

The King and his Servants

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 13 April 2014

Preacher: Edward Lobb

[0 : 00] So let's turn now to our Bibles, and I'll read our passage, which is from John's Gospel, chapter 12. John's Gospel, chapter 12.

The Palm Sunday ride, the ride on the donkey into Jerusalem, is told in all four of the Gospels. John's version is quite short, but he says some very interesting things here, which don't come in the other four.

And I've chosen it partly for that reason. So let's turn to John 12, page 899 in our church Bibles, and I will read from verse 9 to verse 26.

John 12, 9 to 26. When the large crowd of the Jews learned that Jesus was there, they came not only on account of him, but also to see Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead.

So the chief priests made plans to put Lazarus to death as well, because on account of him, many of the Jews were going away and believing in Jesus. The next day, the large crowd that had come to the feast, that's the feast of the Passover, heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem.

[1 : 22] So they took branches of palm trees and went out to meet him, crying out, Hosanna, blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, even the King of Israel. And Jesus found a young donkey and sat on it, just as it is written, Fear not, daughter of Zion.

Behold, your king is coming, sitting on a donkey's colt. His disciples did not understand these things at first. But when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered that these things had been written about him and had been done to him.

The crowd that had been with him when he called Lazarus out of the tomb and raised him from the dead, continued to bear witness. The reason why the crowd went to meet him was that they heard he had done this sign.

So the Pharisees said to one another, You see that you're gaining nothing. Look, the world has gone after him. 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.

[2 : 38] 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.

If anyone serves me, he must follow me. And where I am, there will my servant be also. Also, if anyone serves me, the Father will honor him.

This is the word of the Lord, and may it be a blessing to us today. Well, let's turn up in our Bibles, John chapter 12 again, page 898 and 899.

Now, I've chosen this passage from John's Gospel because, I guess it's obvious, today is Palm Sunday, just a week before Easter, and Christian people up and down the country and elsewhere will be reading this passage or one of the parallel passages in one of the other Gospels today.

[4 : 09] And the title I've taken for today is The King and His Servants. The King and His Servants. And in a few minutes, I want us to see from verses 12 to 19 what John the Evangelist tells us about the king.

And then I want us to look at verses 20 to 26 and see what Jesus tells us about his servants. But let me first of all put this passage in its context in John's Gospel.

Always we feel the force of any Bible passage more if we can see the context in which it is set.

Now, John's Gospel is quite a short book, 21 chapters, and towards the end of it, in fact, at the very end of chapter 20, John tells us very clearly why he has written his book.

Some of you will know this very well. Others will not. So let me just say it again. He says this at the end of John 20. This is why he's written his book. Now, Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples which are not written in this book.

But these are written. These particular signs are recorded. So that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

[5 : 23] So John's book is written so as to persuade the reader, the non-Christian reader, to put his or her trust in Jesus as the Christ, which means the Messiah, the anointed king of Israel, of the line of David, and as the Son of God, so that, John goes on, through believing, the reader may come to experience and enjoy eternal life in Christ's name.

So John has a very sharply focused purpose, and he is very direct. He's not messing about with the reader. He's not playing with the reader. His message is simply, put your trust in Christ, and you will have eternal life.

You will have, refuse Christ, and you will not have eternal life. So the question of belief or not belief in Christ, that is the great issue that runs right the way through John's gospel from chapter 1 to chapter 21.

And John tells us in that short passage from chapter 20 that I've just quoted, that it's the signs that the reader must look at and consider. Signs is John's word for miracles.

miracles. And these miracles act to the discerning reader as signposts, if you like, to the identity of Jesus. So as to help us to put our trust in him.

[6 : 37] Now when we get here to chapter 12, Jesus has just performed the seventh and last of these signs. There are seven. It's the raising of Lazarus from the dead. And the account of the raising of Lazarus takes up most of chapter 11.

Lazarus, his friend, whose two sisters were Mary and Martha, they lived in Bethany, Lazarus had been dead and buried for four days. That length of time is emphasized to make the point that he was very dead.

So dead and buried four days. And Jesus came to the graveyard where he was buried and he called him forth from the grave. And you'll see that moment at chapter 11, verses 43 and 44.

When he had said these things, he cried out with a loud voice, Lazarus, come out. That, friends, is the voice that wakes the dead.

