



The Gospel of John

Session 27: True Glory

THE LESSON AT A GLANCE

What does it mean to glorify God? In the New Testament, “glory” (in Greek *doxa*), means to honor God with praise for who He is and what He has done. To glorify God is to declare His greatness with our words and our lives.

Jesus, as the second person of the Godhead, is worthy to receive glory, honor, and praise. As a man, He glorified God with His Words and actions.

Self-glorification and seeking the approval of man are the opposite of worship. When we point toward ourselves or vainly seek to have others affirm our every move, we take the focus off Christ in our lives. Those who live for themselves and for the fame of people may enjoy fleeting pleasure or popularity, but it will come to an unavoidable end. Those who glorify God with their lives will enjoy worshiping God, who is worthy of all honor and praise, now and for eternity.

TODAY'S SCRIPTURES

John 12:20-50

THE MAIN IDEA

Jesus spoke of His coming crucifixion as the hour of His glorification and revealed that true life is found not in self-glory, but in surrender to Him.

QUESTION TO EXPLORE

How does this passage challenge you to remember that Christ's approval is enough when you long for the approval of others?

SCRIPTURE IN CONTEXT

John 12:20-36 Jesus recognized that the hour of His death was close at hand. In His last public address, Jesus chose to glorify God with His words and actions, and the crowd heard audibly from the Father. Jesus expressed His firm commitment not to abandon the mission at the moment of His death, but to complete the work that He came to do—securing our salvation at the cross.

John 12:37-43 In the roughly three years of public ministry, Jesus had done just what the prophets predicted—healed the sick, made the blind see, served the poor, and brought the dead back to life. Yet, many saw His miracles and heard His teaching but refused to believe. Even religious leaders who silently acknowledged His miracles were reluctant to publicly affirm Him, for fear of the rejection of man. We must all choose what we will do with Jesus—will we receive Him and experience life or reject Him and experience eternity separated from God?

John 12:44-50 Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners. When we accept Christ, we pass from death to life and experience eternal life with the Father through Christ.

START HERE

Across time and cultures, people have sought a way to secure their legacies. The Pharaohs of Egypt built massive pyramids, monuments meant to immortalize their names and legacies. Centuries later, artists like Frida Kahlo created numerous self-portraits—a means of self-exploration and self-preservation throughout time. Today, wealthy donors give generously to universities and hospitals, partly in hopes of having a wing, building, or even a stadium that bears their name. These efforts reflect the deep human desire to be seen, honored, and remembered.

In John 12, Jesus presented a radically different version of glory. He did not secure His legacy through monuments, art, or endowments, but through sacrifice. Where the world seeks to preserve life and name, Jesus taught that true life comes through surrender.

DISCUSS

What are some ways our culture tries to preserve legacy? What's fleeting about our best efforts to keep our name "alive"?

REVIEW AND DISCUSS THE TEXT

1. True glory is found in surrender, not self-preservation.

John 12:20-36: Now some Greeks were among those who went up to worship at the festival. So they came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and requested of him, "Sir, we want to see Jesus." Philip went and told Andrew; then Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus.

Jesus replied to them, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Truly I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains by itself. But if it dies, it produces much fruit. The one who loves his life will lose it, and the one who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. If anyone serves me, he must follow me. Where I am, there my servant also will be. If anyone serves me, the Father will honor him.

"Now my soul is troubled. What should I say—Father, save me from this hour? But that is why I came 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 standing there heard it and said it was thunder. Others said, "An angel has spoken to him."

Jesus responded, "This voice came, not for me, but for you. Now is the judgment of this world. Now the ruler of this world will be cast out. As for me, if I am lifted up from the earth I will draw all people to myself." He said this to indicate what kind of death he was about to die.

Then the crowd replied to him, “We have heard from the law that the Messiah will remain forever. So how can you say, ‘The Son of Man must be lifted up’? Who is this Son of Man?”

Jesus answered, “The light will be with you only a little longer. Walk while you have the light so that darkness doesn’t overtake you. The one who walks in darkness doesn’t know where he’s going. While you have the light, believe in the light so that you may become children of light.” Jesus said this, then went away and hid from them.

