

4. The Response to Glory

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[0 : 00] Well, now we're going to read together these words from John's Gospel, chapter 12. You'll find them on your sheets or in the Bibles at John, chapter 12. And reading from verse 27, these are the last words of Jesus' public ministry.

Following this, we have the private words to his disciples in the upper room, and then follows his arrest, his trial, and his crucifixion.

So very significant words indeed. And Jesus said, 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.

[1 : 11] 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.

So the 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 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. When Jesus had said these things, he departed and hid himself from them.

[2 : 17] Though he had done so many signs before them, they still 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 has 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, 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. And Jesus cried out and said, Whoever believes in me, believes not in me, but in him who sent me.

And whoever sees me, sees him who sent me. And I have come into the world as light, so that whoever believes in me may not remain in darkness.

[3 : 45] If anyone hears my words and does not keep them, I do not judge him. For I did not come to judge the world, but to save the world.

The one who rejects me and does not receive my words has a judge. The word that I have spoken will judge him on the last day.

For I have not spoken on my own authority, but the Father who sent me has himself given me a commandment, what to say and what to speak. And I know that his commandment is eternal life.

What I say, therefore, I say as the Father has told me. Amen. May God bless these, his words, to us today.

I want to speak for a little about responding to the glory of the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.

[4 : 57] Those of you who have been with us these last few Wednesdays at our Wednesday lunchtime Bible talks, and I know many of you have. If you haven't, then let me invite you next Wednesday to come and join us.

We're here every Wednesday at 115 to 145. But if you've been with us, you know that we've been looking at this passage together in John chapter 12, because here Jesus himself teaches us about the significance of his own death on the cross.

It's what the whole chapter is about. You can see that in verse 33. Everything that he's saying is to explain the kind of death that he was going to die.

Now, we haven't time today to rehearse everything that we've learned so far, but it is important to grasp that, for Jesus at least, his death was a matter of glory.

And his teaching here is all about the glory of the cross. First, he tells us that the cross is a revelation of glory. Indeed, it is the climactic revelation of God's glory in this world.

[6 : 06] He said that the cross would be the hour, the long-awaited hour of ultimate revelation. And in verse 28, you can see the voice from the glory confirmed that.

I will glorify my name again. And I have glorified it in the cross. How so?

Well, because the cross of Jesus brings the restoration of God's glory. The complete restoration of God's glory for this whole world.

Jesus' death, he says in verse 31, judges the sins of this world and casts out Satan, the ruler of this world, and saves God's people in this world and shows them the road to glory.

He will draw all those who follow him after him to share the glory through his salvation. Back in the words that I spoke at the beginning of the service, just a few verses before those on our sheet, Jesus spoke about losing his life as a seed falling into the ground and dying, so that it would bear much fruit.

[7 : 24] And so likewise, Jesus said, whoever loves his life in this world will lose it, but whoever loses his life will keep it for eternal life. Whoever serves me, he says, must follow me.

The challenging road to glory, the road to eternal life, says Jesus, is this road to following him in the way of the cross.

Responding to God's great revelation of himself to us in Christ. And responding to the call of the one who will, at the last, draw all people without exception to stand before him in judgment.

And who now calls all people without distinction to respond to his mercy and to his salvation.

And that's why the whole of this Bible passage that we have before us in the sheets here is about Jesus' demand for a response to God's glory that he has wonderfully revealed in himself and will reveal in the cross.

[8 : 34] Look at verse 36. Believe while you have the light that you might become sons of light, he says. And Jesus says this because his life and his death really does have meaning.

It has ultimate meaning. It has unique meaning. It has eternal meaning. And so it demands a response from every single human being in this world.

You see, as soon as you start saying that kind of thing today, it tends to grate on people, doesn't it? We live in a very secular world, a post-modern world, a world where we've really relegated religion and faith to matters of just, well, people's opinion or preference.

That's just your opinion, people say. Don't foist that on me. That's fine for you to believe that. I don't mind. But just don't foist your beliefs on me. Don't try to make demands on me in my life.

