

Seeking Glory?
John 5:41-44, February 18th, 2024

Usain Bolt always wanted to be more than a great runner, he wanted to be a legend. In 2008 he stunned the world when he left the Beijing Olympics with 3 gold medals around his neck and 2 world records under his belt. Again, at the London Olympics in 2012, he won triple gold and set another world record. And at the Rio Games in 2016, he defended his title as the “World’s Fastest Man,” with three more gold medals. “I am a living legend,” he boasted during a press conference, “Bask in my glory. I’m the greatest athlete to [ever] live.” But Bolt is proof that the victors’ laurel crown soon withers & gold of earthly glory quickly dims. In 2017, he lost his final race. That same year, one of his 9 medals was stripped when a member of his relay tested positive for steroids. Bolts’ records have already begun to fall to the next rising track stars.

You don’t have to be a world-famous athlete to hunger for glory and significance. *Don’t you want to be respected and admired? Don’t you want to make a mark on the world and be remembered? Why?* Because God has cast us after his own immortal image & set eternity in our hearts. Because, as David sang in Psalm 8:5, God made man “a little lower than the angels and crowned him with glory and honor.” Though the fall marred man’s Edenic glory it did not remove man’s longing for glory! So, the question Jesus poses to us this morning is: “*From whom are you seeking glory?*” JC- “***We ought to boldly despise the [glory] of man.***”

First, ***we ought to boldly despise the glory of man because it is devoid of the love of God.*** Remember, Jesus is on trial informally or formally before the Sanhedrin, for claiming to be the Son of God. In his own defense he appealed to the testimony of JTB, his own miracles, the commendation of His Father, and the Scriptures themselves. But despite the mountain of evidence, the Pharisees refused to come to Christ and be saved because sinful man doesn’t need to be intellectually convinced, he needs to be spiritually conquered & converted by the power of the Holy Spirit, and because these Pharisees were only seeking the glory that comes from man.

In **v41** Jesus said, “I do not receive glory from people.” *What does he mean by that? Haven’t we come this morning to give glory to Jesus?* Yes, but not because we have something he lacks. WCF2:2 says that as God, Christ has “*all life, glory, goodness, blessedness, in and of himself; and is alone in and unto himself all-sufficient, not standing in need of any creature which he hath made, nor deriving any glory from them...*” That means you can no more add glory to Jesus than you can add light to the sun. You see, God’s not like us. He’s not needy or insecure. His self-esteem doesn’t rise & fall like the tide. He isn’t worried about being popular nor is he affected by his latest poll numbers. He’s God! “Wondrous King all-glorious, sovereign Lord victorious!” When we strive to glorify God as a church on the Lord’s Day or individually on the days in between, we aren’t giving God something he needs rather we are receiving something we need. We are basking in the splendor his character and reflecting his radiance in heartfelt praise & obedience, like the night moon brightly beaming the reflected rays of the sun.

Jesus does not receive glory from man because of his own nature but also because of the nature of the glory that man gives. *What is glory?* The OT Heb word for “glory” is *cavode*, which means “weight, significance.” The NT Greek word (used 3 times in these 4 verses) is *doxa*, (*as in doxology*) means “honor/praise/value.” Jesus refused to derive his glory (value, honor) from man because the glory man gives is devoid of the love of God and filled only w/ self-love **v42**.

For Christmas, we went to my dad & step mom’s farm in Tallahassee. And one morning I was up in a tree stand, not killing deer, when a flock of 20 turkeys (rafter) came out of the woods right in front of me... with one big tom. *Have you ever watched a tom turkey?* They’re ridiculous! To impress hens & intimidate young jakes, they fluff themselves up round as a beach

ball. They open their wings, spread their pinions and drag them on the ground. They fan their tail feathers into a semicircle as wide as they can, cock their heads back & then, they strut.

The Pharisees do the same. They wore special clothes, assumed the seat of honor, prayed long loud flowery prayers in public, made grand displays of their learning, and boasted in their charity not because they loved the Lord, but because they loved themselves and wanted to be seen & praised by others. In a sort of narcissistic group therapy, in a self-obsessed symbiosis they would celebrate one another and then wait for the favor to be returned. **MH**-It is the proud man's art to throw honor upon others only that it may rebound upon himself.

But are we so different? Ask yourself: Why do I try on so many pairs of clothes before leaving the house? Why am I so touched by compliments and so wounded by criticism? Why do I talk about myself so much? Why do I really want to get into that college? Why do I want to be fit or beautiful or ageless? Why do I obsess over likes & shares online? Is it not because I crave the praise of people? Is it not because so often, my love of self swallows up my love of God? Is it not because I forget that the fool's-gold of man's glory is worthless? Jesus would not receive glory from people because he knows it's fickle and fleeting like a sandcastle in the surf, like a crowd crying Hosanna on Sunday and "crucify him" on Friday. So, we must repent of our self-love & beg God to wean us from our addiction to the glory man gives. In 2021, for the 1st time in history, spectators were prohibited from attending the Olympics. Can you imagine training and dreaming your whole life for that moment but when you take the place to start your race, the stadium is silent and the stands are empty? So, is the race of faith run... not for the applause of men, but as we see next, for the glory of God our father.

