

2. The Road to Glory

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Preacher: William Philip

[0 : 00] Well, let's sit and turn to our Bibles, and we're going to read again some verses from John chapter 12. John chapter 12, that's page 899 in the Bibles, 899.

And once again, we're looking at this second half of the chapter, reading the middle part today, verse 20 down to verse 36. John 12, verse 20.

Now, among those who went up to worship at the feast were some Greeks, Gentiles. So these came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and asked him, Sir, will you wish to see Jesus?

Philip went and told Andrew, and Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus. And Jesus answered them, The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.

Truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone. But if it dies, it bears much fruit.

[1 : 11] 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.

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.

[2 : 18] 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's going. While you have the light, believe in the light, so that you may become sons of light.

As we keep our Bibles open, let's bow our heads in prayer. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we thank you that you have spoken your words to us.

Words which are indeed light and life. And so, Lord, as we gather in this lunchtime hour, we pray that you would indeed speak these words of life and light to our hearts this day.

[3 : 25] Open our eyes and the eyes of our hearts, that we might behold wonderful things out of this your law. For we ask it in Jesus' name.

Amen. I hope the microphone is going to behave. But if you find you can't hear me, then wave your hands. And then we shall try and do something about it, even if it just means I have to shout.

Keep your Bibles open at John 12. We're looking at these chapters and these verses where Jesus is explaining himself what his death is really all about.

Verse 33. He's talking about the kind of death that he was going to die. He's not giving a description of crucifixion.

Now, we know that that was a terrible death, an agonizing death, a humiliating death. But it's rather significant, actually, that neither in the Gospels nor in the Epistles is much focus given to the physical description of crucifixion with all its horrors.

[4 : 32] That's not what the Bible writers are really interested in. What interests them and what interests Jesus in his own focus on the cross is the kind of death he's going to die in terms of what that death is all about.

What this death declares to the world and what this death does for the world. It's the significance of Jesus' death that is all important in what Jesus records for us here in his own words.

Just days. Just days before he was about to go to the cross. Now, last time, in the first of our new lunchtime talks here on this chapter, we focused on verse 23.

Do you see it? Jesus' death was supremely a revelation of glory.

Indeed, it was the climactic revelation of God's glory to this world in Jesus Christ and in the cross of Jesus Christ. That is where you will see the true glory of the God who made this whole universe.

[5 : 44] That is where you will see it revealed uniquely and ultimately to this whole world. In the cross. That's where God revealed his glory to the Jews.

And, as verse 20 points out to us so carefully, also to the Greeks, to the Gentile world. This is where the whole world sees the glory of its creator.

That is, everybody who is seeking the truth about God in this world, anybody who is looking for the meaning of life and the understanding of the divine, will find it here.

And, indeed, only here. Not in an amalgam of truth from all kinds of different religions, nor in any one of the religions of man. But in this person, in Jesus Christ alone, and at the cross of Jesus alone, this is where you will see the glory of the God who made you and made everything else in this universe.

And this is where, at last, you can come to know God. Where you can find God. If you want to understand the true glory of God, the God who made you and the God who will judge you, then this is where you will find the answer.

[7 : 09] In the cross of Jesus. That's why the apostles were very clear that the only true Christian gospel is the gospel of the cross.

We preach Christ crucified, said Paul. Yes, it may be a stumbling block to Jews. It was then. It is today. Yes, it may be foolishness to the Greeks, to the rest of the Gentile world.

But it alone is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes. Because the cross is the climactic revelation of God's glory to this world.

But today I want to focus our eyes on verses 24 to 26. Because Jesus also clearly tells us that the cross is likewise the road to glory, as well as the revelation of glory.

The cross and the cross alone defines the costly road to glory and to finding God's glory in this world and in the world to come.

[8 : 22] The cross that declares the true glory of God to us is also the cross that must define the true people of God, who they are and what they're like.

You see in verse 24, Jesus speaks of his own death as a death that must happen in order to achieve a great salvation, in order that he might bear great fruit.

And we're going to look at that in particular next time. But look how Jesus goes straight on in verses 25 and 26. He says that the manner and nature of his death sets an irrevocable pattern for everyone who would follow him, for all who would be his true people.

Verse 26, whoever serves me, he says, must follow me. Jesus' death sets a defining pattern for his people. And he tells us that it does that in two clear ways.

First of all, the pattern of Jesus' death is the pattern or the definition for real saving faith. It's the only road to that glorious salvation promised from God.

[9 : 33] But second, the pattern of Jesus' death is also the pattern or the definition for real fruitful service. It's the only road to glorifying service for God in this world.

So first let's think of this first thing, the defining pattern of our salvation. Jesus says that to live with Jesus, we also have to embrace death with Jesus.

Verse 25, whoever loves his life loses it. And whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. Now what does that mean? Well let's notice that Jesus is talking all the way through this passage about a stark either-or choice, isn't he?

