

## **Title: What Jesus says to glory-hunters**

Author: Christopher Ash

For several years I taught through John's Gospel with my students on a ministry training course I ran in London. Every time I worked through the material, I found my heart searched by the teaching in John 5. The Jewish opponents of Jesus accuse him of "making himself equal with God" (verse 18), in the sense of setting himself up as a rival of God. No, says the Lord Jesus, I do only what my Father does; I seek his glory and not my own. He says to his critics:

*"I do not accept glory from human beings". (Verse 41)*

But they do, and this prevents them from believing:

*"How can you believe, since you accept glory from one another but do not seek the glory that comes from the only God?" (Verse 44)*

The trouble is that by nature I seek and value the glory that comes from the praise of other people. What other people think of me matters far too much. I fear I am not alone.

If you are in pastoral ministry, you might have hoped for a successful career in the secular workplace. You are capable; you have many natural abilities. Perhaps you came into pastoral leadership after such a successful career, or in the early days of what might have become a secular success story.

You were used to, or might have expected to enjoy, the praise, respect, high regard, and the applause of people in the world. But now you have chosen a work the world despises, or at best considers marginal and odd. You and I may easily seek substitute adoration from our own flock, or from our fellow-pastors, to fill the gap left by the absence of affirmation from the world. And we may become proud loners, seeking self-fulfillment through our work.

Or perhaps you are still in that successful career, but serving wholeheartedly in your local church. The prestige and status given you by that career matter to you more than perhaps you realize. The wholehearted local-church service you squeeze into a busy life gives you very little affirmation and praise from others. It is tempting to pitch our energies into the activities that result in praise from others.

I am ashamed to say that I am like that by nature. I want you to say how helpful you have found my ministry. I want you to blog that my new book *Zeal without Burnout* has been helpful to you! I would love you to wave it in front of your congregation and say it is the best thing you have ever read on the subject. That is what I want, by nature. But I suspect I may be speaking to a fellow glory-hunter.

You too want the people in the church you serve to think well of you. If you are a pastor, you want your fellow pastors to admire you. When asked at a pastors' conference how things are going in your church, you want to be able to reply like this: "Well," you say quietly, "when we planted the church there were three old ladies and a three-legged dog; now there are 30,000 young, gifted, lively men and women, 3,000 doing an enquirers' course, 300 people on the church staff, and a budget of \$30 million. And we only planted the church three weeks ago."

"Isn't God good?" you add modestly!

But the Lord Jesus says that seeking the praise of people *prevents* real faith in our hearts.

*Beware celebrity!* We live in a secular culture of celebrity; it is all too easy to let that culture of people praising people infect our churches and conferences. Beware putting speakers and pastors on pedestals. Beware heroes. "Do not put your trust in princes" (Psalm 146 v 3). Beware wanting to be on such a pedestal yourself. Search your heart.

Pray that, by some wonderful supernatural ministry of the Holy Spirit, in your heart and mine there will truly begin to be a desire that God be glorified. Pray that Jesus will grow greater and we will grow less (John 3 v 30). And pray that we will care less what people think of us and more what they think of Jesus.

I ask myself how much of my overwork over the past decade was driven by an honest desire for the glory of God? And how much by a desire that people should think well of me and my ministry? I trust there was some of the former; and some of the overwork was the result of inadequate staffing, as is so often the case in Christian work.

But I wish I knew the full and honest answer, for my heart is deceitful and desperately corrupt (Jeremiah 17 v 9). And I cannot plead innocent, and I doubt if you can either. This rebuke to our self-centered motivation is a sword into the depths of our twisted, dark hearts. We follow a Master who “did not please himself” (Romans 15 v 3, one of the great understatements of Scripture). If we buy into the church culture of celebrity, we drift away from following Jesus faithfully.

This is an extract from Christopher Ash’s new book *Zeal without Burnout*, available now.