

How will the world be put right?

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[0 : 00] This morning's reading is John chapter 12, and we're going to be starting at verse 12, and if you've got a church Bible, it's on page 1083.

So John chapter 12. The next day, the large crowd that had come to the feast that heard Jesus was coming to Jerusalem. 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, daughters of Jerusalem, behold, your King is coming, sitting on a donkey, 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 are gaining nothing. Look, the world has gone after him.

[1 : 14] 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. 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. If anyone serves me, the Father will honour him. Now is my soul troubled.

[2 : 11] 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. 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 the Son of Man must be lifted up? Who is this Son of Man?

[3 : 10] 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 darkness does not know where he is going. While you have the light, believe in the light, that you may become sons of light. Thank you so much, Ruth, for reading.

Do please keep those verses open with you if you can. They're very useful to you and me if we do that. It's quite a lot to go through. It's an amazing, climactic bit of John, really. I look forward to looking at you over the next few weeks.

A happy new year. And the question I want us to begin with this morning is this. How will the world be put right? How will the world be put right?

As we look forward to the next year, 2022, what is it that's going to make the difference? How are we going to make sure it's not just a repeat of the previous couple of years?

[4 : 10] Can we really even make sure of that at all? Is it in our hands? How is the world going to be put right? And of course, within the last year or so, there has been no shortage of answers to that question.

I guess pretty much every religion claims to have some kind of answer. Every four years, we're confronted with the competing answers. Every president, every prime minister who takes the stage has their answer ready to give.

And when they're elected, it's not just the religions of the world. Every government, every president, every ballot paper is trying to provide an answer in one way or another.

I don't know if you remember this. Almost a year ago exactly, the president of the United States was inaugurated, Joe Biden. And I don't know what your reaction was, but I guess your reaction, whether you think it was a brilliant thing or a terrible thing, has something to do with the question of how the world's going to be put right.

We want a leader who can deliver us. We want the world put right again. I mean, someone to make the hard decisions for us. And I want to suggest this morning that if instead of being in this lovely school and we were transported to the first century and the time of these crowds that we've just had read, well, if we were there, the answer would have seemed utterly obvious to us.

[5 : 37] And they were following Jesus, this man who had just literally spoken to a corpse and that corpse had come back to life again and had a few people around for dinner the next day.

Lazarus in chapter 11. Incredible display of power. And the support of Jesus, unsurprisingly, is growing from strength to strength. Everyone wants a peace. And if you had asked one of the members of this crowd, if you said, you know, how's the world going to be put right?

It's obvious they would have said to you. Here he is. Our king is here. Now the moment we've been waiting for for so long has arrived. They'd have every reason to think that this was the moment when everything would come to an end.

The world was going to be put right again. And that's exactly how our passage starts. If I was organized enough to give you points on your handouts, this would be the first one. The king has arrived to put the world right.

Look at verse 12 with me. The next day the large crowd that had come to the feast heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem. So they took branches of palm trees and went out to meet him, crying out, Hosanna!

[6 : 45] Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, even the king of Israel. And this is it, isn't it? Surely. And we've reached the moment in history when our king has arrived to bring final judgment, to give life to his people.

There's nothing left to say. And what are we waiting for? And his arrival, Jesus' arrival in history, it was the arrival of the king. And he's come to rule.

He's come to conquer. He's come to put everything right again. The crowds, they can see it. And they've just seen the guy raise someone from the dead. Who else could it be? The promised king come to end the world and decisively put things right again.

I guess it's sometimes hard for us to imagine a monarchy that kind of has that much of a direct impact on how the country's run. Our queen is obviously wonderful. We love our queen. But it doesn't really feel like she kind of has that much of a say in sort of exactly how she wants the world to be run, this country to run.

And the best illustration I can think of is a few years ago, the film Black Panther in the cinemas came out. An amazing film. And if you haven't seen it, don't worry. The point is that in the world of Black Panther, the king of the land has a very, very, very direct say in how that land is to be governed, to be run.