Unpacking John 12:20-36

The ancient Egyptian pyramids stand as some of the most enduring monuments in human history, built as elaborate tombs for Pharaohs. They believed their legacies, including their enduring authority and power, could remain with them beyond death. These massive structures weren’t just graves; they were carefully engineered statements of power, permanence, and glory. The Great Pyramid in Giza, built around 2500 BC, remained the tallest structure in the world for nearly 4,000 years, until it was overtaken by the Lincoln Cathedral in 1311. The Pharaohs filled their tombs with treasures, inscriptions, and provisions for the afterlife, designed to secure their name and power for eternity. Their strategy for glory was self-preservation at all costs.

Passover week, and the final days of Jesus’s life and ministry on earth, had commenced. Jews poured into Jerusalem in preparation for the Feast. There were also Greeks, often called “*God-fearers*” who came to witness the celebration. These Greeks, like Cornelius in Acts 10:1-2, respected the faith of the Jewish people, and may have made some spiritual steps toward faith, but had not yet become full proselytes (people who have converted from one religion to another). Nevertheless, many of them arrived in Jerusalem to witness the Passover celebration, and some requested a meeting with Jesus. They likely sought out Philip from Bethsaida, a Greek town, to make the introduction.

When Philip and Andrew approached Jesus with the request, Jesus replied, “*The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified*” (v. 23). Scripture does not give us information on whether Jesus met with the Greek men. However, the arrival of people from a different faith and culture who wanted to see Jesus was a further indicator that the culmination of Christ’s earthly ministry had arrived. The Son of Man had come to save the world, not just the Jews.

For anyone else facing the threats of the religious leaders, the arrival of more attention would be cause to draw back and regroup. Jesus, however, already had His sight on the cross. He would not shrink from what was coming. “*Truly I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains by itself. But if it dies, it produces much fruit*” (v. 24). Part of Jesus’s mission was to unite the world under the new covenant invitation of God. The arrival of these God-fearing Greeks illuminated the fact that Jesus’s hour had come, and the fruit of the cross and resurrection would be a harvest from every nation, tribe, and tongue (Revelation 7:9).

“The one who loves his life will lose it, and the one who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. If anyone serves me, he must follow me. Where I am, there my servant also will

be. If anyone serves me, the Father will honor him" (vv. 25-26). Glory is found in surrender, not self-preservation. Just as Jesus would die to secure eternal life for us, we must die to self to experience the fullness of life in Him. The Pharaohs, who set up pyramids that reached the sky, are as dead today as they were then. Their efforts to attain immortality failed. In Christ, however, the body that is buried will be raised to immortality in the last days (1 Corinthians 15:54). Following and serving Jesus are the marks of true disciples, and surrender to Christ is the kind of life that God honors.

While Jesus was ready and willing to surrender His life for us, the reality of the cross weighed heavy on Him. *"Now my soul is troubled. What should I say—Father, save me from this hour? But that is why I came to this hour"* (v. 27). Jesus not only predicted His own death, He was establishing a pattern for believers. Those who loved their lives, clinging to self-glory, control, and recognition, would ultimately lose them. But those who released their lives to surrender to Him would find true, eternal life. Then Jesus affirmed His divine purpose: *"Father, glorify your name"* (v. 28a).

Then, a voice came from heaven: *"I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again"* (v. 28b). The voice from heaven is the third time God had spoken audibly during Jesus's earthly ministry, and the first recording in the book of John. God spoke at Jesus's baptism. *"This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well-pleased"* (Matthew 3:17). And He spoke at the transfiguration: *"This is my beloved Son; listen to him!"* (Mark 9:7). God the Father glorifies the Son, and the Son glorifies the Father. Jesus's obedience on the cross is the ultimate testimony to His divine relationship within the Trinity.

The crowd was both amazed and confused by God's voice from heaven. Some believed it was thunder, and others an angel. Jesus was quick to clarify, however, that God spoke for their benefit, not His. Jesus needed no proof or assurance of His relationship with the Father or His divine mission.

"Now is the judgment of this world. Now the ruler of this world will be cast out. As for me, if I am lifted up from the earth I will draw all people to myself." He said this to indicate what kind of death he was about to die" (vv. 31-33). Even in predicting His death, Jesus spoke to the unifying nature of the new covenant, which would draw both Jews and Greeks (aka Gentiles) into an eternal relationship with God through Him.