That's our world, isn't it? We want truth to be relative in that way. We don't want to have to deal with troublesome demands on our lives from somebody's belief that we don't want to have to bother with.

[9 : 51] You see, the problem is, friends, that back here on planet Earth, back in the real world, the world as it really is, not the world as we like to concoct it to be for ourselves, back in the real world, there just is such a thing as truth, as true truth, truth that isn't just opinion, truth that isn't just preference, truth that isn't just a relative idea about truth, but truth that is public truth, that is universal truth, that is absolute truth.

And you see, true truth, when it forces itself on the world and on people, is always divisive. Always. And it's always resisted.

That's what the banking crisis is revealing so painfully in our world today. For years and years, bankers and politicians and indeed everybody else have just willfully forgotten that there is such a thing as real economic truth.

And we've all colluded in this idea that things can only get better and that money only gets more and more plentiful, that we go on and on getting more and more rich, that you can just keep borrowing and borrowing, and the more you borrow, the richer you'll get.

And that things like the euro and other things will just save the world. And everybody wants to believe that sort of thing, and so everybody will vote for politicians who offer that sort of thing. And when people stand up and say, that's just not true, and that's just going to lead to disaster, that's very divisive, isn't it?

[11 : 30] We've met with great hostility, great resistance. Because people don't want to believe that kind of truth because of the demands that it makes on us that we just don't want to think about.

Well, the poor people of Cyprus have been met with a very rude awakening to the truth this week, haven't they? And the truth is, the nation is broke.

There's no money. And the sad thing is that it's now too late for a response that will save them from calamity. The damage has been done, and regardless of any EU bailout that will come, the truth is, there's a very dark, dark future for that land and its people for a long time to come.

And I doubt very much whether Cyprus will be the last nation to fail to respond to the harsh medicine of reality before it's too late. Because, you see, truth demands a response.

And in the end, it forces a response. There's no response, abstaining or hiding or sitting on the fence or procrastinating.

[12 : 44] That actually is a response. It's the wrong response. And all these responses, in the end, can lead only to disaster, because they've ignored the truth, because they've ignored the light of solid reality.

And for us, ignoring reality in any area of life can only, in the end, lead to catastrophe. And that is Jesus' point exactly here in these verses, in his last words of public ministry, as he speaks the truth about his own death.

He is saying to us that ignoring ultimate reality will lead to ultimate catastrophe. And so in the last words of his public ministry, he is pleading with people to hear the truth about himself and to respond.

Respond to what he came to do for human beings. To reveal the glory of God and to restore the glory of God in this world. And to lead people in the road to that everlasting glory.

He's pleading with people to respond to the revelation in the cross. To respond before it's too late. before the future becomes immeasurably dark.

[14 : 12] While you have the light, verse 36, believe in the light that you may become sons of light. Jesus' death demands a response.

And whether we realize it or not, friends, every single person in this world will respond one way or another because Jesus says that not to respond positively to his call, not to purposely walk in the light with him, means, do you see verse 35?

It means that you are walking in darkness and that darkness will therefore overtake you ultimately in the end. Sitting on the fence is no protection from ultimate darkness.

That's what he's saying. Well, people, of course, don't like that kind of exclusive and absolute message.

They don't like it today, that's for sure. And they didn't like it then either. And these verses show what happens when Jesus' demands are made over people's lives.

[15 : 20] People try to deflect his demands. And very often, actually, what they do is they appeal to their own sense of religion to do it. That's what you see in verse 34.

It's a pious defense against Jesus. The classic piece of defense against the challenge and the commitment demanded from people by the real gospel of the real Jesus Christ.

They try to fend Jesus off with religion. That might seem a very odd thing to say, but it just goes to show that the message of the real Jesus just does not fit.

Not at all with the comfortable world of human religion. Look at what they're saying in verse 34. It's just the sort of thing that lots of respectable and religious people say today.

We know enough about the Bible, Jesus, they say. We don't recognize any of this fanatical stuff that you're talking about, about this son of man being lifted up. We've been to Sunday school.

[16 : 20] We've grown up in a Christian country. We've had school assemblies. We've had RE. We're quite content with the institutional church. We like the church for weddings and funerals, occasional Christmas or Easter service.

