

Rev. Shaun Arndt
Sunday, April 21, 2024
Confirmation Sunday, 1 John 4:1-6

“I have a test for you”

Glory to God in the Highest and Peace to His people on earth. Amen.

Dear Friends in Christ,

Addressing his soldiers, World War II General George Patton said: *“Americans love a winner... When you were kids, you all admired the champion marble shooter, the fastest runner, and the big-league ball players. Americans play to win all the time.”*

We get what he’s saying right? I mean who wants to lose. Who would rather get a demotion and pay cut rather than a promotion at work? Who wants to fail? Who wakes up in the morning and says, “I sure hope *no one* likes me today!”?

Or listen to the old Bruce Springsteen song, “Glory Days.” The people in that song are looking back wistfully to the time when they were successful, winning and at the top of their game. Who would say of the elderly man in the nursing home bed who is dying, “these are your glory days?”

Such things help us see our world and the natural hearts inside of us are truly **Committed to Glory** – that is the worldly glory of winning, our happiness and wanting recognition, having people like us, to get the best, the latest and greatest and whatever will benefit ourselves and maybe those who are closest to us.

In other words... the **glory** of getting *our* way. Even if we don’t say it out loud, even if we try to coat it over with humility, deep down our old hearts are **Committed** to such selfish **Glory**.

Once again, Jesus flips our natural thinking upside down and teaches about true **Glory** –**glory** from God: the kind that instead of receiving, gives at expense to itself. The **glory** that seeks what is best for others. He teaches us about the godly way to be **Committed to Glory**.

Our Gospel lesson takes place in Holy Week. Jesus has already entered Jerusalem amid Palm branches, cheers of Hosanna and the children singing. Clearly the word about Jesus is getting out – way out. **Some Greeks** approach his disciples and **want to see Jesus**.

Maybe Jesus is finally getting the kind of glory He deserves?! He even says: **The time has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.** The key awaited time that Jesus life and ministry has been building towards is here. What comes next is *BIG!*

Especially since Jesus says: **Amen, Amen, I tell you.** (Amen is Hebrew for Truth and when Jesus says this He is about to say something especially important!) And here it is: **Unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it continues to be one kernel. But if it *dies*, it produces much grain.**

Jesus is speaking about His death. Wait... this is what it is all been leading up to? This is the big important deal, the crucial hour and Jesus' great **glory?! YES!**

Jesus points to His glory above all as the suffering, the pain, the bloody and shameful death on the cross beneath God's judgment that He will soon undergo. Like a lifeless seed buried in the **ground**, so Jesus' lifeless body will be sealed in the tomb.

This doesn't seem glorious to human thinking, but this is the Father's great plan to rescue lost sinners. This is what He said in His Word. And so, Jesus **will glorify the Father** by carrying out that plan according to His Word.

Jesus' death will also **glorify the Father's Name** because it shows us to what an extravagant, amazing degree **God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son** to rescue us. Jesus is **Committed** to the **Father's Glory.**

And Jesus is **committed** to our **glory.** **If it** (the seed of wheat) **dies, it produces much grain.** A seed dies when it goes into the ground, but it causes life, lots of life! So it is with Jesus. Through His suffering and death He gives us life, endless life with God! Jesus is **committed** to bringing us to live with God in heavenly **Glory!**

Truly, Jesus is **Committed to Glory** that serves others and **glorifies God the Father.**

And the same is true about you! After all, God has made you own. The Father has loved you with that amazing love. The Son gave His life to save you. The Holy called you to faith through the gospel, and has given you a new heart, a new self that wants to **glorify** your God and Savior by following and imitating Jesus.

And so our Savior says: **Anyone who loves his life destroys it. And the one who hates his life in this world will hold on to it for eternal life. If anyone serves me, let him follow me.**

Jesus uses strong language here to get our attention. To **hate life in this world** does not mean we should go around trying to be miserable, crying woe is me. Nor is He telling us to give everything up to become a monk.

Not when God's Word also says things like this in 1 Timothy: **In fact, everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, because it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer.** The same book also says: **God, who richly supplies us with all things for our enjoyment.**

The key to understanding what Jesus is saying about **hating life** and what the Bible says about enjoying God's good gifts is our relationship to God and His Word. God's Word tells us that our purpose as God's people is not to just live it up and enjoy ourselves in selfish pleasure, but to receive God's gifts with thanksgiving and use them to honor God in service to our neighbor.

