

At the end of the day, we're simple people. We want to live in a world of what you see is what you get. And so we follow celebrities whose lives are filled with action, glamor, and riches. We want to work for a successful company. We want our kids to go to the best schools. We want fame, fortune, and success in the here and now.

Yet the picture painted for us in today's readings is anything but fame, fortune, and success. Jeremiah foretells of the crucifixion of Christ. Jesus predicts His crucifixion and raises a child as the greatest, and James tells us to humble ourselves and weep and wail.

There are two ways to view God and understand who He is: the theology of glory and the theology of the cross. The theology of glory seeks to find God in the successful, the outwardly perfect, and the greatest among us. However, the theology of glory is shiny on the outside but rotten on the inside.

On the other hand, the theology of the cross is unappealing. It is average. It is even unattractive and scary. It invites suffering and pain. Who wants that? Yet it is only through those means that we truly understand who God is and what He does. The Theology of the Cross teaches **GOD'S STRENGTH IS MADE PERFECT IN WEAKNESS.**

Yet we as fallen humans only inspect the surface. I. We fail to find God's strength in worldly greatness. Yet we may try to find God in worldly greatness. So we listen to the celebrity pastor with the most followers on Twitter. We ask for spiritual advice just solely on who seems to have his or her life together. We seek out the biggest churches with the loudest praise bands. Yet all of these are a theology of glory.

Yet the theology of glory is so attractive. It offers us our best life now. It offers to make all the suffering go away. It offers us quick fixes and easy solutions. If only we could be like the Christian on TV. If only we could be like that Norman Rockwell painting with the family all getting along and impeccably dressed.

As we continue our sermon series on the book of James, we see that James issues warnings about seeing things according to worldly eyes. He gives us a plethora of warnings, chapter 3 verses 14–16 **“But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast and be false to the truth. This is not the wisdom that comes down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic. For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice.”**

He also warns: **“What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you?... You adulterous people! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.”** James gives us stark warnings. He tells us in our Epistle text, don't play

by the rules of the world. The world around us finds value in the strongest, the most popular, or the richest, but that's not how it is to be with us. That's not how God manifests Himself to us. Friendship with the world is in fact declaring war on God.

Instead, it's our selfish appetites that we're serving when we try to find God in the glorious things of this world. It manifests itself in arguing who is the greatest. It shows itself in not being able to make any sense of Jesus' death and resurrection. When we let our sinful appetites control us, we find that we're never filled.

Yet we find the solution to all of this in the theology of the cross. II. The Father perfected Jesus' strength in the weakness of the cross. In our Gospel text today, we see Jesus explain the heart of the theology of the cross. Instead of encouraging the disciples to compete for first place, he turns that theology of glory on its head. He replies, **“If anyone would be first, he must be last of all and servant of all.”**

Jesus showed God's strength by becoming weak for us. Perfect God and perfect man, Jesus Christ could have flex his muscles through worldly displays of power: becoming an earthly king, forcibly defeating his enemies, and living a life of luxury. Instead, He cast all those aside and lived a life of humility. He was hardly rich. He wandered through the countryside preaching. He had familiar origins such that some asked, **“Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon? And are not his sisters here with us?”**

We see this way of life as Jesus predicts His death in today's Gospel, **“The Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men, and they will kill him. And when he is killed, after three days he will rise.”** We see this as Jeremiah writes, **“But I was like a gentle lamb led to the slaughter. I did not know it was against me they devised schemes, saying, “Let us destroy the tree with its fruit, let us cut him off from the land of the living, that his name be remembered no more.””**

What is the most profound revelation of who God is? Not a seminar on ten steps to a better life. Not a revival where a preacher conducts faith healings. The theology of the cross tells us that the most profound revelation of the nature and character of God is a naked, bleeding, dying man suffering on a cross.

And yet, in this act of suffering and dying God was most at work to show His strength to the world. The Bible tells us that the cross is the power of God. In the cross is where God's power was made manifest as He in weakness took on the sins of the world. The suffering, dying Savior paid the penalty for our attempts to find God in the glorious things of this world. The suffering, dying Savior humbled Himself before the Lord.

Then and only then did the Father exalt Jesus. It was through that suffering and humility that the glory of the resurrection came. When Christ was raised from the dead, He declared victory over sin, death, and the devil, and He promised a wonderful life for His followers.

But it is only through the cross that glory comes, and that glory is only fully realized when we too are raised to live with Christ in eternity. Do you see the difference between the theology of the cross and the theology of glory? The theology of glory promises glory and may do so for a time, but ultimately leads to suffering as the worldly glory fades. The theology of the cross promises suffering, but ultimately leads to forgiveness, life, and salvation.

And when we properly understand the theology of the cross, that GOD'S STRENGTH IS MADE PERFECT IN WEAKNESS. Then we see III. In our weakness is where God reveals His strength to us. And so this is where James' words come into play. He tells us **“Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.”** This submission to God is nothing else than to submit ourselves to the theology of the cross.

This theology of the cross teaches us to redefine how greatness might look. Greatness might not look like a church growing 20 or 30 people at a time. It may not look like a celebrity pastor who has a private jet. It may not even look like a church that is well loved and appreciated in its community.

James writes, **“Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Be wretched and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you.”**

James teaches us here that the theology of the cross might mean people leaving a church when the congregation takes a stand for an unpopular Biblical teaching. It might mean cutting the budget in half if a congregation removes a charismatic but ungodly and heretical preacher and the money leaves with him. The theology of the cross might mean being wretched, mourning, and weeping as you by the power of the Holy Spirit try to kick a sin habit.

James, Jesus, and Jeremiah teach us this theology of the cross in today's texts. Yet the theology of the cross comforts us because it promises that Jesus is there to pick us up as we stand in the rubble of a broken relationship, a broken promise, or a broken body. In the humility of a lost job, a failing grade, or a closed casket, even there we can find the Lord's redemption waiting to spring up, exalting us at the proper time and in the proper manner.

The theology of glory tells us, “You broke it, now you buy it!” The theology of the cross is Jesus looking at you and saying, “Broken? I'll buy him. I'll buy her. I'll pay with my blood, sweat, and tears.” It is in *this* weakness that God's strength is shown to be perfect.