

John 13:1-5, 20:1-9
Glory and the Lord's Table

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What we believe about the future impacts the decisions we make today. What we believe our end-goal is has a direct bearing on how we define our purpose in life here and now. In the Christian faith, what we believe our Christian faith is moving towards shapes our understanding of how to live today. In the Christian faith, what we believe our end-goal is all about shapes our understanding of what happened through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. If we believe the goal of the Christian faith is to get to heaven, then we will focus on the cross and resurrection being about the forgiveness of our sins and eternal life. If the end-goal of the Christian faith is about going to heaven, in other words, if the end goal of the Christian faith is focused on me, then the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ will always be communicated and understood in terms of me. Jesus died for me. Jesus died because he loves me. Jesus saved me. And now I will go to heaven and have eternal life.

Now these statements aren't false. It is true that Jesus loves me and saved me and I will have eternal life. There is Biblical truth to these statements. But does it capture the full image? Does it capture the whole story of the Bible? And, perhaps more importantly, what story does it tell us? When the cross and resurrection are framed around how Jesus saved me, who is the focus of the story – me or God? As an aside point, it's fascinating to me to observe throughout church history, in different times and places, how churches structure their worship service. What churches choose to emphasize in a worship service - what songs are sung, how often communion served, what and when Scripture read, how prayers are spoken – say a lot about a church's understanding of the story written in the Bible. Is the focus, in songs or prayers or through teaching – on me or on God?

I suggested to you last week that the penultimate goal of the Christian faith is not for our souls to go to heaven. Yes, eternal life is most definitely a sure promise and hope for any Christian. But it is not the goal, it is not the vision which gives us energy in the morning or rest at night. Instead, I have suggested to you that there is a deeper goal which holds the themes of the cross and resurrection together. I have suggested to you that there is a deeper thread woven throughout the entire Bible that holds everything together. I have suggested that to understand the centre of the Christian faith, we must understand glory. I suggested to you last week that glory is the heart of Jesus' mission and vision; that glory is the reason for everything Jesus said and did and, ultimately the reason for the cross. I suggested to you last week that to fully understand the cross and empty tomb, we must understand glory. And when we understand glory, then we start to see how those other important aspects of the cross and resurrection – forgiveness of sin, healing of wounds, God's kingdom coming to earth, the defeat of evil – come together. And then when we start to see that glory is the heartbeat of Jesus' mission, it clarifies our mission and vision here on earth. For as we realize that glory – that manifesting the divine essence of God, that revealing the essential nature of God – is our mission and vision, then two things happen. Both our love for one another and our unity is rooted in the shared vision of glory. And this is a vision far bigger and grander than you or me; it's a vision that's about way more than Jesus loves me and Jesus forgives my sin; it's a vision that's all about God.

Last week, we considered the themes of glory, temple, love and unity. This morning, during our communion service, I want us to begin to explore the themes of glory, Passover, and exodus. These are part of John's gospel – and how he speaks of the death and resurrection of Jesus - but we tend to often ignore them, or not pay attention to them, or not even realize they exist.

To explain what the cross and tomb are all about, to explain his death and resurrection, Jesus chooses to do two things. Jesus doesn't use a theological argument to argue what his death and resurrection are all about. Jesus doesn't even quote Old Testament Scripture at length to explain to his disciples his death and resurrection. Rather, Jesus does something. Jesus chooses two actions, two events, two deeds to teach us what his death and resurrection are. First, in John's gospel, Jesus washes his disciples' feet. The second thing he does to explain what his death and resurrection are about is to share a meal with his disciples. It's striking to me that how Jesus chooses to explain to us the meaning of his death, Jesus does not do it through some logical kind of argument or discourse, it's not in gathering the people around him and teaching them, rather it's through visible, tangible actions. Jesus reveals the meaning of his death – and the meaning of glory – through action. Should we be surprised? No. After all, it is the Word made flesh who dwelt among us. It is in the Word made flesh that we behold the glory of God. And so of course it is in the flesh – in the material – that we understand what his death and resurrection are.

Now there are several Jewish celebrations or festivals that God commanded His people to observe throughout the year. There's the feast of Tabernacles, Hannukah, and Day of Atonement, for example. But what is the Jewish festival that was happening when Jesus went to Jerusalem? All four gospel writers – Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John – specify the Jewish festival that was happening when Jesus went to Jerusalem, to the cross. For some reason, it mattered to every gospel writer to point out what time of year it was when Jesus began his journey to the cross. It was Passover. We know this, we hear it, we read about it at Easter time. But let's pause this morning for a moment to consider why the gospel writers are careful to situate the death and resurrection at this time and what that means.

