Romans 9:23 What if he did this to make the riches of his glory known to the objects of his mercy, who he prepared in advance for glory….

 I would venture to say that of all the Reformation principles that we have before us, this one, this one that speaks of all glory to God alone is perhaps the most difficult for us to grasp. Not so much on the basis of what it says and teaches but rather on the basis of the fact that what it says goes against our very sinful nature. While in our minds we know God is to be given all credit and glory for everything, in our lives we all too often claim the honor and glory due to God for ourselves. To illustrate this point, let me again share what Luther wrote. Please note he speaks sharply on this subject.

 *“We dare not come with a lot of boasting and bragging when we appear before God. For though we live in the highest and best estates on earth and like to boast much, we are nothing before God but corruption and filth, full of lice, maggots, stench, and dirt. Hence St. Paul says: “All have sinned and come short of the glory of God’ (Ro 3:23), and Isaiah says; ‘We are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags’ (Is 64:6). Therefore we owe it to His grace and mercy, not to our good works, that our dear God shows us favor despite our shortcomings and has hitherto kept us alive and has tolerated us poor pieces of corruption in the world, in this vale of tears…although he had the right and a good reason every hour to hurl us into the abyss of hell. If our works are good, they are so only because our dear God does not look too closely and has patience with us. For if He were inclined to impute sin, who would be able to stand before Him? Therefore we know of nothing whatever to boast of except the grace and mercy which Christ imparts to us out of his fullness. This is inexhaustible.” (SL:7,1684)*

 Again, “Wow!” Luther cuts to the core. We tend to think we are something, but in truth, what is it that we have or know or think that can even begin to measure up to the greatness and majesty of the Lord our God? And yet it is in our nature to think we are something. What do you think was the problem with the Tower of Babel? The people had exalted themselves above God. Why do you think the Jewish people rejected Jesus even though he was the very fulfillment of the religion God had given them? Because they exalted themselves above God. Why today, are there so many different Christian denominations and so many who spurn and disregard the Bible as God’s Word? Because the people have exalted themselves above God. The lesson before us is a tough one but may our Lord and God lead us to this truth: **To God alone the Glory!**

 Now typically we would start this exposition of God’s Word by beginning with our highlighted text, but today we are going to be just a little bit different. Today we are going to begin with our Old Testament text found in Isaiah 43:5-13. Let me just highlight verses 10-13, **“You are my witnesses,” declares the Lord, “and my servant whom I have chosen, so that you may know and believe me and understand that I am he. Before me no god was formed, nor will there be one after me. I, even I, am the Lord, and apart from me there is no Savior. I have revealed and saved and proclaimed—I, and not some foreign god among you. You are my witnesses,” declares the Lord, “that I am God. Yes, and from ancient of day I am he. No one can deliver out of my hand. When I act, who can reverse it?”**

 Do you grasp the wonder of those words? We begin here because here are words of God that give us insight into him, that help us to grasp the very marvel, wonder and wisdom God is. We begin here because this passage leads us to contemplate the very essence and glory of what God is! I believe this is so important to do, to grasp who and what God is, because if your God is anything short of what the real God is, then what is the point of god? Notice that God lets us know clearly that He is the only God, that there is no one like him nor will there ever be. He is the God who rules and moves in accord with his will and desire, his wisdom and power. And did you catch those three statements that just jump at you? **“Apart from me there is no Savior.” “I have revealed and saved and proclaimed.”** And the last a dual statement but one thought: **“No one can deliver out of my hand. When I act, who can reverse it?”** Those three are worth a closer look

 **Apart from me there is no Savior.** Here is the truth. God, in his total power, wisdom and love has determined to use what He is for our eternal life and salvation. If you want to see the difference between our God and any other “religion” out there, here it is. Other religions tell you what you must do, how you must behave, how you must earn and cultivate the favor of their god or gods. But the God of the Bible is different! The Bible from beginning to end gives you the knowledge that God has acted and moved to save. That God has promised and completely fulfilled his plan to bring you into His eternal kingdom and forever world. God sent His Savior, his son Jesus, to pay for your sins and in Jesus to give you the gift, yes, the gift of eternal life and salvation. The only thing put upon us is that we believe. Believe in this Savior God and his grace. Believe that everything is done for us and for our salvation in Jesus. And even this faith is a gift of God! The true God is the Savior God, not the “Obey me or else god” of the false religious world.

 **“I have revealed and saved and proclaimed.”** God has revealed himself. Now, if you believe somehow, that God…GOD…is not capable or wise enough or smart enough to actually do this, to give us His clear and true Word that reveals all things necessary for our salvation…then you do not believe in God! You have decided His Word is not clear! You have decided how the bible is just another holy book of the world, a book written by men with absolutely no applications to today’s world because it is so old or you think full of errors! You are going to suggest that God had to reveal himself one way to this group and another way to that group…as if God were not God! Who are you, oh man, to exalt yourself so above God! Please note how this section clearly is the echo of the truth found in our Epistle reading.

