

John 1:1-18; 17:1-5, 24

What is Glory?

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Like many of you, this week marked the beginning of Advent: Christmas songs played in my office and home, my Christmas wish list was given to family members, and, as is tradition in my home, I've hung up my orange shoelaces from which I hang Christmas cards I receive! Advent is here and I am excited about all that it means – waiting, anticipation, expectation, hope, peace, joy, love, glory.

This Advent, we will spend our time in the gospel of John. We will study the prologue, John 1:1-18. Prologue comes from two Greek words: pro which means before and logos which means word. So this is the word that comes before the word. But this is not simply a preface or introduction or prelude. This is not something that just comes before the main part, like a preamble that sets up the main plot by providing background context and information. This is, as some theologians and scholars rightly point out, an overture. Those who are musical know that an overture is the orchestral piece that comes at the beginning of an opera or composition. The overture is where all the important themes of the composition are introduced. The overture is where we get a taste of the story which is to come by familiarizing ourselves with the main people and main themes. In John's overture, we hear about Word and flesh, light and life, grace and truth, revelation and glory. In John's overture, we become familiar with all of the themes that John will expand on during the rest of the book. In John's overture, we hear the key pieces that we need to pay attention to when we hear the stories about Jesus' life and ministry and death and resurrection.

In this rich and poetic passage, John says so much. One of the themes John picks up in the overture is glory: *The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his*

glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. This Advent we'll dig a bit deeper into that theme of glory, along with other themes John writes about. So this morning, to help us understand glory, to help us answer our question 'what is glory', we turn to John 17.

The entire chapter of John 17 is Jesus praying. This is the only time we are invited to listen to the words of Jesus, the Son of God, to God the Father in Heaven. This prayer happened on the night of Jesus' arrest. Jesus had finished eating the evening meal with his disciples, washed their feet, and broke bread with them. That same evening, the night of Jesus' arrest, the night before his crucifixion, we hear the sacred and intimate words of Jesus' prayer. When we listen to his prayer, we realize that Jesus is in the valley of the shadow of death because he knows what will soon happen to him. When we are faced with death, our most critical concerns and deepest desires are revealed. So in this prayer, we hear the fundamental longings of Jesus' heart.

Notice with me how Jesus starts his prayer. Notice with me the deepest desire of Jesus. Notice with me the most fundamental longing of Jesus' heart: *Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you. ... And now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began.* And, listen, again to the words of Jesus at the end of his prayer: *Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world.*

Glory. Glorify. The most fundamental longing of Jesus' heart is that the Father would glorify the Son so the Son may glorify the Father. The deepest desire of Jesus is that God the Father would

glorify God the Son so that God the Son may glorify God the Father. This is in verse 1, verse 4 and verse 24. Glory and glorify: this is the main thrust, the driving force, the central trajectory, the fundamental purpose, the heartbeat of Jesus' life and being: glory and glorify.

What is glory? The Greek word is doxes. The Hebrew word is kabowd (kaw-bode). The Greek and Hebrew words for glory are defined as essence. Glory is about the essence of God. In Exodus 33, we read this interaction between Moses and Yahweh God: *Moses said to God 'Now show me your glory. And the Lord said, "I will cause all my goodness to pass in front of you, and I will proclaim my name, the Lord, in your presence. I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. But, he said, you cannot see my face, for no one may see me and live."* Glory – essence. It means show me the essence of who you are. Show me the essence of what you do. Show me what makes Yahweh Yahweh. It is why, when Moses asks to be shown God's glory, God responds by naming the essence of God: goodness, mercy, compassion. It is why the Hebrew Bible reads "you cannot see my face" – you cannot see the essence of my being, you cannot see the divine essence that makes God God. Glory – the essence.

The verb to glorify means to honour or to manifest. It means to honour the essence. It means to manifest the essence. To reveal the essence. To show the essence.

So, Jesus' prayer in John 17:1: *Father, glorify your Son that your Son may glorify you. Father, honor me that I may honour you. Manifest the essence of me so that I may manifest the essence of who you are. Honour my essential nature so that I may honour your essential nature.*

Then in verse 4, we begin to understand more fully what glory actually means and looks like in the life of Jesus. Jesus prays in verse 4: *I have brought you glory on earth by completing the work you gave me to do.* This means that in every deed Jesus did, he was honouring the essence of his Father in Heaven. In every word Jesus spoke he was manifesting the very essence of God.

