

1. A Revelation of Glory

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[0 : 00] Well, let's take up our Bibles, and if you turn to page 899, we're going to read some words from John's Gospel, John chapter 12.

We're going to be looking for these next few Wednesdays, and indeed on Good Friday, at this passage of John's Gospel. We're going to read just now from verse 20.

John 12, verse 20. Now, among those who went up to worship at the feast were some Greeks. 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 : 08] 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 : 14] So the whole crowd answered him, We have heard from the law that the Christ remains forever. How can you say that the Son of Man must be lifted up? Who is the 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.

When Jesus had said these things, he departed and hid himself from them. Though he had done so many signs before them, yet still they did not believe in him. So that the word spoken by the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled.

Lord, who has believed what he heard from us? And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed? Therefore they could not believe. For again Isaiah said, He has blinded their eyes and hardened their hearts, lest they see with their eyes and understand with their heart, and turn, and I would heal them.

Isaiah said these things because he saw his glory and spoke of him. Nevertheless, many, even of the authorities, believed in him.

[3 : 29] But for fear of the Pharisees, they did not confess it, so that they would not be put out of the synagogue. For they loved the glory that comes from man more than the glory that comes from God.

Just keep your Bibles open, but let's bow our heads in prayer as we come to God's word. Let's pray. Lord, open our eyes, we pray, that we should not be blind, but that our hearts, as our eyes and our ears, would be receptive of the word that you have for us this day.

For we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Well, now, as we approach Easter, I want us to focus on these Wednesdays and on Good Friday on the very heart of the Christian faith, on the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.

It's so important to do that today because so few people today have anything other than a very vague notion about what Easter's all about. I'm sure you realize that. To many people, it's just nothing more than the school holidays and daffodils and Easter eggs and Easter bunny and things like that.

But I'm afraid for many churchgoers, too, there's often a great deal of confusion, isn't there? And even ignorance about what Jesus' death is really all about. Now, of course, the blame for that lies squarely at the door of preachers who themselves very often ignore what Jesus taught, very often just prefer to give what their own thoughts are, their own interpretation of the Easter story.

[5 : 12] You know the sort of thing. You get it on the TV and the radio interviews at this time of year on the Easter programs, don't you? Tell me, John, what does Easter mean to you? And John tells us what Easter means to him.

And there might be a thousand different answers to that from John or Jemima or whoever else it is who phones up to give their opinion or from Dr. Vane or Professor Vague, so very often in the studios giving their opinions.

But, you know, there's very little help to us, isn't there, if it's just their opinions. So we're not going to waste any time on that kind of foolishness. Frankly, your interpretation or my interpretation or some professor's interpretation is utterly worthless.

What matters, of course, is Jesus' own interpretation and explanation of his death. And that's precisely what we have in the Gospels and, of course, the whole New Testament as Jesus taught his view of what he was doing to his apostles and charged them to pass his interpretation onto the whole world.

So we don't need to be vague. We don't need to be ignorant. But we have the truth about Easter and all its significance. We have it right here with the authority of Jesus Christ himself.

[6 : 28] And here in John chapter 12, we have an excellent, excellent place to focus our minds for two reasons. First, because Jesus explicitly speaks here, as verse 33 says, you see, to show what kind of death he was going to die.

That's his focus. And secondly, because it's all the more powerful, isn't it? Because Jesus is explaining it in advance. This is not some post hoc analysis.

He is purposely telling us about a death that he knew was coming and telling us exactly why it was coming and telling us exactly what it was going to achieve.

So I want to begin today by looking at these verses we've read and especially focusing on verse 23, where Jesus tells us, first of all, that his death is to be a revelation of glory.

The cross displays the climactic revelation of God's glory to this world in Jesus Christ.

[7 : 35] Verse 23, the hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Look down to verse 28, for this purpose, says Jesus, I have come into the world.

Father, glorify your name. And the voice from heaven. I have glorified it and I will glorify it. Jesus himself is very, very clear.