In response to Jesus's words, the crowd asked a legitimate question: *"We have heard from the law that the Messiah will remain forever. So how can you say, 'The Son of Man must be lifted up'? Who is this Son of Man?"* (v. 34). Israel had been awaiting the Messiah for hundreds of years. God spoke through the prophets, declaring that after King David, He would raise up a king who would last forever, and whose kingdom would never end (2 Samuel 7:12-13,16; Psalm 89:26-29,35-36) It was hard for them to understand how Jesus could be the Messiah if He was also predicting His death. How could a King who surrenders to death be the eternal ruler God had promised?

“Jesus answered, ‘The light will be with you only a little longer. Walk while you have the light so that darkness doesn’t overtake you. The one who walks in darkness doesn’t know where he’s going. While you have the light, believe in the light so that you may become children of light.’ Jesus said this, then went away and hid from them” (vv. 35-36). Jesus answered their question, indirectly, by identifying Himself as the source of light and life, just as He had done in John 8:12. He is the Light of the world. Those who walk in Him will not walk in darkness but will have the light of life. The people, perhaps, were looking for a final sign or proof of Jesus’s power. Instead, He reminded them that they need to believe in Him in order to belong to Him.

With the cross looming, Jesus reminded the people that His time, and theirs, was short. They did not need another sermon or miracle. They needed to believe and belong with Christ. The time for proof had ended; the time for belief and surrender had begun. With nothing left to say, Jesus allowed His message and the enduring words of the prophets to speak for themselves, and He hid from their sight.

DISCUSS

- *What did Jesus mean by comparing His death to a grain of wheat?*
- *Where are you most tempted to seek to preserve your life rather than surrender it?*
- *What does it mean, practically, to walk as a child of light in a current season or circumstance in your life today? What tempts you to stay in darkness rather than do the hard work of believing and surrendering?*

2. The pursuit of human glory leads to spiritual blindness.

John 12:37-43: *Even though he had performed so many signs in their presence, they did not believe in him. This was to fulfill the word of Isaiah the prophet, who said:*

*Lord, who has believed our message?
And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?*

This is why they were unable to believe, because Isaiah also said:

*He has blinded their eyes
and hardened their hearts,
so that they would not see with their eyes
or understand with their hearts,
and turn,
and I would heal them.*

Isaiah said these things because he saw his glory and spoke about him.

Nevertheless, many did believe in him even among the rulers, but because of the Pharisees they did not confess him, so that they would not be banned from the synagogue. For they loved human praise more than praise from God.

Unpacking John 12:37-43

Mexican artist, Frida Kahlo, is widely known, and remembered, for her colorful and bold paintings. Kahlo suffered a bus accident at the age of 18 that left her with lifelong pain and limited mobility. She began painting from her bed using a mirror mounted above her. Her work became a way of processing her emotions, and creating a way to be seen, understood, and remembered. Today, her image and story are recognized worldwide, reflecting the deep human need to define ourselves and secure our legacies.

Despite the many signs Jesus performed, many still did not believe. John looked back at the Old Testament prophet, Isaiah, to explain how people could have witnessed Jesus's words and His works but remained in unbelief.

In Isaiah 53, the Messiah is identified as a suffering servant who would die for the iniquities of the people (Isaiah 53:5). The Messiah would take the sin punishment for mankind (Isaiah 53:6) and would surrender to the cruelty of the cross without protest (Isaiah 53:7). He would die and be buried in a rich man's tomb though there was no sin found in Him (Isaiah 53:9). He went on to say that after death, God's servant would *"see light and be satisfied, by his knowledge my righteous servant will justify many, and he will carry their iniquities"* (Isaiah 53:11). By quoting the first verse of this spectacular Old Testament passage, John boldly declared that Jesus is the suffering servant the prophet spoke of. Not only did John declare Jesus as the Messiah, but He confirmed Jesus bought our salvation through His willingness to embrace the suffering of the cross.

Like Pharaoh hardening his heart in the Exodus account, the people hardened their hearts through disbelief. Sadly, John declared God would allow them to experience the tragic consequence of their choices. The *Expositor's Commentary* gives an explanation of the blinding of eyes and hardening of hearts that might be helpful as we examine this challenging text:

"Not only did prophecy describe unbelief, it also explained it. Why should the hearers of Jesus not believe in him when the signs so unmistakably accredited his claims? John quotes from Isaiah 6 (the story of Isaiah's commission) to show that unbelief is the result of the rejection of light, which act, by the sovereign law of God, gradually makes belief impossible. God warned the prophet in advance that his mission would not be successful, for the hearts of those who heard him would be hardened. John interprets this prophecy by its effect rather than by its intention. It was not God's desire to alienate His people; but without the offer of faith and repentance, they would never turn to Him anyway. The cumulative effect of unbelief is a hardened attitude that becomes more impenetrable as time progresses."

