

Glory

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[0 : 00] Now what I want to do today is speak about the theme of glory in terms of the vision and strategy of this church.

And so I want to focus on a text, an individual text from 1 Corinthians chapter 10. You may have guessed it already. So whether you eat or drink, it's verse 31, or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.

And Abe and Kirsten were married in Smith and Free Church, in Emerson on Friday. I was doing the service, but they chose the reading. And the reading they chose was Colossians chapter 3. And it finishes, the section that they were looking at finished with, and whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him. So we have that kind of common theme, is that everything, whatever we do, is to be for the glory of God.

[1 : 05] And over these next four Sundays that we're looking at the vision and strategy of the church, we're going to have four words. And I hope it's simple enough for us to remember so that when we think, well, what am I involved in the church for?

What am I doing? What am I part of it for? And what's it about that we will recognise and see and know and understand several things? The four words are going to be glory, it's very simple, gospel, grace and growth.

So over the four weeks, that's the vision that we have, that's the structure, that's the basis that underpins everything we do. It's going to be glory, gospel, grace and growth.

And I want to begin with a quote from a book called Dangerous Collings, which I've mentioned here before. And it was the quote that was at the beginning of the agenda that we had for our leaders meeting about strategy that we had recently.

It's quite a long quote. Don't fall asleep. Listen, because it's very important. Ah, of glory or worship or awe. Ah, of God is one of the things that will keep a church from running off its rails and being diverted by the many agendas that can sidetrack any congregation.

[2 : 16] Ah, of God puts theology in its place. Theology is vitally important, but whatever awe of theology we have is dangerous if it doesn't produce in us a practical awe of God.

Ah, of God puts the ministry strategies of the church in their proper place. We don't put our trust in our strategies, but in the God of awesome glory who is the head of the church we endeavour to lead well.

Ah, of God puts ministry gifts and experience in their proper place. We cannot grow arrogant and smug about our gifts because unless those gifts are empowered by the glorious God we serve they have no power to rescue or change anyone.

Ah, of God puts our music and liturgy in its proper place. Yes, we should want to lead people in worship that is both practical and engaging, but we have no power to really engage the heart of people without the awesome presence of the Holy Spirit who propels and applies all we seek to do.

Ah, of God puts buildings and property in their proper place. How a building is constructed, even if it leaks on the inside, and maintained and used is a very important issue, but buildings have never called or justified anyone.

[3 : 24] Only a God of awesome sovereign grace is able to do so. Ah, of God puts our history and traditions in their proper place. Yes, we should be thankful for the ways God has worked in the past and we should seek to retain the things that are a proper expression of what he says, but we don't rest in history.

We rest in the glory of God who is the same yesterday, today and forever. So that, you see, that's really the basis of why glory is so important for us.

So we exist as a church to promote the glory of God and that is foundational and fundamental to us. That's why we exist.

And that's very often why we feel so utterly and completely inadequate and struggling so badly because of God's glory and because we fall so far short of it.

And I just want to say a few things. And the first thing I want to say is if our church exists for the glory of God, then it's all about Jesus Christ.

[4 : 25] It's all about Jesus Christ. And by what I mean by that, we can't look at everything about Jesus Christ today, but what I want to think about for a moment about Jesus is that if we are wondering how to live for God's glory, what it looks like, because we might think, what does that mean?

What's it involve? Then we look at Jesus. Jesus is the perfect example, the human divine, but human example of a person who lived for God's glory.

He's far more, of course, than an example. He's our enabler. He's the one that we come to for salvation. He's our rescuer, isn't he? But he's a perfect example of what it means to live for God's glory.

So he was obedient to his father from the very beginning. He was a joiner. He was a host. He was a listener. He was a preacher in everything that he did.

And we only know a tiny proportion of what he did because it's only a tiny proportion of his life that we're told about. What he lived for the glory of God. He learned to do the Father's will.

[5 : 36] He learned to glorify, to please God so that God looked down on him when he was about 30 years of age and said, this is my beloved son. With him I am well pleased.

And that is a statement of someone from God about someone who's living for God's glory. He knew the word of God. He knew the person. He learned about God in his humanity and he understood about God.

And he was about his father's business from an early age. And he was relentless in prayer. A dependent being. Yes, he was God, but he emptied himself because he was becoming an example and a perfect substitute for us, the perfect human being.

And he was someone who wasn't monastic, wasn't self-obsessed, wasn't pietistic. He was outward looking.

