

FOCUS: The hidden glory of the cross turns the very definition of glory on its head, is revealed by the resurrection, and shows us God's heart. We can grow to see glory the way God does.

FUNCTION: That hearers would understand more of God's way of glory and begin to see this in their own lives.

1. Intro – The glory of the cross

JBS - glory = combination of power and beauty. First heard – liked it, made sense, appealed. Helps you? too abstract? Today - the glory of the cross – let's put definition to the test!

²⁷ Some of the governor's soldiers took Jesus into their headquarters and called out the entire regiment. ²⁸ They stripped him and put a scarlet robe on him. ²⁹ They wove thorn branches into a crown and put it on his head, and they placed a reed stick in his right hand as a sceptre. Then they knelt before him in mockery and taunted, "Hail! King of the Jews!" ³⁰ And they spit on him and grabbed the stick and struck him on the head with it. ³¹ When they were finally tired of mocking him, they took off the robe and put his own clothes on him again. Then they led him away to be crucified. ³² Along the way, they came across a man named Simon, who was from Cyrene, and the soldiers forced him to carry Jesus' cross. ³³ And they went out to a place called Golgotha (which means "Place of the Skull"). ³⁴ The soldiers gave Jesus wine mixed with bitter gall, but when he had tasted it, he refused to drink it.

³⁵ After they had nailed him to the cross, the soldiers gambled for his clothes by throwing dice. ³⁶ Then they sat around and kept guard as he hung there. ³⁷ A sign was fastened above Jesus' head, announcing the charge against him. It read: "This is Jesus, the King of the Jews." ³⁸ Two revolutionaries were crucified with him, one on his right and one on his left.

³⁹ The people passing by shouted abuse, shaking their heads in mockery. ⁴⁰ "Look at you now!" they yelled at him. "You said you were going to destroy the Temple and rebuild it in three days. Well then, if you are the Son of God, save yourself and come down from the cross!"

⁴¹ The leading priests, the teachers of religious law, and the elders also mocked Jesus. ⁴² "He saved others," they scoffed, "but he can't save himself! So he is the King of Israel, is he? Let him come down from the cross right now, and we will believe in him! ⁴³ He trusted God, so let God rescue him now if he wants him! For he said, 'I am the Son of God.'" ⁴⁴ Even the revolutionaries who were crucified with him ridiculed him in the same way.

⁴⁵ At noon, darkness fell across the whole land until three o'clock. ⁴⁶ At about three o'clock, Jesus called out with a loud voice, "Eli, Eli lema sabachthani?" which means "My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?"
Mtt 27:27 NLT

Pause.

Hard to even read out loud. Not style - matter of fact. Sheer gut-wrenching awfulness of it.

So let's run our definition of glory past this scene. Power and beauty.

Where's the power? Get less powerful than this?! Jesus - isn't even fighting back, passed from group to group, spat on / struck, nailed naked to cross, slow agonising death, mocked /ridiculed by everyone, leaders to crims.

Where's the beauty? So much ugliness. Violence, cruelty, pain / torture, horrific perversion of justice, lies, insults, abuse, shame and humiliation, and utter abandonment.

On our definition, there's no glory to be seen here.

2. God hides his glory then turns it on its head.

And that's the way it was at the time too. No-one saw the glory. Not closest friends/devoted followers/ mother. A couple saw glimpses of who Jesus really was, but even they didn't see glory as they looked at the cross.

The fact is, the glory of the cross is hidden. No outward clues but its glory is deep /profound, powerful / beautiful. Jason - need eyes of faith to see God's glory – cross = supreme eg!
G Bingham – *“its glory is hidden under veils of the inglorious”*.

Where is this hidden glory found?

Jesus' submission – what looks like powerlessness = deliberate willing submission.

“No one can take my life from me. I sacrifice it voluntarily. For I have the authority to lay it down when I want to and also to take it up again. For this is what my Father has commanded.” Jn 10:18 NLT.

Jesus doesn't put down his authority (and Fathers).

What looks like ugly imposition, fate forced upon Jesus actually = choice.

What looks like the world wielding power over Jesus actually = Jesus winning power over all that is evil in the world. Jews, Romans, satan, all seek to destroy Jesus, completely unaware that by doing this they are actually taking an active part in accomplishing God's will!

Jesus' love – Jesus' submission driven by sacrificial love for humanity, collectively/ individually. Although does gain power, not his motivation. Motivation = rescue his Bride.

Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her ²⁶to make her holy, cleansing^[b] her by the washing with water through the word, ²⁷and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. Eph 5:25 NIV

Who Jesus is. If he had been a regular man, this whole scene would indeed have no skerrick of glory – shame, agony, ugliness, despair. But Jesus Christ Son of God, by nature glorious.

The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. Heb 1:3 NIV

And although glory of Son can be hidden, it cannot be snuffed out. In life, in death, who Jesus is changes everything and everyone around him. And for this radiant Son to submit and to love is a glorious act which only increases the weight and the wonder of his glory.

Plenty of power and beauty after all, just not in the way we are used to seeing it.