We are not guaranteed an amount of time in which we can accept Jesus. The writer of Hebrews warned about the sin of unbelief, saying, *"Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says: Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion, on the day of testing in the wilderness."* We are not guaranteed tomorrow. James 4:14 says, *"Yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring—what your life will be! For you are like vapor that appears for a little while, then vanishes."*

It's as if the apostle John was warning those who read his Gospel account to learn from those who rejected Christ at the time of His crucifixion. God allowed their hearts to be hardened through their unbelief. We should also learn from their mistake and choose Christ while we can.

John ended this passage with a final warning: We should acknowledge Christ openly, aligning ourselves fully with Jesus. Some believed in Jesus but were afraid to confess him publicly. *"Nevertheless, many did believe in him even among the rulers, but because of the Pharisees they did not confess him, so that they would not be banned from the synagogue. For they loved human praise more than praise from God"* (vv. 42-43). These people believed Jesus is the Messiah, but kept quiet, because acknowledging Christ would have caused turmoil—they might have been alienated from loved ones or put out of the synagogue community that meant so much to them.

The pursuit of human approval leads to spiritual blindness. The people's desire for human approval outweighed their willingness to align themselves with Christ. John 12:43 provides a sobering diagnosis for the sin of unbelief: *"They loved human praise more than praise from God."* When we put our focus on pleasing others and winning their approval, we follow a dead-end road that only leads to further blindness and disorientation.

The people of Jesus's day traded eternal glory for temporary fraternity. They focused on preserving their own reputation more than they were willing to surrender to the obvious truth of Jesus. Like painting their own self-portraits over and over, their pursuit of human recognition and praise ultimately cost them the very thing they sought—meaning, purpose, and eternal safety. When we focus on ourselves, rather than on Christ, we make the foolish, and short-sighted exchange of this life over eternity. John's words stand as an enduring witness to *"walk while you have the light so that darkness won't overtake you"* (John 12:35).

DISCUSS

- According to this passage, why did some people refuse to believe in Jesus?
- Where do you feel the tension between pleasing people and honoring God?
- What would it look like for you to choose God's approval in a specific situation this week?
- How should the brevity of time change our attitude toward people who don't know Christ?

3. True life comes through believing and obeying Jesus.

John 12:44-50: *Jesus cried out, "The one who believes in me believes not in me, but in him who sent me. And the one who sees me sees him who sent me. I have come as light into the world, so that everyone who believes in me would not remain in darkness. If anyone hears my words and doesn't keep them, I do not judge him; for I did not come to judge the world but to save the world. The one who rejects me and doesn't receive my sayings has this as his judge: The word I*

have spoken will judge him on the last day. For I have not spoken on my own, but the Father himself who sent me has given me a command to say everything I have said. I know that his command is eternal life. So the things that I speak, I speak just as the Father has told me."

Unpacking John 12:44-50

In modern cultures, one of the clearest ways people seek to secure their legacy is through transformational giving, or philanthropy, particularly to universities. In 2015, hedge fund billionaire John A Paulson gave \$400 million to Harvard University, the largest gift in the school's history. In return, Harvard named their entire engineering school after him, ensuring that generations of students would study under his name. Major donors at institutions like Stanford University and Columbia University have had schools, programs, and global initiatives permanently tied to their legacy. These gifts often accomplish tremendous good, but they also reflect something deeply human. We all desire to attach our names to something that will outlast us.

Yet, in John 12, Jesus pointed to a radically different kind of legacy. He revealed that true life comes through believing and obeying Him. He came to accomplish not His mission, but the Father's. He came to free people from spiritual darkness and invite them into spiritual light. He came not to judge, but to save. He came to point people away from darkness and into the light of life. He sought not His own fame but instead glorified the Father in word and action.