Not mine. Jesus says, Lazarus, come out. Verse 44, the man who had died came out, his hands and feet bound with linen strips and his face wrapped with a cloth.

[7 : 42] Jesus said to them, unbind him and let him go. Now that is one of the great moments in John's gospel. It's a foretaste of the future resurrection of all those who die as believers in Christ.

Now look at the next verse in chapter 11, verse 45. Many of the Jews, therefore, who had come with Mary, Lazarus' sister, and had seen what Jesus did, believed in him.

So the raising of Lazarus brought many of these Jews to put their trust in Christ, but not all of them. Because look at the next verse, 46, some of them went straight off to the Pharisees and told them what this terrible man Jesus had just done.

So the chief priests and the Pharisees, they called a meeting of the high council of the Jews, the Sanhedrin. And the upshot of that meeting, look on to verse 53, was a decisive determination on that day to put Jesus to death.

53, so from that day on they made plans to put him to death. So a bridge has been crossed at verse 53. An irreversible decision has been made.

[8 : 51] This Jesus must die. And the chapter closes at verse 57 with the Pharisees giving orders to their henchmen, their police and so on, to look for Jesus and if possible to arrest him.

Now the miracle of the raising of Lazarus stretches its influence well forwards into chapter 12 as well. I used to think that when you got to the end of chapter 11, the Lazarus episode was closed.

But not a bit of it. Chapter 12 opens with a dinner being given for Jesus by Lazarus' two sisters, Martha and Mary. And you'll see in verse 2 that Lazarus himself was present at the table.

We then have the lovely account of Mary pouring some fragrant, expensive ointment on Jesus' feet. We won't get sidetracked into that because I want us to see how John follows up on his theme of the Jews who had put their faith in Jesus on account of the raising of Lazarus from the dead.

So look on to verse 9 in chapter 12. When the large crowd of the Jews learned that Jesus was there, they came not only on account of him but also to see Lazarus.

[10:00] Well, you would want to see him, wouldn't you? If you'd known he'd been dead and there he was alive, you'd be very interested. Also to see Lazarus whom he had raised from the dead. So the chief priests made plans to put Lazarus to death as well because on account of him, many of the Jews were going away and believing in Jesus.

So the news that Lazarus had been raised obviously spread like wildfire around Jerusalem. So a great crowd of Jewish people flocked to Bethany, to the home of Martha and Mary and Lazarus to see Jesus but also to see Lazarus.

The chief priests obviously heard about this further excitement and they made plans to have Lazarus killed as well as Jesus presumably because they thought that if Lazarus was then out of the way it would discredit Jesus.

People might come to the Pharisees and they might say have you heard that Lazarus has been raised? And then they would be able to say if they'd put him to death, they'd say, well yes, there was a silly rumor about that but haven't you read the obituary columns in the Jerusalem Times today?

Lazarus, God rest his soul, passed away yesterday suddenly at Bethany. Must have been a heart attack, so sudden. Poor Martha, poor Mary. But the influence of the Lazarus miracle stretches on into the account of Jesus' ride into Jerusalem on the donkey as well.

[11:21] Did you notice there are two crowds mentioned here? First of all in verse 12, there's the large crowd which had come to the feast of the Passover to Jerusalem.

The regular crowd of pilgrims who always flocked into Jerusalem at that time of year, end of March, early April, just about this time of the year. They heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem and it was they who took the palm branches and cried out, Hosanna, as Jesus rode into the city on the donkey.

But there's a second crowd mentioned in verse 17. The crowd that had been with him when he called Lazarus out of the tomb and raised him from the dead continued to bear witness, continued to blab, if you like, about Jesus having raised Lazarus from the dead.

The reason why the crowd went to meet him was that they heard he had done this sign, raising Lazarus. So while that first crowd were there anyway because it was Passover time, the second crowd had come to see Jesus because they'd heard that he'd raised Lazarus.

And many of them, as we learned back in chapter 11, verse 45, came to believe in Jesus because of this great miracle. All of which led to the Pharisees eventually in chapter 12, verse 19, saying to each other in utter disgust and frustration, you see, you're gaining nothing.

[12:47] Look, the whole world has gone after him. In other words, our world, our little empire is falling apart. This charlatan, this maverick Nazarene is undercutting and undermining everything that we stand for.

