

The True Follower

Listos! Are You Ready? Pt. 6

I hope you've had a great Thanksgiving break and are ready for what's coming. Break out the Christmas music, put up the lights, it's Christmas time, baby! Of course, if you are in retail, it's been Christmas for a couple of months already. And for the church universal, Advent season doesn't officially start until next week. In fact, we will be starting our Christmas series here at SWFF in *two* weeks.

Because I want to squeeze two more sermons into our *Listos* series. We've been exploring this Fall the largest block of Jesus teaching in the Bible - John chapters 13–17 – it all takes place in a single night, the night before Jesus' death. And so he is preparing his disciples for life without him. And we're specifically looking at a passage this week – and last week and next – about what it means to be a follower of Jesus. Because Jesus is not just talking to the 12 Apostles at the Last Supper table, he's talking to all of us.

And we started by looking at the false follower – last week we saw Jesus confront Judas. Jesus had shown that he knew that Judas was going to betray him. He confronts him, he tries to reach out to him, to melt his heart one last time. But Judas hardens in his resolve and he goes out into the night. And that's actually where we are going to pick up the passage this morning.

Because as soon as Judas walked out that door, Jesus knew that the clock was ticking. Jesus knows that soldiers will be back to arrest him soon. So these really are his final moments. And when you are talking to your friends, your disciples and it's the final moments of your life, you don't talk about the weather. You don't talk about your favorite sports teams, as tempting as that will be for some of you. You talk about whatever is the *most* crucial thing you could *possibly* say to people.

And so let's see what Jesus chooses to say – we will be reading from **John 13:31–34**, “*When he was gone, Jesus said, “Now the Son of Man is glorified and God is glorified in him. 32 If God is glorified in him, God will glorify the Son in himself, and will glorify him at once.*”

33 “*My children, I will be with you only a little longer. You will look for me, and just as I told the Jews, so I tell you now: Where I am going, you cannot come.*”

34 “*A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. 35 By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.*”

Ok, so what is the thing Jesus chooses to focus on in these final hours? Well, he tips his hand, because in the first two verses that we read, Jesus uses the word “glory” *five* times. And he uses it to talk about *two* things, the cross and the Christian. And of course the one leads to the other – the cross is causal to the Christian.

So let’s organize our discussion today around setting an identity for those two things. Let’s first talk about *the mark of the cross* – which he talks about in verses 31 and 32. And then *the mark of a Christian* – which is verses 33 to 35. You’ve heard of “the mark of the beast” – that’s the identifier for singular evil, how you would know the spirit of anti-Christ is in your midst. Well, likewise there’s a mark for the cross and for the Christian – how we can identify, authenticate those two things. So let’s look at them.

First of all, The Mark of the Cross. It is extraordinarily significant that when Jesus has one thing to say to a group of his friends before he dies, that he talks about glory. And it’s not just here, if we could go all the way through Chapters 13-17 – I wish we could – we would discover that “glory” is actually the theme of the entire discourse.

Now, the fact is that when I talk to modern people about God’s love or about His power or His wisdom, everybody’s kind of immediately okay, at least they know what I’m talking about. But when we start talking about God’s *glory* we have a lot more trouble. Modern people have *a lot* more trouble. It feels remote, it feels vague, is hard to get our hands around it. So let’s start right off by asking the question; what is glory - according to the Bible?

And we can’t say everything, but here’s just a couple of ideas that are important to us to help us this morning. The Greek word that we translate as “glory” in the Bible is the word *Doxa* - from which we get our word “doxology”. Glory means “value and worth”. Something is glorious if it has value and worth.

So in **Matthew 13:44** Jesus tells a parable about hidden value; “*The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field.*” And that “with joy” part tells you how great the value is. You can imagine that this man would have been very attached to his possessions. He had acquired these things over his whole life. And he sold, “*all he had*” – stuff he had likely inherited from his ancestors. His commemorative Super Bowl mug!

But all of a sudden, in light of the glory of the treasure, all of his possessions are like, “Okay, good riddance.” Why? Because even though I valued all of this stuff yesterday, today they *pale* in comparison to the glory of the treasure I have discovered. If I have the treasure, I’ll be *infinitely* richer than if I hold on to all my stuff. Why? Because of the greater glory - worth and value - of the treasure.