So in all of this - John Calvin – *“The glory of God shines, indeed, in all creatures on high and below, but never more brightly than in the cross”*.

Did Jesus know / understand the cross as glory? Yes, it seems he did –

Just days before - ²³ Jesus replied, “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. ²⁴ Very truly I tell you, 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....

²⁷ “Now my soul 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. ²⁸ Father, glorify your name!”

Then a voice came from heaven, “I have glorified it, and will glorify it again.”

3. The resurrection reveals the glory of the cross

So if no-one saw the hidden glory of the cross, how can we see it today? Resurrection three days later = not only glorious on Sunday but reveals true glory of Friday!

Blinders off, truth unfolds (for anyone looking). If he didn't rise, Jesus' acts of willing submission, of sacrificial love, = noble /maybe even beautiful but ultimately tragic / robbed of glory. The cross is glorious but it is glorious because it does succeed, death is overturned, God's power and love are proved and all these things bring glory to him.

Phil 2 charts course of Jesus' glory –

⁵ You must have the same attitude that Christ Jesus had

⁶ Though he was God, he did not think of equality with God as something to cling to.

⁷ Instead, he gave up his divine privileges; he took the humble position of a slave and was born as a human being.

When he appeared in human form, he humbled himself in obedience to God and died a criminal's death on a cross.

Therefore, God elevated him to the place of highest honour and gave him the name above all other names,

that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue declare that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Phil 2:5-11 (NLT)

So in Jesus' time on earth, his glory remains but it is hidden. Those who know him well get glimpses but it is only revealed who he really is after the resurrection. We today are blessed not only to have this revealed but to have inspired NT writers explain and apply it for us, and the Holy Spirit to enable us to become like Jesus, in his suffering and in his glory. We are also promised that one day we will see Jesus worshipped as his glory deserves.

4. The glory of the cross gives us a profound window into God's nature

Mind-blowing but there's more! Girls in my GG - first question you always ask of Bible is – what does this tell me about God – who he is, what he is like?

Glory of the cross - profound window into God's nature – what he values, how he sees things. So what can we say about God as we look on the glory of the cross?

Here are some of my thoughts – you might have others –

- He doesn't do things the way I would!

If God, Jesus, salvation, dreamed up by humans – it would never look like this!!

Takes crazy risks, veils his glory so no-one can see it, endures all kinds of suffering, prefers the humble / lowly to the important, doesn't force anyone into believing him, offers forgiveness without demanding anything in return, he serves his servants, he dies!

When we preach that Christ was crucified, the Jews are offended and the Gentiles say it's all nonsense. But to those called by God to salvation, both Jews and Gentiles, Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God. ²⁵ This foolish plan of God is wiser than the wisest of human plans, and God's weakness is stronger than the greatest of human strength. 1 Cor 1:24-25

For a long time, this truth = comfort / assurance. Very fact God doesn't do things as I would strengthens my trust in him = real, true, the one who knows better than me.

- He turns things upside down

God's way! Echoed all through the Bible -

He has brought down rulers from their thrones but has lifted up the humble. He has filled the hungry with good things but has sent the rich away empty. Luke 1:52-3

"So the last will be first, and the first will be last." Matt 20:16

God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. ²⁸ God chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are.

This is the pattern of the glory of the cross. But it's also how we are to live – *You must have the same attitude as Christ Jesus did.* Where we are 'the last', rejoice in being lifted up, where we are 'the first', join God by humbling ourselves and lifting up others.

- His ideas are infinitely deeper and wider than ours

“As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts. Is 55

This is what we have seen with power / beauty –

human power = overbearing/greedy/forceful power which makes point of being visible,
God’s power = deep / subversive, hidden, giving /sharing.

human beauty = skin-deep temporary prettiness, clung to in fear

God’s beauty = goes deep, only increased with scars, born of love and giving.

Yet Paul - *we have the mind of Christ* through Holy Spirit – God’s thoughts (some of them?) can be ours if we seek them! For me, also = letting go of assumptions.

- He receives glory in all forms

God not glorified BY suffering –mistake sometimes made by martyrs.

Not glorified by IGNORING suffering –made by Christians - exude happiness.

Not glorified when suffering IS glorified - held tightly inside/ nursed in bitterness.

God is glorified when suffering human beings turn to him in trust. This is what Jesus does on the cross. This is what God desires. No circumstance where we cannot glorify God.

5. How do we glorify God in the midst of suffering?

How do we respond? Before anything else, stop - wonder at awe-inspiring, upside down, powerful, beautiful, humble, unique glory of the cross and the One who died there for us.

Pause.

If you don’t know him personally, haven’t committed yourself to him, and you feel him calling you through any of these words today - do it, answer him!

If you do, have a talk to the Holy Spirit about how you can become more like your incredible Saviour. In particular, how can you bring him glory, not only with joy and gladness but in the midst of whatever you are going through.

AG – *We pour out our misery, God he hears a melody, Beautiful the mess we are, Honest cries of breaking hearts are better than a hallelujah sometimes.* This song says it beautifully and I’ve asked Jess if she would sing it for us as we respond...