Only what is **sanctified** and sanctioned by God's Word can be done to His glory. When the Bible says **whether you eat or drink or do anything else, do it all to the glory of God** (1 Cor 10:31), it is only talking about whatever is done in faith in Jesus and according to God's Word.

But you can't disobey God's Word to His glory. You can't rob a bank to God's glory. Nor can you be greedy to God's glory. You can't live together with your boyfriend or girlfriend before you are married to God's glory. You cannot let impure thoughts linger in your heart to God's glory. You can't hold a grudge or seek personal revenge to God's glory. Whatever is sinful in thought, word and action, whatever goes against God's Word is not done to His glory.

So, when Jesus tells us to **hate life in this world**, He is talking about rejecting the self-serving life that listens to our old sinful hearts along with the lies of the devil and the world's temptations.

Living to **God's glory** means not just avoiding the obviously sinful, but also doing the good things for *the right reasons*. Are we doing it for the Lord or just to please ourselves?

For example: you can work hard and succeed to honor what God teaches us about being faithful with our gifts to honor him and serve our neighbor. That gives glory to God.

But if you're working hard to make a name for yourself, or just to serve yourself or you think it's all on you to provide for your family rather than trusting the Lord to take

care of you through your efforts or in spite of it, then it is living for yourself and the ideals of the world.

Jesus warns us against living according to the world's idea of self-serving glory, because such a life will end in destruction – leading us away from Jesus and **eternal life** that comes only from Him.

And that leaves us with a problem, right? Though our new hearts are **Committed to Glory** – to honoring God by His Word and others first, yet you, just like me have an old sinful heart within, the old sinful nature that is committed to sin and selfishness and constantly trip up our Christian living, so that all we have a right to is eternal death.

If you rightly understand this describes you and are troubled by it, then dear fellow troubled sinners loved by God, take heart in this truth: Our **devoted commitment** to God's glory flows from God-given saving faith, but our *commitment* is not what saves us. Let me repeat that: our **devoted commitment** to God does NOT save us. Our **commitment to God** does not make us Christians.

Only God's **commitment** to us makes us Christians. Only God's **commitment** to us saves us! Only Jesus' perfect life and innocent death was perfectly **committed** to God's glory.

You see, just like us, Jesus, the Son of God was tempted to turn away from God's glory. It was not easy or fun for Jesus to do what He did. He said in our Gospel: **Now my soul is troubled**. He knew full well the pain and suffering that stood in front of Him, He knew what He would have to sacrifice to **glorify the Father's Name**.

But unlike us, Jesus' **commitment** never wavered. He said **This is the reason I came to this hour**. He never got sidetracked when it came to His living **committed to God's Glory**. He stayed the course all the way to the cross where **He was lifted up** to suffer the judgment of hell and death to pay for our selfishness and every way we failed to **glorify** God.

By His sinless death, He has defeated the devil and **thrown out** Satan's power to claim us. His rising again proves His death brings us life just like the seed put in the ground burst forth into new life!

Through the good news of Jesus' saving work, He has drawn you to Himself, so that now you will be where He is for all eternity – forever freed from death in the endless life and glory Jesus' won for you!

Understand that Jesus did not just give His life and death and resurrection for you, but He also gives them to you through your baptism, just as Romans 6 declares: **All of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death... We were therefore buried with him by this baptism into his death, so that just as he was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too would also walk in a new life.**

That means joined to Jesus in baptism His life perfectly **committed to** godly **glory** counts as your life. His death to pay for all sin means your sins are forgiven. The power of His rising from the dead is yours not just on the Last Day at the resurrection, but right now too, so that He gives us power to live a new life in Him, to fight and sin and selfishness and live by His Word so that you do all things to His **glory**. Yes, it is sometimes stumbling now, but then we remember it all depends on and flows from Jesus' perfect **commitment** to us!

Because of Jesus **devoted commitment** to you, your glory days are not in the past, no matter how old you are or how horrible you feel. Your true glory days are still to come when Jesus closes your eyes to this world and takes you by the hand to welcome you into the unfading **glory** of life with Him forever. Amen.

To Him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood and made us a kingdom and priests to God His Father – to Jesus be the glory and the power forever. Amen.

We use the confession of faith – Luther's explanation to the 2nd article of the Creed on page 7 of the worship folder.