Verse 19 surely is a study in angry frustration, isn't it? They're absolutely sick of what's been going on. Now, I've gone into the Lazarus miracle in introducing the Palm Sunday ride for two reasons. First of all, to show that the issue throughout is the question of belief in Jesus. To believe or not to believe, that is the question. In Hamlet, it's to be or not to be, isn't it?

But in John's gospel, it's to believe or not to believe. Eternal life hangs on the question of believing in Jesus or not believing in him. But my second reason for looking at the Lazarus episode and its consequences is to help us to see the kind of pressure that Jesus himself was under at this stage. This ride into Jerusalem on the donkey with the crowds clapping and cheering was not like, let's say, the Manchester United football team. Turn the clock back a year or so.

[14:02] Things are different for the poor old Reds, aren't they, just at the moment. But think of them a year or two in their pomp and glory when they might return from Europe having won some great Cup Winners' Cup or Champions League or whatever it is.

And there they are on an open-top bus riding around the center of Manchester. Everyone's clapping and celebrating their return. Now, in a scenario like that, the footballers are in no danger at all. It's pure celebration and pure enjoyment and all the happy Mancunians are doing cartwheels in the street because the Reds have done it again. Not so with Jesus.

He is riding here into the lion's mouth and he knows it. As he says in verse 23, the hour has come. Indeed, it had.

He'd been preparing for this all along. He'd been teaching his uncomprehending disciples for two or three years that the Son of Man must be betrayed and delivered into the hands of the Jewish

leaders, the priests and the Pharisees, to be rejected and condemned and then put to death.

[15:07] Jesus was not deceived by the applause of the crowd. Ride on, ride on, in majesty, as all the crowds Hosanna cry through waving branches slowly ride, O Savior, to be crucified.

So he knew full well on this Sunday morning where he was going to be five days later. He had said to his disciples back in John chapter 10, for this reason, the Father loves me because I lay down my life that I may take it up again.

No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and I have authority to take it up again.

So he rode into Jerusalem clear-sighted, purposefully determined to lay down his life so that you and I should not be eternally lost.

His death is the price of our eternal life. Well, let's look more closely at our passage and we'll look first in verses 12 to 19 at the king who has come to establish peace.

[16:18] We'll look at his servants later, but we'll look first at the king who has come to establish peace. Now, let's look carefully at verses 13, 14, and 15 because the strength and interest of these verses lies in the details.

Palm branches. Look at that in verse 13. Now, palm branches apparently had come to symbolize a kind of Jewish nationalism and various things and various things can come to symbolize nationalism in nations.

Do you remember that moment when Mr. Salmond took a Scottish saltire at Wimbledon last summer on the first Sunday in July, it must have been. Andy Murray had just won the men's singles final and Mr. Salmond picked up the saltire and did this with it, I think, and Mr. Cameron was sitting about two rows below him.

Looking at the two faces there, it was a study in human irony. Now, the palm branch in Jerusalem at that stage was a bit like the Scottish saltire in the hands of a Scottish nationalist like Mr. Salmond. It was a potent symbol that was always potentially making a bid for independence. The palm branch was really saying we want to be independent of the Romans. When you think of the Jews in Israel in 30 or 31 AD, they were a nation subjugated by the Romans.

[17:34] They were allowed various privileges. They were allowed to keep their temple and its regular worship. They were allowed to keep their royal family, the Herods, although the Herods had no real power. Rome had the real power in the land.

But the Jews hoped that one day a liberator Messiah would be sent to them who would free them from their servitude to the dreadful Roman Empire. So when Jesus appeared and when Jesus began to demonstrate supernatural powers over sickness, over demons, and in the case of Lazarus and one or two others, even over death itself, people began to ask, could this be the Christ? Could this be the political liberator Christ? Now here we are in John chapter 12, just a few days before the Passover. And the Passover was a major Jewish festival and huge numbers of Jews would flock into Jerusalem every year.

Possibly, I've read, hundreds of thousands of pilgrim visitors coming into Jerusalem. So there would have been a heightened sense of Jewish nationhood and, if you like, nationalism.

Now look carefully at verses 13 and 14. As Jesus comes to Jerusalem, initially it seems, on foot, initially on foot, that's when the crowds begin to wave their palm branches, their saltires, if you like, and they start to cry out some words from Psalm 118, which was a psalm often used at the major festivals.