Why does Jesus choose Passover? Why does Jesus choose a meal to tell us what his death and resurrection mean? Perhaps it has something to do with how Jesus understood his purpose on earth, his vocation, his ministry. Most of us know that the Jewish festival called Passover was instituted way back in the book of Exodus, the second book of the Bible.

What is the exodus all about in the Old Testament? We know that the exodus is in reference to God's people being freed from oppression and slavery in Egypt. We know that there were ten plagues as a result of Pharaoh refusing Moses' request to let God's people go. The exodus is about God's people finally experiencing freedom from bondage in Egypt. But I think we sometimes miss, or forget, another crucial part of the exodus. The exodus isn't only about what God's people escaped. The exodus isn't only about what God's people experienced. The exodus isn't only about God's people experiencing freedom. The exodus is primarily about God. Let me explain.

What does God tell Moses to say to Pharaoh? Moses' repeated refrain to Pharaoh is 'let my people go, so that they may worship me in the desert'. Often we focus on the first half of this statement, concluding that the exodus is about God's people being freed, about the declaration 'let my people go'. And that is certainly an important part of the Exodus. But what about the second half of the statement? What about 'so that they may worship me in the desert? What is the purpose of the exodus? What is the reason for letting God's people go? Is the reason to let God's people go primarily because God's people are in slavery and bondage and oppression? Or is there something else, is there another reason why God wants his people to be let go?

The book of Exodus is long, lasting 40 chapters. But if you read through the whole book in one sitting, you may notice a different focus of this book, a different reason why God's people are let go. When we start reading the book, we learn pretty quickly that it's a story of God's people in oppression in Egypt. But then when we keep reading we'll get to the middle of the book and read about Mt Sinai. I want to suggest to you this morning that what happened at Mt Sinai is the purpose of the exodus. Mt Sinai is where the exodus is heading and what it's all about. Most definitely the exodus includes the freedom of God's people, includes their deliverance from oppression and slavery and bondage. The exodus is not less than that but is so much more. The heart of the exodus, the driving force behind the exodus, the reason for the exodus is God and His glory. How do we see that?

Recall from last week that the place God's glory dwelt in the Old Testament was first in a tent, then in the Tabernacle, then in the Temple. What happened at Mt Sinai? Exodus 24:15-18 says this *Then Moses went up on the mountain, and the cloud covered the mountain. The glory of the Lord settled on Mount Sinai, and the cloud covered it for six days; on the seventh day he called to Moses out of the cloud. Now the appearance of the glory of the Lord was like a devouring fire on the top of the mountain in the sight of the people of Israel. Moses entered the cloud, and went up on the mountain. Moses was on the mountain for forty days and forty nights.*

During those forty days and forty nights, Yahweh God gave Moses instructions about the Tabernacle. Moses received instructions on how to build the Tabernacle so the glory of God would dwell with God's people. And so the exodus is about God's people being freed from

slavery and oppression so they can go to worship God in the Tabernacle. The exodus happens so God can reveal his glory.

Again, let's consider a question I put forth to you last week. What is the purpose of the Christian faith? What is the main point of the Bible? If it's about souls going to heaven, then we'll read the Bible through that lens of human failure and punishment and God's judgment and damnation. It also means our decisions, both individually and as a church, are made through that lens – how are we reaching the lost souls? Or, at an individual level, it's easy to become laissez-faire because I've got my ticket to heaven so nothing more needs to be done. We'll read this story from Exodus through that lens and see it as a story where God's people need to be rescued and saved and we'll focus on Israel's sin in the wilderness – building a golden calf, grumbling in the wilderness, disobeying God. But if the purpose of the Christian faith, if the main point of the Bible, if the thrust of Jesus' life and ministry on earth is not primarily about getting people saved so they go to heaven, then what is it about? I suggested to you last week that it's about glory.

And if the thrust of the Bible, if the purpose of the Christian life is glory, then perhaps the story of the exodus is also about glory. Maybe the exodus isn't first and primarily about the rescue of God's people from slavery to freedom. Maybe the exodus is first and primarily about God and glory. Yahweh God says through Moses to Pharaoh: 'Let my people go, so that they may worship me in the desert'. In other words, let my people go because I want to reveal my essence to my people. Let my people go so that my glory and presence will be with them.