[8 : 00] If the king wants the land to be a certain way, it will be that way. And that's much more like the atmosphere here. We have a king entering the capital who is more powerful than anyone they'd ever heard of.

He's here and he's arrived to put the world right. But the truth is, well, they were in for a bit of a surprise. They knew what kind of a king they wanted, or at least they thought they did.

But it turns out they were not ready for the king they got instead. Jesus, he kind of tests them a bit, right? Verse 14, he finds this donkey to sit on as he approaches Jerusalem, which you might think is quite a strange image, quite a strange choice, mode of transport.

I was trying to think of an image, maybe, if you imagine maybe the queen traveling into Buckingham Palace in like a beaten up Ford Fiesta or something. And crazy, really, that their king would travel to Jerusalem on a donkey.

But of course, John, who's narrating for us, he says, verse 14, just as it is written, fear not, daughter of Zion, behold, your king is coming, sitting on a donkey's colt.

[9 : 16] And just as their scriptures had told them, this was the king precisely coming, exactly as he promised. And if they were slightly less focused on their political dreams, they might have noticed.

But they didn't. They wanted a war horse. They wanted a ruler who would make Israel great again, if you wanted the slogan. They had a plan, a king that was going to triumph to rule the nation, to sort everything out.

And they got a donkey. And they wanted a ruler. And they got something that didn't look exactly like what they expected. And it makes us slightly nervous, I think, about the verses that follow.

So Jesus, he's winning this popularity contest. If there was the votes, if they were taking votes, he would win them all by a landslide. And yet, the shock of the verses in front of us, the shock of the Bible, really, and the shock of the story of this world, is that Jesus Christ does not put the world right by overthrowing the human institutions, by kind of zapping Caesar on the spot, by making Israel great again, an insurrection and a new world order.

Jesus, he puts the world right again, second point, by the glorious work of the cross. Look down at verse 20 with me. Among those who went up to worship at the feast were some Greeks.

[10 : 49] So these came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and asked him, Sir, we wish to see Jesus. And Philip went and told Andrew, and Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus. Listen, Jesus answered them, the hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.

And Jesus is saying that his life has reached its peak. History's climax has arrived. That the moment, the hour we have been waiting for, if you had been reading through the beginning of John's Gospel, the moment, the hour, the hour we've been waiting for since the beginning of Israel's history, the moment we've been waiting for since the moment humanity was exiled from God's presence, the nations were scattered across the world.

Well, now the nations are gathered again, haven't they? These Greeks, they've come to see Jesus, verse 20, and they ask Philip, and they go to Jesus, and Jesus says, The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.

Truly, truly, I say to you, verse 24, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone.

But if it dies, it bears much fruit. He's saying that the moment of his greatest glory is his death.

[12:10] And the moment of Jesus' greatest, greatest glory, his greatest achievement, is his death on a cross outside Jerusalem. If you struggled to imagine the queen driving into Buckingham Palace in a battered old Ford Fiesta, it's a strange image.

And well, how about this for an image? And the queen traveling into Buckingham Palace in a battered old Ford Fiesta in order to be publicly executed. And that's an image.

And that's the image we have here. And unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it bears no fruit. The king who's come to bring history to an end, he doesn't come on a war horse, leading an insurrection of fanatical followers, overthrowing the capital.

He doesn't come in valiant strength with an army of angels to make Israel great again. He comes to die. He comes to lay his life down, to be lifted up on a cross for the whole world to see.

And of course, you might be thinking, okay, but how exactly does that work, right? What is so glorious about the cross? What is so impressive about a man dying on a cross outside Jerusalem?

[13:31] And I have three answers for you. Firstly, the cross, it makes the father known. Look at verse 27 with me. And now is my soul troubled, Jesus says.

And what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour? You know, is this just one sort of mistake? Is this a huge failure on Jesus' part? Verse 27 continues.

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 will glorify it again.

See, the cross, it's the moment where God's glory is put on display. And God's name is kind of vindicated in all the earth.

You know, God's reputation really is sort of fully restored. The Old Testament prophets, they look forward to a day when the holiness of God's name was going to be restored.