[19:01] And quoting from the psalm, they shout, Hosanna, which literally means give salvation now. And then they shout, and they're still quoting from the psalm, blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.

And then they add, and this doesn't come in the psalm, even the king of Israel. So they're taking the familiar and rather nationalistic words of Psalm 118, and in their whipped up and frenzied state of mind, they're adding their own further shout, this is our king, this is the king of Israel, this is our Messiah, this is our liberator.

But at that point of fervor and excitement, Jesus does something which might have dampened their enthusiasm considerably. Look at verse 14. He finds a young donkey and sits on it and continues to journey into the city.

Now just imagine the crowds, perhaps lining the street 10 or 20 deep. And imagine two friends who are at the very back of the crowd trying to watch, straining their eyes to see what's going on in the

road.

But there are so many people they can only get a glimpse. And one says to the other, what can you see, Benji? And Benji replies, I think, Ruben, he's mounting an animal, an animal.

[20 : 20] Really? Is it a white stallion? Is it 17 hands tall? Does it have a neck like thunder? I'm not sure. I can't really see. I keep looking. Yes, yes, now he's just coming into view.

You could knock me down with a feather. I can hardly believe it. He's riding a donkey. A donkey? Yes. D-O-N-K-E-Y.

Now, verse 16 tells us that the disciples didn't understand what all this meant at the time. So if the disciples didn't understand what it meant, then certainly the crowds would have been clueless. But John explains it to us in verse 15 by telling us that Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a donkey so as to fulfill a prophecy from Zechariah chapter 9.

There it is in verse 15. Fear not, daughter of Zion, and behold, your king is coming sitting on a donkey's coat. Now, friends, I think it would be helpful for us to turn to Zechariah 9 just for a minute or two.

[21 : 28] And you'll find that on page 797. 797. The relevant section is not just verse 9.

That's the one that's really quoted or at least part of it is quoted. But the relevant section is verses 9, 10, and 11. So let me read, well, you've looked at verse 9.

Let me read verses 10 and 11. I, this is the Lord speaking, I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim and the war horse from Jerusalem, and the battle bow shall be cut off, and he shall speak peace to the nations.

His rule shall be from sea to sea and from the river, that's the river Euphrates, to the ends of the earth. As for you also, because of the blood of my covenant with you, I will set your prisoners free from the waterless pit.

Now, when a New Testament writer quotes a verse from the Old Testament, the New Testament writer, like John, is assuming that the reader will take note not only of the actual quoted verse, but also of the larger passage and the context in which that verse is set.

[22 : 39] So John the evangelist is virtually assuming that the interested reader of his 12th chapter will quickly reach for Zechariah chapter 9, as we've just done, and we'll have a look at the context. So what do we find in these verses that's going to help us to understand what John is saying about Jesus?

Let's notice three things here in Zechariah 9, 9, 10, and 11. First, the king of Jerusalem is gentle and humble. The word humble is used there, you see, in verse 9.

And the fact that he is mounted on a donkey, even a donkey's colt, and not on a great mighty charger, shows how humble he is. Let me put this in modern terms.

If a ruler is riding into a city on top of a huge tank and looking out through the gun turret with the great gun pointing forwards, you know that that ruler, his message to the city is, I'm coming here as a warrior.

You'd better do what I say. But if a ruler comes into a city driving a Fiat Panda or possibly riding a bicycle, he is saying, I'm coming in peace.

[23 : 48] Jesus' donkey is a Fiat Panda. He's saying, I'm not coming into Jerusalem as a firebrand warlord. Yes, I am the king of Israel, but I'm a gentle king.

In the words of verse 10, I'm cutting off, I'm eradicating the chariot and the war horse and the battle bow. I'm not that kind of king. If you thought I was, you must think again.

So there's the first thing, he's humble. Secondly, this gentle king, as the second half of verse 10 puts it in Zechariah 9, this king will speak peace to the nations.

Now that is the Gentile nations. Remember what Paul says in Ephesians 2, Jesus came and preached peace to you who were far off and to you who were near.

Peace to the far off Gentiles and peace to the nearby Jews. Zechariah is saying just the same thing more than 500 years beforehand. Peace to the Gentile nations.