But we don't want any of this fundamentalism that you're on about. Not this fanatical stuff about the Bible and about the cross and about being born again, about denying yourself and following Jesus, about being scorned and hated by the world and doing so.

We don't want any of that sort of thing. We don't want any talk of suffering loss in the world. That's what these people meant, you see, because what they say in verse 34 presupposes two things. It presupposes that they understood exactly what Jesus was talking about when he spoke about being lifted up to die. When he spoke about his glory involving a death, they understood him. And they understood also that he was claiming to be the great son of man, the glorious Messiah. In other words, they grasped his message about who he was and also they understood at least in part about what he was coming to do.

[17 : 41] They just didn't like it. Because they knew that being confronted by the demands of the Messiah, the Christ, in the way Jesus was talking, was not at all the kind of Messiah that they wanted at all.

It was not at all the kind of discipleship and religion that they were interested in. You see, there were people who said yes, happily to the idea of a Messiah, yes, happily to the idea of a king and to eternal life and all those things, but they said, no hearty, no to the real Messiah who had to be a savior from sin, who would be a lord who would call people to follow him and to carry the cross and to bear the shame and the scoffing that he did.

You see, it's yes to thought for the day and songs of praise and the occasional communion service and christenings and weddings and church and that sort of thing, but a hearty no to any sort of evangelical fanaticism, any talk about a Christ who dies for sin, any idea about a God who shows anger and wrath against sin, and certainly nothing to do with having to have guilt of sin taken away. No, no, no, no, no. You'll have to do a lot better than that if you want me to embrace your message, Jesus. That's what many, many people say, even if it's not articulated that way today, isn't it? We're educated, we're sophisticated, we're civilized people. We ask all sorts of clever questions and think that that puts Jesus away.

[19 : 39] You have to give us lots of refined and clever explanations. What kind of son of man, what kind of God is that you want me to believe in? A dying Savior and God, come on.

We know all this stuff. It was just the same back then, no different. Verse 42 is very telling, don't you think?

Some of the religious establishment wanted to believe, but what? they were afraid. They were embarrassed because you don't want to confess in public to being really serious about Jesus Christ too.

You might get put out of the synagogue. You might get put out of polite establishment society. That's just the same today. Others, of course, were told they're, again, just like today, didn't want to believe at all, turned their backs, very happy to have a cloak of spirituality, but certainly not anything that ever interfered with their lives, that challenged their way of life, their own self-glorification, their own pride.

Verse 43, for they loved the glory of man more than the glory that comes from God. very, very little has changed in the world of human beings in 2,000 years.

[21 : 07] Isn't that so? A pious defense. How does Jesus respond, though, to their defenses against this challenge?

Well, if you look at verse 35, you'll see he just doesn't indulge them in answering their pompous questions. instead, in the face of their pious defense, he just gives them a pressing demand. He pierces through their defenses and he puts them right on the spot. Do you see? He puts the spotlight right between their eyes and says, you. Notice, by the way, he's no longer talking in the third person.

He was talking in the third person. If anyone will follow me, he'd say, but now it's you. It's you who are standing in front of me right now, says Jesus. The light is among you just a little while longer. So walk while you have the light. Lest darkness overtake you. You can't hide, he's saying. You can't abstain.

[22 : 15] You must respond, and it's the matter of the most utmost urgency, according to Jesus. Jesus. That's Jesus' answer. He says, you have all the answers you need.

They'd seen all the signs, says verse 37. They'd heard all the words that Jesus had spoken, words that are light and life. And he says, you don't have much time left.

Verse 36, while you have the light, believe in the light. Jesus' death, it demands a response. It's a pressing demand, and it's a demand for an urgent response.

Believe, says Jesus, before it's too late, before disaster overtakes you, before all opportunity is lost forever. Do you see the end of verse 36, how it makes the point so pressingly?

When Jesus had said these things, he departed and he hid himself from them. You see what John's gospel is saying to us, friends? It's saying that there comes a time when either you have to believe and respond to a warning, or it's too late, and disaster will strike.