Another definition of *doxa*, or glory, is “brilliance and beauty.” So for example, in 2 Corinthians 3, Paul tells a story about when Moses was up on Mount Sinai and he was talking to God face-to-face. And when he came down to the people, they couldn’t look at him. Why? Because his face was shining with *doxa*, with glory, and it was too brilliant and too beautiful and he had to put a veil over his face in order to have the people even come near.

And I think the reason we struggle with God’s glory is the same reason those Hebrews struggled. It’s the same reason I find that the theology books tend to struggle with God’s glory. When you read about the characteristics of God - His love or His power, His wisdom, His eternity, His justice – they are fairly clear.

But when it’s comes to describing His glory the systematic theology texts are all over the place. It’s because God’s glory in some ways is *the* overwhelming superlative - the beauty of *all these* attributes put together; infinite love, infinite power, infinite wisdom, infinite everything, all wrapped up in one...it’s just overwhelming.

And therefore, God’s glory is His **overwhelming beauty** that leads you to, with joy, give away everything you have, and everything you are, to serve Him because of His **infinite worth**. Now that’s all fine and good. We can, I think, start to grasp that definition of glory. But what’s the ultimate *picture* of it? What’s the mark? *Where* does Jesus Christ say this glory is going to be manifest? Because if you look carefully, he says, **(v.31)** “*Now the Son of Man is glorified, and God is glorified in him.*”

Jesus Christ says “right now” God’s glory is going to be manifested through me. He doesn’t say, “oh, *eventually*, you know, I’ll be ascended to heaven or *eventually* I’ll come back and renew the world or even *eventually* I’ll be resurrected. *Now* I’m going to be glorified!” And what is he talking about? Remember what’s happening. Judas has just left to set the events in motion. And “now” means he’s talking about the fact that the greatest possible manifestation of the glory of God is going to be on display when he goes...to...the...cross.

Now I can tell you that these disciples have no idea what he's talking about. And you know why? Because you and I, here even with our vantage point, are struggling with this idea. I hope you are, because it just doesn't make much sense. This weekend Deanna and I started watching the latest session of the Netflix series, "*The Crown*."

You know, basically it's chronicling the life of Queen Elizabeth the Second. Except this year it appears to be about Princess Dianna – which I'm sure her Majesty would have been thrilled about. But anyway, back in the first season Elizabeth was the international beauty whose picture was plastered all around the world – especially at her coronation when she is crowned after the death of her father.

You can't take your eyes off of her. I mean, she's sparkling, she's dazzling. She's got the crown, she's got the regal robes, she's *gorgeous* and there's the music and she ascends to the throne and there's beauty and there's power and there's glory. There was a commemorative magazine of the event called "*Coronation Glory*". Glory.

And Jesus Christ has the audacity to say the greatest manifestation of the glory of God is going to be right now – at the moment of his death. Now look, Jesus didn't die like Socrates, you know, quietly drinking hemlock while all of his weeping disciples were

gathered around him. The cross was the *most... shameful, agonizing, possible form of death*. It had a *unique* aspect of shame and humiliation to it. Jesus was stripped naked, hanging up there for all to see. His face had been beaten beyond recognition.

Isaiah 53 says he was so marred and beaten that he scarcely looked human. He's hanging there naked, between two thieves, so the mob can jeer at him. It's the exact *opposite* of the understanding of glory that we have. It's the exact opposite of *everything*. Look, here's Queen Elizabeth. You can't take your eyes off of her. But if there was anybody in this room that suddenly could catch actual sight of Jesus Christ dying on the cross, let me tell you what your overwhelming urge would be...to vomit.

It's preposterous. Doesn't glory mean, power and worth and wealth? Well what can be more powerless than to be *nailed*, to have your hands and your feet nailed to a piece of wood? And yet, what's the claim? "*Now the Son of Man is glorified and God is glorified in him.*" And D.A. Carson, who wrote an excellent commentary on the book of John, says this is what Jesus is claiming: "Now, bringing to a climax a theme developed through this Gospel, the Evangelist makes it clear that the supreme moment of self-disclosure, **the greatest moment of displayed glory, was in the shame of the cross.**" (482)

Now, how in the world could that be? Are you starting to get the problem? You wouldn't want Jesus' "coronation glory" on the cover of a fancy magazine. Well, let's use our *hearts* for a second. How could the cross be a manifestation of beauty? I'll tell you how. It's in what the image represents. What could be more beautiful than someone of infinite beauty, voluntarily being beaten to a pulp and *losing* all of his beauty so that he could save us? What is more beautiful than someone willing to lose all of his beauty...for us? Isn't that *real* beauty?

