

The Glorious Hour of Restoration

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Preacher: William Philip

- [0 : 0 0] We're going to read together these words from the Gospel of John in chapter 12, which you find on the service order sheets. Beginning of John chapter 12 tells us that six days before the Passover, Jesus came to Bethany and then he entered Jerusalem triumphantly.
- And at verse 20 we're told, Now among those who went up to worship at the feast, that is the Passover, there were some Greeks, Gentiles.
- So these came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and asked him, Sir, we wish to see Jesus. Philip went and told Andrew, Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus.
- And Jesus answered them, The hour has come. For the Son of Man to be glorified. Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone.
- But if it dies, it bears much fruit. Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life.
- [1 : 2 2] If anyone serves me, he must follow me. And where I am, there will my servant be also. If anyone serves me, the Father will honor him.
- Now is my soul troubled. And what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour. But for this purpose I have come to this hour.
- Father, glorify your name. Then a voice came from heaven. I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again. The crowd that stood there and heard it said that it had thundered.
- Others said, An angel has spoken to him. Jesus answered, This voice has come for your sake, not mine. Now is the judgment of this world.
- Now will the ruler of this world be cast out. And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself. He said this to show by what kind of death he was going to die.
- [2 : 3 1] So the crowd answered him, We've heard from the law that the Christ remains forever. How can you say that the Son of Man must be lifted up? Who is this Son of Man? So Jesus said to them, The light is among you for a little while longer.
- Walk while you have the light, lest darkness overtake you. The one who walks in the darkness does not know where he is going. While you have the light, believe in the light that you may become sons of light.
- Amen. May God bless to us his word. Do keep your service sheets open or your Bible if you have one at John chapter 12.
- And these verses that we read together. And look particularly there at verse 33. Jesus said this to show by what kind of death he was going to die.
- Here is the Lord Jesus Christ just days before his death. Not only predicting that death to come, but telling us plainly what his life and indeed his death are really all about.
- [3 : 5 3] Isn't that a great relief? So we don't need clever professors with all kinds of fancy language that we can't understand to explain what they think Jesus' death is really all about and what it means for our world.

Far less do we need the kind of speculative TV programs. The sort of thing that are very often on the television at this time of year. Telling us about the real secret to the real truth about Jesus' story.

You know the kind of things. We've had lots of those in recent years, haven't we? There was the real story of Mary Magdalene and her supposed relationship with Jesus. Or then there was the rehabilitation of Judas Iscariot.

It turns out actually he was the hero of the whole story. Or we have the discovery of some supposed grave of Jesus or something like that and so on. And the variety is almost infinite. Although I suppose perhaps as our society is becoming more secularized, even these skeptical and scornful programs seem to be disappearing from the TV.

It's just reality TV just now. I looked up and in fact today at 3 o'clock on Good Friday at the Holy Hour, the offerings from the BBC are Guard and Rescue. And from ITV it's A Place in the Sun.

[5 : 09] Well, but if you are lucky enough to find among the schedules something about the death of Jesus Christ, it is very likely that it will be something full of skepticism, if not scorn.

It's quite telling, isn't it? It's very different from the very respectful tone that you'll find in discussions of Islam. You can't imagine, can you, the BBC putting on a highly critical documentary about Muhammad to celebrate Ramadan.

It just wouldn't happen, would it? But set aside the ignorance and the prejudice of our media, and set aside the apparent learning of liberal theologians and clerics, and let's focus instead today on the words of Jesus Christ himself, as they're revealed to us and recorded by these eyewitnesses like John's Gospel.

And of course, these witnesses are attested far, far better than almost any other historical documents in our possession today. When we read the pages of the Gospels, we're dealing with eyewitness testimony of the highest order.

And here in John, we have John the Evangelist recording for us Jesus himself, telling us plainly by what kind of death he was going to die.

[6 : 27] And he tells us that with his approaching death, verse 23, the hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. His death was to be the hour of glorious revelation.