His death is supremely a unique revelation of God's glory. The ultimate revelation of God's glory to this world.

And at last, he says, the hour has come for the climax of this story. Now we need to remember what the story is that John is telling us in his gospel.

Remember from the very beginning of John's gospel, we really have a drama unfolding with two very distinct strands in it. So often dramas are like that, aren't they?

[8 : 31] That's what makes them interesting. Think of *Les Miserables*. I'm sure some of you have been to see the film at the cinema recently. There are multiple strands, aren't there, bound together in that story. There's the unfolding romance and the love story that's winding its way towards its climax.

At the very same time as the tragedy is being played out on the barricades. Or think back to the story of the *Titanic*, where the climax of that love story happens just at the same moment as the climax of the disaster story as the ship hits the iceberg.

And yet all the way through from the very beginning of these stories, there are hints of all these different things unfolding. Well, John's gospel is a little bit similar to that.

There are two very clear strands unfolding from the beginning. And that's what gives such a sense of tension, a sense of a real paradox in John's story. The first strand, you see, is all about the glory of God.

The awaited hour when all that glory is at last going to be revealed. Right back in John chapter 1, in the prologue, John says, We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only from the Father. [9 : 45] And as you read on, you're waiting for us to see that glory. We're waiting for the hour of full revelation of God's glory. But always, as you read on in John's gospel, you find that the hour has not yet come.

So, at the wedding of Cana in Galilee, Jesus' mother speaks to him and he says, My hour is not yet come. Or in John chapter 5, we're told the hour is coming when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God.

It's coming. Or in chapter 7, when the authorities try to seize Jesus. But we read no one could lay a hand on him because his hour had not yet come.

So, we're always waiting and asking, Well, when is this hour going to come? When is this great glory going to be revealed? But you see the second strand unfolding in John's story is happening at the same time.

And that's a strand that tells us of a growing sense of impending death. And that's also building up right from the start. In John chapter 5, they start to persecute Jesus when he heals the man by the pool.

[10 : 54] In chapter 7, as I've said, they try to seize him. In chapter 10, after the feast, once again, they try to seize him. If you look here at chapter 12, verse 7, do you see?

The anointing of Mary of Bethany, of Jesus' feet. She's doing it, says Jesus, for my burial. Jesus is explicitly prophesying his coming death.

He knows that the priests and the Levites are out to kill him. Why? Well, look at verse 11. Because many were believing in him. And you'll see there that they even plotted to try and kill Lazarus, whom Jesus had raised from the dead, because they wanted to get rid of the evidence of Jesus' mighty works.

They couldn't refute his miracles. The evidence of Lazarus was right in front of them. But they still didn't believe in him. By the way, that's worth noting, isn't it? Sometimes people say today, what we really need if we want people to believe in Jesus and in the gospel is great and mighty miracles. Well, there's not much more mighty miracle than a dead man raised up in front of you can't refute. And still, they did not believe. So here we are. There's these two strands in John.

[12 : 09] The coming glory that we're all waiting to see in Jesus. But also this coming sense of the coming death. Two things that seem to be in absolute opposition to each other.

And yet now, here in John chapter 12, Jesus brings these two things absolutely together. And he shows that they are in fact one and the same thing.

It's not like the Titanic story, where there are two separate stories that come to their climax together. Rather, Jesus is saying the glory and the death that are coming are two sides of the one story, the same story.

The hour has come, verse 23, for Jesus to be glorified. Everything that we've been waiting for and anticipating, everything that has been anticipated by the signs and the wonders that he's done that show that he is the Lord of glory on earth.

The hour has come, he says, for that glory to be revealed. And yet here is the astonishing thing. Jesus equates that hour of glory with his death.

[13 : 18] Look at verse 24. He goes right on. Unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone. But if it dies, it brings forth much fruit.

And he goes on to speak with clarity about the kind of death he was going to die, verse 33. Isn't that astonishing?