And what can be more glorious, and powerful, and strong than someone who's strong enough to be weak? Someone who's powerful enough to lose all this power for us? In other words, what can be more glorious than to be willing to lose their glory for us? What is more glorious than sacrifice?

We saw the new *Napoleon* movie this week – Ridley Scott is one of my favorite directors, so I loved it. There's a moment before the battle of Waterloo when Napoleon rides up and down the line, inspiring his troops, and he shouts, "For France and for glory!" Now an awful lot of those guys were never going to make it home to France – and they *knew* that. Throughout history, what is the greatest glory of a soldier? You know what it is? It's not necessarily to win the battle, right? A soldier is not *necessarily* manifesting the greatest glory by winning.

No, here's the greatest possible glory for a soldier; to know that you're going in against overwhelming odds, and to know even that you might be looking at certain death. But to just keep your ground and just say, "I'm here to defend my people. And if they're going to come for my people, they're going to have to go through me and if it means I perish, I perish." *That's* glory! The glory of courage, the glory of self-sacrifice.

Do you know what the cross does? Do you know that there's no other religion in the world, that says God required courage? We're the only religion that actually believes that God became *killable* - became vulnerable, became mortal. That in order to save us God had to put Himself in a position where He could be crushed. And Jesus looked and said, "If I perish, I perish." No, Jesus said, "*when* I perish, I perish...this the only way to save them." Our God, because of the cross, has a glory that no other god even claims to have, as it were. The glory of courage, the glory of bravery, the glory of giving up everything for us.

There has never been a greater manifestation of the glory of God than the shame and the humiliation and the pain and the suffering of the cross. That means a lot of things. It certainly means by the way, Christians who understand the glory of the cross will never look at suffering the same way. Will you?

Here's what Paul says happens when we fix our eyes on the cross – on the one who suffered for us, **2 Corinthians 4:16-17**, “*Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us **an eternal glory** that far outweighs them all.*”

Do you see the glory of the cross? Are you at least *starting* to see it? This is why I point us to the cross week after week after week. Because I'll let you know that it takes decades to even get a *glimpse* of it. But what a glimpse! What glory. The mark of the cross is glory – value and worth, brilliance and beauty.

Now, having said that, that's not all Jesus says here. **Secondly, the glory of the cross leads to the mark of a Christian.** After showing the glory of the cross, he says “Here's how you know you're a real Christian, here's how you know you're a disciple. **V.34**, “*A new command I give you: **Love one another.** As I have loved you, so you must love one another.*” This is the mark of a Christian. He actually says, “this is how everyone will know you are my disciples.” So we need to understand this if we want to be recognized as true followers of Jesus.

And the first thing we have to ask ourselves is what's so *new* about this? And if you know the Hebrew Bible, if you know the Old Testament, you'll know that actually, it *has* been said before. It's a little weird for you to say, “I give you a new command.” Because *Moses* said, “Love one another.” And you know, it's not like this the first time anybody told anybody else to love one another. So what's new about it? Two things.

Number one, Jesus says, *not* “love one another”, but, “love one another *as I have loved you.*” And you see, up until this time in the history of the world, nobody had ever seen love like what Jesus was about to show them. In other words, he's saying I want you to have your love for each other fueled by the glory of the cross. You're going to see a kind of love that no one's ever seen. You know, the level of my sacrifice, the magnitude of my sacrifice, what I give up, what I go through, *that* now is your model for what love looks like.

He's getting them ready – *listos* – to represent him in the world when he is gone. See, he's talking about his death – that's the context to the love command. Jesus is saying, “While I was here on Earth, everyone could see my love. Everyone could see my life. And everyone could say, ‘Wow, this is the Son of God.’ But I'm about to leave - the incarnate Christ is about to leave - and the only way people are going to know my supernatural reality is in the quality of love amongst Christian believers.

Later on that night, in his prayer in the garden, he's going to make it very explicit. In **John 17:23**, Jesus asks his Father, "...*that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.*" So what he's actually saying is the way people will know, the way the *world* will know, that I was really here, the way the world would know that I'm a supernatural reality, is by the quality of the love that you show one another.