Indeed, the climactic revelation in this world of God's glory to our world. What an astonishing thing that was for him to say. That the darkest hour of Jesus' death on the cross would actually be the glorious hour of God's glory being revealed here on this earth.

But there's no mistaking it. Look at verse 24. Jesus is speaking so clearly here of his own road to glory. To wonderfully fruitful glory.

But it's going to happen, he says, through his death. Like a seed falling into the ground and dying in order to bear much fruit. Indeed, it's not only the way of his death that he's talking about here.

He's saying this is the only road to glory for anyone who wants to follow Jesus there. Verse 25. Whoever hates his life in this world in the same way will keep it for eternal life.

[7 : 36] If anyone serves me, he must follow me in that path. What seems to be the darkest hour for Jesus, and indeed for this whole world, is in fact the hour of glorious revelation of God's power and glory in this world.

How can that possibly be? Well, it's not because this is a story of triumph after disaster. Like the film The Darkest Hour.

It tells about Winston Churchill enduring that extraordinary pressure of the British army's defeat in France and the evacuation from Dunkirk. And enduring it so as to beyond that live to fight another day and eventually come to victory over Hitler and the Axis powers.

No, no, no. What Jesus is telling us here, very plainly, is that it was that hour. It was the hour of greatest darkness itself, which was the victory.

And that's what he says so plainly here in these words in bold in verses 31 and 32, which I want to focus on this Good Friday. Because these words explain to us why this hour, the hour of Jesus' death to which his whole life had been leading him, why this hour was itself the glorious hour of restoration.

[8 : 59] The very hour that delivered nothing less than the complete restoration of God's glory to this world and for this world that he has made.

These verses make it plain to us that Jesus' death on the cross effected a mighty purpose. That it actually accomplished a wonderful cosmic salvation.

That it achieved mighty deliverance for all God's people. And that's so, so important for us to understand. Jesus' death is not glorious just because it is the epitome of self-denial and the greatest display, the greatest example of human love.

It is that, most certainly. But it's not glorious either because it displays what is, well, the most noble idea and ideal of all humanity that we should aspire to.

Self-sacrifice for others. Although, of course, it does that too. And Jesus himself said, greater love has no man than this, that he lay down his life for his friends. But none of that actually gets to the heart of it.

[10 : 06] According to Jesus himself, in these words, the death that he knew was approaching would be glorious primarily because of the uniqueness of what that death accomplished.

The glorious restoration of everything that God had promised since the very beginning of this world's disastrous fall into rebellion and sin and under God's curse.

When you read the opening chapters of the Bible story, if you have, you read about the world as it's meant to be, don't you? As God created it to be. God created the whole world, we're told, in Genesis 1.

He created a perfectly ordered world. He created a wonderfully good world. Everything in perfect harmony in nature, in humanity, and indeed between humanity and God himself.

But by the end of Genesis chapter 3, it's all gone wrong. Humanity's insistence on self-rule, on autonomy from God to do it our way.

[11 : 08] Well, that is what has left the world, well, the way that we know the world to be today. A one of total fracture. In every relationship on earth, there is fracture, isn't there, between individuals, between communities, between nations.

There's fracture in nature itself. We live in a world that is out of control. A world that's full of disaster, full of division, full of evil, full of wickedness.

We live in a world where, indeed, we have made man the measure of all things. And the result, therefore, is a world in which everything, with man himself, is turning to dust.

And man himself is but a glorious ruin. We do live in a world where we see much glory in humanity. There is still a reflection of the goodness and the glory of God in the human race.

But it's a passing glory, isn't it? Can we argue with William Shakespeare? Life is but a walking shadow. A poor player that struts and frets his hour upon the stage and then is heard no more.

[12 : 20] And we know that's true, don't we? And it's the tragedy of our human life. But in these two brief verses, Jesus himself tells us three things that his death will accomplish so as to bring the complete and glorious restoration for this world.

which will bring the very thing that is deep as a longing within every human heart and which God has promised for all who will listen to him and trust him and obey him.

And there can be no more important message for us or for anyone in this whole world today to understand than this. So let me take these three things in turn. First, Jesus says that on the cross through his death, the rebellion of this world is finally judged forever.

