

John 13:30-35; 17:1-5, 20-24
The Glory of the Cross and Resurrection

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If I were to ask you to summarize the gospel of John in one verse, which verse would you choose? Or which verse in John's gospel would you choose to teach about what the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ are all about? Maybe John 3:16: *For God so loved the world he gave his one and only Son that whosoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.* Or what about John 11:25 *I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die.* Or John 13:35 *By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.*

These verses are encouraging, helpful and critical to understanding the life and ministry of Jesus Christ. But when we make these verses, with their emphases on eternal life and love, the absolute central part of the purpose of Jesus' death and resurrection, then we make the gospel message about me and about morality. Let me briefly explain. What we believe about the future impacts how we interpret and define the cross and resurrection. If we understand that the whole thrust of the New Testament, the whole point of the Bible is for souls to go up to heaven, then we will of course look at the cross and resurrection as the place where we receive the gift of eternal life. If we explain the Christian life in exclusive terms of me going to heaven, then what is life on earth all about? For some, life on earth is still aimless and directionless because I've already got my ticket to heaven, as it were. If my purpose in life is to go to heaven, then for others, my purpose on earth becomes about my morals, my ethics, my knowledge of good and evil, my behaviour and actions.

Now let me be very clear: morality and ethics matter. Ethics matter because it is the fruit or result of abiding in Christ. Ethics matter in the Christian life. But when morality becomes our focus, when we make the knowledge of good and evil the centre of the cross, then we turn the Biblical story into a story about me and my sinfulness and how God is going to fix it. We will then start to read the Bible looking for what the Bible says about me, not about God. It means that when we start to read Genesis – and keep reading the Bible - we focus on the sinfulness of humans, we get so fixated on how humans fail, over and over again, and how humans deserve to be punished. So the cross gets defined as the place where the Son of God was punished for me, where the Son of God died for me, where the Son of God saved me. Now there is truth to this, for humans throughout the Bible have failed miserably but when that becomes the central narrative from which we read the gospels, from which we read Jesus' life and ministry, from which we interpret the cross and resurrection, then I doubt we will ever fully grasp what the entire Bible as a whole is about, or what Jesus was and is about, or what the church is about. The New Testament is not primarily about souls going up to heaven because the Bible is not a story first about me or you. It's a story about God.

During the season of Advent this past December, we spent four weeks in the prologue of John. Those eighteen verses are also rightly understood as the overture. An overture is the orchestral composition that comes at the beginning of an opera. It is in the overture where listeners are introduced to all the major movements of the opera. The overture is where we get a taste of what is to come. The overture is where we hear all the important themes that will be picked up. In the overture in the gospel of John, we read about life, light and darkness; being children of God, grace and truth. But underlying all these themes is one that rings in every chapter and verse

throughout John's entire gospel. The theme is sometimes loud, sharp, focused and clear; and sometimes it is in the background, unnoticed and invisible, but still a quiet and unmoving presence.

The central verse in the overture, the verse where John's prologue reaches its climax is verse 14:

The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. Glory. Underlying each story we read in John's gospel – underlying each of the signs and miracles Jesus performed is glory. Behind every word spoken, every action completed, every prayer prayed, is glory.

Sometimes it's not named, other times it is: after Jesus performed his first miracle, turning water into wine at a wedding celebration, John wrote in his gospel: *This, the first of his miraculous signs, Jesus performed at Cana in Galilee. He thus revealed his glory, and his disciples put their faith in him.* All that Jesus said and did was for this purpose: glory.

For the next two Sundays, this week and next, I want us to explore the theme of glory and the cross and resurrection. This morning, we'll consider how glory forms the purpose of the cross and tomb, how glory connects to the theme of Temple, and how glory relates to us – the church. Next week, during our communion service, we'll look at how glory is woven into the events and themes of Passover and exodus – which are in turn about the cross and empty tomb.

Before we consider how the cross and resurrection are about glory, first let me remind you what glory means. The Greek word for glory is *doxes* and the Hebrew word is *kabowd* (kaw-bode).

Both the Greek and the Hebrew words for glory are about essence. So glory is about the essence of God. We remember the dialogue between Moses and Yahweh God in Exodus: *Moses said to God 'Now show me your glory. And the Lord said, "I will cause all my goodness to pass in front of you, and I will proclaim my name, the Lord, in your presence. I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. But, he said, you cannot see my face, for no one may see me and live."* When Moses asks God to reveal His glory, what is God's response? God names his very essence: goodness, mercy, compassion. Glory is about the essence of God, it's about what makes God God. It is about the essence of who God is. It is about the essence of what God does. So that is why God then said to Moses "you cannot see my face". You cannot see the essence of my being; you cannot see the divine essence that makes God God.

Glory is about the essence. The verb glorify means to honour or to manifest. To honour the essence of who God is. To manifest the essence of the divine God. To show the essence of what makes God God. To reveal the essence of what God does.

