creation reaches its climax in Genesis 1:26,27 with the creation of man in God's image. Four things should be noted about this climatic act: 1) man is created as the last of all God's works and thus is the highest creature. 2) Only man is said to be in the image of God (v. 26,27). 3) Only now that man is on the scene in the image of God does the writer describe the work of creation as being very good (v. 31). 4) Man is given dominion and commanded to subdue and fill the earth (v.28).

What is God's purpose here? According to the text, creation exists for man. But since God made man like himself, man's

dominion over the world and his filling the world is a display-- an imaging forth--of God. God's aim, therefore, was that man would so act that he mirror forth God who has ultimate dominion. Man is given the exalted status of image-bearer not so he would become arrogant and autonomous (as he tried to do in the fall), but so he would reflect the glory of his maker whose image he bears. God's purpose in creation, therefore, was to fill the earth with his glory. This is made clear, for example, in Numbers 14:21 where the Lord says, "All the earth shall be full of the glory of the Lord." And in Isaiah 43:7 the Lord refers to his people as those "whom I created for my glory."

THE TOWER OF BABEL

Genesis 11:1-4 Now the whole earth had one language and few words, and as men migrated from the east, they found a plain in the land of Shinar and settled there. And they said to one another, "Come, let us make bricks, and burn them thoroughly." And they had brick for stone, and bitumen for mortar. Then they said, "Come, let us build ourselves a city, and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth."

In Genesis 11 an incident is related which illustrates how fallen man thought and still thinks. And by contrast, it shows what God's purpose was for man. The key phrase in this passage above is "Let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be scattered" (v.4). The instinct of self-preservation seeks fulfillment not by trusting God and thereby exalting his name, rather the means that fallen man chooses to preserve himself is to employ his own genius to assert himself and make his own reputation and exalt his own distinctives so that his own name would be revered.

This was contrary to God's purpose for man and so God frustrated the effort--and has been frustrating it more or less ever since. God's purpose was that he be given credit for man's greatness and that man thus depend on him. This will be even more evident when we look at what God did next in redemptive history.

THE CALL OF ABRAHAM

Genesis 12:1-2 Now the Lord said to Abram, 'Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing.'

In Genesis 12:1,2 God calls Abraham and begins his dealings with the people of Israel. There is a clear contrast between what God says here and what happened at the tower of Babel. Here God says that he will make Abraham's name great, in explicit contrast to Genesis 11:4 where man wanted to make his own name great. The key difference is this: when man undertakes to make his own name great then he assumes the credit for his own accomplishments and does not give glory to God. But when God undertakes to make a man great the only proper response is trust and gratitude on the part of man, which gives all glory back to God, where it belongs. Abraham proved himself to be very different from the builders of the tower of Babel, because (as we see in Genesis 15:6) Abraham believed the promises of God.

The apostle Paul shows us the link between Abraham's faith and God's glory in Romans 4:20,21: "No distrust made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith,

giving glory to God, fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised." So, in contrast to the builders of the tower of Babel, the Israelites were chosen by God to be a people who trust him and thus give him glory. This is what God says in Isaiah 49:3, "You are my servant Israel, in whom I will be glorified." It shouldn't be surprising, then, that as we follow the history of Israel on through the Old Testament and into the New the repeated purpose ^{of} ~~with~~ God in his dealings with his people is that his glory might be displayed and the people might respond in faith and enjoyment.

THE EXODUS

After the period of the patriarchs (Abraham, Isaac and Jacob), which is recorded in the rest of the book of Genesis, the people of Israel spent several hundred years expanding in the land of Egypt and then became slaves there. God hears the cry of his people and finally undertakes to deliver them through the hand of Moses and to bring them to the promised land of Canaan. God's purpose in this deliverance from Egypt is recorded in several places besides the book of Exodus. For example:

Ezekiel 20:5-9 ...and say to them, Thus says the Lord God: On the day when I chose Israel, I swore to the seed of the house of Jacob, making myself known to them in the land of Egypt, I swore to them, saying, I am the Lord your God. On that day I swore to them that I would bring them out of the land of Egypt into a land that I had searched out for them, a land flowing with milk and honey, the most glorious of all lands. And I said to them, Cast away the detestable things your eyes feast on, every one of you, and do not defile yourselves with the idols of Egypt; I

am the Lord your God. But they rebelled against me and would not listen to me; they did not every man cast away the detestable things their eyes feasted on, nor did they forsake the idols of Egypt.

