

2. A death that defines

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[0 : 00] Well, would you turn with me in the Bibles to John chapter 12, it's page 899 in the Church Bibles.

And we're back in John chapter 12 for the second time this week. All our studies this month are in this chapter where Jesus is teaching us about what kind of death he was going to die and where we discover that there's no secret code, there's nothing hidden, everything is made plain by our Lord Jesus so that we can understand.

So let's read from John 12 and verse 20, page 899. Now among those who went up to worship at the feast were some Greeks. So they 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.

[1 : 18] Whoever loves his life loses it. And whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. 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've 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, and 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.

[2 : 18] He said this to show by what kind of death he was going to die. So the crowd answered him, We've heard from the law and the prophets 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.

Well, do keep your Bibles open, and it will help you to see, as we study some of these verses today, under the title, A Death That Defines.

It's our second study, as I said, in this chapter, in John 12. And the subject, all the way through, is what kind of death Jesus was going to die.

[3 : 22] Now by that, I don't mean, of course, a description of Jesus' death. The crucifixion. It was terrible. It was a violent death. We know that.

That's what Mel Gibson's film was all about, wasn't it? The passion. To show the horror, the aggression, the sheer violence of that death.

I haven't seen it myself, but I believe that that's very vividly portrayed in that film. But no, that's not what Jesus is talking about here. We know it was an agonizing death, but incidentally, it's interesting that the Gospel writers, the apostles, those who wrote the rest of the New Testament, they very rarely talk much about that aspect of things.

That's not the thing that really interests them. But what they do do, what they do take a very great deal of time to talk about, is the kind of death Jesus died, in terms of what the death was all about, in terms of what it said to the world, and in terms of what it did for the world.

In other words, the Gospel writers and the writers of the letters of the New Testament are very concerned to talk about the significance of Jesus' death. And that's what we're looking at here.

[4 : 37] This month, we're looking at what Jesus himself teaches before he died about the significance of his own death. This is what occupied his mind in the week running up to that death, that Easter.

Last time, we looked at verse 33, just to point this out. Do you see it there? He said all of these things in order to explain what kind of death he was going to die.

So, Jesus is very clear what he's talking about. And we focused last time on verse 23, that Jesus' death was a death that declares, a death that declares, that reveals to the world for once and for all the true glory of God.

Jesus says, the hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. And he says, God's glory was going to be seen supremely and uniquely and once and for all in the cross, in the Son of God being crucified and killed.

And so, of course, that means that in all our understanding of God, who he is and what he's like, if we want to understand the true glory of God, we cannot understand it without understanding the cross of Jesus Christ.

[5 : 53] That's why the Apostle Paul says that the true gospel is always the gospel of the cross. We preach Christ crucified, he said. It may be a stumbling block to Jews then as it is today.

It may be foolishness to the Gentiles as it is today, but Paul says it is the power of God for salvation to all who are being saved. The gospel is the gospel of the cross.

But today we're going to focus on verses 24 to 26. You see those verses there? Where Jesus clearly tells us that his death is also a death that defines.

His death declares the true glory of God, but his death also defines the true people of God. In verse 24 there, you see he speaks of his own death as a death that must happen in order to deliver his people, in order to achieve a great salvation, to bear much fruit.

We're going to look at that specifically on Friday, the death that delivers. But you see he goes right on in verse 25. He goes right on to say that the manner and the nature of his death sets an irreversible pattern for all of those who would follow him and be his people.

[7 : 13] Whoever serves me, he says, verse 26, must follow me. And in these verses he makes it clear that it's his death that sets a pattern for his people.

His death defines his people on two levels. First of all, Jesus' death is the pattern or the definition of salvation. And second, his death is the pattern, the definition of Christian service.

So let's look at this first then, the defining pattern of salvation. Jesus says that if we want to live with Jesus, we must also embrace death with Jesus.

Look at verse 25. Whoever loves his life loses it. Whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. Well, what does that mean?

Well, let's just notice that Jesus, all the way through this chapter, is talking in very stark either-or terms. Either, verse 25, you love life in this world or you hate it.