[24 : 48] Now the Gentiles were always going to be included in the scope of Christ's salvation. And if that were not so, you and I would not be in this building today doing what we're doing.

Peace to the nations, to the Gentiles. And as verse 10 puts it, his rule will eventually be universal from sea to sea, from the Pacific to the Atlantic, and from the river Euphrates right to the ends of the earth, which is why at this very moment there are churches in Alaska and Vladivostok and Kinloch Berwi and such places.

And those last two phrases in verse 10 are themselves a quotation from Psalm 72, which was already a few centuries old in Zechariah's time.

So John, in quoting from Zechariah 9, is making the point that the prophecies of the scriptures are themselves cumulatively fulfilled and they find their full and final fulfillment in King Jesus.

This is the humble king of Israel, John is saying, whose salvation will include Gentiles as well as Jews. Now thirdly, from verse 11 in Zechariah 9, this gentle donkey-mounted king will set prisoners free from the waterless pit.

[26 : 03] Now that's a picture of imminent destruction. If you're in a waterless pit, you haven't got long to live. So he will set them free from death because of the blood of God's covenant.

That's what verse 11 says. So here is Jesus riding into Jerusalem on a Sunday morning knowing that in four days' time he's going to be lifting up a cup and saying to his disciples, drink this, for this is my blood of the new covenant which is shed for you.

And knowing that one day after that on the Friday his blood would indeed be shed as the means of setting many prisoners free from the power of death. So turning back now to John chapter 12, we can assume that John has all this in mind as he includes this slender quotation from Zechariah chapter 9.

And then John writes this very interesting verse 16. His disciples did not understand these things at first but when Jesus was glorified then they remembered that these things had been written about him and had been done to him.

Now John of course was one of those very disciples himself. He was one of the apostles. So he's really saying here all of us, Peter, James, me, the others, we couldn't make head or tail of this Palm Sunday ride at the time.

[27 : 27] But later when Jesus was glorified, that is to say after his crucifixion, his resurrection and his ascension to glory, the glorification is not in the cross only, it's in that whole sequence of events that took Jesus finally back to his native glory.

After all that, says John, we understood finally how his actions were the fulfillment of Zechariah chapter 9. Now friends, just on a personal level, don't you find that very encouraging that dim perceptions of Bible truth can be followed by clearer understanding?

That's going to happen to people like us again and again if we keep reading our Bibles thoughtfully. Now I know that in the case of John and the other apostles, they had the promise given to them, to the apostles, by Jesus in John 16 that when the Holy Spirit came, he would enable them to understand everything about Jesus so that they could then authoritatively teach the church about Jesus.

So they have a special role. But in a lesser way, the same thing happens to us and it should mean that the Bible becomes more and more wonderful to us as the years pass because we come to see how astonishingly the whole thing fits together and how it all comes to fulfillment in the person and achievements of the Lord Jesus.

You might think, mightn't you, that reading the Bible ought to become more boring as you get to know it better because familiarity perhaps breeds contempt. But the truth is quite the opposite.

[28 : 59] The business of studying the Bible when you're a young Christian can seem to be rather a chore. But it can grow and should grow into a delight and a joy more and more. Just think of John here studying Zechariah 9 and being able to see that it was fulfilled the moment when Jesus mounted that donkey and rode into Jerusalem.

What joy John must have had as he traced the finger of God working out his purposes through those many centuries. Well, there's something about the king.

The king who has come to establish peace, our King Jesus. He's gentle and humble. He's come to proclaim peace to the Gentiles, those who were the dogs, the outsiders, people like us.

And by the blood of God's covenant, he releases those who are dying in the waterless pit, those who are under sentence of death. Good friends. Ready for just a little bit more?

Let me take a sip of water just to... The hydration of the brain is... I'm told good for the brain. That's better. Well, let's move on now from the king to his servants, his servants in verses 20 to 26.

[30 : 10] We won't be quite so long over this. Now, the thing that characterizes his servants here is that they learn to die. They learn to die.

Now, the great words of Jesus in verses 23 to 26 are triggered by an unexpected event. And that is, in verse 20, the arrival of some Greeks.

Now, Greeks doesn't necessarily mean that they had actually come from the country of Greece. It may simply mean that they were Greek-speaking Gentiles. Greece was very influential in the ancient world and there were centers of Greek culture and Greek language all over the Mediterranean area and the language was widely spoken.