[23 : 33] It's like shouting to a child when they're playing out on the street and you see a great big lorry coming. This is not the time, is it, for the child to get stropping and say, oh, explain it to me.

Prove it to me. How can I be sure you're right? No, you don't get into an argument. It's time to act. It's time to grab them and jump out of harm's way.

And Jesus, you see, is saying, my gospel and the message of my salvation, one on the cross for sinners, it demands response. You can't presume on it. Believe, he says, lest the darkness overtake you.

And you see, the tragic thing is, friends, the tragic thing is that for many, it did overtake them.

Look at verse 37. Despite all that they'd heard and seen, many, we're told, still did not believe in him. And so ultimately, that light was removed from them and darkness came.

[24 : 40] They would not believe and in the end, do you see verse 39? They could not believe. You see, you can resist the demands of Jesus too long.

And because his demand is the command of God, the Father himself, Jesus is clear about that.

Look at verse 49. He says, he speaks God's words of command.

Because he speaks the words of the Father himself, then to resist is inexcusable. And because, you see, they had hardened their own hearts in unbelief, as verse 37 says, in the end, in the end, God just confirmed the desire of their own hearts, as verse 40 says.

He hardened their hearts so they could not believe. believe. And so there's division. It can't be any other way, can it?

Because in the end, the pressing demand of Jesus forces, forces a response. And there's a division between those who do believe and do obey the voice of God and the person of his Son.

[25 : 58] And so enter light and life and walk in the light of glory. Those who refuse and who are overtaken by darkness.

Whether that refusal is consciously deliberate or whether it's by default, by just abstaining, by apathy, by saying, oh, well, I'll think about that later, another time.

There's a stark division, darkness and light. light. Now notice, friends, that this is a permanent division.

That's a clear message of the whole of that last paragraph, isn't it? Jesus is very clear, this gospel that divides people in history, then, as it does today, also divides people for eternity.

That parting of the ways is a parting that becomes infinite. covenant. Jesus is talking about something very final in these verses. You can see that.

[27 : 04] It's all about judgment on the last day. Look at verse 48. The light and the life that he's talking about is eternal life.

Look at verse 50. His command is eternal life. And therefore also it means that the darkness he's talking about is eternal darkness.

Eternal loss. And you see, to refuse the command of eternal life now, that is to determine now today that this eternal life he's talking about will never be yours.

Look at verse 48. The one who rejects me and does not receive my words has a judge. The word I have spoken to him will judge him on the last day.

Do you see what he's saying? The judgment of the last day is being brought into the present day in the word of the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. And as that gospel divides people in history, so also it will divide people for all eternity.

[28 : 19] friends, that is why Jesus ends his whole public ministry with this urgent cry.

Look at verse 44. He cried out from the heart, whoever believes in me, believes in him who sent me. I've come into the world as light, so that whoever believes in me may not remain in darkness. that's what Jesus came to do in that first Easter. Look at verse 47, not to judge the world, but to save the world.

His death delivers from darkness into light. But his message, it demands a response, a response to the glorious truth of a God who came as Savior, of a God who came to bring us eternal life.

These were Jesus' last words of his public ministry. What if these were Jesus' last ever words to you today?

[29 : 41] today? Don't put up a defense, however pious. Friends, his words to you demand a response today.

Listen one more time. Walk while you have the light, lest darkness overtake you. While you have the light, believe in the light that you may become sons of light.

That is the promise and the command of the God of heaven and earth. And to respond affirming that.

That's the only right and real response to the glorious message of Easter. Father, let's pray.

Heavenly Father, how we thank you that into our world of darkness and confusion and pain and sorrow and death, in the person of your Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, your light has shined.

How we praise you that our sins were cast out at the cross. This ruler of this world was cast down forever at the cross.

[31 : 13] And that our Savior, Jesus, your Son, was lifted up high forever through the cross. That in his reigning life, he calls us now to follow him into that life.

O Lord, may our hearts, every one of us here today, be open to the light of life in our Lord Jesus Christ.

For his name's sake, we ask. Amen.