But it may seem to be, but of course not, not if you have understood the Old Testament properly, says John here. And there's a clue here, isn't there, in the quotations that John gives from the Old Testament and the prophet Isaiah.

You see them there in verses 38 to 40. It's very significant, this, because this is a quotation from Isaiah, and it's the second time in his gospel John has quoted from the prophet Isaiah.

The first quote was right back in John chapter 1. Don't look it up, you know it. John 1, verse 23.

John the Baptist quotes from Isaiah 40, saying, I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, make straight the way of the Lord.

[14 : 30] Remember how that part of Isaiah goes on from Handel's Messiah? I'm not going to sing it today. I got in trouble for singing on Sunday morning. Every valley shall be exalted, every

mountain and hill made low, and the crooked straight, and the rough places plain, and the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh will see it together.

John quotes that in John 1, and then says, and we have seen that glory fulfilled. And so we are waiting to see that glory all the way through, as I've said.

When will it be revealed in the flesh and to the world? Not just to the people of Israel, but to all flesh. When will that glory be revealed? Well, here in John chapter 12, we have John's second quote from Isaiah, verse 37, do you see?

But this time, it's not at all obvious that it's about glory, is it? This quote is from Isaiah chapter 53, the famous fourth servant song about the suffering of God's servant, who's going to suffer to bring salvation.

It's just worth us looking this up. Do turn back with me to page 613. I do want you to see this. Page 613 in Isaiah 53, verse 1.

[15 : 54] That's where our quote is. You see, who has believed what they heard from us? What is it that's so unbelievable for John's readers and for the Jews of Jesus' day who couldn't stomach this message?

Well, it's a message from the prophet about God's servant who would be glorified. Look at chapter 52, verse 13, where the song begins.

He'll be high and lifted up. But you see, he'll be glorified in a manner that is totally astonishing to human beings with our ideas of glory.

Look at verse 14. Many were astonished at you. Why? His appearance was so marred. Why was that?

Well, read on down to verse 3 of chapter 53. He was despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. Turn over the page to verse 5.

[16 : 58] He was wounded for our transgressions. He was crushed for our iniquities. He was led like a lamb to the slaughter. And that, you see, verse 10, that is how God's will will prosper in his hand.

When his soul makes an offering for sin, then he shall see his offspring. He shall extend his days. See what Isaiah is saying. Just what Jesus is saying.

When the seed falls into the ground and dies, it bears much fruit. When God's servant is crushed, he'll bring salvation to many.

Turn back to John chapter 12. You see what John and what Jesus is saying. He is saying that this glory of the Lord long prophesied that it would be revealed to all flesh in the suffering and death of the Son of God on the cross.

That these two things are one and the same event. That the glory of God is declared to the whole world in God the Son himself being put to death on a bloodstained piece of wood, in the dirt of a rubbish tip, outside the city gate amidst all the smell and the stink of that refuse scene.

[18 : 33] This is the glory of your God, he's saying, in the suffering of this servant king.

And you see, he is saying that to the whole world, not just to the Jews, but to the Gentile nations also. That's the significance of verse 20, the beginning of our passage.

Some Greeks, some Gentiles come along and say, we want to see Jesus, we've heard about him, we want to see the true glory of God being revealed in this man. That's the world's question, isn't it?

That is what those who are seeking the truth about God are asking. Show us, show us where the true glory of God is to be found. Show us the way. The extraordinary thing is that the religious establishment dreaded the world finding Jesus and believing him.

They say it right before our passage here in chapter 11, verse 48, when people begin to believe in Jesus in droves, they say, if we go on like this, everyone will believe him and the Romans will come and take away our place, they'll take away our temple and our nation.

[19 : 45] They'd lose control of their institution. If all these people started believing in Jesus and that's why they're furious, chapter 12, verse 19. The whole world has gone after him.

Yes, says John, because that is exactly what God promised. Isaiah saw it. The glory of the Lord will be revealed to all flesh, to the whole world, in the coming Messiah.