But these people were certainly Gentiles and that's the important thing about them. They find Philip and they put their request to him, Sir, we wish to see Jesus.

Jesus. And the verb really means not simply we want to look at him with our eyes but we want to have an interview with him. We want to talk with him. So what is happening here?

[31 : 14] Well, do you remember Paul's famous motto which he quotes three or possibly four times in Romans? To the Jew first and also to the Greek.

Now, think of John's gospel here. At this stage in the gospel, the Jewish leaders have reached the point of utterly rejecting Jesus. Chapter 11, verse 53, from that day on they determined to put him to death.

As John puts it, in the opening chapter of his gospel, he came to his own people but his own people received him not. But the rejection of Jesus by the Jews opens the gateway to the Gentiles.

So here in chapter 12, the Jews are shutting the door in the face of Jesus at verse 19 and in the very next verse, verse 20, some Greeks appear anxious to meet Jesus and to find out who he is. And it's this hinge moment that precipitates the words of Jesus in verse 23, the hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. In other words, the events that are going to open the door to the Gentiles are now beginning.

[32 : 24] And those events, the cross, the resurrection, and the ascension to glory are now relentlessly underway. The hour has come. And when Jesus speaks in verse 24, he's surely thinking in the first instance of his own imminent death.

Look at verse 24. 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.

Now that, of course, is a straightforward piece of agricultural knowledge. And John's readers, who were all brought up close to the soil, immediately would have understood him. You can't get a beautiful ear of wheat carrying 20 or 30 or 40 grains unless you first sow one grain into the soil.

And once that grain is in the soil, it rots and disappears, and then the strong green plant grows out of it. If the grain dies, the consequence is great fruitfulness.

But if the grain does not die, nothing happens at all. That's the same with any sowing of seeds. I've been this week planting my potatoes, and I grow them in my garden every year.

[33 : 36] And when I dig up the lovely new potatoes in the summer, I always find nestling amongst the roots the rotten shell of the seed potato, just a little husk, usually with some squidgy, nasty stuff in the middle.

It's the death of the one potato that produces the many. So in verse 24, Jesus is looking with clear, steady eyes at his own forthcoming death, and he's teaching Philip and Andrew, who have brought the request of these Greeks to him, what his voluntary self-sacrifice is going to mean.

And that is great fruitfulness, great blessing through his death. And when you think of the countless millions of people who've put their trust in Christ over the last 20 centuries, you can begin to grasp something of the great fruitfulness that Jesus is talking about in verse 24.

But as soon as we get to verse 25, he broadens the scope of this process of fruitfulness through death, and he applies the principle to each and every one of his followers.

So look at verse 25. Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. So it's not just for Jesus to die.

[34 : 54] He is teaching all of us to be willing to lose our lives in this world so as to keep them for eternity. Now, friends, we can't really get closer to the heart of what it means to be a follower of Christ than we do here in verses 24, 25, and 26.

So just forget everything else for the next five minutes as we work away at these two verses. First, to be a Christian involves at one level a loss of identity.

This grain of wheat that falls into the earth loses its shape, its color, its character, its everything. It rots away and disappears. Its place is taken by something glorious and fruitful, something far better. But the grain of wheat itself must die. Now, what this means for us is that the sense of self of which we're naturally proud needs to rot away and disappear.

And that sense of self is something which shows itself up in many different guises. There can be, for example, a sense of family pride. I belong to the McNeils of Barra.

[36 : 07] I don't personally. I belong, somebody says, to the McNeils of Barra. Or somebody else says, I belong to the Campbells of Argyle, that famous clan. I belong to the Lobs of Cornwall, that infamous clan.

There can be a sense, can't there, of pride in our family history, our name. There can be a sense of pride in our achievements. I've been a master cabinet maker, I shouldn't say it myself, for the last 45 years.

Somebody else says, I've been called the best bassoon player in the whole of Scotland. Now, friends, it's good to play the bassoon well. And there's no shame in bearing the name Campbell or Lobb.

But the question is, am I willing to sit loose to my precious sense of who I am and what I am? If I'm not willing to sit loose to all that, it means that I'm enthroning myself.

