

The Splendour of the Coming King

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[0 : 0 0] We're going to turn now to our Bible reading this morning, which is in Luke chapter 9. And if you have one of our visitors' Bibles, that's page 867. Luke chapter 9.

And we're going to be reading on from where we were last Sunday morning. And beginning, looking this morning, particularly at verses 28 to 50, which is this climax, as we said last week, of the first part of Luke's gospel before, in verse 51, Jesus begins his long journey to Jerusalem, to the cross, to his resurrection and ascension.

And all the rest of the gospel is Jesus teaching his disciples what it means to walk that road to the cross. And as we'll see, all the rest of Luke's gospel is Jesus trying to let these words of his teaching sink into the ears of his disciples.

So they'll understand what his mission is and what their discipleship is. And you'll see that that emphasis is very clear in our verses today. Let me begin reading at verse 26 of Luke chapter 9.

Jesus said, Peter said to Jesus,

[2 : 1 9] Master, it's good that we are here. Let us make three tents, tabernacles, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah. Not knowing what he said. As he was saying these things, a cloud came and overshadowed them.

And they were afraid as they entered the cloud. And a voice came out of the cloud saying, This is my son, my chosen one. Listen to him.

And when the voice had spoken, Jesus was found alone. And they kept silent and told no one in those days anything of what they had seen.

On the next day, when they had come down from the mountain, a great crowd met them. And behold, a man from the crowd cried out, Teacher, I beg you to look at my son, for he is my only child.

And behold, a spirit seizes him. And he suddenly cries out. It convulses him so that he foams at the mouth and shatters him and will hardly leave him. And I begged your disciples to cast it out, but they could not.

[3 : 2 2] Jesus answered, O faithless and twisted generation, how long am I to be with you and bear with you? Bring your son here. While he was coming, the demon threw him to the ground and convulsed him.

But Jesus rebuked the unclean spirit and healed the boy and gave him back to his father. And all were astonished at the majesty of God.

But while they were all marveling at everything he was doing, Jesus said to his disciples, Let these words sink into your ears. The Son of Man is about to be delivered into the hands of men.

But they did not understand this saying, and it was concealed from them so that they might not perceive it. And they were afraid to ask him about this saying.

An argument arose among them as to which one of them was the greatest. But Jesus, knowing the reasoning of their hearts, took a child and put him by his side. And said to them, Whoever receives this child in my name receives me.

[4 : 2 7] And whoever receives me receives him who sent me. For he who is least among you all is the one who is great. John answered, Master, we saw someone casting out demons in your name.

And we tried to stop him because he does not follow with us. But Jesus said to him, Do not stop him. For the one who is not against you is for you.

Amen. May God bless to us this, his word. Well, let's turn, if you would, to Luke chapter 9, page 867 in the Church Bibles.

Last time we saw how Luke brings the first part of his gospel to a climax, that first part all about the revelation of the Savior's glory from heaven to earth.

How he brings it to a climax by giving us a foreshadowing of the splendor of that coming kingdom in all its glory. He gives the apostles a taste of the time when all human hunger will be satisfied. [5 : 53] And indeed all sorrow and sadness banished in the rejoicing of the kingdom of God's peace. But he also makes it clear that the path to that world lies only in confessing a suffering Savior.

So is at last to be unashamed at the coming of the Son of Man. And the second half of Luke chapter 9 is all of a piece, but with a focus particularly here on the splendor of the coming king himself. Remember I suggested that the whole chapter is something of a mirror image pattern. The first half views the coming of the kingdom and the path to establishing it from an earthly perspective. And then the second half of chapter 9 looking at it from a heavenly viewpoint. I think that's particularly evident in this central part that the whole chapter hinges on. And the two accounts, first in verses 18 to 27 that we looked at last time, and then in verses 28 to 36. Because both of these passages focus on Jesus' true identity.

[7 : 03] They focus on his coming suffering and also on his ultimate coming in glory. But while in verse 26 it's Jesus who speaks plainly about his glory, which will be seen one day by all the world.