As we keep reading the book of Exodus, we quickly forget the story of the exodus from Egypt, we soon forget the story of Israel's oppression and slavery and bondage. We're caught up in the story of the Tabernacle. The book of Exodus ends this way: *Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle. Moses was not able to enter the tent of meeting because the cloud settled upon it, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle.*

Whenever the cloud was taken up from the tabernacle, the Israelites would set out on each stage of their journey; but if the cloud was not taken up, then they did not set out until the day that it was taken up. For the cloud of the Lord was on the tabernacle by day, and fire was in the cloud by night, before the eyes of all the house of Israel at each stage of their journey.

The Bible is about God, it's about his glory, the revelation of who He is and what he does. So the climax of the book of Exodus is not the exodus itself but rather the Tabernacle. The Tabernacle is the place where the living God comes to dwell, in a mysterious tent that moves. The Living God comes to tabernacle in the midst of his people. But the tent is not simply an afterthought, a poor thought out construction using odds and ends, scraps, the materials no one wants. The tent is designed and built with the best human artistry and materials. And there's a reason for that. After all, it is in the Tabernacle in which divine glory comes to dwell. So divine and glorious was the Tabernacle that even Moses couldn't enter.

Let's turn once again to the gospel of John, to that climactic verse in John's prologue: *and the word became flesh and dwelt among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.* Wow - John tells us that we can enter the

place that not even Moses could go. We behold divine glory. Divine glory tabernacles among us, divine glory pitches his tent among us. We see this glory in Jesus of Nazareth.

So then we get to the scene just before Jesus' death. We get to the scene where Jesus shares the Last Supper, the last Passover meal. And John is now describing for us a new exodus, which is to say the ultimate exodus. Yes, the exodus of which I speak includes our freedom from the bondage of sin, our freedom from slavery to sin, our freedom from the evil. But the exodus to which John points our attention gets at something deeper. Like the exodus in the Old Testament, this new exodus is all about the revelation of God and his glory. We experience freedom so that we can behold God's glory, so that we can worship the one true God.

All the gospel writers point our attention towards the fact that the death and resurrection are about the new Exodus. How? Because Jesus chose Passover as the occasion where he would describe what his death and resurrection are all about, he framed his revelation of glory to the whole world through this meal, it's the moment where he would fulfill all that he came to do. So this is the story of Jesus and the new exodus, the story where at last glory returns but in a way and form that nobody expected: on the cross.

Now there's one more thing that must happen in the exodus in order for God's glory to be revealed. Pharaoh must be overthrown, the powers of darkness must be defeated. This is why, then, in the book of John, we hear Jesus' bold words: *'Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world is to be cast out; and when I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw all*

people to myself.' It is through Jesus' death that the evil and dark and oppressive powers which have taken hold of the world will be overthrown by a power much greater, by the power of divine love.

What difference does this make? Let me remind you that how we see the end goal of our faith, how we understand the future impacts how we see our present and the decisions we make. When we see souls going to heaven as the ultimate goal or purpose of the Christian faith, then the human vocation, then our purpose on earth is focused more on morality, on what's good and evil, about right and wrong.

As I mentioned last week, morality and ethics matter. But ethics matter precisely because ethics are the result of being a disciple of Jesus Christ, not the reason for becoming a disciple. Ethics matter because it is through our ethics that the goal of our Christian faith will be achieved. But ethics are not the goal of our faith. For when we make going to heaven the end goal of our Christian faith, we make ethics our primary focus, and we turn the story of the Bible into a story about me.

But when we see the end goal as being about God's glory, when we understand that the Christian faith is about God's glory and about God dwelling with His people, then our task isn't primarily about good and evil but primarily about revealing the divine essence of God to the world through our love and unity, about participating in the new exodus. The end goal is the new heavens and

new earth and God's eternal dwelling with His people – this is the story of the living God, not a story about me.

And so the cross and resurrection are about glory: about revealing the essence of God the Father to the world; about manifesting the essential nature of God; about showing us what makes God God; about telling us who God is. Jesus chose to begin that journey to the cross at Passover, and in so doing showed us that this is the new exodus. It's the new exodus where all evil and darkness is defeated so that God's glory can be revealed fully and we can enter into that glory.

As we gather around the Lord's Table this morning, let us give thanks for the new exodus and for the glory of God. I invite our communion servers to come forward.