Then I thought I would pour out my wrath upon them and spend my anger against them in the midst of the land of Egypt. But I acted for the sake of my name, that it should not be profaned in the sight of the nations among whom they dwelt, in whose sight I made myself known to them in bringing them out of the land of Egypt.

Psalm 106:6-8 Both we and our fathers have sinned; we have committed iniquity, we have done wickedly. Our fathers, when they were in Egypt, did not consider thy wondrous works; they did not remember the abundance of thy steadfast love, but rebelled against the Most High at the Red Sea. Yet he saved them for his name's sake, that he might make known his mighty power.

Here it is clear that the deliverance from Egypt is not due to the worthiness of the Israelites but to God's merciful purpose to save them and to honor his own name. This is also made clear in the story of the Exodus itself in Exodus 14:4,18.

Exodus 14:4,18 And I will harden Pharaoh's heart, and he will pursue them and I will get glory over Pharaoh and all his host; and the Egyptians shall know that I am the Lord...And the Egyptians shall know that I am the Lord, when I have gotten glory over Pharaoh, his chariots, and his horsemen.

God's purpose is so to act that men must own up to his glory and confess that he is the only Lord of the universe (the one who, in sovereign freedom, does as he pleases, irresistably). Therefore, the great event of the Exodus, which stood out in Israel's memory and was sung about for hundreds of years and was a paradigm for all God's saving acts -- this event should have made clear to all that God's purposes with Israel are to glorify himself by mighty acts on her behalf and create a people who trust him and who delight in his glory.

THE GIVING OF THE LAW

When Israel reached Mount Sinai, God called Moses onto the mountain and gave him the ten commandments and other regulations for the new social community. At the head of this law is Exodus 20:3-5.

Exodus 20:3-5 "You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself a graven image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the water under the earth; you shall not bow down to them or serve them; for I the Lord your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me."

When God says that we may have no other gods before him and that he is a jealous God, he means that his first aim in giving the law is to see to it that we accord him the honor that he and he only is due. He had just shown himself gloriously gracious and powerful in the Exodus and so now he simply demands in the law an appropriate response from his people: that we should love him and keep his commandments (v. 6). To love God does not mean to help him out but rather, to delight in him and to be captivated by his glorious power and grace and to value him above all other things upon the earth. All the rest of the commandments are the kinds of things that we will do from our hearts if our hearts are truly delighted with and resting in the glory of God's grace.

THE WILDERNESS WANDERING

God had good reason to destroy his people in the wilderness because of their repeated grumbling and unbelief and idolatry. But again the Lord stays his hand and rather is gracious toward Israel for his own name's sake.

Ezekiel 20:13-14, 21-22 But the house of Israel rebelled against me in the wilderness; they did not walk in my statutes but rejected my ordinances, by whose observance man shall live; and my sabbaths they greatly profaned. Then I thought I would pour out my wrath upon them in the wilderness, to make a full end of them. But I acted for the sake of my name, that it should not be profaned in the sight of the nations, in whose sight I had brought them out.

But the children rebelled against me; they did not walk in my statutes, and were not careful to observe my ordinances, by whose observance man shall live; they profaned my sabbaths. Then I thought I would pour out my wrath upon them and spend my anger against them in the wilderness. But I withheld my hand, and acted for the sake of my name, that it should not be profaned in the sight of the nations, in whose sight I had brought them out.

The motive of God in preserving his people in the wilderness described here is the same one that emerges in Moses' prayer in Deuteronomy 9:27-29,

Deuteronomy 9:27-29 Remember thy servants, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; do not regard the stubbornness of this people, or their wickedness, or their sin, lest the land from which thou didst bring us say, "Because the Lord was not able to bring them into the land which he promised them, and because he hated them, he has brought them out to slay them in the wilderness." For they are thy people and thy heritage, whom thou didst bring out by thy great power and by thy outstretched arm (cf. Numbers 14:13-16; Exodus 32:11-14).