Here in verses 28 to 36 we have, if you like, a preview of that glory in the plain sight of three of Jesus' chosen disciples. And then we get another preview of the life of the world to come. It breaks into this world's darkness and despair in the healing of the boy and in the casting out of the demon. And then the section ends just as chapter 9 began with instruction to the disciples about how to do heaven's work, heaven's way in this world.

And how they're to represent truly the splendor of the king. How they're to proclaim to this world its true king. In a world that has very different ideas about glory and status and authority.

So I want to look at these three sections in our passage this morning in turn. And we'll see that they're all about seeing how our great salvation looks with heaven's perspective.

[8 : 22] It's all about the perfect fulfillment of God's plan, despite the pitiful fallenness of God's people. And it's also at the end of the chapter about understanding the perplexing foolishness of God's power, as it often seems to us and to this world.

So let's look at verses 28 to 36 first, which speak of the glorious transfiguration of the perfect son of God. And the focus here is on the perfect fulfillment of the plan of God that is revealed in the Savior, Jesus Christ.

Now this experience was a never-to-be-forgotten experience for these three disciples. Peter, when you read his second letter, you'll see Peter bases his whole exhortation for faith and endurance upon it.

He says, we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. And earwitnesses too. He says, we ourselves heard the voice born from heaven when he received glory and honor from the Father.

Eyewitnesses and earwitnesses. So let's first look at what they saw. It was an epiphany. It was a visible appearing of the glory of God in Jesus himself.

[9 : 42] Verse 32. They saw his glory. Now when you notice the context, Luke explicitly draws our attention in verse 28 to what has just gone before.

It's just eight days after these things. After everything we've read in verses 1 to 27. And if you look again at verse 27, you'll see that Jesus has just spoken about his coming in glory.

And then he says that some right here will not taste death until they see the kingdom of God. Well, in a sense, Jesus' whole ministry was about telling people that the kingdom of God has now come. Although not quite in the way that they had expected it. The people of Israel were expecting one fell swoop. The last day, the great day of the Lord. But Jesus says, no, the kingdom of God has already come and begun in my person with his coming.

So chapter 11, verse 22, for example. He says that if they can see that he is casting out demons by the finger of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you already.

[10 : 49] And in chapter 17, verse 20, he says that the coming of the kingdom isn't now to be seen in signs that people look for. But he says already the kingdom of God is in the midst of you, in his person.

In other words, where Jesus is present, the kingdom of God is breaking into the world. But here, in the context of, I think, just having talked plainly about the consummation of his kingdom, about the splendor and glory of his kingdom, well, he's shown a preview of it in the feeding of the 5,000.

He's just spoken about his glory and the glory of the Father and the angels. Surely then, in that context, what he means in verse 27 is that some right here will see with their own eyes the splendor of that coming kingdom.

As verse 29 tells us, as he truly is, dazzling white in all his glory. So this is a preview shown to these three of what he'd been speaking about.

And the language is very reminiscent of the book of Exodus. If you read Exodus chapter 34, for example, when Moses' face shone with the glory of God as he'd been meeting him on the mountain.

[12:05] Or in Exodus chapter 24, where we read about the glory cloud of God that appeared on Sinai. Or later on, on the tabernacle, the Shekinah glory of the presence of God. It can be no doubt, when you understand that background, that verse 29 is speaking about the glory of God himself.

And that it's shining out of Jesus. And verse 32, they saw his glory. And glory filled the whole mountain, verse 31.

And these three men with Jesus saw it. And verse 36 just rounds off the whole thing by talking about what they had seen. It's all about what they saw as eyewitnesses of his glory.

It was an epiphany. They saw the splendor of the coming king with their own eyes. Now notice verse 29. This all happened when Jesus was praying.

And as you read the Gospels, you find that often at night, Jesus went into the desert place to pray. And you might wonder, as indeed one writer does wonder, whether that glory, in fact, broke out every time he was out on his own in the desert praying.

[13:17] Seen only by the desert hills or perhaps by the nocturnal creatures, when all human beings were asleep and unaware. Who knows? But these men certainly did see it with their own eyes that day.

And it certainly convinced Peter, at least later, of the certainty of his power and the sure hope of his coming in glory at last.