Now, verse 31, now is the judgment of this world. What does Jesus mean? Well, all through John's gospel, this word judgment, crisis, is used in two senses.

And both of those, I think, are to be understood here. First of all, in the sense of judgment as a verdict pronounced, which publicly exposes the truth about this world.

[13 : 36] A world that is undeniably in rebellion against God. The cross of Jesus exposes to the whole universe, exposes the scorn of humanity for its maker.

It epitomizes man's defiance of God as man has defied God all through human history. It's easy to say, isn't it? People often do say, I'm not hostile to God.

I have nothing against God. I'm just agnostic. But what happens when people actually are faced with God, not just in theory, but right up close and personal in the unique and exclusive claims of Jesus Christ, God the Son?

What happens when society is faced with the authentic demands of Jesus, the unique Son of God, faced with his holy standards for life, for morality, for behavior?

For example, in matters of sexual fidelity, between man and woman for life, or in his demands for a unique and total faithfulness to him as the only way, as the only truth, as the only way to life.

[14 : 50] Define what happens then. Well, we know the answer, don't we? People say, we don't want that kind of God at all. Not this God, not this Jesus. We don't want this kind of extremist religion.

Very happy to have God in theory. We're very happy to have a mild form of religion, but none of this extremist Jesus stuff. Ask Israel Folau. Ask Billy Vanapola, the rugby players this week, losing their jobs because of faithfulness to Jesus.

You see, in the gospel, what we see is the real Jesus Christ confronting people and forcing truth right out into the open. And that reveals a judgment, a verdict on the world.

And that verdict is clear. This world and its people is in rebellion against its maker, against God revealed on earth in the person of his son, Jesus Christ.

And it hates that God so much it wants to kill him. John says in the very first chapter of his gospel that he, God the Son, came into the world, that he came to his own, the people of Israel, who of all people should have known him and respected him and loved him.

[16 : 08] But even his own, says John, received him not. The world rejected God made known in the person of his Son. And the cross and Jesus' death at the hands of those he had created, it exposes more clearly than anywhere else that reaction.

And the verdict, the judgment is clear for all to see. Even his own received him not. And yet, remember, John goes on to say, to all who did receive him, he gave the right to become children of God.

And that, you see, is because the cross is also a judgment on the world in another sense. As well as a verdict being pronounced on the world, it was a judgment in the sense of condemnation, in the sense of a sentence being passed as real punishment for sin.

When the world's hatred of God and rebellion against God is exposed, that last so completely in its reaction to God, the Son, in the flesh.

And when that verdict is now utterly incontrovertible, then that verdict demands condemnation, it demands punishment. All heaven is crying out for justice.

[17 : 32] And God's justice must be seen to be just. No longer can such rebellion be passed over as God had in his immense forbearance passed over former sins.

No, says the Apostle Paul in Romans chapter 3, he must now show his righteousness, show his justice at the present time. Now judgment must fall upon a world that has rejected God to his face.

to show the earth and to show the heavens that God is just, that God is not unjust, that he's not weak, that he's not twisted. Just as a high court judge in our own society must, must pass sentence against the murderer or a rapist when the evidence shows that the crime is absolutely incontrovertible, otherwise there'll be shouts, howls all around, injustice, and rightly so.

So now must there be judgment on this world. That's a cry of all heaven against guilty humankind.

And now, says Jesus in verse 31, now is judgment on this world. But that judgment on this world would not fall upon the world because Jesus Christ came himself to stand in the place of rebel sinners.

[19 : 04] Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, was John the Baptist described, because for Jesus it was judgment as condemnation, judgment, as punishment for real sin.

The sin of the world who rejected him, who scorned him, who led him to that cross to die. That's why verse 27 here tells us that the sorrow and the horror of this overwhelmed him.

His soul was deeply troubled. It was filled with anxiety, with revulsion, with horror. Because he alone knew the horror of that death, not just physical death, but death as the wages of sin, as the punishment of sin, as the condemnation for wickedness beyond measure.