[14:31] The name that had been profaned among the nations. A day when the nations would finally know the one true God and the spirit would be poured out. It's a promise that God's name would be known in all the earth where idols are put in their place, where the nations would know the one true God.

And it happens at the cross. That is his prayer in verse 28. Glorify your name. And the crowd, shockingly, I think it's so tragic, they demonstrate what has been true all throughout John, right?

These people, they do not know the Father. And they don't recognize his voice, even as it thunders from heaven, verse 29. I wonder if you've ever asked somebody, you know, what would it take for you to believe in God?

I've asked a few people that in my life, quite a few people. And have you ever heard the response, you know, if I just heard a sort of a voice from heaven, you know, if I heard God speaking from the clouds, sure, I believe in God, sure.

Actually, that's the answer that Douglas Murray, the British journalist, is the answer that he gives, if you just heard a voice from heaven. And the question I always want to ask him back, or anyone who asks, anyone who says that is, well, how do you know you'd recognize his voice?

[15 : 44] How do you know? So the trouble with, excuse me, the trouble with asking how the world's going to be put right again is it sort of depends on what you think the biggest problem of the world is, right?

You know, is it poverty? Is it power? Is it greed? Is it racism? Is it anti-vaxxers? Is it bad leadership? And what Jesus thinks that the biggest problem of the world, really the problem of all problems, is that it does not know the Father.

We don't know God. And the work of the cross, it is to turn a world that does not know God into a world that does.

It turns the world emptied of the presence of God into one that is full of his glory. And that's what the world being put right actually means.

You see, the central problems of 2021 have not really changed. And the problems of 2021 and 2022 are that lots and lots of people in Dulwich and across London and across the world don't know the Father.

[16 : 52] And the cross is what makes him known. And verse 28 again, Father, glorify your name. Then a voice came from heaven, I have glorified it and will glorify it again.

And the cross, it makes the Father known. Okay, secondly, and the cross, it brings judgment on the world. Look at verse 31 with me. Verse 31, now is the judgment of this world.

Now will the ruler of this world be cast out. Of course, the temptation is to think that the cross is the sort of bad part, the failure, the disaster, and then the resurrection is kind of good.

The resurrection makes it okay again. The Jesus is being killed. It doesn't look like he's achieving anything. Surely, if anything, Jesus is being judged. Look at verse 31 again.

It is exactly the other way around. Now is the judgment of this world. The ruler of this world, that is Satan, the moment where the world is judged and Satan is cast out.

[17 : 54] That's what happens at the cross. The moment where light exposes the darkness and where the world's deeds are brought into the light and its hatred of God is shown most clearly.

And the world, it thought it was judging Jesus at the cross. You know, as we've seen throughout the book, so if you read through the gospel, you know, how dare you say you're from heaven, they kept saying, as we see later on again with Pilate as well.

But at the cross, that is where the world is judged. And when we see just how much the world hates its gods. Now verse 19, I used to think verse 19 was a great verse.

You know, they've gone after him. But why have they gone after him? It's because they were looking for the wrong kind of king. If you want to know what the world really thinks of God, just look at the cross.

And it happens. Makes the father known. The cross makes the father known. The cross judges the world. I think the cry for justice and judgment, it's grown louder, hasn't it, in the last couple of years?

[18 : 57] Especially, I've noticed, especially in the last year. The demand for justice. That's what drives us into the streets to riots. It's the demand for justice that provokes an insurrection in the capital city.

And I guess whatever you think would put the world right, whatever you think it is, I suspect that it has something to do with bringing offenders to an account and justice, judgment, the verdict made clear and the world's actions exposed.

And that's what the king has come to do. And to put the world right again by the cross as it judges the world. And then thirdly, so it makes the father known, judges the world.

And then thirdly, the cross brings global salvation. Look at verse 31. And I, he says, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.

He said this to show by what kind of death he was going to die. I guess we're a bit more familiar with maybe this aspect of the cross. Jesus' death, it was the means by which he brought God's great global salvation to the ends of the earth.