As I suggested in December, the moment of Jesus' glorification is seen in his death and resurrection. Indeed, every aspect of Jesus' ministry on earth was for the purpose of glory: everything Jesus said and everything Jesus did was to glorify the Father in Heaven. Glory was the driving force behind Jesus' ministry, it was his heartbeat, it was his vision, it was his purpose, it was the reason why he said what he said, why he taught what he taught, why he did

what he did, why he prayed what he prayed, why he healed those he healed, why he had compassion on those he had compassion.

Now, I have spent over thirty years in the church. I started attending church when I was in my mother's womb. My grandfather was a Pentecostal and Baptist pastor. I went on missions trips. And throughout my entire life, the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ – the cross and empty tomb – has tended to only be about the forgiveness of my sins. This is what I heard, this is what I've sung, this is what I've prayed, this is what pulled me to the cross; after all who doesn't want to hear a story that's about themselves? But when I read John's gospel, when I read the Passion narrative, when I read what's commonly referred to as the Farewell discourses in chapters 13-17, I can't help but think I've gotten this wrong. Yes of course the cross is about the forgiveness of sins. Yes of course the cross is about the atoning work of Jesus Christ. Yes of course the cross is about the healing of wounds. Yes of course the cross is about God's Kingdom. Yes of course the cross is about the defeat of evil. The cross is not less than any of that. But the cross is so much more – it's all about glory. And when we come to see how glory frames the cross and resurrection, I believe the worldwide church will have clarity on its mission and vision.

Regrettably, I don't have the time this morning to read the second half of John's gospel or to unpack all the ways glory is woven through the Farewell discourses. I do encourage you to read through chapters 12 to 21 in the coming week or weeks and notice the language John uses, notice the themes that appear, notice what John writes about the death and resurrection of Jesus, notice

what John says and what he doesn't say. But this morning I hope to provide a brief overview of how the cross and resurrection are about glory and the implications of that for us.

In John's overture, he writes *the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.* There's a lot packed into this statement. One of the things John does is link dwelling and glory. We learned during Advent that the word 'dwelling' is better translated as pitching one's tent or tabernacling. The Word became flesh and pitched his tent among us. The Word became flesh and tabernacled among us.

The idea of tabernacle and glory being together is not new to John. We first encounter the merging of these themes - tabernacle and glory - in the Old Testament. Where is the place where God's glory dwelt in the Old Testament? When God's people wandered through the wilderness, God's glory dwelt in the tent. When Solomon built the Temple, God's glory dwelt in the Temple. But then what happened to God's people and to the Temple? Israel sinned and the consequence of her sin was exile. God's people were exiled from their land, taken over by other nations. God's people were scattered. And when Babylon conquered Israel, the people of Babylon also destroyed the Temple. The place where God's glory dwelt was destroyed and God's glory abandoned them.

Israel longed to return from exile. So much was wrapped up in the promise of return from exile: it wasn't just about the people of God physically returning to Jerusalem. The return from exile

was about the forgiveness of sins, restoration, the promise that Yahweh God would return to dwell with his people, but it was a promise that God wouldn't simply return to live in His temple but would return and fill the whole world, indeed the whole creation, with his glory. These expectations were formed by the writings of the prophets. God's people looked to the prophets to anticipate what return from exile would be about. The prophet Habakkuk writes *For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord*. Like so much in the Old Testament, the Temple shows us what is to come. The Temple – the place where God's glory dwelt – was to show us what would come – when God's glory would cover the whole earth. When you read the Old Testament writings after the exile, nowhere does it say that God's glory had returned among God's people. After the Temple was destroyed, God's glory left God's people and did not return. The prophets are vague, mysterious, unclear about how glory would come again. Isaiah describes it as a suffering servant.

But then we start to read John's gospel. Before too long, we get to the climax of the prologue. And John is not vague, he doesn't leave it a mystery to be solved, he doesn't leave us confused. He is very clear how God's glory is returning to dwell: *The Word became flesh and dwelt among us. And we beheld his glory*. God's glory has returned to dwell through the Word-made-flesh. God's glory has come to dwell in the person of Jesus Christ. God's glory has come to dwell in the Word, the Word which was in the beginning, the Word which was with God, the Word which was God, the Word which was in the beginning with God. In a mysterious and unexpected way, God's glory has not come to dwell in a tent, not in a Tabernacle, not in the Temple that Herod built in Jerusalem. God's glory has come to dwell in the person of Jesus of Nazareth, a human, the Son of God. God's people have waited hundreds of years for the return of God's glory and at

last, at last it has come. And it has come to dwell among God's people in the person of Jesus Christ.

So from John's gospel, we realize that glory dwells among us as a human being, but not just a human being – glory dwells in the perfect human being, the Son of God. This, I suggest to you this morning, is what John is trying to point us to: that the glory of God has returned at last in the form of Jesus. That glory is seen when Jesus changes water into wine, his first miracle and sign. Right after that story about water turning into wine at the wedding feast, John tells us that Jesus went to the temple and drove the people out. Jesus announced that the temple in Jerusalem will be destroyed and a new one, not made with hands, would be built in its place. Jesus was, of course, referring to the temple of his body. The other gospel writers put that story in the Passion narrative. But John is purposeful in writing that story about the temple right after the story of Jesus revealing his glory through changing water into wine. Then several chapters later we begin to read the Passion narrative and although we don't find the word 'glory' anywhere, we realize that the entire book of John is designed so we behold the glory of God. When Jesus triumphantly enters Jerusalem in chapters 12, Jesus said "Father, glorify your name." And then a voice from heaven said "I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again".

