

True Glory

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Date: 17 May 2026

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[0 : 00] Leo Tolstoy's *The Death of Ivan Ilyich* is a classic, and it's actually, in my opinion, more timely now, even maybe than it was 15, 20 years ago. So if you've never read it, I'd encourage you to pick it up. It's about a man who spent his life chasing the things that most people think that we should spend our lives chasing, the things that our society tends to value most.

So he's gone after status and career. He's achieved financial security. He has family. He has cultural refinement. He has sort of all of the markers of a life well-lived, of a successful life. And he thinks at the beginning of the story that he's figured it all out. But then he gets injured. It's a minor injury, but then it doesn't get better, and that injury turns into a sickness, and then that sickness, doctors can't cure it, and it becomes terminal. And as death draws near, Ivan has this agonizing realization. He says this, kind of a famous quote from this book, "'Can it be that I have not lived as one ought?' Suddenly came into his head. But how not so, when I've done everything as it should be done?' Ivan had been living by all of the social scripts, all of the social plans that he had grown up around, and he assumed that if he had done those things, if he checked those boxes, then at the end of his life, he would realize, I've lived a good life. I've done things as they ought to have been done. But then he realizes that even though he thought he knew what life was all about, that he's completely missed it. And so, he begins to wonder, what is all this really for? And in John chapter 17, we just heard a little snippet of it read, the beginning of it read by Hillary, but it's a much longer chapter. We see the exact opposite.

We see another man, Jesus, who's also on the verge of death. At this point in the story, he's hours away from an agonizing and brutal death, and he's praying to his heavenly Father. And so, we get this very rare glimpse into the relationship between Jesus and his heavenly Father, and what we see is astounding. Unlike Tolstoy's character, Jesus is a man who has lived a perfect life. He's able to say, at the end of his life, I've done all that I was sent here to do. I've accomplished my mission. I've lived out everything that the Father gave me to do. And then, remarkably, he prays in this prayer that we would do the same. He prays that at the end of our life, we would be able to look back and say something similar. And so, John 17 is essentially about the kind of life that Jesus wants us to have.

It's about the life that we were made for. And there are a whole number of themes in this. It really would merit its own sermon series to look at this chapter in detail. So, there's some themes that we're not going to have time to get into. What we are going to do this morning is focus on the first 11 verses, and we're going to really tease out the most important, the sort of driving theme of the whole chapter. What does it mean to live life as we ought to live it? All right, what is a life well-lived? Well, what we're going to see this morning is that it is a life that is fully aimed at the glory of God. So, let's pray, and then we'll get started. Lord, we thank You this morning for Your Word. And as always, we pray that as we read Your Word, Your Word would read us. As we seek to understand Your Word, that we would come to understand and know You better. And then, we would come to understand and know ourselves better. And we pray that as we open Your written Word, we would come face to face with Your living Word, Jesus Christ. And it's in His name that we pray.

Amen. So, first, we're going to look at what is true glory, as we see here, the thing that we're supposed to be aiming at, and then what difference this makes for us in how we live our lives. So, what is true glory? There is something in every human being that longs for glory.

[4 : 21] I've never met a person who didn't in some way, shape, or form long for glory. Now, we don't use that word. It's like, unless you're a Viking, you don't talk about longing for glory. So, we don't use the word, but we all long for it. You know, most people I know want their lives to matter. I mean, most of you do what you do. A lot of people move here because it's a kind of place where people live because they want their lives to matter. You know, we want to be seen and valued. We

had a great conversation in the adult ed time before worship this morning on being known and being seen and being valued. Most people want that. Most people want to leave something behind.

You know, some of us are getting to the stage of life where we're starting to think about that more. When you're like 16, 17, you're not really thinking about that. But when you're in the middle stages of your life or further, you're like, what am I going to leave behind? You know, all those are longings for glory. And I want you to hear me say this, that desire for glory is not evil.

I would say if we read Scripture accurately, human beings were made for glory. We were created for that. The problem is that we tend to look for glory in all the wrong places. The world that Jesus lived in was the first century Greco-Roman world, and that was an honor-shame culture. And so, glory was paramount. Your social standing, your public reputation, those were central measures of a person's worth. And so, the aim of life in the first century was to seek glory for yourself.

It was to amass glory. And in modern times, I would argue that with all of our social media platforms and the rise of influencer culture, arguably not much has changed in the seeking of glory.

There was a 2023 survey done of Gen Z where 57% of respondents said that their first chosen career path was to become an influencer. 57%, the majority. And, you know, most people think that this is what life is all about. Most people think that life is about optimizing for attention. It's about optimizing for influence. It's about optimizing for impact and recognition. And most people would assume that would be success. But what we see again and again and again is it does not work.