[20 : 08] And just as Isaiah the prophet said, you know, if you know your Old Testament, this servant lifted up in glory and bringing God's salvation to the whole world. And this is the moment that makes it happen.

And it happens through the cross. And if you had Lazarus back in your mind sort of as you were reading, which I guess you probably should have, he was just the beginning. And just, just a sign that pointed to the moment where all who heard the words of the Son of Man would come out of the tombs and have life.

Salvation that is available to the ends of the earth. And the world being put right again as the servant is lifted up and all the nations are drawn to Jesus.

That's where it happens. It happens at the cross where a world is united in its worship of the one true God. I don't know if you listened to the inauguration last year, listened to some of it.

The word that was used again and again, actually you hear this word all the time, unity, in most prime ministers' pitches somewhere, and this idea of bringing a divided world together is certainly what everybody wants.

[21 : 16] And that is in most pitches for how to fix things. And a united world, well it seems almost impossible, doesn't it, these days, these last couple of years.

What about this? What about this suggestion? It is only when the world becomes united on who God is that real unity, lasting, substantial unity is possible.

A people that are united by the saving work of the Lord Jesus Christ. And the world being put right again, it happens as the cross reveals the Father, it judges the world and it brings salvation to the ends of the earth.

And I said earlier that the shock of these verses is how the world is put right again, right? So it's not impressive solutions to things, but it's actually the cross.

And I think that is probably the biggest shock. But if there was a contender for second place and for the second biggest shock, it would be this, and this is our last point, the world prefers not to be put right.

[22 : 27] The world prefers not to be put right. And they object quite starkly, don't they? How dare you, they say. How dare you say that our Messiah would die?

Verse 34, the crowd say, you know, we've heard from the Lord that Christ remains forever. How can you say that the Son of Man must be lifted up? Who is this Son of Man? that they just can't, they cannot conceive of a Christ that would die.

They're just, they're so committed to their version of a king, their version of a world's put right, and Israel made great again.

So committed that it's blinded them. See, the world was impressed by Jesus, but only because they had got him wrong. His whole ministry was pointing toward the cross when everything would be put right again, but it turns out they would rather be left alone.

And the world doesn't want to be put right. You see, they preferred the world as it was. They preferred a world that didn't know the Father. A world outside of his presence.

[23 : 39] And they preferred a world ruled by Satan. You could imagine that. And they loved the glory of this world and the glory that comes from man to the glory that comes from God.

And we'll think more about that next week. But I think that pretty accurately describes the world that we live in, doesn't it? We don't want the solutions that Jesus offers.

Probably because we refuse to accept the problem that we face. We're clinging to the darkness in John's language. and refusing to come into the light.

It's the light that is our only hope of a world put right. And we want impressive solutions to the problems of this world. You know, we want a mighty ruler of our own kind.

We want a war horse and not a donkey. But it is Jesus' death that conquers. And it is his death that wins.

[24 : 38] Only as the Son of Man is lifted up. Only in his death is the Father made known, the ruler is cast out, and salvation is brought to the ends of the earth.

That is how the world is put right again. And the question really for us, I guess, is are we really prepared for the kinds of solutions Jesus offers?

It doesn't look glorious. It doesn't look very impressive. It doesn't feel comfortable, the life of the cross. It's not going to go down well with your social status. It's not going to get any votes in the House of Commons.

It might cost us our lives to follow him. It might mean losing our lives in order to gain them, in the language of verse 25, hating our lives in order to keep them.

Are we really prepared for that? Or do we prefer the glory of this world? When I was preparing this, I wrote a prayer for myself.

[25 : 41] I'm just going to read it out and then we'll continue the next part of our service. Thank you. Let's pray. Gracious Father, the cross was the darkest hour in history when your son went to his death, hated by a world he came to save.

And yet, and yet it was the most glorious moment in all of history because it is where you were victorious, where you brought light to a world plunged in darkness, where you nourished a world starved of your presence, where you brought vindication to a world crippled by injustice.

Please would you give us eyes to see what the Lord Jesus achieved that day, that we ourselves would glory in the achievement of the cross, we pray. Amen.