He cared about people. He went for people. He looked for people, particularly people in need. And that is a reflection of someone who was living perfectly for the glory of God.

[6 : 43] But he died young. He didn't have any home. He didn't leave an inheritance, humanly speaking. He had few friends and the friends that he had abandoned him, betrayed him, turned their backs on him.

He was unjustly treated. He was betrayed. He was murdered. He died single. He didn't have any kids. He didn't have a wife. He didn't have a family.

Not our example of the perfect, blessed human being. Is he? Yet he lived for the glory of God perfectly. And we know he ascended, he resurrected, ascended and reigns supreme.

I just threw that in to remind ourselves that living for God's glory is not a short cut to an easy life or a kind of quid pro quo. God, I'm going to live for your glory.

Now, you give me all that I need and want. It's not that kind of, it's not a quid pro quo between us and God. And it doesn't mean that we have a life of unbridled blessing and happiness when we follow him.

[7 : 50] It is a recognition that to live for the glory of God may well mean and will mean because the Bible tells us it will mean suffering and persecution and a different level of expectation of what life is about and what contentment and peace will mean.

So Jesus is an example and as a church and as individuals, the baseline of why we exist is for the glory of God.

And what does that mean? Well, it's impossible, isn't it, in the few moments we're together to underpin all these things. But it is about everything.

It's about everything. You know, that verse, it's in the context of eating and drinking, in the context of idolatry and food sacrifice to idols, okay?

I'm not going to go into that today. But the theme is whatever you do, whether you eat or drink, whether you eat or drink, whatever you do, do it all, all, whatever, all to the glory of God.

[8 : 54] That is an absolute and complete revolution. You think coming to Christ is kind of a gentle skip into a meddle of buttercups. Because sometimes we think that, isn't it?

We skip into His presence and nothing really changes, we just carry on. But if we ever doubted the need to be born again, what does that mean? It just means completely starting afresh and turning round.

Then this statement, we should remind us, it's a complete radical revolution. We should kind of all be having headbands and standing like that because it's a revolution.

You know, we've come to expect it to be neat and tidy and content and peaceful like the cemetery. But it's not like that. You know, I wonder sometimes if the rows of churches are the same kind of way that cemeteries are put out.

Rows of gravestones. But it must be living for Christ, being Christ, serving Christ is much more than just, for example, this hour that we're here together.

[9 : 58] And when we talk about vision and strategy for the church, this is our underpinning reality. Probably, I'm hopeless with figures, but probably a rough estimate. About 5% probably of our waking time at best is spent doing anything connected with the church, the congregation, St Columbus, our worship time together or serving or anything else.

So a very small percentage of our time, for most of us is spent actually in or part of church, 70% roughly of our time is spent sleeping and working.

And maybe for some people it's a lot more than that. You come together and worship like this in this public, worship on a Sunday morning for one hour or maybe a little bit more.

Out of 168 hours in the week, one hour. What's that percentage? One hour out of 168. And yet we are asked as a church to live for the glory of God and for you in your lives to live for the glory of God.

So at best, what can we achieve as a church when we place so little part in your life, tangibly in reality? Which maybe it's going to be a little bit like the dandelion, where you come together and you're all together and there's a sense of community and beauty together, but as the Holy Spirit blows in us we go out and we just, we see the church by living in our day to day lives for His glory.

[11 : 28] So can I just spend a little bit of time thinking about that? The verse here says that whether we eat and drink, in the ordinary things of life we do for His glory, what does that mean?

Well it must mean at very fundamental basic ordinary level that we thank God when we eat and drink. You know it's a bit uncool now, we're doing grace, saying grace, giving thanks.

Why is that the case? It's a recognition that the gifts that we get are from God. But also does it not mean that we eat and drink obediently?

That means we don't become gluttonous, nor do we get drunk. Because we recognize that God has parameters for us even in everything and drinking.

And when we eat and drink we do it for His glory, in obedience to Him because He is the giver of all these things. And we do so with grace. But let's move on to the 70% of your life that isn't anywhere near here or to do with church.

[12 : 28] You're sleeping and your work lives are your study lives. How can we sleep to God's glory? That's a great question isn't it? Have you ever thought about that?

Surely it's by recognizing at least at some levels the rest cycle that He gives, one day and seven, we can't work all the time. If we're always working and never resting and sleeping then we're probably just self-obsessed and legalistic and think that the world will not progress without us. If we're all play and don't recognize the importance of work then we're probably just hedonists, pleasure seekers. We're not recognizing that our sleeping pattern, our rest pattern is also from God as is our work or study pattern.