We made known to you, says Peter, his power and his coming. That was his Gospel. That Jesus is coming again to judge the living and the dead.

And Peter says we didn't follow cleverly invented myths or stories. We were eyewitnesses of his majesty. And we proclaim to you what we have seen. And friends, that is the basis of all our hope also, is it not?

Our Christian faith is not a leap into the dark. It's a recognizing the light based on firm eyewitness testimony of those who saw and heard with their own eyes and ears.

[14:22] And it's the content of our hope. As Paul says in Titus 2 verse 18, we wait for the blessed hope of the appearance, the epiphany of the glory of our God and Savior, Jesus Christ.

All our hope for the end of darkness and despair in this world rests upon the appearance at last, permanently, of the glory of Christ as he truly is, as he was transfigured that day on the mountain.

And on that day, says Paul, to the Thessalonians, he will bring to nothing the devil and all his lawless ones. How? By the appearance, by the epiphany of his coming.

And Peter says in his letter, we can assure you that this is so because we saw that glory once. We can't deny it. We can't ever forget it. We were eyewitnesses to his true majesty.

And earwitnesses, he says, they heard the voice from heaven when he received honor and glory. And notice when that voice comes, verse 33, it was as Moses and Elijah departed.

[15:32] It was as Jesus turned away from the glorious experience of the mountain to come down and renew his ministry very shortly to set his face towards Jerusalem and the cross.

Because, you see, the transfiguration shows us not only who Jesus is, it also shows us so clearly what he came to do. It shows us that the focus of that epiphany was his exodus, verse 31, the departure, the exodus, literally, that he was to accomplish at Jerusalem.

And it was upon that mission and upon Jesus' willing acceptance of it that the Father's praise and his bestowal of majesty and of glory was heard.

Because the true glory of the Son of God is the glory of his cross. And notice something supremely important. What Jesus had said to his disciples in verse 22 that he must suffer and be killed.

He shocked his disciples, didn't he? Matthew and Mark tell us of Peter's outrage at that. But you see, heaven's perspective here in verse 31 is very different. There's no shock at all, is there?

[16:54] There's no surprise. Now this is the focal point of all history from the perspective of heaven. Long promised and now to be accomplished in the coming of Jesus.

the great redemption as the glorious Messiah of God, the great Redeemer at last comes whom every other Redeemer in Israel's history had pointed to and foreshadowed.

That explains the appearance of Moses and Elijah, of course, representing the law and the prophets to speak with him of his great exodus to come. That's what their whole ministries had always been about, speaking of the great exodus to come that they were longing for and pointing for.

And just as back in Exodus chapter 6, God spoke of the exodus from Egypt that was to come and he announced it beforehand. He said, I will redeem Israel and bring her up to a promised land. Well, so here, in the great redemption of God's people, out of darkness, out of the bondage of sin, God announces it beforehand. And this is if Moses and Elijah are reassuring Jesus that yes, just as you said to your disciples in verse 22, this must be, must be accomplished according to all that we and all the law and the prophets have spoken and written.

[18:20] And Jesus, though he is the glorious, the perfect, obedient son of God, he must obey the father, he must fulfill the promise, and he will accomplish everything that God has covenanted in perfect fulfillment of God's plan.

Remember how after the resurrection in Luke 24, again and again and again, that's what Jesus is saying to his disciples. Was it not written that this must happen and that Christ must suffer and then enter his glory?

And that's what Moses and Elijah were speaking about. Maybe they were reminding Jesus also something else, that indeed they and all the saints of the Old Testament who'd gone before, that they also depended upon him and his exodus for their deliverance, for their salvation and redemption.

Just as every other human being in the world throughout all history depends on Christ's redemption. It's difficult for us to understand, isn't it, how events in our time and history can relate to the eternal world of God and how Christ's saving death works backward in time as well as forwards as it were. But maybe this passage helps us a little with that because we get a sense, don't we, of how time seems to work differently in this world and in the world to come. In our time, in our history, Moses and Elijah were separated, weren't they, by hundreds of years and both of them were separated by hundreds of years from Christ just as we're separated from Christ by hundreds of years.