That was the terrible prospect that convulsed him. The judgment on this world became the judgment on Jesus Christ.

And God's holy, righteous anger on sin fell wholly on him. There are many people who can't stomach the very idea of God judging anyone at all, far less that he should judge his own son for other sins.

[20 : 32] But there's nothing modern about that view at all. A few verses after these ones that we read, John quotes from the prophet Isaiah, where Isaiah spoke precisely of this, the suffering servant of God coming to bear others' sins.

And the prophet said, but who has believed what they have heard from us? They couldn't believe it then in Isaiah's day, they couldn't believe it in Jesus' day. Isaiah spoke so clearly, he was crushed for our iniquities.

The punishment that brought us peace was upon him. Jesus' death accomplished the judgment of this world.

And through his death, the rebellion of this world is judged forever for all for whom Christ bore that judgment in himself. Our sins were cast out at the cross forever.

But that's not all. Jesus' death brings glorious restoration, because on the cross he also tells us in verse 31 that Satan is cast down forever.

[21 : 42] The ruler of this world is defeated forever at the cross. Now will the ruler of this world be cast out. Not only does the cross do away with the guilt of sin in those who are saved by Christ bearing that judgment for them, but it also destroys the power of sin and the author of sin, the personality behind sin, the devil himself.

On the cross, Paul tells us that Jesus disarmed rulers and authorities of a dark spiritual world. He says he put them to shame, triumphing over them in his cross.

He shattered the devil's hold over his redeemed people. evil. Or to put it another way, Jesus not only banished the sins that we are addicted to, but the very addiction itself.

The thing that gives power to the pusher to control our lives, to destroy our lives. And so that evil pusher is disarmed and he can have therefore no power, no ownership over us any longer.

That's why the apostle Paul cries out in Romans chapter 6, sin shall no longer be your master. That's why he says there's no condemnation any longer for those who are in Christ Jesus because Satan the great condemner has been overcome.

[23 : 08] His power to condemn us is gone because of the cross of Jesus Christ. That's what C.S. Lewis conveys so wonderfully as he does so many of these great biblical truths.

In his Narnia stories where after Aslan's death on the stone table, after his return to life, the power of that white witch is destroyed and the endless winter that was the result of her reign is shattered.

Spring brings new life and the promise of summer. And Jesus' death restores his people from that bondage of sin by freeing us from guilt but also by freeing us from the power of sin over our lives.

The cross sets us free truly from the mastery of the ruler of this world. John the evangelist shows us another lovely marvelous picture of that in his revelation at the very end of the Bible where he shows us Satan, the accuser, the one who accuses us before God, being cast down forever, overcome by the blood of the Lamb.

God and so when we sing the hymn, it's true when Satan tempts me to despair and tells me of the guilt within, I look to heaven and I see him there who made an end of all my sin and I rejoice because the ruler of this world is defeated forever.

[24 : 33] because sin is cast out forever, Satan is cast down forever in the glorious hour of restoration, in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.

But third, do you see verse 32? Jesus' death brings the glory of hour of restoration because our Savior is lifted up at the cross. The Redeemer of the world is exalted forever.

He who is the great Savior of men is enthroned as the great ruler and the judge of all people. I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.

And again, this deliberate ambiguity here, the lifting up, well it clearly refers to Jesus' crucifixion that's coming. He's to be lifted up on the cross. But it also refers to Jesus being lifted up in glory and in exaltation.

In Isaiah's great prophecy, repeatedly he sees one who is high and lifted up, only the Lord God himself, the King of heaven. But then he also sees the humble suffering servant of the Lord high and lifted up and thus exalted through his saving suffering for his people.

[25 : 50] Jesus' exaltation isn't a reward for his death. It's inherent in his death as our Savior. His death, by this kind of death, exalts him in a new and superlative way.