Law students here today, they're all looking very guilty. But our student lives and our work lives are to be for the glory of God. You know what the greatest problem is in our lives?

That we think when we get out of the church that we are no longer in God's presence, that we can do what we want and the worst reality is thinking that God is contained in our worship time or service or the five minutes we give him at the beginning of the day in prayer or work.

[13 : 47] That's my God time over. Now I can do what I want. He says whatever we do to the glory of God. So in the workplace and in the study we do, how do we do our best by doing our best?

By the way we act in a crisis in the workplace, by our attitude to staff, by our management of staff, by our being managed in the nights out.

This is going to be a testing week for young students who are Christians in the city. This is Freshers week and there are students who go around the city in packs, fresher packs, hundreds of them in packs and they are going out to get drunk and they are going out to sleep with other people because that's what you do when you are a fresher.

And so there is a great challenge. I recognise that's a broad kind of overview. I don't mean every student's like that, sorry.

I just saw some aghast looks and I said, but I mean I'm just speaking in general terms of the way of the world, okay? That's what it is like in the way of the world for so many.

[14:59] And there's so, I say that because there's so much pressure. It seems like everyone's doing it, of course they're not. But as a Christian, Freshers week, live it to the glory of God.

In the workplace, your conversations. You know that you do, that you're living so that God is saying, with you I am well pleased. You're living for my glory because you're obeying and following like Jesus did.

You're living for me because you recognise that we don't compartmentalise our God and stick them somewhere in the back pocket. That we live for His glory.

Therefore, and the following, this is a kind of following on servant, each bit follows the next.

Therefore, in terms of the glory of God as a church, the heart, your heart and my heart is key.

You know, vision and strategy of the church. I wonder what you thought about it. What's your going to do? You're going to do a 10 point plan. Is going to speak about the great vision we have for the church, how we're going to move forward and we can look at that and criticise it.

[16:04] And we shouldn't be going that way, we should go in this way and we shouldn't be doing that way, we should be doing this. Not yet, not so, not today. We're not looking at the church as an institution and we're not looking at the failure of the ministry or others.

Today we're looking at our hearts, our hearts. We belong to the church, we are the church. If you look around you today in St. Columbus as a member of St. Columbus, you'll see lots of problems and angst and difficulties.

The answer is not everyone else changing, although it might include that. It's about us. We are both part of the answer and part of the problem of any church and we're a broken, fallen, failed, miserable institution.

At that level, we're sinners but we're saved by grace and we're dependent on the goodness and grace of God. So the heart is key because the glory of God in our lives as a church will only ever happen when we recognize the glory of God in our hearts as individuals together because it's a heart issue.

I've got a couple of quotes from C.S. Lewis today. One is absolutely, they're both wonderful, one is really great. It's from a book called The Weight of Glory which is about sermons that he wrote.

[17:29] So we understand living for God's glory. I'm going to say a little bit about what that means in a minute. But C.S. Lewis says in that, it would seem that our Lord finds our desires not too strong but too weak.

We are half-hearted creatures fooling around with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered to us. Like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea.

We are far too easily pleased. This is not a glorious picture. We are content so often as believers with making mud pies in the slums because we're not willing to let the spirit of God show us the imagination of a holiday at the sea.

And our heart therefore is key because when we understand who Jesus is in a relationship with Jesus and his Lordship, it's because Jesus is the image of the glory of God.

Hebrews 1.13 speaks about that. Hebrews 1.3. And so we're to live as individuals for him and for his glory, for his honor because he is worth it because he is true because he offers us eternal life and eternal fellowship and love and because we have come to know his grace and his forgiveness and our hearts being transformed so that we can love him first and love our neighbor as ourselves and we are forgiven and the mess-ups we make, he takes and he forgives us and he transforms them when we come to him and confess them and our honest, the freedom of honesty, the honesty of freedom both come together when we give God the glory and rely on him.

[19:19] He sets us free. We're set free. Again, maybe young people are coming away from home for the first time and they sense freedom.

But it might not be freedom they're looking for, but Christ, you stick close with Christ. That is the greatest freedom that you will ever know because as Jesus, Louis says in the Word of God, clearly says we satisfy ourselves with pleasures of a lesser love in the shadow lands of temporary existence and we persuade ourselves that it matters, that we are important, the way we're living and we fail to see that a way we live will be infinitely greater when our motive is the glory of God because that is why we have been created to honour him, to worship him, to live for his glory because then when we live for his glory, we are as human as we can be, we are as complete as we can ever be as we come to him through Christ.