Isaiah. And now when the Gentiles come and say, show us, show us the glory, Jesus says, yes, I will. The hour for revealing my glory has at last come.

And this is it. You'll see the glory of God in my death upon that cross. And verse 41 says very plainly, Isaiah foresaw all of this.

He saw Jesus' true glory and he spoke of him. And that's why he also foresaw that to many it would be a message that people simply couldn't grasp.

[20 : 53] They couldn't stomach it. The glory of God himself on a cross? They could not believe it. So verse 39, they could not believe.

Who has believed what we have said? You see, it was so in Isaiah's day and it was so in Jesus' day and it's been the same ever since.

Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 1, Jews demand miraculous signs, Greeks look for wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Greeks.

but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ, the power of God and the wisdom of God. You see, it's still the same issue today, isn't it?

There are many, many who look to the message of the cross and they see nothing but embarrassment. They scorn it. The cross of Jesus as the declaration of God's glory is still a great stumbling block to religious people today.

[21 : 59] To Jews, of course, who can't conceive of a Messiah who suffers. Well, is God himself suffering? It's the same for Muslim people, isn't it?

It's equally abhorrent. They cannot bear to think of even a great prophet suffering like that. Far less God himself and many other religions, people just say, I simply cannot believe it.

They cannot believe what they have heard from us about God's supreme glory really being in the death of his son upon a cross for sins. It's still great foolishness to many Greeks today, many people of learning and culture and refinement.

They can't stomach the message of the cross. Bloodshed, atonement, God punishing sin. We can't have that. Even religious people, many religious people, because they believe deep down that we're all really basically good and that peace and justice and all of the things we want in the world will just eventually come if we all just try a bit harder.

The cross is foolishness to somebody who thinks like that. What are the seculars who think it's really all within our own exalted human abilities to triumph at last with science and progress and so on to give us the world that we want?

[23 : 21] To them, there is no greater foolishness than the cross of Jesus. What kind of God do you call this? It's primitive. It's infantile.

We've outgrown all of this thing in this modern age. Friends, you'll even hear that sort of thing said within the professing church of Jesus Christ, those who profess to speak in the name of the gospel of Christ.

But you cannot speak like that if you listen to what Jesus says about the kind of death he was going to die. He says right here that it is a death that reveals the glory of God once and for all to the whole world.

It tells us that God glorifies himself in that cross and in the death of his son. And as we'll see in our next few studies, he does so because it is a death that is not a sad and a pointless and a tragic death.

It's not just the death that is a display of love or a display of emotion because it's a death, says verse 24, do you see? A death that bears much fruit.

[24 : 45] It reveals God's glory to the whole world and by it, it shares God's glorious salvation with the world. That's why it's such a glorious death.

So friends, just for today, what Jesus says to us and what the voice from the glory in heaven confirms for us is this, don't ever, ever minimize the cross of Jesus Christ in your thinking about God, in your telling about God, in your message about God, in your worship of God.

Don't ever, ever minimize the glory of the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ because the death of Jesus, the cross of Jesus, is what reveals ultimately the glory of the one true God to the people of this world.

And any other thinking about God that focuses on power or victory or celebration or whatever it is, but doesn't exalt as absolutely central, the death of the Lord Jesus Christ on the cross for sins.

That is not how the Lord Jesus himself wants us to understand his glory. No, the glory of God and the greatness of God and the victory of God is declared supremely to this world in the cross of Jesus Christ.

[26 : 26] So that is something for us to think about this week, isn't it? And something for us to think about especially as regards our own lives, as we think to ourselves what it means to seek glory and

to seek greatness.

The glory of God is the glory of the cross. Let's pray. Lord, we find it so hard to understand the greatness of your glory, glory.

We, like the Jews of Jesus' day, so love the glory that comes from man more than the glory that comes from God. Open our eyes and humble our hearts, we pray, to bow before the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ and to see the God of glory who came that we might be forgiven.

For we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.