

“The upside-down glory.” John 12:20-28

Now among those who went up to worship at the feast were some Greeks. So, these came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and asked him, “Sir, we wish to see Jesus.” Philip went and told Andrew; Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus. And Jesus answered them, “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. If anyone serves me, he must follow me; and where I am, there will my servant be also. If anyone serves me, the Father will honour him.

“Now is my soul troubled. And what shall I say? ‘Father, save me from this hour’? But for this purpose I have come to this hour. Father, glorify your name.” Then a voice came from heaven: “I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again.” The crowd that stood there and heard it said that it had thundered. Others said, “An angel has spoken to him.” Jesus answered, “This voice has come for your sake, not mine. Now is the judgment of this world; now will the ruler of this world be cast out. And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.” He said this to show by what kind of death he was going to die.

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ!

Let’s talk about glory, shall we? John uses the word “glory” a lot in his Gospel account, as does Jesus in His speeches as recorded in John’s Gospel. What is glory? What does it mean to be glorious? What does it mean to give glory? It is not that easy to provide a satisfying definition, but we can describe a certain field of meanings.

To give glory is about showing great admiration, great honour, praise, recognition and deep appreciation. Why would we give glory to anyone? Because they are glorious and worthy of great admiration, of great honour and praise, of recognition and so.

Why would anyone be worthy of glory? When we excel, when we are superb, when we succeed magnificently, when we have attributes or traits of character that are praiseworthy, admirable, honourable and commendable, lovely and perfect. Wasn’t easy, but I think this sums up the field of meaning for the word “glory” quite well.

Now, today we will reflect on [1] **our thirst for glory**, and [2] **on the upside-down glory** and [3] **on the fullness of glory**. On our thirst for glory, on the upside-down glory that Jesus teaches and exemplifies, and on the fullness of glory for those who follow Jesus.

First, the thirst for glory. This is a real thing. We may know it under different names, such as longings for praise, appreciation, noticing, recognition, honouring, commending, etc. And this thirst for glory is a very handy tool of manipulation. Why? Because the

thirst for glory is a powerful motivator, it is one of the main driving forces of our lives. But how can this thirst for glory be a tool for manipulation? We know it instinctively. We know that people love to receive glory, to receive compliments, flattery, to be buttered up. Pastor Mal taught me this expression.

Just listen to this, imagine someone saying this to you, and check out how it feels: “You are such a faithful member of this congregation; I wish everyone was like you!” “You are always so kind and caring, I have never met a better and more caring person than you!”

“You are so hardworking, so committed, everyone should learn from you!” “You always stand up for what is true, without any fear, you are so courageous, so inspiring!” “You are so generous, with your time and means, that’s what all Christians should be like!” This is my favourite: “Pastor, you know how to explain Scripture so well, and your sermons are always so good!”

Or “you are so faithful to the Lord, you are so fervent in your prayers, you are so devoted in your worship, you are so respectful to authorities, you are so caring for others, you are such an exemplary spouse and parent, you are so generous with your means, you always say something encouraging, it seems you are always grateful and full of hope, you are such a glorious being!” This is all about the glorious you! How does this feel?

Isn’t it great to have our thirst for glory satisfied? “Just give me more and I will do whatever you ask me!” By the way, all the above can be said as a genuine praise, without any intention to manipulate. The difference would be, I guess, in our motivation. Do we really think that way and want to appreciate and praise the other person, or do we say it so that they would notice that we are the ones saying it and be favourable to us.

This is true, the thirst for glory is one of the main driving forces of our lives. Surely, it will be somewhat different for each of one us. Some may want to receive glory by being intellectually superior. Others may want to attain it with their achievements. For yet others it may be about accumulation of wealth and riches, or gaining popularity or about living morally perfect and caring life, being the most altruistic person there is.

This all is about our life, about loving our life, about striving forward and upward, about building ourselves up, about establishing ourselves, about gaining name for ourselves, for we thirst for glory, for significance, for recognition. We do.

And when we succeed in the above-mentioned efforts, we believe that we can enjoy our life, we have gotten it, we have made it. But here comes Jesus and turns everything upside down. **He teaches the upside-down understanding of glory.**

When the Greeks came seeking for Jesus, recognizing that He was someone special, what did Jesus say? **“The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.”** What did He mean? How does Jesus define glory? What did His disciples expect?