We ought to boldly despise the glory of man because it is devoid of the love of God and in the second place, because **it is antithetical to faith (43)**. Around the year 4BC, a Jewish shepherd named Athronges led a revolt against the Romans with his 4 brothers & their many followers. They crowned Athronges king before his movement was crushed by the Romans. That same year, a slave named Simon of Peraea burnt down Herod's royal palace in Jericho. He was tall and handsome and amassed many followers who hailed him as messiah before being beheaded by the Romans. A few years later in 6AD, Judas the Galilean led an armed resistance against the Romans. Many believed he was the long-awaited messiah but their hopes were dashed when he too was executed by the Romans. I could tell you of Judas bar Hezekiah, or Theudus, Simon bar Kochba or all the other wannabe messiahs but I don't have to because they're all the same: they each came in their own name & won the allegiance of the Jews by promising to give them exactly what they wanted: political freedom, national pride, & personal wealth.

Jesus' claim to be Messiah was not unique. The *kind* of Messiah Jesus claimed to be, now that was something truly unseen in Israel. For Jesus wasn't tall and handsome like the other messiahs **Isaiah 53:2** "He had no form or majesty that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him." Jesus wasn't wealthy & powerful; he was gentle and lowly. He did not come to his people in might on the back of a war stallion but in meekness on the foal of a donkey. Rather than coming to conquer his enemies, Jesus came to be crucified for them. His diadem was thorns; his throne, a cross on a hill. Because Jesus did not come to save the Jews from the Romans. No! Jesus came to save them, Jew and gentile, from their spiritual bondage to sin and death! He came to vanquish not Caesar but Satan by claiming the curse of his people's sins on the cross and crediting his righteousness to them. He came, not to unite the tribes of Israel under one national banner, but to reconcile sinners to God. Though God's own Son came in God's own name to God's people, they would not receive him they would not believe him... why? **V44**.

Do you hear what Jesus is saying? These pharisees could not believe the gospel because they were seeking glory from one another. He's saying that the glory of man is antithetical to faith because the glory man gives (though it is fleeting & worthless) can be seen, heard, and felt while

the glory God gives (though it is eternal and priceless) is invisible, and can only be received through faith. We can see the smiles of men but we cannot see the smile of God. We can hear the cheers of men but we cannot hear the approval of our heavenly Father. We can feel the congratulatory pat on the back but we cannot feel the hand of God upon us **but by faith** which “is the assurance of things hoped for and the conviction of things unseen.” **JC**- The gate of faith is shut against all whose hearts are preoccupied by a vain desire of earthly glory.”

The glory of man is antithetical to faith (believing in Jesus) because the glory man gives is fueled by self-love, but believing in Jesus & receiving the glory that comes from God requires self-hatred, that is the hatred of our sins. Believing in Jesus and receiving the glory that comes from God requires us to accept who Jesus says we are, rebels, enemies of God, violators of his holy law, worthy in ourselves not of eternal glory but eternal shame in hell... worthy of what Jesus received as he stood condemned in our sins: worthy of being despised and scorned, worthy of a painful punishment, worthy of darkness, worthy of the wrath of God, worthy of being forsaken... but for Christ who paid it all. So you see friends, the path to glory is not the worldlings boast but the humble confession “Lord Jesus, have mercy on me a sinner.”

And what is the glory God gives (worthy, honor, praise)? God gives the glory of knowing that my sins have been paid in full by the blood of the lamb; the glory of being justified (forgiven and declared righteous); the glory of being adopted and cherished as his own child; the glory of having God’s name upon us, the glory of being coheirs with Christ, and being pitied protected and provided for by our Heavenly Father; the glory of knowing that even now, my elder brother Jesus Christ is preparing a room in the great house of my father in heaven for men; the glory of being the temple of the holy Spirit who transforms me from the inside out into the likeness of Christ; the glory of being a part of the church, a member of Jesus own body of which he is the head, the beloved bride of Christ, the glory of knowing that because God is sovereign all my pain has a holy purpose; the glory of knowing that Christ has conquered the grave for me and I can live and die boldly knowing that nothing can separate me from his love and that with Job I can say, “even after my body has been destroyed, in my flesh I shall see God.” This unfading crown of glory, this eternal weight of glory, God gives us is the unspeakable privilege of standing next to his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, our brother, savior, and friend, as heaven’s spotlight falls on him and every knee bows down, and every tongue confesses that he is Lord.

In the light of God’s glory, the glory man gives grows dim & dingy does it not? Grasping the glory of God frees us from living in fear of man’s scorn and in pursuit of man’s praise; it frees us to live boldly for Jesus Christ in the face of a world that hates him; it inspires us as a church to preach and teach and worship boldly in a world growing increasingly intolerant of our faith. It instills in us the reflex to reflect glory to God rather than receive it when it is offered by the world like former Superbowl champion **Rocky Seto** telling a reporter, “Jesus is better!”; like the Master’s champion **Bubba Watson** who as he dawned the August green jacket for the first time broke down weeping as he thanked his Lord and Savior Jesus Christ before they cut his feed; like **Kevin Durant** who when a courtside reporter asked the source of his talent simply said, “God. That’s all I can say. Jesus Christ... It’s all him.” Like **Steph Curry** saying “It’s in his name I go out there and compete using the gifts he’s given me for his glory,” like **Michael Chang** who said in his victory speech after the French open “I’d like to thank my Lord Jesus because without him I would not have this talent to play Tennis and I give him the glory for my success.” Like the **Olympian Lolo Jones** who said “Whether God wants to promote me or humble that is in his hands...” Like **Manni Paqueo** who said, “God has a purpose... he has brought me into his kingdom to glorify his name...” whose team logo is “All glory and honor belongs to God.” Like NFL superstar **Ben Watson**, who before being cut from a CNN interview said, “the only thing you need to know about me is that Jesus Christ died for my sins.” So too may we boldly despise the glory of man and live to the praise of God’s glorious grace. Amen.