I become my own little center of attention, my own little God. And my life ends up being all about me, about my ambitions, and my reputation, my plans, my powers and abilities, my pleasures, my likes and my dislikes.

[37 : 14] And if that's the case about me, it means that the grain of wheat, which is me, has not fallen into the ground or died. It's still intact. But where is it?

Look at verse 24. It remains alone, says Jesus. To serve the God of self is to be ultimately and finally isolated. It's an ugly way to live and it's a gruesome way to die.

The world around us, society around us, presses us to live for ourselves and to serve at the altar of self-gratification. But how would we rather live? With a desperate struggle for self-preservation becoming harder and harder as life goes on, ending up in aloneness?

Or with a glad rejection of the demands of self so that we can serve the Lord Jesus and be enduringly fruitful. But if there's a loss of identity at one level, following Christ, secondly, involves the discovery of the most glorious way of life, the very lifestyle that we were made for.

Let me read verse 26 again. 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.

[38 : 35] And you see, twice in that verse, Jesus says, if anyone serves me. So let's look at both of these times. First, if anyone serves me, he must follow me.

Must. He must follow me. There's a necessary connection between serving Christ and following Christ. So what does Jesus mean by following him?

He means simply that each stage in his own pattern must be repeated in our experience. So what is his pattern? It is this simply.

To die, to be raised, to be glorified. Look at the middle of the verse. Where I am, there, my servant will be also.

So, when I am put to death, my servant will be there with me. He or she will also learn to die, like the grain of wheat that disappears under the soil. And then, when I am raised from death, my servant will be with me at my side, sharing my resurrection, walking in newness of life.

[39 : 41] And then, thirdly, when I am taken to heaven, to glory, my servants will be with me again, inhabiting the glory for which they were always destined. It is the necessary and unavoidable thing that we share every stage with him.

That is what it means to follow him. There is no resurrection and no glory for us without first dying to the rule of self. And indeed, that may involve being prepared to die physically for the sake of Christ if we were called upon to do that.

As I look around this room with different nations and so on represented, it would be surprising if not one of us was called to lay down his or her life physically for Christ. So, the true servant of Christ must follow in the same pattern.

But just look at the joy in the next phrase. Where I am, my servant will be also. That's what makes the dying bearable. We're with him. We're in the best company.

The person who lives for self is alone, as verse 24 puts it. But the person who dies to self is with Christ. It would be madness not to want to be with him.

[40 : 50] The dying is worth it. Now, finally, the last phrase. If anyone serves me, the Father will honor him.

Now, Jesus doesn't explain here whether the honoring is in this life as well as in the world to come. It may be both, but I suspect that it's primarily in the world to come that the Father will honor the servants of Christ.

After all, servants of Christ tend to receive more dishonor in this world than praise. To think of the world to come. The Father there will honor the servant of Christ who has been willing to die to self. The Father, in effect, will say to the servant of Christ, come in and sit here at table with me in the kingdom of heaven. Look with joy at your Savior whose self-sacrifice has brought you here and look around with joy at the great company of all those from every nation and tribe and tongue who have also been rescued by Christ.

And then to pick up that phrase from the book of Revelation, he will, so to speak, take out the divine handkerchief and wipe away every tear from the eyes of all his servants.

[42 : 05] Those tears that came because of the dying to self, because of the difficulty of serving him and being unashamed of him and of his words in a godless world, it will all be taken away.

Isn't that something you look forward to? To be honored by the Father. Little Joe soap. Little Josephine soap. It's you and me to be honored by the Father.

It seems extraordinary, but it's what the Lord Jesus is promising to the one who serves him and follows him. The one who dies with him will be raised with him and will be glorified with him.

Let's pray together. Our dear Lord Jesus, we thank you so much that your salvation is a comprehensive and wonderful thing.

And on this day, we look forward to the glory. We look forward to that promised new creation where we shall be with you, where every tear will be wiped away from every eye and how we praise you for it.

[43 : 21] Give us grace, Lord Jesus, to die in the way that you are asking us to. We think of the way that you yourself did not shun death, but indeed embraced it for our sake.

And we pray that you'll help us to be willing to lose our identity at the level of our humanity so that we can be part of you and can be unashamed to serve you throughout the days of our life.

So we thank you and we ask these things for your dear namesake. Amen. Amen. Amen.