What does that mean then in terms of our heart? It means that today we face up to impossibility. If you're looking for a five point plan of strategy that God will come and you'll bless this church, it will grow, the planning of Cornerstone for those who don't know it's a church plan that we're doing, we've not really done anything like that before.

It's been a walk in the dark, we've stumbled the whole way and we're still stumbling. We have no master plan and God has blessed us in ways we could never have imagined at the beginning.

[21 : 08] It's not that we have a clear strategic vision that somehow God is going to honour and bless. We're stumbling around in the dark seeking his goodness because we know it's impossible. I've preached for 25 years and I looked at this theme today and I thought I haven't preached one decent sermon in 25 years because the glory of God is so great.

How can you contain that in one sermon? Impossible, impossible. And you live your life for the glory of God and you think we can do it without him.

It's absolutely impossible. We need his grace, we need the Holy Spirit, we need his transforming power, we need to depend on him. Jesus depended on the Father even in his perfection. He prayed so much. So how can you live, how can you go into your day tomorrow without prayer? Can you live for his glory tomorrow as an ambassador, as a representative of this church, the church of Christ without praying for his glory, without humbly thanking him for taking you through another night, without blessing him for giving you another day in which to live?

Every good thing you have, every gift you have, every talent you possess, every beauty that you have when you see and look at yourself or others in the mirror is a gift from God.

[22 : 35] And we recognize that to live for his glory is an absolutely impossible thing unless first we come to Christ to be a redeemer and to save us and to transform our hearts so that we're not living for ourselves, we're living for him.

We can't do it, we just can't live for his glory. And we're lost, we're blind, we're in the dark. We need Jesus Christ and we need to face up to the impossibility of that to the core of the strategy of St. Columbus which we've come to just as we finish.

It's impossible. But you need to be part of that impossibility by being dependent on Christ and living for his glory because the 95% of your life is left outside this building.

And that's where we're to be obedient. That's where St. Columbus will be blessed and will be flourishing away from here. This is the easy bit.

This is the blessed bit. Hope. It should be. That's what we aim it to be, we want it to be. And that's what I just finished with today. How does this mean, how does this fit in with strategy, how does it fit in with St.

[23 : 58] Columbus which you're a part of, sorry, if you're not part of St. Columbus today, if you're vesting, I hope that you'll bear with me just for five minutes as we close. The reality is that St. Columbus is one of many throughout the world.

It's just a church. And the church is God's new community. And as a church, as a people, we are to reflect His glory as a people.

He doesn't just save us as individuals. He says so famously in 1 Peter 2, 10, you are not a people but now you are a people. You're citizens, you belong.

You're the people of God and it's reflected in this local community. And you are part of this congregation, part of this community, the 95% of the time that you're not even in touch with us. I spend more time in the community because I'm the minister at full time. But most normal, ordinary, brilliant people are doing things out there in the real world.

[25 : 00] But that's when you're part of Christ's community as St. Columbus. And as you serve God out of here by loving Him through Jesus Christ, by living for His glory that where you eat or drink or whatever you do, you're doing it for the glory of God, that will bless this church because that is what this church is.

It's all about our personal responsibility here because the commandments say, love the Lord your God with all your heart, but don't do it in a ministry.

Don't go up to the castle and do it in that hill that's above contradiction where no one else will see us. Do it. What was Jesus like? Was he a monastic? No, he was in among the people all the time. He didn't stop him praying, he just got up earlier to pray. But he was in among people all the time, particularly people who had graded. Love the Lord your God with all your heart. Love your neighbour as yourself.

Who's my neighbour, the person in need that would come across. So as we live for His glory as a church, it means living for His glory as individuals, means ditching the blame game and the critical spirit and the judgmentalism and the individualism and the monasticism that can so often inflict church life and church leadership.

[26 : 14] I speak to myself, my friends. It's the impossibility of grace, a grace filled community.

Community of sinners saved by grace. So I'm asking for a commitment to the church. Yeah, I've said it. Commitment to the church.

Not to the institution, not to the denomination. However, signify that will all come when we're committed to Christ's community. Here, it's part of St. Columbus. I'm asking you to be committed. Committed by living for God's glory and by being a people together and that involves commitment. Can't get away from it. But you're not doing it for me.