[19:56] And yet here they are together because here's a meeting of two worlds for a moment overlapping with each other. I guess that is what C.S. Lewis is trying to deal with, isn't it, in his Narnia stories where just a few moments in one world can be like centuries in another world.

And you see, the world to come, the kingdom of God, has different time, it seems, from our world. That's how the Bible can say things like God sees the end from the beginning and knows all things. We get a sense of that here in this passage. It's not, I think, that there's no time in the kingdom of God. Sometimes we think that. Sometimes we think, well, in eternity there'll be no time.

But that can't be so here because for Moses and Elijah, they still seem to be talking about something that's future to them, Christ's exodus. If you think about it, if there were no time, that would be terrible, wouldn't it?

Somebody who's caught in the ever-present moment, that's the scourge of dementia, isn't it? Can't remember what happened two minutes ago. Well, that poor man that you read in the papers this week who can't do anything because he's stuck in a perpetual sense of *deja vu*, always reliving the present moment, thinking he's been there before.

[21:16] Maybe it's better to think that in the fullness of God's kingdom, time will no longer be our enemy, but a friend. No longer will we talk about the scourge of not enough time or the agonies of the toll of time as it takes on our bodies.

But instead, it'll be just the accumulated joys and memories and experience of time. I don't know, maybe that's something for you to ponder this week.

But there's no doubt that Christ's coming exodus is the focal point of this great event and all the glory that surrounds it. But you see, the poor disciples still don't understand that.

So Peter responds, verse 33, not knowing what he's saying. He's ignorant. He wants to set up tabernacles, tents, maybe to celebrate, thinking that the glory of God's kingdom at last has fully arrived.

But no, he hasn't grasped that it will come in glory only after the accomplishment of Christ's great exodus, only after the suffering of the Passover sacrifice.

[22 : 26] And so the voice comes from heaven again to teach them. And we have an exhortation. This is my son, says the father, quoting Psalm 2, the Messiah King of God that everyone longed for. But notice, he is also my chosen one. He's quoting Isaiah 42, the servant, the servant of God who will suffer for his people.

You keep refusing to see that. So be quiet and listen to him. Listen to him tell you. And he'd listen to Moses and the prophets who told you to look for one like him and to listen to him, as Moses himself said in Deuteronomy 18.

And listen to God himself telling you that this is he. This is the one who sums up and fulfills everything that the whole Old Testament has been speaking of.

Now, Peter and the others did learn eventually that Christ's death was no accident, that it was the perfect fulfillment of the plan of God for all time. Read Peter's sermon on the day of Pentecost.

[23 : 37] You'll see where he proclaims that this Jesus was delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God. And Peter learned that the shame of the cross was no obstacle to God's kingdom.

Indeed, it was the means to fulfilling God's kingdom of glory. And therefore, he learned that the message of the cross with all its scorn, with all its scoffing, was no blockage to Christ's glory being spoken in the world.

Where is this coming? The scoffers would say. No, says Peter, this message is the power of God to salvation. But they couldn't see it yet at this point and so they must learn to listen to Jesus.

Listen to him teaching them that this is not just showing you who I truly am, Peter, but what I have come to do. Someone has put it, he came down from the mountain, turned his back on the glory, came down to where we were, where we all are, gripped by dark powers and torn by deep and tragic mysteries and broken by sin and shame.

And that's the lesson, isn't it, that's reinforced in what follows, in what Luke makes so plain, in the stark contrast that he wants us to see between the glorious transfiguration of the perfect Son of God and the world that he came down to save.

[25 : 11] Which verses 37 to 43 show us so vividly the grotesque twistedness of the perverse sons of men and how can we miss the obvious focus here on the pitiful fallenness of the people of God who so badly need rescue by the Savior.

Some of you might know the painting by the Italian Renaissance painter Raphael of the Transfiguration, said to be his last work and by many his greatest work.

And in that painting he pictures these two scenes, it's very unusual, right together in one painting. And in the foreground there is darkness and suffering and agony and need as the tormented father and his boy are helpless with impotent disciples unable to do anything.