Moses appeals to God's promise to the patriarchs and argues with God that surely he does not want scorn to come upon his name which would surely happen if his people came to nothing in the wilderness. So God repents of the evil that he would have done and preserves his glory.

THE CONQUEST OF CANAAN

At the end of the book of Joshua, which records how God gave the people of Israel victory over the nations in the land of

Canaan so that they could possess the land, we find a clue to why God did this for his people.

Joshua 24:12-14 And I sent the hornet before you, which drove them out before you, the two kings of the Amorites; it was not by your sword or by your bow. I gave you a land on which you had not labored, and cities which you had not built, and you dwell therein; you eat the fruit of vineyards and oliveyards which you did not plant.

Now therefore fear the Lord, and serve him in sincerity and in faithfulness; put away the gods which your fathers served beyond the River, and in Egypt, and serve the Lord.

Verse 14 is an inference from verse 13. It shows that the purpose of God in being so powerfully gracious to the people to give them the land of Canaan was that they might fear him alone and honor him alone and exalt him alone. In other words, God aimed in giving Israel the land of Canaan, to create a people who would recognize his glory and would delight in it above all things. This purpose is confirmed in David's prayer recorded in 2 Samuel 7:23,

2 Samuel 7:23 What other nation on earth is like thy people Israel, whom God went to redeem to be his people, making himself a name, and doing for them great and terrible things, by driving out before his people a nation and its gods?

THE BEGINNINGS OF MONARCHY

After a period of judges (recorded in the book by that name) Israel asked for a king. And the books of 1 and 2 Samuel tell about the early years of the monarchy, namely, the reign of Saul and the reign of David. Even though the motive for asking for a king was not good (they wanted to be like all of the other nations), nevertheless, God did not destroy his people. His motive in this

gracious act of mercy is given in 1 Samuel 12:19-23.

1 Samuel 12:19-23 And all the people said to Samuel, "Pray for your servants to the Lord your God, that we may not die; for we have added to all our sins this evil, to ask for ourselves a king." And Samuel said to the people, "Fear not; you have done all this evil, yet do not turn aside from following the Lord, but serve the Lord with all your heart; and do not turn aside after vain things which cannot profit or save, for they are vain. For the Lord will not cast away his people, for his great name's sake, because it has pleased the Lord to make you a people for himself. Moreover as for me, far be it from me that I should sin against the Lord by ceasing to pray for you; and I will instruct you in the good and right way."

Here the preservation of the people in spite of their sin at the beginning of the monarchy is due to God's purpose to preserve and display the honor of his name. This goal is supreme.

Another way God showed mercy during the monarchy was that he brought to the kingship a man after his own heart named David, whose goal was the same as God's. We can see this in the way David prayed. For example, in Psalm 25:11 where he says, "For thy name's sake, O Lord, pardon my guilt, for it is great." And in the most famous psalm of all David says that God's motive in leading his people should be the glory of his name: "He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake."

THE TEMPLE OF GOD

The books of 1 and 2 Kings tell the story of Israel's history from Solomon, David's son, who built God's temple, down to the Babylonian captivity. This was a period of about 400 years ending in 587 B.C. In 1 Kings 8 we read Solomon's dedicatory prayer after the building of the temple. Among other things he prays,

I Kings 8:41-45 Likewise when a foreigner, who is not of thy people Israel, comes from a far country for thy name's sake (for they shall hear of thy great name, and thy mighty hand, and of thy outstretched arm), when he comes and prays toward this house, hear thou in heaven thy dwelling place, and do according to all for which the foreigner calls to thee; in order that all the peoples of the earth may know thy name and fear thee, as do thy people Israel, and that they may know that this house which I have built is called by thy name.

If thy people go out to battle against their enemy, by whatever way thou shalt send them, and they pray to the Lord toward the city which thou hast chosen and the house which I have built for thy name, then hear thou in heaven their prayer and their supplication, and maintain their cause."

This prayer shows that Solomon's purpose for building the temple (in accord with God's own purpose, v. 29) was that God's name should be exalted and all the nations should know and fear God.