 In our Epistle reading (Ro. 9:14-24) God addresses the foolishness of man that would question his majesty and wisdom for all. You are going to say **“God is unjust!”** I love the fact that God’s basic answer is: “I am God and I will do what I want! You are at my mercy!” And then the example of the Pharaoh of the Exodus is brought up. God reveals it was his plan and purpose to give that man his place in life to demonstrate the power and name of God to all the earth! That is God. He doesn’t have to answer to you and me. He doesn’t have to measure down to what we think or want! He is God. He is the potter and we are the clay! He can make of us what He wants and even when He does we are still called upon to hear and trust in God and to give God the glory in all things.

 And please, give deep thought to the words that we highlighted from our Epistle reading. The context of those words reveal that things are the way they are for basically two purposes. One, that God’s wrath and power be made known to those prepared for destruction. Two: that God’s riches and glory be made known to the objects of his mercy, those whom God created to be the display of his glory. What it boils down to is this. No matter what type of pot God has made you, you hear his word, you believe what He has revealed, you give God all glory and honor by being the best, a godly pot to his name, even if you are a “potty” pot! Or if that isn’t clear enough then here it is again: No matter what you are, what gifts you have, what shortcomings you have, what struggles you must endure, or what temptations and tests you have before you, your calling is to give God all honor and glory. God’s Word makes clear what that means. It is to follow God, to believe God, and to grasp that God has revealed and saved and proclaimed! When you decide to do or be the opposite of what God says, that is a problem, a problem because it shows you do not have the new man, the new creature that God creates when you are given faith.

 **“No one can deliver out of my hand. When I act, who can reverse it?”** Here is one of the most startling truths of God for us to grasp. God is totally and completely in control. The first thing we can do is take a quick look at that parable found in our Gospel reading, Matthew 13:3-9, 18-23. Jesus explains it all to us. The sower sows the seed. The seed is God’s saving word. It is true, God is the cause of where the seed falls. It falls everywhere He wants it to! Still note that in his explanation Jesus clearly lays the truth before us that if the seed does not grow, it is the fault of the Devil or the fault of the plant the seed has sprouted! God is not at fault. God knows just who, what, how, when, and where. It is God’s desire to save souls, that’s why the seed goes everywhere. God will bring the soul to his means of grace, grant the soul the gift of faith and fill the soul with all the good works that soul is to do. When, despite God’s wisdom and mercy, a soul is lost, it is because the Devil snatched that truth of God away or because the plant that sprouted, that was given life, let this world and its deep problems of sin rob them of God’s love and mercy. And yet, go back to our first statement. What can you do about it?

 Do you grasp that those words are God’s absolute challenge to us? You have a choice, limited but a choice. You can believe in the wonder, marvel, grace, and salvation of God in Jesus or you can reject that gracious truth and end up in hell. When you believe, it is to God’s glory and credit because God gave you life, gave you faith, gave you the forgiveness of sins and salvation all in Jesus and His Holy Word. It’s like the person who falls off an ocean liner. If someone on the boat doesn’t throw you a life ring, you will die. And when the life ring is thrown even though you must hold on, not a single saved person would take the credit and glory for being saved! If you do not believe it is because you have rejected God’s gifts, spurned his love, questioned His majesty and power, dissed his total wisdom and exalted yourself above him! In other words, you are that person overboard and you keep swimming away from the life ring!

 Here are some other thoughts and statements that I want you to grasp.

 If you are a child of God and an heir of eternal life, then to God alone the glory!

 If you are beset by problems, troubles, disease or even death, trust that God is with you, that He has acted for your eternal salvation. Trust he knows more than you and that He acts only for your good and that even in your difficulties you can give him glory and show the world his power. Yes, even in this to God alone the glory!

 If you are fallen into sin and shame, guilt and despair weighs upon you, then trust in God. Trust that He will grant forgiveness through repentance, grant strength and comfort in his grace and love. Trust that the work of Jesus is for you and that no matter how late in the game this repentance and calling to life comes, God’s grace is for you and totally sufficient to save. Because no matter who you are: To God alone the glory!

 If you are a Child of God, sow the seed of the Lord, the Gospel of his truth and wonder. Sow everywhere you can. Yet note, it is not your job to do anything but that. God will cause the growth or the lack thereof. God will grant the increase or the decrease according to His good will and pleasure. Stop thinking that you can do anything but sow the Word. All else is in the hands of God. Grow, shrink, remain faithful, fall away, everything spiritual is in God’s hand. Yes, to God alone the glory!

 Be careful. God warns us again and again that this world and the powers of this world are working to destroy your faith, to pull your focus from God and his Christ. Be aware and alert. The devil is prowling to destroy. False teachers are out there in droves to lure you aside and get you to doubt, question and make you a child of hell as they are. God warns of all of this. Stay focused on God and give God alone all the glory!

 I know it is hard to put aside our human pride, to not pat ourselves on the back and not give ourselves the credit. So today, learn one, solid and basic truth. To God alone the glory! Amen.