But in the background and above there's the light of the glory of heaven that's shining down to the world through the transfigured Christ.

And it's a powerful message in that painting. And it's a contrast that Luke wants us to see very clearly just as the artist understood. See the incident he relates here in verses 37 and following it's a deeply poignant one.

[26 : 32] Luke actually leaves out of his account quite a lot of what Matthew and Mark include in theirs if you read their accounts. Jesus' conversation with the father, Jesus' conversation with the disciples and so on.

But I think he does that to make his main point so clear the starkness of the contrast between the glory of the transfigured son of man as he truly is and the pitiful twistedness of the sons of men here on earth.

Luke leaves these things out but he also includes some very interesting details that the others don't. Only Luke tells us in verse 38 that this child is the father's only son and only Luke tells us in verse 42 that when he is rescued Jesus gave him back to his father.

That highlights doesn't it the agony of the father whose only child is tormented and ill and helpless and in this case so dehumanized. Any parent who has a chronically ill or a chronically handicapped child will know something of the draining emotional trauma of life like that and the conflicting feelings and the anxieties and the near despair at times as there's any parent with a new baby that's born with disease or some kind of deformity.

I was speaking to a dear friend in ministry this week and they just had a new baby with Down syndrome and I could just sense that his heart was full of love and delight and joy on the one hand

and yet at the same time tearing him apart was the agony and the tears and the horror of it.
[28 : 22] Isn't that a wonder however opaque in a story like this into the heart of our heavenly father and how he looks with love upon his human children and yet also with the pitiful twistedness and fallenness of our sin.

Surely this can't be anything else but an enacted parable of our savior's own mission. Of course these events are real, of course these happenings are real, but they speak a vivid message, don't they, about man's desperate need for a savior to bring healing, to bring renewal to our world sick with sin.

Just as in verses 10 to 17 with the feeding of the 5,000 that was rescued from the hunger of the natural human condition, well so here it's rescued from the horror of the twistedness of our condition due to sin.

And that is certainly Jesus' own explicit diagnosis here in verse 41, a faithless and twisted generation you are, he says, surely including both his disciples and the crowd.

And he rebukes them. How low things had fallen. One of all the places on earth, God's own promised land, the holy land, has become overrun completely by demons.

[29 : 48] What have you ever thought of that? God's land was holy. Think how assiduous the law of Moses is that the land should not be defiled, not be defiled by unclean food or unclean animals, not be defiled by disease, not be defiled by dead bodies.

Think of all the cleansing regulations that there are in the law to speak of the holiness of God's land. And certainly not defiling it with idols, with false worship.

And yet here is the land of Israel in a worse state than anything that you read anywhere, it seems, in the whole of the Old Testament. Overrun completely by demons.

So that it's become completely the domain of Satan himself. And that's why I think Jesus says what he says in verse 41 about this generation.

And all through the Gospels, he speaks of this generation being so far gone that it can only be under inevitable judgment.

[30 : 51] Let's read Luke 11, 29 and following, where again and again he speaks of it. they've known privilege after privilege. They've even known the bodily presence of the Lord God himself in their midst and yet they were twisted and perverse in their unbelief.

That phrase actually comes from Moses from Deuteronomy 32, from Moses' great song which he made the Israelites learn and sing forever afterwards because he said, I know that after my death you will go after other gods, you'll do evil in your hardened hearts.

And so he says there are crooked and twisted generations seeking after demons and false gods.

And God replies, I will hide my face from them and I will see what their end will be.

And you see the end of such perverse rebellion is bondage and darkness inevitably. If you seek idols, if you seek false gods and worship them, you'll discover that in fact you have put yourself in bondage to demons, to a dark world.

And that's the story of the whole of humanity. If you turn your back upon God, if you will not worship the creator but worship the creature, whatever form that takes, whether it's primitive idol worship or whether it's very sophisticated and modern, well if you do that, says Paul in Romans chapter 1, God gives you over to what you want.

[32 : 25] And so we get as human beings the world that we have made for ourselves. And the world that we've made for ourselves is perverse and twisted. We want Raphael's painting upside down.