In the gospel of John, chapters 2 through 11 are the signs, events, and miracles in Jesus' life. Chapter 2 begins with the story of Jesus' first miracle: turning water into wine. In verse 11 we read: *This, the first of his miraculous signs, Jesus performed at Cana in Galilee. He thus revealed his glory, and his disciples put their faith in him.*

In chapter 11 we read the story of the sickness and death of Lazarus, the beloved brother of Mary and Martha. When Jesus heard that Lazarus was sick, he said in verse 4: *This sickness will not end in death. No, it is for God's glory so that God's Son may be glorified through it.* Three days after Lazarus died, Jesus went to his tomb and raised Lazarus from the dead. In conversation with Lazarus' sister, Martha, Jesus said: *Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?*

Chapters 2 through 11, the chapters that describe the signs, the wonders, the events, the teachings, the sayings, the miracles, the interactions of Jesus of Nazareth are bookended with glory. John makes clear in his gospel that the events in Jesus' life took place to honour the essence of God. John makes clear in his gospel that the signs of Jesus are to manifest the essence of God the Father. Thus, it is through this lens of glory and glorify that we read the gospel of John. It is through this lens, this purpose of honouring and manifesting the essence of God that

we read about Jesus: from birth to death. All that Jesus did and said was to show who God the Father is.

When Jesus clears and cleanses the temple, Jesus is responding to a human problem but at a deeper level Jesus is acting to manifest the essence of the Holy God. When Jesus traveled through Samaria and met a woman and gave her living water, he was meeting a very real human need. But at a deeper level, Jesus was honoring the essence of the Living God. When Jesus was in Cana in Galilee, he healed the son of an official. In Jerusalem, he healed a lame man. Here again, Jesus was focusing on a human need but at a more significant level, Jesus was glorifying the Father. When Jesus used five loaves and two fish to feed thousands, Jesus was meeting a very real human need but at a deeper level, Jesus was showing us who God is. In every act Jesus did, yes he met human needs, but he did that to glorify the Father. In every word Jesus spoke, yes he responded to human concerns, but he said that to glorify the Father. Everything was said and done for the greater purpose of glorifying God.

Then we get to John 12, which marks the beginning of Holy Week – Palm Sunday. In verse 23 we hear Jesus' words: *The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.* The hour has come. The time has come. This is the hour where the world will fully and completely see God for who God is and what God is like. This is the hour where the very essence of God the Father will be revealed, honoured, manifested, shown.

The hour has come for God to be most glorified. What hour is Jesus referring to? He is referring to his death. It means the hour that God the Father is glorified is through the death of the Son.

The time where the essence of God the Father will be manifested is through the crucifixion. The occasion where the world will know who God is and what God is like happens on the cross. The moment where the very essence of God will be honoured happens in the death of Jesus Christ.

On the cross, Jesus glorifies the Father. The essence of God the Father is fully manifested when Jesus Christ takes upon himself all the sin of the world. On the cross, Jesus is meeting the greatest of all human needs but at a deeper level Jesus is glorifying the Father – Jesus is revealing God the Father to us. Jesus desires our salvation, of course. Jesus desires that we would have eternal life. Jesus desires that we would repent and be forgiven and healed. Jesus desires that we would be the new creation, the redeemed people. Jesus desires that we would be part of God's Kingdom. But, John the Apostle makes clear in his gospel that our salvation is not the primary focus of Jesus' life and ministry. The deepest passion of Jesus' heart is the glory of God. The fundamental longing of Jesus is that the very essence of God the Father would be manifested and honoured. And then, of course Jesus desires our salvation because the essence of God is love and salvation lies at the heart of who God is.

