

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Today we're going to be talking a lot about glory. So before we really get started let's think about the meaning of that word. What is glory? What does it mean when a person receives glory? There are probably different ways to define it, but maybe we could use this simple definition: Glory is having positive attention... being recognized for greatness. Have you ever heard someone complain, "I did all the work, and he/she received all the glory." The nature of the complaint is that someone else was recognized for greatness and received the positive attention and acclamation that you deserved.

How many of you can remember a moment of glory in your lives? A time when you received the attention for greatness. I bet many of you associate a moment of glory to some sporting event or competition. You scored at a crucial time or you made the key play. Your team won. And you got the glory.

There are some players getting lots of glory right now as the NCAA basketball tournament. We're down to the elite 8. Next week the final four will play...and then the championship game. There are key players receiving the glory already. And when the final buzzer sounds in the final game next week, you better believe the MVP is going to have his moment of glory.

Attention for greatness is what glory is all about. It's something I think all people crave, at least on some level. And who wouldn't? Conjure up the image of the MVP being interviewed immediately after the championship game. The one getting all the glory. What does his face look like? Joy! Elation! Gladness!

Friends, today we are celebrating an event we are calling March Gladness. And I'm here to tell you that there is indeed gladness, even elation, where there is glory. However, that glory is found in a very strange place, where no one would even think to look. See if you can find the glory as I read the words of today's sermon text from John 12:20-33.

The setting: Jesus' ministry here on earth was drawing to a close. His suffering and death were just days away. The Jewish religious leaders were turning up the heat on Jesus. And John records this:

"Now there were some Greeks among those who went up to worship at the Feast. They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, with a request. "Sir," they said, "we would like to see Jesus." Philip went to tell Andrew; Andrew and Philip in turn told Jesus. Jesus replied, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds. The man who loves his life will lose it, while the man who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honor the one who serves me. "Now my heart is troubled, and what shall I say? 'Father, save me from this hour'? No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour. Father, glorify your name!" Then a voice came from heaven, "I have glorified it, and will glorify it again." The crowd that was there and heard it said it had thundered; others said an angel had spoken to him. Jesus said, "This voice was for your benefit, not mine. Now is the time for judgment on this world; now the prince of this world will be driven out. But I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself." He said this to show the kind of death he was going to die."

Some Greeks came to Jerusalem for the Passover feast. Though not Jewish by descent, they

recognized that the God of the Jewish people was the only true God. They came to worship him. Somehow they had heard about Jesus. And they desperately wanted to meet him. For whatever reason, they approached Philip to make their request. Philip talks to Andrew and the two of them approach Jesus about this request.

Now, first let's remember that Jesus was always more than willing to share God's Word and God's will anytime and anywhere. Nicodemus, a Pharisee, once secretly came to Jesus at night, and Jesus was happy to talk to him. Jesus once intentionally traveled through Samaria so that he could meet a non-Jewish woman at a well to share the way of salvation with her and everyone in her village. Jesus frequently whole days preaching and teaching... and even when his vacation plans were ruined by crowds who tracked them down, he always had compassion on them and taught them and healed them.

But this time was different, wasn't it? When these Greeks want to see Jesus, Jesus denies their request by saying, *"The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds."* The time for teaching and preaching was now over. It was time for Jesus to accomplish the Father's will. It was time for him to stop talking and start doing. We have sayings for people who talk but don't do. All talk and no action. His bark is worse than his bite. He talks the talk, but doesn't walk the walk. Those sayings can never apply to Jesus. What brings him glory, that is what causes people to recognize greatness in Jesus and bring him positive attention is what Jesus **did**. In his preaching and teaching, Jesus touched the lives of thousands during his life on earth, but in what he was about to **do**, he was going to touch the lives of every person on the planet, past present and future.

And what brings glory to Jesus is a rather strange thing. Suffering. Death. Jesus alludes to it when he says that the seed must die and then it produces many seeds. When you plant a seed, it germinates, and the original seed is, in essence, destroyed. But a plant grows and with it many, many seeds. Jesus was foretelling his own death... a death which would bring forth many seeds... much fruit.