DELIVERANCE IN THE TIME OF KINGS

After the death of Solomon the kingdom of Israel was divided into the Northern and Southern Kingdoms. One example of God's continued grace during this time and his continued purpose to be glorified and maintain the honor of his name is evident in the way he intervened when Hezekiah was king of Judah in the late 700's B.C. The Assyrians, led by Sennacherib, were coming against the people of Judah. So Hezekiah prays to the Lord for deliverance.

Isaiah the prophet brings God's answer, the essence of which is stated in 2 Kings 19:34, "For I will defend this city to save it, for my own sake and for the sake of my servant David." He says the same thing ^again in 2 Kings 20:6, "I will deliver you and this city out of the hand of the king of Assyria, and I will

defend this city for my own sake and for my servant David's sake."

EXILE AND PROMISED RESTORATION

Finally, in about 587 B.C., Jerusalem falls to the invading Babylonians (the Northern Kingdom had gone into exile with the Assyrians in 722 B.C.). The people of Judah are deported to Babylon. It looks like God may be through with his people Israel. But if so, what about his holy name, for which he has been so jealous over the centuries? But we soon discover that God is not finished with his people but will again be merciful. And again, as Isaiah makes crystal clear, God's purposes are the same as they always have been:

Isaiah 48:9-11 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 like 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."

Similarly, Ezekiel, who prophesies during the exile, tells of God's merciful restoration and why he will perform it.

Ezekiel 36:22,23,32 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. 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, says the Lord God, when through you I vindicate my holiness before their eyes...It is not for your sake that I will act, says the Lord God; let that be known to you. Be ashamed and confounded for your says, O house of Israel.

Salvation is never a ground for boasting of our worth to God. It is always an occasion for self-abasement and joy in the glorious

grace of God on our behalf--a grace which is never dependent upon our distinctives but flows out from God's overwhelming concern to magnify his own glory on behalf of his people.

POST-EXILIC PROPHETS

Zechariah, Haggai, and Malachi prophesied after the return of Israel from exile and they represent the latest writings in the Old Testament period. They each reflect a conviction that God's goal after the exile is still his own glory.

Zechariah 2:5 (prophesying the rebuilding of Jerusalem): I will be the glory within her.

Haggai 1:8 'Build the house that I may appear in my glory.

Malachi 2:2 (criticizing the wicked priests that they): do not lay it to heart to give glory to my name.

Moving from the Old Testament to the New Testament we move from an age of promise to an age of fulfillment with the coming of the hoped-for Messiah. But God's supreme goal does not change, only some of the circumstances in how he is achieving it.

JESUS' LIFE AND MINISTRY

Two texts from the gospel of John show that Jesus' whole life and ministry was devoted to glorifying his father in heaven. In John 17:4 Jesus prays at the end of his life, "I glorified thee on earth, having accomplished the work which thou gavest me to do." And in John 7:18, referring to his own ministry, Jesus says, "He

who speaks on his own authority seeks his own glory; but he who seeks the glory of him who sent him is true, and in him there is no falsehood." Therefore, we can say with certainty that Jesus' all-consuming desire and deepest purpose on earth was to glorify his father in heaven by doing his father's will (John 4:34).

JESUS' DEATH FOR US

In John 12:27,28 Jesus weighed the question whether to escape the hour of his death; but he rejects that alternative because he knows that precisely through dying will he finish his mission of glorifying the father through atoning for our sins.

John 12:27,28 "Now is my soul troubled. And what shall I say? 'Father, save me from this hour'? No, for this purpose I have come to this hour. Father, glorify thy name." Then a voice came from heaven, "I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again."

The purpose of Jesus' death is to glorify the father. To be willing as the Son of God to suffer the loss of so much glory himself in order to repair the injury done to God's glory by our sin--that obedient willingness, even unto death, showed how infinitely valuable the glory of God is. It also shows the love of God, for he could have preserved his honor by punishing sinners, but he found a way to be both true to his honor and to save sinners. The redemption that Christ achieved on the cross is not only for our benefit but God's glory. It says in Romans 15:7, "Welcome one another, therefore, as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God." In other words, the welcome we have received from Jesus Christ into the presence of the father is precisely for the glory of God.