Sometimes we get this backwards. I grew up believing that the cross was all about me. Now, as a pastor, I hear this question often: did Jesus die for me? Yes. And no. Some of our songs reinforce the belief that the cross is first and foremost about me. Think of the song *Above All*: the chorus says: Crucified Laid behind the stone You lived to die Rejected and alone Like a rose trampled on the ground You took the fall And thought of me Above all

“You took the fall and thought of me above all.” On the cross, was Jesus’ first thought me? Was Jesus’ first thought you? Was Jesus’ first thought his disciples or the Jews or the Gentiles? Was Jesus’ first thought the Kingdom of God? Jesus did not think about me or about you or about the Jews or Gentiles above everything else when he was on the cross. Jesus thought of God the Father above everything. Jesus thought about manifesting the essence of God the Father to the world. Jesus thought about honouring who God is. Friends, the cross is not first about me. It’s not about you. It’s not first about salvation or redemption or renewal or forgiveness or God’s Kingdom. The cross is first about glory: it is first about revealing the very essence of God the Father to the world. The cross is first about showing the world who God is. And then, of course, it is about salvation and forgiveness and healing and redemption and renewal because that is what the Father is about!

So if Jesus’ prayer, if Jesus’ most fundamental longing of his heart is glory – we should not be surprised that the incarnation is all about glory. The glory to which John refers in his overture is this glory: the glory of the cross. John does not refer to the glory we read about in the gospel of Luke with the angels and the shepherds. John does not refer to the glory we find in the account of the birth of Jesus in Matthew. No, John’s overture is pointing us directly to the glory of the cross – to the manifestation of the very essence of God the Father on the cross. So the glory we read about in the overture is not about me. It’s not about you. It’s not about Riverdale Baptist Church. It’s not about Whitehorse. It’s not about Canada. It’s all about God. The incarnation points us not to ourselves, not to salvation, not to eternal life, not to redemption. The incarnation points us to the glory of God. The incarnation, indeed everything, comes down to the essence of God – to the honour of God, to the glory of God.

When we begin to comprehend that the story of the incarnation of the Son of God, the stories of Jesus' miracles, the story of Palm Sunday, the stories in Holy Week, the story of the cross, and the story of resurrection are all about glory – it will change and transform us. These stories – the incarnation, the life and ministry of Jesus, the death and resurrection – are not first about me or you. These stories exist to rightly point us towards God. These are stories about God the Father.

You see, we won't fully understand Jesus of Nazareth or what it means to be a disciple of Jesus or our ministries or the purpose of the church unless we understand that everything Jesus did and said was to honour his Father, that Jesus lived and died to manifest the essence of who the Father is and what the Father is like; and that the Father wants to honour and manifest who His Son truly is.

So what does this mean for me, for you, for RBC? Listen to the words of Paul the Apostle to the saints in Ephesus: *In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will, in order that we, who were the first to hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory.* “To the praise of his glory” – this is a phrase Paul repeats three times in 9 verses. According to Paul, the church exists for the praise of his glory. Praise – which means thanksgiving, celebration. Glory – to honor and manifest the essence of God. The church exists to celebrate and honour and manifest the essence of God. The driving force of the church is not to meet my needs or your needs. The driving force of the church is to glorify God. The church does not primarily exist to meet my needs or your needs. It's way bigger than that. The church is so much greater than me or you. The church is about the glory of God.

When we understand this, it will impact our ministries, our vision, our direction, our decisions. Yes - we are meeting real human needs through our ministries – we meet human needs by packing shoeboxes and volunteering with the Salvation Army; we are meeting real human needs by inviting people into our homes to read the Bible and pray and share a meal; we are meeting real human needs by supporting our missionaries. But at a deeper level, we do these ministries because we are glorifying God. This is what makes the church's ministry different from the organizations in our community that help others. This is why Jesus came and this is why the church exists: to glorify God. May this church – Riverdale Baptist Church – seek to manifest the very essence of God in all we say and do and think. May that be the driving force from which we live and make our decisions.

One way we glorify God is by coming together at the Table. When we gather at the Table, we are pointed to God, not to ourselves or what we get from God. But our attention and focus are rightly pointed towards the glory of God. As we gather at the Table this morning, we come with thanks. We come with thanks for the cross: that the cross is the deepest expression of the glory of God. That the cross is where the very essence of God is manifested. That the cross is where the essential nature of God is honoured. That the cross is where who God is is most revealed.

And because the cross is where the Son of Man is glorified and because the cross is where God is glorified, it means the cross is where we encounter God's love, forgiveness, healing, salvation, help. This is all demonstrated here at the Table with bread and cup.