We want to say, well God is twisted and evil and dark. We don't want anything to do with him. Our world, well our world is enlightened and full of glory and honor and praise.

But let me ask you, which of these two scenes in front of us do you think really describes our world and humanity as we know it? Is it verse 29? Is it man, glorious, dazzling, impurity and light?

Or is it verse 39, shattered, literally crushed and broken and helpless? As we see in the picture of that boy. Well Luke, I think is very clear, isn't he?

At least in what he wants us to see. It is a picture, vivid as it is frightful of the pitiful fallenness and twistedness of people who are in dire need of rescue, in dire need of a redeemer.

[33 : 40] And yet, we're being told that just as in Moses' day in the time of the first exodus, God looks down from the glory of heaven and he says, I have seen, I have seen the affliction of my people and heard their groaning, I know their sufferings and I'm come down to save them and to

bring them out of bondage and into a land flowing with milk and honey.

And so it is here as the great redeemer, the Lord Jesus Christ, comes down from the glory of the mountain. And he comes down with power to save the pitiful people caught in darkness.

I was reading the other morning Psalm 102 in the version from the Book of Common Prayer that I quoted at the beginning of the service. For the Lord has looked down from his sanctuary, out of the heaven did he behold the earth, that he might hear the mornings of such as are in captivity and deliver the children appointed to death.

Isn't that what's pictured here? That he who is the glory of heaven humbles himself and comes down into the dark valley of human sin and suffering and shame to bring redemption, to bring rescue from the bondage of darkness and evil.

And so at the sight of Jesus, verse 42, the demon has won the last attempt to try and destroy the boy. But Christ rebukes him and he heals him and he gives him back to his grieving father, surely with joy and great delight.

[35 : 28] Isn't that a picture of what Jesus does for his grieving father? As he brings back restored and remade the lost sons of men to make them at last true sons of God once again in the father's house?

And verse 43 says, all were astonished at the majesty of God. A phrase that by the way outside Luke's writing is only found in one other place in the New Testament, 2 Peter 1 verse 16, where Peter says, we were eyewitnesses of his majesty.

But you see, what Peter and the others saw that day on the mountain in the glory of heaven is being seen here on earth in the works of saving power that Jesus came to accomplish among human beings.

It's a glimpse of the glory of heaven. Someone said to me this week, there's so much sadness in the world, but I feel that the clouds parted for a little while today.

And so it was exactly right there that day, both on the mountain of transfiguration, but also when the Savior brought his wonderful preview of the hope of his glorious kingdom into the lives of these ordinary poor people down below.

[36 : 54] A kingdom where what is now grotesque is transformed into something glorious. Their eyes were opened that day to see his true splendor, the splendor of the king.

And friends, that's still what the message of Jesus does today, isn't it? It parts the clouds, it gives a glimpse of the splendor of the king and the hope that his glorious coming kingdom must bring for this world.

But you see, that message and that ministry can only be made known by those who share the Savior's way. The way of the one who turned his back on glory and came down to embrace the cross.

And the disciples hadn't yet grasped that true glory. Neither the real dreadfulness of sin and the dreadfulness of what therefore has to happen to release people and forgive people for his sins. Nor had they grasped the true glory of heaven's power at work on earth to save. And that is why we have what follows in verses 43 to 50. Because it's only the Savior who must suffer who can bring his glory into people's lives.

[38 : 17] And so if the disciples are to serve that kingdom and that glory, then his way must be their way also. That's why Jesus again turns to his disciples and focuses here in his teaching on the great task of the privileged servants of Christ.

They too must begin to grasp the perplexing foolishness of the power of God. And that's something that must be shared by everyone who represents the Savior.

Listen to him, said the voice from the glory. Jesus says, verse 44, let these things sink into your ears, into your thick heads, he might have said.

Yes, you're marveling at the glory and majesty of God being unleashed on earth, but it's a splendor that will be known on this earth only through the Savior's sufferings.

The Son of Man, he says, is about to be delivered into the hands of men. And if you are going to share in my mission, Jesus is saying, of opening eyes on this earth to the glory of my true heaven, to my glory, then you need to let it sink into your heads and into your hearts, that this must be your path as well.