You're not doing it for the leaders. You're not doing it to get into heaven. You're doing it for God's glory. And all that we do, whether it's on the door, whether it's hoovering out there, vacuuming, whether it's doing the tease, cleaning the toilets, singing at the front, welcoming at the door, whatever these are, a very small part of what we are.

[27 : 28] But if we do it sluggishly, if we don't care about anything, well, there's nothing else to do. Not doing the glory of God. Just his new community. Let us seek as a people and what we strive to do as leadership is to inspire all.

When we're together, we're a worshiping community. And our hope is that when we come together, whether it's in city groups or in prayer meeting or here on a Sunday, it's to inspire all, to give God the glory, to teach, to equip, to pray that you'll come here, part of coming here was when you'll be refreshed.

We will just seek God's blessing and inspiration on you so that you will go from here refreshed. We don't want you to go from here feeling heavier and more burdened and more depressed.

We want you to go from here refreshed and built up and encouraged by the glory of God and by the wonder of the impossibility of serving Him because He will provide for us.

So that the 95% of your life out of here will be marked by seeking His glory. And as we seek to inspire all, we seek to maintain in what we do a simplicity.

[28 : 43] And what we found as a church leadership is that the church grows. There's always the tendency to complexity. Things become more complex. It becomes more difficult to keep it simple.

And there's all kinds of pressures and demands to make things more complex. And just as complex, I can't think of any other word, multiplication of events, business, fewer people taking a greater burden.

And it all becomes very complex. The battle is keeping it simple. And the way we will keep it simple, I hope, is when we focus on these primary realities of what we're about primarily today, the glory of God.

So here, the centrality of the word, because the word reveals the glory of God, will always be the case. We're never going to be a non-preaching, non-believing church that follows trends of society because the word will remain central because it reveals the living Christ.

Prayer must remain central because we're not the bowling club. We're not just the people together. We're the people who are being asked to do something impossible is to live for His glory.

[30 : 00] So we reflect that impossibility by coming together and praying. You know, our greatest burden this year, and I'll say this in another sermon this year, is evangelism and people becoming Christians.

We can argue all we like, and we can be apologetic with the gospel, but the greatest need is for God to take dead people and make them alive spiritually. And that requires us to be praying.

It means that in that simplicity, accountability to one another and protecting each other's thoughts, each other's hearts, honesty and openness, and a recognition, you know, just because everyone

looks like they're doing great on a Sunday morning doesn't mean they are.

And there's an honesty and a depth and a commitment to one another that goes beyond the kind of vague Sunday morning niceness and that we're committed and responsible and caring because there are, I guarantee there are people here today who are crying out and who look great on the outside but who are crying out in depth and despair and longing to speak to someone about their soul.

And that my friends is impossible. And that's where our strategy starts. The glory of God is an impossibility and we need Him.

[31 : 26] You need to meet with God and I need to meet with God on a regular daily basis. I don't believe that we can live our Christian lives without that old fashioned daily routine of reading the Bible and praying.

Call it what you wish. It's not, it's, this is my second CS Lewis quote and we have it downstairs. It's on one of our boards downstairs when we did that special time of prayer.

I pray because I can't help myself. I pray because I'm helpless. I pray because need flows out of me all the time, waking or sleeping. It doesn't change God.

It changes me. That's why we pray. That's why we believe in God's glory and we believe that He will enable us to live for His glory as He transforms us by His grace.

And I hope that for you, Saint Seas doesn't become an added extra. A tag on. A burdensome chore. A low priority.

[32 : 27] An institute of failures that you're happy to expose and find fault with and can become involved because they simply don't understand what it's all about.

We are an institution of failures, but you will always be restless and you will avoid the heart battle and you will misunderstand the impossibility of grace.

If you think like that, you will also miss out on the reality of the glory of God in your life and your purpose for living.

Your purpose for living is not your happiness. It's not your pleasure. It is God's glory. And in so doing, you will find purpose like no other and blessing and joy eternally like you can't imagine.

I mean, let's bow our heads and pray. Lord God, we ask and pray that you would help us to understand and to know and to be grasped by your glory.

[33 : 37] Forgive trying to explain your glory in a short sermon, which is utterly impossible, may your Holy Spirit take the impossibility and transform us and may each individual here hear your voice and respond to it in glory and in grace.

We thank you for Jesus for his amazing life as an example, but his astonishing death as a substitutionary atonement for our sin.

And we thank you for his resurrection, that great seal of approval on life eternal as we put our faith and trust and repent and turn to him.

Bless us then we praise, we sing and as we fellowship and mingle together, may God have all the praise and the glory. Amen.