There was research done at Harvard last year, this is not going to surprise many of us in this room, that found there's a massive mental health crisis among online content creators. Online content creators and influencers are more than twice as likely to be suicidal compared to the general population. So, something is not working in that form. The math is not adding up. It's not mathing, right? Jim Carrey, I love this example. Jim

[7 : 14] Carrey in his 2016 Golden Globe acceptance speech sort of rocks the room a bit. He comes up to to actually to present an award at the Golden Globes. And here's what he says. He comes up there and there's all these people in their suits and their dresses and everybody's looking good and everybody's kind of done up, you know, and it's a big night and people's careers are sort of hanging on this and they're all, you know, waiting to see who gets the award. And he comes up and he says this, I am two-time Golden Globe award winner Jim Carrey. And everybody laughs. He says, and when I go to sleep at night, I'm not just a guy going to sleep. I'm two-time Golden Globe award winner Jim Carrey getting some well-needed shut-eye. And everybody continues to laugh. And he says, and when I dream, I don't dream any old dream. No, sir. I dream about being three-time Golden Globe award winner Jim Carrey. And then he goes on and everybody's laughing and he says this, because then I would be enough.

It would finally be true. And I can stop this terrible search for what I know ultimately won't fulfill me, right? And at this point, if you watch the clip, which you should, everybody in the crowd is laughing, but it very strongly turns to this uncomfortable laugh. Everybody's kind of like laughing and like also like, ooh, and they're all, everybody's kind of looking at people that they know in the room and they're kind of like giving these, you know, he just, you know, shots fired. He just, he just kind of went under the surface unexpectedly. And it's essentially this amazing moment where Jim Carrey is pulling back the curtain and exposing the emptiness of the whole thing, right? And people don't know what to do with that. The old Christian word for the kind of glory that we seek for ourselves is vain glory, which is an old way of saying empty glory. It's glory that looks solid from a distance, but the closer you get, the more you try to put weight on it, like the weight of your life or the weight of your soul, you realize there's nothing there. It's empty, it's vapor. It's not real.

And it's a symptom of spiritual brokenness. You know, at the root of sin is really the desire to displace God. And one of the ways that manifests is that we want to actually seek our own glory instead of His glory. But what we figure out is that the more we try to glorify ourselves, the more we lose ourselves. The more we try to puff ourselves up, the more empty we become. And so, by contrast, Jesus shows us what real glory looks like. It says in verse 1, after Jesus said this, He looked toward heaven and prayed, Father, the hour has come. Glorify Your Son that Your Son may glorify You. And then if you look at verse 4, I have brought You glory on earth by finishing the work You gave Me to do. And now, Father, glorify Me in Your presence with the glory I had with You before the world began.

John 17 is amazing because we see, we catch a little snippet of a conversation that has been happening within the heart of God for all of eternity. We catch this glimpse of this eternal

conversation. And what it shows us, one of the things it shows us is the nature of true glory, that within the life of God, there is no grasping after glory, there is no rivalry, there is no insecurity, there is no self-promotion. Each person of the Trinity is focused on the glory of another, which is amazing. The Father glorifies the Son, the Son glorifies the Father, the Holy Spirit glorifies the Son, and through Him the Father. And so, each member of the Trinity, each person is focused on the glory of another. That's a really big clue that seeking one's own glory somehow doesn't work. Moreover, when Jesus says, Father, the hour has come in John's gospel, that's a very clear reference. He's talking about the cross. He's talking about the cross. The hour has come. My death is imminent.

[11 : 54] He's talking about the fact that He's about to endure humiliation and torture and death. And He's about to do that in order to set the world free, in order to reconcile the world to God.

And so, when Jesus says, Father, the hour has come, He's saying, I'm about to give up my life in order to give life to the world. So, here's what we learn about true glory from this prayer.

Just think about this. At the heart of reality, at the heart of reality, there is no such thing as rivalry or competition or insecurity or self-promotion. At the heart of reality, there is an eternal communion of other glorifying self-giving love. That sits at the very heart of the universe.

And so, what that means, if you follow out the implications, is that self-glorification is not just wrong, it's a lie about reality. It runs against the grain of the universe. When any being seeks to glorify itself, it is running against the grain of the universe.

So, self-exaltation is unnatural, right? In the deepest sense of the word, it is unnatural. It's a perversion of reality. It's not the way things are supposed to be. And that's why it doesn't work.