OUR LIFE AS CHRISTIANS IN THE CHURCH AND IN THE WORLD

This work of Christ for the glory of God leads inevitably to the conclusion that God's purpose for his new redeemed people, the church, is that our life goal be to glorify God. Paul makes this explicit in 1 Cor. 10:31 where he says, "So whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God." And Peter shows that all of our service as Christians has as its goal that God would be glorified as the one who enables all good things: "Whoever renders service let him do it as one who renders it by the strength which God supplies; in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen." And when Jesus was instructing his own disciples what their goal should be in their daily living he said in Matthew 5:14, "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and give glory to your father who is in heaven."

SECOND COMING AND CONSUMMATION

In 2 Thessalonians 1:9,10 the second coming is described in its hope and in its terror. Paul says of those who do not believe the gospel,

2 Thessalonians 1:9,10 They shall suffer the punishment of eternal destruction and exclusion 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 in all who have believed, because our testimony to you was believed.

Jesus Christ is coming back not only to effect the final salvation of his people but even more so "to be glorified in his saints and to be marveled at in all who have believed." In the end, our

salvation and God's glory are achieved in the very same act.

The reason that can be is that there is no greater hope for us than to see and enjoy the glory of God. This is made abundantly clear, for example, in Romans 8:18 where Paul says, "I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us." And again in 2 Cor. 4:17 Paul says, "For this slight momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison."

One final comment on the climax of history in the book of Revelation. John pictures the new Jerusalem in chapter 21. It is highly symbolical and probably refers to the glorified church (21:2). Verse 23 says this about the new Jerusalem, "And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine upon it, for the glory of God is its light, and its lamp is the lamb." God and Christ are the light in which we will live our eternity. That this display of glory to the redeemed was God's great goal in history is confirmed by Jesus' prayer when he says in John 17:24, "Father, I desire that they also, whom thou hast given me, may be with me where I am, to behold my glory, which thou has given me in thy love for me before the foundation of the world." Our great hope and destiny as Christians is to behold the glory of Christ (1 John 3:2) which Christ has as the image of God (2 Cor. 4:4) and to share in that very glory by reflecting it back to God in love and praise.

Therefore, I conclude that God's supreme goal in history, in all that he does from beginning to end, is to display his glory and bring honor and praise to his great name.

IMPLICATIONS FOR CHRISTIAN LEADERSHIP

I would draw three inferences from this biblical study concerning our Christian spiritual leadership.

1) The fundamental requirement of all spirituality is that we love the glory of God. If this is what lies most heavy on our Father's heart, that his glory be displayed for the praise and joy and trust of his people, then we are only deceiving ourselves if we think that we can please God by going through religious exercises when we have no heart for the glory of God. Paul loved the glory of God so much that it gave him all the strength he needed to endure every affliction and suffering that came his way. You cannot even begin as a spiritual leader until your heart is ravished by the glory of the almighty sovereign creator and redeemer.

2) If we love the glory of God then we must and we will seek with all our heart to magnify that glory by the way we live. There are certain kinds of life styles which exult the glory of man and signify to others self-reliance and the love of the world. And there are other kinds of life-style that show forth a reliance on God and his all-sufficiency and his great worthiness to be trusted and loved. A Christian leader will seek those life-styles no matter what they cost him.

3) Loving the glory of God with all your heart and seeking to make your life a mirror of that glory will fill us with a desire to bring other people to love that glory and to live that kind of life.

These are the fundamental prerequisites of Christian spiritual leadership. Without them a man may have great mental and personal skills that draw much attention; but he will achieve nothing ultimately worthwhile in the world. For the only leadership that counts is the leadership that moves in the direction that God is going, with a heart that is filled with a love for his glory.

STUDY QUESTIONS

for

"Where is God Going?"

- 1.) Why is this a relevant question with regard to spiritual leadership?
- 2.) Why must we deeply care about the answer to this question?
- 3.) What is John's fundamental assumption?
4. a) Do you agree that the Scriptures he cites support this fundamental assumption?
b) Can you think of any Scriptures that would indicate this assumption to be false?
- 5.) Where is God going?
- 6.) What is the "glory of God" and the "name of God"? In what sense are they the same; in what sense are they different?
- 7.) Is God aiming at His glory or the joy of His people?
- 8.) Study carefully John's survey of redemptive history. Is his interpretation of these texts persuasive to you?
- 9.) What are the three implications for Christian leadership from God's goal in history.