[39 : 38] And that's why he says, verse 44, there must be no triumphalism for those who share in the privileged task of proclaiming the world to come and representing the splendor of the Savior and

his kingdom in this world.

It's a way of weakness. And you must come to see that and not resist it. It's the way of the cross. The splendor of the king and the suffering of the king are inseparable.

And so it is for all who follow him. Do you remember verse 23? It's the only way to come after me, says Jesus, bearing a cross. Now that is perplexing, that is foolishness to the world.

But it is the way of heaven's true glory. My power, said God to the apostle Paul, is made perfect in weakness. We don't believe that though.

In the apostles, verse 45, they couldn't believe it or grasp it either. It's so counterintuitive. It's so reversing of all this world's ideas. Ask the opinion formers, ask the power brokers at Davos this week.

[40 : 48] Which are the countries with real power? Which are the economies that are going places? Is it the one whose currency is tanking to be worth nothing? Or is it the one who's on their eyes?

Our world knows the answers, it's obvious. This is the opposite of our world's idea of power. Such weakness. But it's the pattern, isn't it, that suffuses the whole of the scriptures from beginning to end?

Because supremely, it is the pattern of our Savior, who made himself nothing, of no repute, to show God's saving power in this world.

And if we are to represent him and his kingdom, we need to let that sink into our ears too. It's a way of weakness, says Jesus.

Sometimes I think God does have to force that on us, doesn't he, in circumstances beyond our control. I was speaking to another friend in ministry this week, speaking of our friend who'd had this little baby, and just speaking about so many that we know in Christian work and mission who struggle with the ill health issues, both mental and physical, in their children.

[42 : 08] I said to him, I wonder if God gives us these things to force us just to come to terms with our helplessness and sheer impotence and drive us to prayer.

And he just said, yes, but the Lord has many such fountains of helplessness. And I guess that's because we have such thick ears, and we can only hear when God uses that megaphone of pain to get through to us.

And yet, isn't it a great comfort too to know that his way for us to represent his glory and his saving mercy here on earth is not a way of triumphalistic strength, but that the true glory of God is given to us purposefully in jars of clay to show that the surpassing glory is not from us but from God alone. Don't we need to keep relearning that? Letting it sink into our ears both to humble us when we tend to pride, but also to lift up our often despairing heads when we feel so weak.

There's no triumphalism, no inherent strength in representing the Savior. It's a way of weakness. And verse 46, there must be no rivalry or pride.

[43 : 33] It's a way of humility because our greatness comes not from ourselves but only from the Savior himself, from our connection with him, from our closeness to him, from our commissioning by him.

Any greatness that we have is simply because we have the privilege of bearing his name. Like a shop when you see the crest above it by appointment to her majesty the queen.

It's by her appointment that that shop has the glory. Or somebody who's made a lord in the house of lords. They are enabled only by her majesty. It's a glory that's conferred, not earned.

And the disciples show their ignorance, don't they? Their total blindness to heaven's true glory by their words in verse 46. They're arguing. Jesus has just been speaking about self-sacrifice, but they're still speaking about self-exaltation.

Who's the greatest? Oh, you see, we got to go up the mountain. And of course, you couldn't heal that boy. You just hear it, can't you? But we need to recognize ourselves in them too, don't we?

[44 : 40] It's so easy in our Christian walk, and very especially in Christian leadership and ministry, to want status for rivalry and ambition for our churches, for our movements, to rear their head.

We want our movement or our denomination to have the premier place. We want our name on a blog. We want our name on lists of speakers.

We want our reputation as a church to be up there. No, no, no, says Jesus. Look at verse 48. Look at this little child, he says. This child has no status, no reputation, no strength, nothing.

But if he goes to anyone carrying my name, then whoever receives him receives me, and indeed him who sent me, the Father in heaven himself. Just like with any ambassador.

He's not received because of his personal worth, but because of the sovereign that he comes to represent. It doesn't matter whether he's tall or small, if he's highborn or lowborn. Who he is is irrelevant.