“The hour has come to be glorified...” this is what they witnessed. Jesus gets beaten and mocked, dying naked on the cross, nails through your wrists and feet, struggling for the next breath of air, while being spitted upon by soulless and hateful mobs. Okay, that’s one way to go about it. Not the first thought that came to their mind, I bet.

However, Jesus explains the logic of His understanding of glory, His complete trust and obedience to God the Father. **“Truly I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.”** Great metaphor; unless the grain falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone, but if it dies, oh! There is abundant and glorious fruit.

In Jesus’ definition, true glory is found not in seeking it, but in giving it up in obedience to the Father, giving up even His life for others. This is what He taught, not only in words, but in deeds. Jesus did die for us, and His death now brings salvation and new life to us. He didn’t hesitate to consider us as more significant than Himself.

By dying on behalf of God’s beloved creatures, that is you, and being raised again, Jesus becomes the first-fruits of God’s abundant harvest. The second person of Trinity unites Himself with humanity, He becomes one of us, He “falls in the earth and dies” and as He is raised from the bondage of death, He pulls all of us to Himself.

What a beautiful picture it is! He goes first, the firstborn, the Head of His body, the Church, where we all are His members. The Head goes first and we all will follow Him, as one body, for we are united with Him, for His Spirit dwells in you as well.

And then Jesus invites us to follow Him on His glory road and to do likewise. **“Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life.”** This is the invitation. Change the centre, change the focus of your life!

Take your eyes off your self-interest, from your desires and thoughts and from your thirst for glory, and place Jesus Christ, your Lord and Master at the very centre of your life. Strive to live for Jesus serving your neighbours the way He instructs us. That’s hard. That is difficult. We want glory for ourselves. It was difficult then and it is difficult now.

Even in Jesus’ days many were invited to follow Him, more, **“many even of the authorities believed in him, but for fear ... they did not confess it... [why?] ... for they loved the glory that comes from man more than the glory that comes from God.”** (John 12:42-43) The same is true today. We thirst for that glory. From men. Now!

Wherever we believe we may get it, that pulls us like a magnet. Would living as a faithful disciple of Jesus give us that glory? What do you think? Are we rewarded with glory if we want to listen to Jesus and to live as the Holy Spirit wisely instructs us?

Are we praised if you want to hold to the truth of the Scripture, and if you want to obey God more than men? What happens if you want to follow Christ and not the culture, to

listen to the Word and not to the world, if you want to deny yourself and give glory to the One who died so that you could live? How does that go? Will that bring recognition among intellectual elites? Or wealth in this greed-driven world?

Or popularity among masses? Or praise for being faithful? The world hates it. The false church hates it. Instead of glory you may receive dishonour and criticism. What to make of this? Was Jesus wrong? Is Jesus' way of glory not working? Not at all!

It is **the only way that leads to the fullness of glory**. If by God's grace you have responded to God's invitation, if enabled and led by God's Spirit you have stepped on that road, if you are making your steps, whatever small they are, Jesus' way is working.

If you have listened to what Jesus said, if you have taken it seriously, if you have tried to follow Him, it means that God's creative power is already transforming you into the image of Jesus, from one degree of glory to another, as Paul wrote.

Yes, something has been happening with you while you may not even have noticed it. The Spirit is restoring and perfecting you, He is gently inscribing His law on your hearts, He is making you more and more glorious, more and more excellent, more and more magnificent, more and more like He intended you to be. He works to glorify you.

Where does this leave you? **"If anyone serves me, he must follow me; and where I am, there will my servant be also. If anyone serves me, the Father will honour him."** You know the principle, that the more significant the person who recognizes you and praises you, the more glory you receive thanks to that praise.

Get this! As you serve Jesus, you are already now being honoured by the most glorious being, the Triune God, He looks at you and sees you united with Jesus, clothed in Jesus, more glorious than you realize, and this is only the beginning of your glory.

For as Paul wrote: **"For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us."** (Rom 8:18) **"For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison."** (2 Cor 4:17) Eternal weight of glory! This is already happening!

You are on your way to share the glory of the Risen Son Jesus, to be transformed into that glorious, magnificent, superb being that God designed you to be. So, dear fellow "little grains", may our glorious Lord help us to fall into the earth and die to ourselves and live for Him, so that our fruits are many and sooner rather than later we could share His glory beyond all comparison. For that day is coming. Coming soon!

Glory be to the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit!

Amen.