Now, there's two *profound* implications of this. That if you grasp the glory of the cross, the mark of the Christian is you love one another, *and only* as you love one another will anyone *ever* see the glory of the cross or the glory of Jesus Christ! And there's two profound implications here, they are...Number one, if the world is turning away from Christianity, first, we should look at ourselves. I am a big believer that most of the problems in the world are the churches fault? Does that shock you? Go back and read Paul's letters again to the churches. How much of them are about how bad those pagans are out the world? Pretty slim. But he spills *a lot* of ink talking about the problems inside the church.

And Jesus Christ is essentially saying if the world is turning away from Christianity - and it is right now, by the way, at least in the United States, we all know that over the last 20 years fewer and fewer people identify as Christian, and it's pretty significant. And therefore can we say that in our culture, people are turning away from Christianity? Yeah. And according to this, the *first* place we should look is at what? At ourselves, but in particular, the quality of our relationships.

If the church would just be the church – be marked by radical sacrificial love the way Jesus demonstrated – we wouldn't have enough chairs to seat everyone for service. But the truth is the church has *not* done that. And it has had profound consequences. I mean historically, atheism only exists because of the church. Nobody was an atheist in ancient history – they believed in all kinds of gods.

But during the Enlightenment, after a century of watching Protestants and Catholics kill each other – and a whole lot of others – over the continent of Europe, men like David Hume and Emmanuel Kant began to say, "Hey, can we find a way to talk about things like truth and beauty and nature of existence *without* bringing God into the mix? I mean that track record isn't exactly leading to a healthy society lately." Atheism is the churches' fault.

There is a member of our congregation who was an atheist before coming to faith here at SWFF. And she says that one of the things that kept her away from church the most, was when she was a young nurse, back during the AIDS epidemic. And she would watch parents come into her hospital wing and disown their gay sons as they were dying. Just devastating heartbreak. And this being Texas, most all of those parents were confessing Christians. Is that the love of Jesus? Well, *she* certainly didn't want to have any part of it.

In fact, she says that for the first couple of years here at church, one of the things that kept her from professing faith, was she was waiting for the other shoe to drop. "I like all this talk about Jesus, but when is Anthony going to tell me who I have to hate to be a good Christian?" And eventually she came to realize that shoe was never going to drop. Because Jesus said the mark of the Christian is who you *love* – not who you exclude. Who you are willing to *die* for – not who you are willing to kill.

Look, occasionally the world sees it. You know when Dylann Roof killed a bunch of people in an African-American church in Charleston just a few years ago, and the African-American church there, the people came around and forgave him? When a man came into an Amish schoolhouse, and took a bunch of little

Amish schoolchildren hostage, and killed many of them and then shot himself, and the Amish community came around to the shooter's family and forgave them and supported them? And at times like that, the world actually says, "*Wow*, how do you do that?"

But right now, in general, they're not doing that. Large segments of the American church are doing what Jesus specifically did not do – what he explicitly *refused* to do every time it was presented to him – grasp secular political power and try to usher in religious rule. That's what every religion does. That's not a unique mark of anything. And if the world is turning away from Christianity, we should look at ourselves and *particularly* the quality of our love. Does it seek to serve under, or does it power over? Are we going to the cross, or putting people *on* the cross?

Number two, the second profound implication is this., Christian love must be radically diverse. Notice what Jesus says will happen when we love one another as he loved us. **V.35**, "*By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.*" Everyone will know. This is a mark that is universal. By the way, you yourself are included in everyone. How do *you* know you've really been changed by Jesus Christ? How do you know your faith isn't just lip service? How do you know if something really supernatural has happened inside? I'll tell you how. This!

And let me illustrate it with a story. David Martin Lloyd Jones, who you've often heard me talk about, was a pastor, but first, he was a physician. He lived in the early part of the twentieth century. He was an up-and-coming London physician at the leading hospital in Britain, an apprentice to the physician to the royal family. Lots of royal family illustrations today!

But back in either the 1920s or 30s, he was converted to Christianity – I think I've actually told that story recently. But as a result, he actually left the medical profession and went into the ministry, and he went to Wales and took a little church in a poor fishing village on the southern coast of Wales.

Now, Dr. Lloyd Jones has a series of sermons on Paul's letter to the Ephesians that are collected in a series of books. And when he talks about **Ephesians 1:15**, where Paul writes to these Christians – that he has never met – and says, "*For this reason, ever since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all God's people...*" You see, Paul is saying he knows these folks are Christians because he recognizes the mark - he heard about their love for *all* people.