[45 : 45] The disciples of themselves have got zero ability. That's absolutely beyond doubt. They were abject failures to cast out that demon. And to be great, therefore, in Jesus' kingdom, is to know that.

And it's to harbor no rivalry or pride, but it's to walk the way of humility because, says Jesus, he who is least among you, that's the one who's truly great. Because he knows his greatness is not his own.

It's the greatness of the Lord, the one who came not to be served, but to serve. And so finally, verses 49 and 50, among those whose privileged task is to represent the Savior, there can be no snobbery, no elitism.

Somebody has put it, ecclesiastical snobbery is vice to Jesus. We cannot institutionalize the power and authority of Jesus for ourselves. That's what the disciples wanted to do here.

They didn't want anyone else, not in their band, to be able to do as they were doing. And so they tried to stop this man casting out demons in Jesus' name, and Jesus rebukes them. Now, don't misunderstand this.

[46 : 56] Jesus is not saying that we're to be indiscriminate. He's not saying we're to be taken in by anyone who uses pious language and uses the name of Jesus, but in fact can be a charlatan. In chapter 21, verse 8, he explicitly warns his followers that false Christs will come in his name.

He's not saying that, but what he's saying here is that there's no evidence that this man is a heretic. There's no evidence he's abusing Jesus' name. In fact, he seems to be having a very fruitful ministry, much more fruitful than the disciples who couldn't cast out the demon.

So maybe the disciples were jealous of him. The issue here is not whether this man really followed Jesus truly or not.

Rather, it's that he wasn't in the disciples' particular band. He's not one of us. That was the disciples' issue. We're the ones who are truly in with Jesus. He's not. And it's to that that Jesus says, no, no, no.

He who's not against you is for you. Whoever's a real follower of me and doing my work isn't against you. He's for you. So don't be elitist.

[48 : 08] Don't be spiritual snobs. That's what Jesus is saying to them. Christ's power and authority isn't a commodity that some of us can possess. He's not there to serve our interests.

We're there to serve him. And our calling is to do it in the way he sees fit. Now that's a message that the church always needs to hear and hasn't always heard.

Think of through history how the religious establishment so often has wanted to silence the gospel ministry of those that it can't control, those who are not one of us. From the Reformation martyrs, think of the Covenanters, think of the Methodist preachers, Wesley and Whitefield and so on.

And we always need to be careful ourselves, don't we? There will be always those who are doing fruitful work in Jesus' name, genuine work, real gospel work who aren't quite our people, aren't quite like me, aren't quite our flavor.

Now we've got to be discerning, of course we have, but it's too easy sometimes, isn't it, for discernment to lapse into just demonizing others because they're not one of us. They're not part of our tribe, they're not from our background, they don't have our look.

[49 : 30] Elitism and spiritual snobbery is one of the ugliest things that rears its head in the Christian church. I was just reading a book this week that demonizes virtually every single significantly fruitful Christian leader and movement in the evangelical world today, and I felt that I wanted to send a letter to the author just with these two verses, Luke 9, 49 and 50, and say meditate on that.

But it's a message for us too, isn't it? Not just for others, for me and you and us together, and all who are called to the extraordinary privilege of representing Christ our Savior in this world and to this world.

Let this sink into your ears, says Jesus to us. Learn and rejoice in the true glory of my heavenly kingdom, and learn to welcome the perplexing foolishness of its true power which is made perfect in

weakness, and let there be no triumphalism, no rivalry, no snobbery about your way and about your words, but rather contentment and weakness and humility, and a generous spirited welcome to all who truly labor in my true name and as my true servants.

So, friends, let's be clear. Jesus' ringing message to us today is this. If we want this dark world to get a glimpse through us of the true splendor of our coming King, then we need to listen to him too, and we need to let his way sink into our ears and into our hearts.

Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we find your way, your power, your glory so perplexing, so subversive, so alien to us as human beings.

[51 : 42] and as sinners. Open our eyes, we pray, and our ears and our hearts that we might continue always to hear your word, and so walk in your way, and make the splendor of Christ our King known, and we ask it in his name.

Amen.