Many leaders and philanthropists want their final words etched on a monument or engraved on the side of a building. Jesus's final public teaching, however, wasn't spoken carefully for someone to write down, rather proclaimed to a bustling crowd. In His last communication with the people of Jerusalem, recorded in verses 44-50, He declared six essential truths:

- (1) **To believe in Jesus is to believe in God, and to believe that God sent Him** (v. 44). The persons of the Trinity (Father, Son, Holy Spirit) are One, and yet they are unique. In His earthly ministry, Jesus perfectly executed the plans His Father gave Him. We get to know God the Father by looking to Jesus. Because they are united in person and purpose, if we want to understand God's heart, we need only to look to the Son to see what He is like. Hebrews 1:3 tells us *"The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact expression of his nature, sustaining all things by his powerful word."*
- (2) **Those who accept Jesus's teachings walk in the light He brings; those who do not remain in spiritual darkness.** Jesus frequently used light and darkness to describe walking in spiritual truth versus rejecting it. *"Jesus spoke to them again: 'I am the light of the world. Anyone who follows me will never walk in the darkness but will have the light of life'"* (John 8:12). As we follow Jesus we move from death to life; from spiritual darkness to spiritual life.
- (3) **Jesus came not to judge the world, but to save it.** That is not to say that judgement does not exist. Far from it. Scripture is clear that on the last day all will be judged. However, Jesus expressed that His role in the Person of the Trinity is not judgment, but salvation. His death and resurrection secured for us the ability to avoid the judgment for our sins and instead experience eternal life through Him. *"For God loved the world in this way: He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life. For*

God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him” (John 3:16-17).

- (4) **On the last day, we will be judged by what we have done with the word He has spoken. Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life** (John 14:6). He spoke what the Father gave Him, and by those words we will be judged. *“I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers. I will put my words in his mouth, and he will tell them everything I command him. I will hold accountable whoever does not listen to my words that he speaks in my name”* (Deuteronomy 18:18-19). When we stand before God, we will not be able to feign ignorance of His standards. By Christ’s words we will be judged, but the good news is that by Christ’s words, we will also be saved. When we come to Christ by faith and accept Him as Savior, we are expressing our faith that His Words and actions are true. In Christ, we pass from judgment to life.
- (5) **He spoke only what the Father gave Him.** They are united in purpose, and Jesus perfectly reflects God’s character. If we want to know what God is like, we need only to look to the Son. Not only are they united in purpose, but the Son is the only way we gain access to the Father. Before He death, Jesus said, *“I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you know me, you will also know my Father. From now on you do know him and have seen him”* (John 14:6).
- (6) **God’s command is eternal life.** God’s words are immutable, meaning they are unchangeable, eternal, and perfectly consistent (Psalm 119:89) We can rely on God’s Word to remain the same because of His unchanging nature (Matthew 24:35). In John 6:63, Jesus said, *“The Spirit is the one who gives life. The flesh doesn’t help at all. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and are life.”* His words bring life to those who believe, and judgment to those who do not.

With this final declaration, John closed His narrative of Jesus’s public ministry. From this point forward, John recalled Jesus’s final, private moments with the disciples before His crucifixion. Jesus had spoken words of eternal life to the people. He invited them to come to Him and experience eternal life. In His words and actions, He pointed people to the Father and proved through His miracles that He is the Messiah. There was nothing left to be said, only one thing left to be done—to offer His life as the ultimate sacrifice for the sins of the world.

DISCUSS

- *How did Jesus describe His relationship with the Father?*
- *What does it mean that Jesus came to save rather than condemn?*
- *Are there parts of Scripture that are hard for you to accept? What would it mean this week to lean into the truth that all of Scripture is God’s Word, and that following His Word brings life?*

DEEPER FOCUS

REFLECT ON THE TEXT

DISCUSS

- *Why did Jesus mean when He said, “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified”?*
- *Jesus said a grain of wheat must fall to the ground and die to produce much fruit. Other than your salvation, how have you seen this truth in your own life?*
- *Jesus didn’t seek His own glory; but the Father’s. What should the relationship between the Father, Son, and Spirit teach us about glorifying God versus self-glorification?*

RESPOND TO THE TEXT

- *How does this passage challenge you to remember Christ’s approval is enough when you long for the approval of others?*
- *How can God’s unending, secure love for you liberate you from the need for self-glory?*

APPLY

Where might you be seeking recognition instead of faithfulness?

What would it look like to live this week for God’s glory over your own?

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