It's very, very clear. Either, verse 25, you love life in this world or you hate it. That is, you see it as utterly insignificant in comparison with the eternal life that Jesus offers us.

Well look down to verse 35. Either, verse 35, you continue to walk in the darkness. Do you see? Or, verse 36, you believe in the light and you become sons of light.

[10 : 52] Darkness and light. Or, if you look right down to verse 46, the bottom of the page, either you believe in Jesus and you are not condemned to remain in darkness, or, turn over the page, verse 48, or you will be condemned on the last day because you have not received Jesus' word.

Darkness or light. Condemned, not condemned. Death, life. It's an either-or choice in all of these things that Jesus is speaking about.

It's that choice that he puts before everyone who he challenges to follow him. So his death sets a pattern, a defining pattern for what it means to find salvation, to find the light, to be found not condemned on the last day.

And the pattern that Jesus puts before us is the pattern of death. A pattern of giving up completely and utterly the cherished life and loves that we have in this world.

And to follow Jesus through that death and into the glory of an eternal life that is to come. You must die with Jesus, he says, if you're to keep your life for eternity.

[12 : 19] Whoever hates his life will keep it for eternal life. And there's no other way to glory, says Jesus, because death to this world is true glory.

It's Jesus' death that defines that true glory. And therefore it's the pattern of a death like his that defines the costly road to that glory for all his followers.

It's the road to the cross that is the road to true salvation. And whoever would follow Jesus must seek the same kind of glory that he sought.

Where I am, there will my servant be. Verse 26. And Jesus was always saying that sort of thing, wasn't he? Mark chapter 8. You must deny yourself and take up your cross and follow me if you want to be where I'm going to be.

But again, what does that really mean? Well, it means this very simply. You can either be in love with your own life in this world or you can be in love with Jesus and the life eternal that he offers.

[13 : 35] It's one or the other. It can't be both. That's what Jesus says. Now we think to ourselves, it can't be as extreme as that.

Can it? It can't be as black and white as that. Life is never black and white. But Jesus is pretty black and white here. You can't be more extreme, can you, than life on the one hand and death on the other.

You see, we know. We know that this is really the nub of the issue, don't we? And that is the reason, of course, why there are many, many people who are drawn to Jesus and who are warm to the message of Jesus and who are warm to Jesus himself but who hold back from wholehearted discipleship and following Jesus because of the costliness of that death.

That may be true of some of us here in this room today because all of us love our lives, don't we? And why not we say, well, we say, I have abilities, I've got ambitions, things I love to do.

Why shouldn't I achieve all of these things? Or I've got wealth, I've got time, I've got interests, I've got hobbies, I want to indulge them, I want to prosecute all of these things.

[14 : 57] Nothing wrong with that, surely. Or I've got family, I've got friends, I've got people to live for, I've got things to invest in. What's wrong with that? Or a thousand things beside that we fill our lives with and we love and we cherish.

We would never want to give them up. What's wrong with that? I mean, if I'm not a criminal, if I'm not an immoral person, if I'm not a violent person, what's wrong with doing and devoting my life to what I want to do?

And you may feel when you read Jesus speaking in such an extreme way, you may feel like saying, well, why are you getting at me like that, Jesus?

I've got a life. Surely you don't want me to give up all of these things. But Jesus just calmly says, yes, you have got a life.

But whoever loves his life loses it. If you really want life, eternal life, the only life that counts, then all of those things that you love and cherish have got to be handed over to me for my safekeeping.

[16 : 20] And there's no guarantee that you'll have any of it back, at least not in the way that you want it. You've got to be willing to bury it.

You've got to be willing to fill in that grave and cover it over. Or else you can't have the life that I'm offering you. It's pretty stark, isn't it?

That's why it's called faith, isn't it? Trust. Because you don't give away anything to somebody unless you really trust the word of the one who's asking for it.

unless you trust them that in return they're going to give you back something far, far greater. I mean, you'd be a fool, wouldn't it? Wouldn't you? To hand over all your savings to somebody for some investment scheme that sounds absolutely beyond belief.

If you didn't utterly trust them and think that they're going to give you back your money with interest. Well, actually, I suppose people do, don't they? People put their money in the bank in Cyprus.

[17 : 21] They weren't expected to get it pinched off by the European Union. But you see, that's the thing. That is what Jesus is asking from us if we're to follow him.

Total trust with all of our lives. And that is what stops so many people from following Jesus because, in the end, they don't really trust him.

That was the rich young ruler, wasn't it, in Mark chapter 10. He went away sorrowful. Why? Because he had great possessions. He didn't trust Jesus to hand these things over and for Jesus really, really to give him more, wonderfully and abundantly, in the life that he promised.

But Jesus' death is the defining pattern. It's the only road to the glory of God.

Jesus trusted his father to lead him through death to glory and he calls us to trust him in exactly the same way. There is no other way. If we would live with Jesus, he says, we must die with Jesus.