[8 : 23] In other words, it's utterly significant to you in comparison with eternal life. Look down to verse 35, just at the end of the section that we read. Either you continue to walk in darkness, says Jesus, or you believe in the light and you become sons of light.

Look right down to the bottom of the page, to verse 46. We didn't read that far. Either you believe in Jesus and you won't be condemned to remain in darkness, says Jesus, or just turn over to verse 48, or, he says, you will be condemned on the last day because you've not received Jesus' word.

You see? Either, or, again, and again, and again. And that either-or choice is something that is put before everybody who would be a follower of Jesus Christ.

His death sets the defining pattern for what it means to find salvation. And the pattern is the pattern of death. Giving up completely and utterly the life of this world and following Jesus through that death to the true glory of eternal life.

In other words, you must die with Jesus, he says, if you want to keep your life for eternity. There's no other way to glory because death to this world is true glory.

[9 : 57] It's Jesus' death that declares God's glory. It's the cross that tells us what true glory is. And it's the pattern of that death, therefore, that defines true salvation.

So, whoever would follow Christ to glory must seek the same kind of glory as the glory of Christ. Where I am, says Jesus, there my servant will be.

Jesus was always using that kind of terminology. You must deny yourself and take up your cross and follow me, he said, again and again.

But, what do you think all that really means? What's the actual cash value in real life experience? Well, it means this, really.

It means either you can love your own life in this world or you can love Jesus. but it can't be both. It's either or.

[10 : 58] Or maybe you think that's very extreme. Maybe you think that things can't be so extreme as to be black and white like that. That can't be so. But, you see, you can't get more extreme than life and death, can you?

And that's the kind of terminology that Jesus is using. And, you see, we know that that is the nub of the issue, don't we? we know that that's the reason why there are so many people who are drawn to the message of Jesus, who warm to Jesus' message, but who actually hold back from real discipleship, from real following of Jesus Christ.

In all probability, some of us here this lunchtime will be in exactly that position. And the reason is, it's because we love our life. Yes, we do. And why not, we say, I've got certain abilities and ambitions, there's things I love to do, why shouldn't I achieve them the way I want to?

Why not? Or I've got wealth, and I've got time, and I've got great interests and hobbies, and I want to indulge them, I want to enjoy them, there's nothing wrong with that.

I want to devote myself to these things. Or I've got family, I've got friends, I've got people and things I want to live for, I want to invest myself in.

[12 : 18] What's wrong with that? And we could have a thousand other things that we could say besides that, couldn't we? I'm not a criminal, I'm not an immoral person, I'm not a violent person, I'm not a politician for goodness sake.

what's wrong with doing what I want to do, what's wrong? Why are you getting at me? I've got a life, you know. And Jesus says, yes you have.

But whoever loves his life, loses it. And if you really want life, the life that matters, eternal life, the only life that counts, and the only way that you can have it is by handing over that other life to me completely in its entirety for safe keeping.

And there'll be no guarantee that you'll get it back, not as it was at any rate. You've got to be willing to bury it and fill in the grave and put it away forever or you can't have the life that I can give you.

That's why it's called faith. Trust. You don't give everything away, do you, unless you absolutely trust the word of the one who asks for it and says that he'll give you something infinitely more valuable in return, do you?

[13 : 37] But that's the thing, you see, that's exactly what Jesus asks of you if you want to follow him. And that's what stops so many people from doing precisely that, because they don't actually, trust Jesus.

They don't believe his word. That's what stopped the rich young ruler. Remember the story in Mark chapter 10? He went away sorrowful. Why? Well, he had great possessions and he didn't trust what Jesus had said.

He didn't trust Jesus when he said, put all that to death and I will give you life far, far more abundant than anything that you had before. He didn't really believe him. But Jesus' death, you see, sets a defining pattern.

He trusted his father. He trusted his father to lead him through death to glory. And he calls us to trust him as he wants to lead us through death to glory.

There's no other way. If we want the life of Jesus, we cannot have it without dying to this world. Jesus' death sets a pattern that defines our salvation.

[14 : 52] Jesus' death sets a pattern that defines our salvation.