Because in the cross, God, God, the almighty creator and ruler of the universe, God is revealed to me more, more than ever we could have known him to be before. It's in the cross, the fullness of his grace and truth at last is revealed to us completely, uniquely, forever.

our God is shown to be the great exalted redeemer, the God who sheds his own blood, the God who gives everything that he has for us, miserable, rebellious creatures.

That's why the cross of Jesus Christ lifts him high above all other pretenders as the unique, as the glorious God of heaven and earth. No other God in any other religion ever can define himself in such a self-demeaning glory.

But this God, our God, his greatest glory is in being our Savior. The one who through his death will draw all people to himself.

[27 : 15] And again, there are two senses there, aren't there? He is the Savior who will draw all people to himself without distinction. His saving mercy is for every race, every color, every background, every creed.

John's gospel through and through shows us that. There's Nicodemus, the teacher of the Jews. Then there's the Samaritan woman. To the Jews, she was a half breed. She was a loose woman. In chapter 12, we're told the whole world is going after him.

And here, as we see, there's Greeks, there's Gentiles coming to see Jesus. There's the whole world without distinction. But because of a self-giving death that he dies for sins, even a world that hated him and put him on the cross can find his great love, can know the glorious restoration that he alone can bring.

He draws all without distinction to believe in him, to find life in his name. But just as importantly, there is another sense, isn't there, in which Jesus' exaltation draws all people to himself, this time without exception.

In the prologue to his gospel, John tells us that in Jesus, the true light that sheds light on everyone was coming into the world. And Jesus' death and resurrection and exaltation, his lifting up high and exalted, means that he is the one who is lifted up to the place of judgment.

[28 : 49] He will judge all people. And he alone will shed his all-seeing light on every single human life, exposing every life to that perfect judgment.

Back in John chapter 5, Jesus said, a time is coming when all the dead shall rise and hear my voice. A voice that commands for all eternity, some to the resurrection of eternal life and others, says Jesus, to a judgment that is eternal.

He and he alone will draw all people to himself to face that great judgment, without which there can't be a restoration to glory, where all rebellion, where all wickedness and evil is done away with forever, where those who refuse his gracious rule cannot remain in his kingdom.

him. Friends, that's what it means that the redeemer of this world, Jesus Christ, is exalted forever, that he is lifted up as the ruler and judge.

It means, as C.S. Lewis puts it, that in the end, that face which is either the delight or the terror of this universe, must be turned on each one of us, either with one expression or the other, either conferring glory inexpressible or inflicting shame that can never be cured or disguised.

[30 : 19] I will draw all people to myself. Make no mistake, Jesus' death achieved a mighty purpose.

The rebellion of this world is judged forever and our sins were cast out at the cross. The ruler of this world is defeated forever and Satan was cast down at the cross and the redeemer of this world is exalted forever.

Jesus Christ was lifted up through his cross. Darkness defeated, Eden restored. That's why we call this day Good Friday, when earth's darkest hour became the hour of deliverance.

That's why the Easter gospel is called Good News, because it proclaims that glorious restoration, salvation, the true glory of this world restored by God forever and ever.

But friends, to stand before him with joy and to share in that glory of our exalted Savior on the day that he comes high and lifted up to judge this world, you must abide before him today.

[31 : 32] you must rejoice in a Savior who's calling you to his kind of earthly glory, the glory of his cross of shame, because it is in the darkness of the cross of shame alone that you will find the light of his crown of salvation.

And so he's calling still. Look at verse 35. Walk while you have the light, lest the darkness overtake you. While you have the light, believe in the light that you may become sons of light.

Why would you want to do otherwise? And this is the kind of death that he was willing to die to restore you, to restore this whole world to his eternal glory.

Amen. let's pray. Merciful God, who made all people and who hates nothing that thou hast made, nor wills the death of a sinner, but rather that he should be converted and live, have mercy upon all who are still in darkness and take from them all ignorance, hardness of heart and contempt of thy word.

And so fetch them home, blessed Lord, to thy flock, that they may be saved among the remnant of true Israelites, and be made one fold under one shepherd, Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with thee in the Holy Spirit, one God, world without end.

[33 : 23] Amen. Amen.