[13 : 31] That's why Jim Carrey gets such a strong reaction from the crowd, because deep down, I think we all know, and a lot of people wouldn't admit this, but I think deep down, we all know that there's a certain amount of absurdity in a bunch of human beings sitting around giving each other awards in a world that God created, in bodies and lives that God created, right? To sit in a room and to bank your life and your self-worth on some other human being giving you a piece of metal, that somehow there's an absurdity to it. And for a moment, Jim Carrey pulls back the curtain, and everybody sees it, and then everybody looks away. Because what does that mean about the choices I've made? Right? So, Jesus shows us, here's what aligns with the heart of reality. Pouring yourself out to God and other people. Now, so this is true glory. Why does this matter? Second question that we're going to ask.

This matters because in this prayer, amazingly, Jesus is inviting us into this dance of glory. If you think about the Trinity as this eternal, right, other glorifying, self-giving dance of glory, right, then Jesus is inviting us into that dance of glory. He says in verse 10, all glory has come to me, to Jesus, through my disciples who receive and obey His Word. He's saying, so when we receive and obey His Word, we are glorifying Him. But then, amazingly, down in verse 22, He says, of His disciples, of current and future, including us, I have given them the glory that You gave Me, that they may be one as we are one. So, then we glorify Jesus, but then He turns around and He shares that glory with us.

And the main thrust of this prayer is that even though He is ascending, that we as His people would continue that dance of glory on earth, so that we would continue to emulate this in our lives, and so that we would continue to be people who glorify Him and pour ourselves out for the life of the world the way He did. And He's saying that when we do that, we share in His glory.

And here's something really beautiful. When we live lives focused not on ourselves, but on the glory of God, and when we recognize that life is about other-glorifying, self-giving love, that's actually where we find the most joy, right? The more we try to amass for ourselves, the more we lose our sense of self. The more we actually focus on those around us, on giving away, the more we actually find ourselves. That sounds vaguely biblical. And this is where we find the most joy, and He says in verse 13, to the Father, I'm coming to you now, but I say these things while I'm still in the world. In other words, this whole discourse, including this prayer, He's praying in front of His disciples. So rather than praying on a mountain by Himself, He chose in this moment to pray in a room surrounded by His disciples. He's praying to His Father out loud for His disciples to hear. And so He says, I say these things while I'm still in the world so that they may have the full measure of My joy within them. So He's saying, I want My disciples to understand this is how reality works. This is what your life is meant to be aimed at. And once you figure that out, then you will experience the fullness of joy. So bringing it all together, just kind of pulling all this together, you and I, there's a

reason that you long for glory.

There's a reason you want your life to matter. There's a reason that you want to be seen and valued. There's a reason that you want to leave something behind. The reason is because you were made for glory. You were made to participate in this dance of glory. True glory, though, not the counterfeit glory of the world. Returning to the story, the death of Ivan Ilyich, at the very end of the story, Ivan has a kind of spiritual awakening. And it's just the beginnings of a spiritual awakening. [17 : 49] And the key is that his gaze finally turns outward. He finally stops focusing on himself. So after an entire life curved inward on status and comfort, and then as he gets sick, self-pity, he finally sees the suffering of his wife and his son. And for the first time in the story, he feels genuine compassion. And for the first time, he wants not merely to be relieved of his own pain, but he wants to relieve their pain. And so he begins to move from a kind of self-glory to a self-giving love. And the good news is we don't have to wait until we're on our deathbed to make this shift in our own lives. The good news is we can actually decide right now, right? Whatever choices we've made up to this point, we can decide right now, I'm going to begin to figure out what it looks like, to aim my life. Because we're all aiming somewhere, to aim my life at the glory of God, right? So to begin to choose to honor God above all else, right? I'm going to begin to choose to build my life on His Word, to seek to put His will above my own. That's the first thing.

We can also begin to recognize that when I reflect this love of God into the world, as I seek to love and serve others, that's a way of glorifying God. But that's radically countercultural, right? What does that mean? I'm a person who realizes this is what life is about.

It's about pouring out for the life of the world. To put it as practically as we can, if the world says, optimize your life for attention and recognition, this means optimizing my life for love and service, right? The world says optimize for attention, Jesus would say optimize for love and service. You know, I heard one person put it this way, not a Christian, not talking about this, but I thought the word, I thought this actually helps us understand on a practical level what this would mean. Make it your goal to add surplus value to the world. In other words, to give more than you take, to pour out more than you receive. Because most of us have a kind of counter in our brain, and we're like, what am I getting versus what am I adding? And we want it to be even, and there's a sense of justice in that. We want it to be fair. But living this way, optimizing our life for love and service means we throw out the counter, right? And you say, my goal is just to pour out and to give more than I take. So, seeking to be a better friend than someone else is to you. I'm going to seek to be a better friend. It's seeking to love your spouse more than they love you and refusing to keep score. It's starting, you know, and again, we talked about this downstairs a little bit before the service at the adult ed time. It's a really great discussion.