And so glory marks all of Jesus' life and ministry. It defines his work, defines what he says and does, gives purpose to his movements and messages. The most important sign of course is the sign of the cross, when Jesus is lifted up. This sign fulfilled Isaiah's prophecy of the suffering Servant. In John's gospel, he writes *Isaiah said this because he saw Jesus' glory and spoke about*

him. God's people have waited long enough and at last God's glory has come to earth to fill the whole world but it has come in the Word-made-flesh. And the moment of glorification, the moment where God's glory is fully revealed to the world happens in the way no one fathomed: the crucifixion of the Word-made-flesh.

So how does glory and temple fit with the cross and resurrection? After all, elsewhere in the New Testament, the cross seems to be about the humiliation of Jesus. But John describes the cross as the moment of Jesus' glorification. The cross is always the penultimate display of glory. For the cross is the point where we behold God's glory and are powerfully met with the love of God.

The cross glorifies Christ because it is the revelation of his heart. And the revelation of his heart is love. Throughout all of Jesus' life on earth, in every word and deed, in every thought and prayer, he has been trying to show how much he loves the world. Throughout all of Jesus' life, he has been revealing His essence – his heart - to women, men, and children; to widows and orphans; to the outcasts and down-trodden; to the weary and worn-out. Jesus being glorified is about Jesus being known. Thus, the revelation of his character and the glorification of Himself are one and the same thing. On the cross, we behold the glory of Christ and receive His love.

God the Father is glorified in the Son of God on the cross. If Jesus' entire life and ministry was to purposefully and intentionally reveal the heart of the Father to the world, if Jesus' words were spoken to reveal truth, if Jesus' compassion was displayed to show the kindness of the Father, if Jesus' humility and servanthood is the gentleness of the Father, if his whole life and ministry was

about manifesting the essence of God to the world, then of course on the cross we see the penultimate, the clearest, the grandest revelation of God to the world. Thus, God the Father is glorified in the Son of God on the cross. Jesus Christ is glorified and God the Father is glorified because the cross reveals the essence of who Jesus and is, the cross reveals the essence of the heart of God.

So what does this all mean for us? If the whole of Jesus' life and ministry is rooted in glory – rooted in revealing to the world who God is, what makes God God, then what are the implications for believers and for the church? I suggest two things: first – love and, second – unity.

Let's consider love first. We know that the cross is where the divine love of God is revealed. But the glorification of Jesus also means that we must love one another. When the disciples gathered for the last supper, Jesus told his disciples that one of them would betray him. When the disciples inquired who it was, Jesus gave the piece of bread to Judas indicating he would betray Jesus. Then Judas left. When he had left, we hear these words from Jesus *Now the Son of Man has been glorified, and God has been glorified in him. If God has been glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself and will glorify him at once.* Then in the same breath, Jesus says *I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.*

Before this scene, we read about Jesus washing his disciple's feet. John portrays it this way *Having loved his own who were in the world he now showed them the full extent of his love.* If the cross is where Jesus is glorified because the cross is where the essence – the heart – of God is revealed, then on the cross we see divine love. When we follow Jesus' command to love one another, we are thus glorifying God. We are revealing the heart of God to the world. When we wash the feet of others, when we humbly serve others, when we sacrifice our selfish ambitions and pride to care for one another, we are glorifying God.

Thus God's glory dwells among those who, in response to receiving divine love, show that same love for God and for one another. God's glory dwells among those who recognize the glory of God – who recognize the essence of God and come to know Him, those who know His voice. God's glory dwells among those who are sent into the world – into offices and schools, into playgrounds and art centres, into workshops and coffee shops, into neighbours' homes and city council.

Secondly, we glorify God through our unity. Listen again to part of the prayer of Jesus on that night of his arrest: *I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may be completely one, so that the world may know that you sent me, and that you loved them just as you loved me.* In this prayer, Jesus connects glory, unity and love. Now, because his prayer for unity is rooted in this vision of glory, it means that unity in the body of Christ isn't simply for the purpose of God's mission on earth. Our being united is indeed very important, both for practically speaking and for outreach purposes.

However since Jesus brings together this idea of glory and unity, it seems to suggest that our being united is for a deeper purpose, for that eventual goal when the whole earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.

May we, the church, God's people, remain tethered to this same vision that led Jesus to the cross: the vision which seeks to honour the essence of God, the vision that reveals what makes God God to the world, the vision that shows the world who God is, the vision that points our eyes towards God. Our love for one another and our pursuit of unity are grounded in this vision of glory. We bear witness to glory: we bear witness to faith, hope, and divine love, we bear witness to the kingdom of God, we bear witness to the healing and new creation.

Let us pray.