[18 : 45] I wonder if you really do trust Jesus with your life like that. But Jesus' death sets a pattern in a second way.

It's not just the only road to a glorious salvation. It's not just the defining pattern for our salvation, but also it is the defining pattern for our service. It's the only road to glorifying service for Jesus.

If eternal life costs us everything in this life, if it means losing our life by death to the world with Jesus, then similarly, fruitfulness in the Christian life also will cost us everything.

Verse 24, unless a seed falls into the ground and dies, it does not bring forth fruit. Not any fruit. But if it does, then it bears much fruit.

And if we would live for Jesus, then our lives of service must also be defined by his life of service. And he lived always in the shadow of the cross.

[19 : 54] See, real fruitfulness for Jesus comes not from having exciting or dramatic spiritual experiences. It doesn't come from being exceptionally gifted.

It doesn't come from having all the latest and greatest new ways of prospering the church or whatever it might be. Real fruitfulness, Jesus says, comes only one way.

It comes by sharing in the glory of Jesus' suffering and death. And that can't but be painful, can it? It can't but be hard.

It can't but be costly. And that's Jesus' whole point. You ask a farmer how he gets a fruitful yield. It's not by magic. It's by hard slog, isn't it? Planting and feeding and weeding and sowing.

You ask any gardener how they get a beautiful garden of flowers in the summer. Well, it's not just by walking out on a summer's day and it's all there. It's getting out and the wet and the wind and the rain and the springtime.

[20 : 56] Doing the work. Battling against the elements. And Jesus is saying that it's through the daily struggling with our inward weaknesses and with outward opposition.

All the things that we will face in the Christian life. The attacks of the enemy, the devil. It's through the living death, if you like, of all of these things that we will produce fruit.

Paul says in 2 Corinthians 4 that we die daily. That we're always being given over to death for Jesus' sake. So that death is at work in us but life might be at work in others.

It's death that produces fruit. And friends, you need to know that if you're a follower of Jesus. As a challenge to know that that is the only way for fruitfulness in the Christian life.

But also, also as an encouragement. Because if you're struggling, battling away in your Christian life, seeking to be faithful to Jesus and finding it hard and feeling sometimes that it's like being killed again.

[22 : 13] This is killing me to be faithful to Jesus. Don't you say that sometimes? In your struggle? Do you see the encouragement that Jesus gives us here? That's not a sign of failure.

That's not a sign of unfruitfulness in your Christian life. If that were true, you wouldn't be struggling at all. Jesus says, no, that is the road to glorifying service in my kingdom.

Because this is the pattern for fruitfulness in serving Jesus. If the seed dies, it bears much fruit. If anyone serves me, verse 26, he must follow me.

And that means following the pattern of my earthly life. But look, that path is the path and the only path that leads to the glory where Jesus now is.

Verse 26, where I am, there my servant will be also. The servant who follows me along that hard and bitter and thorny path.

[23 : 24] And you see, if anyone serves me, the Father will honor him. Isn't that wonderful to know? Isn't that liberating to know when Satan tempts you to despair?

That was the only way for Jesus. And it's the only way for those who follow Jesus. Because Jesus wants us to be sons of light.

He wants to be sons like our elder brother, the Lord Jesus himself. Sons who pray like the elder brother. Father, glorify your name. Jesus' death is the road to truly glorifying service of God.

It's the pattern for all of our Christian service. Verse 27, he prays not, Father, save me from this hour, save me from this death, but rather, this death is why I came.

That's the way of faithfulness and of fruitfulness. That's what it means to live a life that leads to glory. That's what it means to live a life of redemptive power.

[24 : 36] That, for Jesus, was the life that drew the world to him, that glorified God in his great salvation. And that same defining pattern will be there always in the lives of every disciple who lives to glorify the Father and who lives to draw others to see the glory of the Father.

It can't be any other way, can it, than to mirror the way of the Lord himself because it's the cross that defines the road to glory.

The pattern of Jesus' death defines real saving faith. Verse 25, whoever loses his life, whoever loves his life will lose it, but whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternity.

There is no other road to the glory of eternal life than the road of death with Jesus. And the pattern of Jesus' life likewise defines real serving fruitfulness.

service. Unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone, but if it dies, it bears much fruit. If anyone serves me, he must follow me.

[25 : 58] And where I am, there my servant will be also. There's no other road to faithful service than the road that Jesus walked.

So friends, the cross is the road to glory, to all glory in this world and the world to come. It's the only road.

So the challenge to us today is this, will we walk that road to glory with Jesus, to serve his glory and ultimately to share his glory?

glory. That's what the gospel calls us to do. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, how we thank you that you call us to walk with you and you promise that where you are, every servant who has trodden the way of the cross with you shall at last be.

So strengthen us and guard us and keep us walking with you until the day of your glorious coming. For we ask it in Jesus' name.

[27 : 10] Amen.