Jesus knew that what was coming would mean horrible suffering. *"Now my heart is troubled, and what shall I say? 'Father, save me from this hour'? No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour. Father, glorify your name!"* Jesus knew that his glory would bring glory to the Father's name as well. And the means by which Jesus and the Father's name would be glorified would be through suffering and finally through death. Jesus *knew* what was going to happen to him. At the end of our reading, it even says, Jesus *"said this to show the kind of death he was going to die."*

So here's where things get weird to our human way of thinking about things. Jesus knew he would suffer. He knew he would be crucified and put to death. And yet he still says the time has come for him to be glorified. He trusts the Father's name would be glorified. And the Father himself says, *"I have glorified it, and will glorify it again."* Through Jesus' suffering and death, God is glorified. That is so counterintuitive, isn't it? A person who is mocked and abused isn't glorified. When a person dies, that is defeat. How can this be for Jesus' glory? How can the Father's name be glorified when Jesus is taken out by his enemies?

What brings glory to God and what brings glory to man are very different. Man makes a name for himself by dominating others. A man has glory when he grabs lots of power and gets lots of money. God makes a name for himself by showing amazing grace and love, when he gives to the helpless and rescues the lost. These things give God exactly the attention he wants and deserves.

Each and every one of us deserves death for our sins. We deserve God's anger. We deserve punishment and separation from him in hell. God has the power to totally dominate over us. He has all authority over us. He can get whatever he wants from us. If he were to do these things, he would

be doing the very things that the people of this world consider amazing. People receive glory for far less.

Instead God oppressing, God serves. Instead of exacting punishment, God saves. Instead of declaring us guilty, he declares us innocent. Instead of despising us, he values us. And instead of demanding from us, he gives to us. He gives his Son. His only Son. Who glorified the Father by suffering and dying. In his love, humility and service, he took upon himself your sins and mine. He took them to the cross. He paid the penalty. He removed our guilt. God accomplished the most amazing act of love ever. God gave what was nearest and dearest to him... his only son... to rescue and save those who live in rebellion against him... you and me.

No wonder the angels sang at Jesus' birth: "*Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests.*" The results of Jesus' work bring glory to God. "*Now the prince of this world will be driven out. But I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself.*" Satan has been completely defeated when Jesus died. When Jesus rose he proved his victory. All people everywhere are drawn to him for his forgiveness, life and salvation.

Find the glory! Find the glory in the strange place that God has hidden it... in the suffering and death of his only Son Jesus Christ. Isn't our greatest concern now to bring glory to the Father's name, just as Jesus did? How do we glorify God? How do we bring positive attention to God so he is recognized for greatness? 1) Trust in Jesus implicitly for your salvation. Your whole heart shouts for joy and says, "Jesus did it! And Jesus is it! I owe everything to him." When a person is trusting completely in Jesus and living a life dedicated to him, he has lost his life. All control and all purpose is given up to Jesus. That attitude of trust and gratitude becomes visible in your daily life... in what you say, in your attitude, in the way you deal with others. And the direct result of this is that other will glorify God's name because of you.

Jesus said it this way, "*The man who loves his life [that is, wants to keep it for himself and live it for self] will lose it, while the man who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life.* If you want to live selfishly in this life, and be the sole commander of your life and the captain of your soul, God will allow you to do it. You will keep your life for this world, and lost it in eternity. But the one trusting completely in Jesus and relying on his life and his death for complete forgiveness... that person gives up everything in this life. And in doing so, he keeps eternal life.

"*Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honor the one who serves me.*" Jesus bought us. He paid the highest price imaginable... he bought us with his holy precious blood shed for you and me. He did this that we might be guilt-free and live with God in eternity. With gladness and willingness, we follow him. We serve him. We will be wherever Jesus is. And we will never go places and do things that Jesus disapproves him. And when we serve Jesus and conform our lives to his life, the Father is pleased. The Father is glorified by us and our lives. And the Father honors us.

March Gladness. That's what today is all about. Gladness because of glory. Glory Jesus brought to the Father's name by a strange thing. By suffering and dying. Which removed our guilt. Glory be to the Father! Jesus has indeed glorified him! And we will glorify the Father also as we live our lives in service to Jesus. May all who live around us see our humility and service to our Savior... not for our glory, but for his. May we give draw all kinds of positive attention to our God as we strive to help other recognize his greatness. To him be the glory for the gladness he has given us. Amen.