And in his exposition on that text, Dr. Lloyd Jones explained how that verse was very important to him. And here's the reason why. One day when he was

new in the ministry, he heard a kind of accusatory voice in his heart that came at him and said, "You call yourself a Christian? What makes you think you're a Christian?" Now, I think most Christians know something about that voice – I know *I am* familiar with it. And we don't really quite know who it is. Is it Satan? Is it your conscience? Don't ask me. I don't know. But every so often, what happens to Christians is you hear this voice that says, "*You? A Christian? You're not a Christian! What makes you think you're a Christian? Look at you.*"

Well, when it came for Lloyd Jones, he had been reading Ephesians 1:15, which had its root in John 13, love for all God's people – and so this is what he said to the voice. "Well, why else would I rather talk about Jesus Christ to the humblest illiterate fisherwoman in this village, with more joy, than I have talking about medicine in a wood paneled enclave with other members of my status in London?"

See, in a class-conscious place like early 20th century London, he got to Wales and he discovered "I have more joy talking to an 80-year-old woman who can't even read and write, but loves Jesus Christ. And I find I feel *more* of a bond here than I did back in my posh London club with other people of *my* rank and *my* status and *my* education. I get more joy. I feel more love."

So he says to the voice, “Okay, if I’m not a Christian, why is it that I love *all* God’s people, not *some* of God’s people, but *all* of them, not just the ones like me racially, not just the ones like me educationally, but all of them - I feel this bond- why is that? What else on earth could account for that?” And he said the voice shut up.

And you know why? It’s brilliant reasoning. Think about this...before you’re a Christian, your race, your educational status, your money, maybe social status, your accomplishments, your politics...These are *extremely* important to your identity. You’re very proud, “I’m a lawyer, I’m a Longhorn, I’m a millionaire.” You’re very proud of these things, and they are very important your self-image.

But when you become a Christian, something comes in more foundational than all those things. That because Jesus Christ, at infinite cost to himself, has united you with God, and now you have *unconditional* love from him - *not* based on your attainments, *not* based on your grades, *not* based on how much money you make - it’s *unconditional* love.

And when that happens to you, that becomes more important. It kind of demotes, it kind of relativizes, it weakens *all* those other factors. And so even though yes, you’re still this, and you’re still that, but you’re a Christian *first*. And it’s more important to your identity.

And therefore, the way you know you’ve been changed, is when you meet somebody - after you become a Christian - you meet somebody of another race, another class, another political party, that in the past you would have just despised – or at least dismissed - suddenly you feel a bond! And you listen to them in a way you *never* would have listened to somebody else.

And he realized that the lack of class consciousness that he had was a supernatural gift. How do you know that you are a true disciple? “By this *everyone* will know that you are my disciples...if you love one another.” Jesus said there were only two great commands; to love God with all your heart, soul strength and mind. And to love your neighbor as yourself. And then he tells the parable of the Good Samaritan to define “your neighbor” in the most broad terms possible. So Jesus is all about Christians loving everybody.

But here’s what I want you to know. If you learn to love each other in this supernatural way, if you put your *roots* down into your Christian identity so that it gets you into *connection* with other brothers and sisters who are *very* different from you - racially, socially, culturally, and politically, and every other way - the *spillage* from that will actually enhance and empower all your other relationships. And let me just explain what I mean...personally.

I was born, raised, and educated, completely in the American South. But it was *inside* the church, for the first time, that I started listening to *non*-white people and *non*-American people who had points of view that I, in the past, would have thought were crazy. It was *inside* the church because of that bond, I started listening to people who were different than me, socially and culturally and racially and nationally. And I began to get my comeuppance, it humbled me. And then that spills out into all of my teaching and all of my relationships. Whether people like it or not.

Do you see? If the glory of the cross moves you to love *all* God's people, then it changes everything. It changes your identity. It is a witness to the world. And it actually spills out into the way in which we love the other people in our city - including the poor, for example.

Alright, look, how does this happen? How can we love each other, how can we have this mark of a Christian? Look at the glory of the cross until you see - in Jesus Christ - the way up is down. The way to rule is to serve. The way to become happy is not to think about your own happiness, but just work for the happiness of others. The way for power and influence is not to *seek* power and influence, but just simply serve other people.

That's what Jesus Christ did. And his death led to a resurrection. He *died* to his happiness. He *died* to his power and influence. He *died* to his wealth. He died to *everything*...and it brought in more. It brought *more!* Go and do likewise. Until our love inside the church is such that the world says there must be some supernatural reality here!

Let's pray...