

Thine Is the Glory!

Will you please pray with me: Holy God, may the words of my mouth and the meditations of all of our hearts be faithful and pleasing unto you, for you are our rock and our salvation. Amen.

Do you know the 1980s Amy Grant song “El Shaddai”?ⁱ The first verse of the songs goes like this:

Through Your love and through the ram
You saved the son of Abraham
Through the power of Your hand
Turned the sea into dry land
To the outcast on her knees
You were the God who really sees
And by Your might
You set Your children free.

Much of this song evokes God’s physical power—the way God parted the Red Sea, led the people with a pillar of fire, or appeared as a thundering cloud upon a mountaintop. Focusing on these actions of God can cause surprise or even severe disappointment when God doesn’t use those grand displays of power now. Indeed, Jesus’ disciples and the crowds who followed him didn’t get what they had expected in Jesus. For many, the Messiah was a political figure—someone who would lead the Israelites in a rebellion against the oppression of Roman rule, someone who would restore their kingdom to glory. Many in the crowd believed their Messiah would have political power which, for them, meant control over others, land, borders as they wanted them and defined them.

The 2000 film version of Jesus Christ Superstar makes this point in a blood curdling way. As the disciples and crowds sing, “To you will be the power and the glory, forever and ever and ever,” they open a case of AK47s and wave them around, while Jesus stands stunned and shocked. When Jesus is finally able to recover from his shock, he tells the crowd, “none of you understand what glory is. None of you understand what power is. None of you understand at all.”

What do we think power and glory are? What do they look like? What does triumph look like and are we involved in it somehow, in God’s triumph?

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Easter morning defied everyone's expectations. The authorities expected that they could silence Jesus by torturing him and murdering him. The crowds who had been hoping for a rebellion leader expected that all hope was lost. Mary Magdalene, Johana, and Mary the mother of James, expected to find Jesus dead in his tomb. The other disciples expected that they would spend the next year grieving and going back to their former professions. Everyone expected to find that death had won.

But that empty tomb signaled the reversal of all expectations—of all understandings of glory, power, rebellion and death. Jesus didn't gain glory by boldly overthrowing the Roman government, but by humbly accepting Baptism from a wild prophet in the desert, by riding a colt into Jerusalem, by washing his disciples' feet.

Jesus didn't gain or demonstrate power with swords or violence, but through his words, by the way he confronted religious and secular authorities, by the way he challenged the privileged to give up their wealth and power to care for the vulnerable, the outcasts, and the poor.

Jesus didn't start a political rebellion that overthrew states. His rebellion was far more radical—he healed the sick, ministered to the poor, hugged lepers, dined with prostitutes and tax collectors, revealed his true identity to Samaritans. In short, he left the safe and healthy flock and went looking for the lost sheep, showing those who were unloved by society that God loved them.

And when the authorities recognized the true power in these radical actions, when they tried to silence him and his followers through terror and death, he went with them peacefully. He did not use the supernatural powers that he most certainly had to stop them. Instead, he accepted death and thus defeated it.

Through the years you've made it clear
That the time of Christ was near
Though the people couldn't see
What messiah ought to be
Though Your word contained the plan
They just could not understand
Your most awesome work was done
Through the frailty of Your son.

Power and glory are not what the crowds thought them to be. They are not what so many of our own political leaders think them to be. True power and true glory were shown to us in Jesus' self-sacrificial love. A love that

Rev. Dr. Laura Miller-Purrenhage
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showed us that we have no need to fear death. A love that showed us that God gives us all grace and that we are deeply loved and forgiven. Thine, thine is the glory, El Shaddai, God Most High!

El shaddai, el shaddai
El-elyon na adonai
Age to age You're still the same
By the power of the name
El shaddai, el shaddai
Erkamka na adonai
I will praise You till I die
El shaddai

^{i i} John Thompson and Michael Card, "El Shaddai," 1981, 1982 Mole Music. CCLI #26856. Permission to podcast / stream the music in this service obtained from ONE LICENSE, License # 732777-A. All rights reserved and from CCLI, License #2091058, and Streaming License #20709045