Being the kind of person who listens more than you expect others to listen to you. So, I'm going to talk less. I'm going to listen more. I'm going to ask more questions, right? I'm going to pour out. So, the point of all these examples is we're not talking about some pie in the sky, move across the world and go, you know, you can do that if you want. But this is the kind of stuff that you can just start doing this afternoon over lunch. Because often love and service sound romantic and ideal when you think about doing it in some far-off place in some big way. But that's also a kind of self-glorification, right? The real true stuff of the kind of glory we're talking about is found in the most mundane, thankless, often unseen, unrecognized acts of daily love and obedience.

[21 : 35] The kind of behavior you would do over lunch in an hour that nobody would even notice, right? It's choosing to invest in people who have nothing to offer you in return.

And I want to press this home just a little more. This can start right here in our church community. You know, church is a kind of laboratory where the things that we're talking about, we first have an opportunity to practice these things in this community. It's one of the big reasons why we need a church community. So, again, I'm just going to push this a little further.

If you think that church is mainly a place to come and take, I'm sorry, you've completely missed the point. And if you're newer, let's, you know, let's go ahead and have this conversation now. If you think that this church is mainly a place to come and take, you've missed the point. People who go to church with that attitude, kind of primarily, what am I going to get out of it? They tend to be perpetually dissatisfied. I've been doing this for 18 years, and that's a very clear pattern. The people who kind of come in with that attitude, they tend to be dissatisfied. They tend to not last very long, and they tend to just, if they go to church, they just kind of go from church to church. By design, church is about being a part of a community where we are serving one another, right? So, if you're

not actively doing that in some way, you're kind of missing the whole thing. When we do that, we become a community that glorifies God, and we begin to experience the kind of joy that Jesus desires for us. I've seen people who've been a part of our church for years, kind of on the periphery, and finally, they kind of make the turn in, and they respond when there's a call out for, we need this or that, and people step up.

And I've heard and seen people say after that, you know, I didn't think there was community here. I wasn't sure if I was going to stick around, and then I started doing that. I just kind of responded to that email that went out, and now I get it. And you see that happen again and again. And many of you understand this, and this is one of the things that makes our church so great, is that many of you get this. In many ways, I'm preaching to the choir. But the point is simply this, you know, when the word goes out, we need more men to get involved in youth ministry, right? We need more people to serve in children's ministry, or we're not going to have children's ministry this summer. When that goes, we're not asking you to do anyone a favor, right? We're giving you an opportunity to experience everything that we're talking about this morning, right? If you don't jump in, it's actually your loss. Because this is really what life is all about. This is the whole point. This is true glory.

[24 : 06] And in a community where people are actively seeking to serve each other in all of these ways, that's a God-glorifying community. The final point I want to make is that the first two points I made are pretty difficult. Just deciding I'm going to make God's glory my aim, I'm going to optimize for service, and I'm going to begin pouring out for the life of the world. That does not come naturally to the human heart. It does not come naturally to my heart. And that's why the gospel, friends, is such profoundly good news. This is the chapter I was reading when I was 22 years old when I came to faith.

It was John chapter 17. And so, it's always had a special place in my heart. And part of why, part of what led to something in me coming sort of unhinged, loose, breaking open, to begin to believe this in a real way, it was this realization. You know, when people are on their deathbed, if you've ever been around anybody who is close to death, there's not a lot of small talk.

People tend to focus on and think about what really matters, right? People on the verge of death, they're thinking about what matters most. And in this prayer, just hours from his own death, what is Jesus thinking about?

He's thinking about you. He's thinking about me. That's his concern. He's praying for us, moments from his death. And I remember that hitting me like a hammer and just realizing that kind of love changes you, right? And Jesus is saying, when you're willing to simply receive this love that is on offer, you glorify me. You glorify me just by receiving it because we're receiving something that he purchased with his life, right? So, we glorify him and we glorify what he did for us.

And that, friends, is the kind of love that can soften hearts. It's the kind of love that makes you want to make your life about God's glory. And it's the kind of love that makes you want to pour yourself out for the life of the world because you can't imagine any other response. Let's pray.

[26 : 28] Our Lord in heaven, we thank you for your word, and we thank you where it needs to comfort us, Lord, we pray that it would do that. Where it needs to hit us like a hammer between the eyes, we pray that it would do that. Lord, we pray that in all the ways that we've talked about, we would be a community that puts you on display, where your heart is evident for all who see it, Lord. And we pray that that wouldn't be just by the force of our own willpower. We pray that it's because we're people who first and foremost know and receive and experience your love, that as you pour into us, we would seek to pour into others, Lord. And we pray that in that way, we would put your glory on display for the world to see. We pray this in Jesus' holy name. Amen.