

Glory Seeking

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[0 : 0 0] You'll find it helpful to turn back to pages 2 and 3 to the two passages that were read for us just a few moments ago. I want to add my congratulations to Jim for making it here, but I just have one question.

Who was it that prayed for the white Christmas? I want you to come and see me later because I've got another thing for you to pray about. And it has to do with the finances of the church, but that's for another time.

I have cancelled one of this afternoon's services and I've cancelled the 11pm service. And in a moment that felt a little Grinch-like, I've cancelled Christmas. So don't come to church tomorrow.

But on the 28th, next Sunday, we have a full rota of services, three services, 8, 10 and 6.30pm. It is wonderful that we're here together in a way under quite strange and wonderful and treacherous conditions.

A little like those on the first Christmas Eve. And like the shepherds and the angels, the reason why we've met together tonight is because of glory.

[1 : 1 8] The glory from another world, the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. And there is something about that glory which draws us.

There is something about that glory which makes us, which shines in our darkness, which we know satisfies something that no other hunger can.

That glory that can remake us, that radiates from the face of Jesus. And that's what's behind tonight's celebration, of course. And that is what is behind all of what is good in this season.

That is behind our family dinners and our reunions. It's behind that sense that there is something else, something better. It's behind our sense of boredom and anxiety, as well as behind our sense of beauty and loveliness.

The Bible says this is what we were made for, for the glory of God. And there's nothing that can take its place. The wonderful thing about tonight is we gather.

[2 : 2 4] We gather because of that impossible announcement that God delights to act to draw us into his glory. And that is the purpose of the gospel reading.

In fact, the whole of the gospel of Luke is written to draw us into the glory of God through Jesus Christ. This is a copy of Luke's gospel.

It's a wonderful eyewitness account. And if you haven't read it as an adult, we have some copies at the back. Why don't you take it as a little Christmas gift? It's called The Essential Jesus.

And if you read the gospel, you will know that the glory of Jesus burst through his life three times. Once at his birth, when God became man, the angel of the Lord, remember, appeared to the shepherds, and the glory of the Lord shone round about, and they were filled with fear.

And then the angels burst into praise, glory to God in the highest. Peace on earth with those on whom God's favor rests. And the second time is at the end of Jesus' ministry, when he has risen from the dead, and the women go to the empty tomb, and there are two men in dazzling white clothes standing there, and they say, Why are you looking for the living among the dead?

[3 : 51] And the women were frightened, and bowed their faces to the ground. And there's one other time between those two in Luke's gospel, and that is what tonight's reading is about.

It's between the birth and the resurrection. It's at the center of Jesus' ministry. And when the glory of Jesus shines, Peter puts both of his feet firmly in his mouth.

You might think that when they see the glory of God, people would like to party or sing songs. But the reaction is always fear, even terror, because when we really encounter who Jesus is, we're instantly conscious, not just of the distance between us, but of our own sinfulness.

Because the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ isn't just some huge cosmic energy. It's the glory of his holiness and his majesty. It's the glory of the other world.

It's the spotless, cleansing glory of the God who made us. And as we turn to this passage tonight, and just think about it for a few moments, Luke tells us about two very different kinds of glory.

[5 : 09] One glory that liberates, and one glory that enslaves. Firstly, the glory which liberates. If you look down on page two at the beginning of our passage, you can see Jesus is talking about the glory, his own glory, and the glory of God.

And you know that if you've read this gospel as an adult, that the angels have already told us that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, a saviour, Christ the Lord.

But the disciples take a lot of convincing. We think we are the first generation to be truly sophisticated and sceptical, but our scepticism makes us look like babies next to the disciples.

So Jesus takes Peter, James and John up on a mountain, and there he is transfigured before their eyes. And the glory of Jesus Christ is like the noonday sun.

His face becomes brighter than lightning, brighter than anything on earth. It's not a spotlight from heaven on Jesus. It's his inner self, the essential Jesus, shining out.

[6 : 23] It's the same glory that shone at Christmas. It's the same glory that shone at the resurrection. And it now blazes out over the disciples.

And if you look down at verse 31, in the middle of the second paragraph, you can see that in the glory, Jesus is joined by two men, Moses and Elijah.

It's amazing. For just a moment, Jesus pulls back the veil, and we are allowed to see into the other world, into the kingdom of heaven.

And we learn that there is another world, and that the other world is energised by the glory of Christ. And that this other world, which has existed before our world came into existence, is not usually visible to us now, but moves along beside our world, always there.

And the interesting thing about that world is that those who belong to God and have died, live there in glory. It's 1,200 years since Moses died.

[7 : 33] It's 300 or 400 years later, Elijah lived. Yet there they appear, speaking with Jesus, because they're both present to God.

And we can't miss this, that Jesus himself is the connection between this other world and our world. He's the one who opens the way for us.

He himself is the door, and all who belong to the other world go through him. And it's here we notice a very important shift. It's the shift from eyes to ears.

If you notice through those early verses, there's a great emphasis on sight and seeing. Verse 29, Jesus' appearance changes.

In verse 30, Behold, look. Verse 31, The two appeared in glory. Verse 32, They saw his glory.

[8 : 32] But seeing's not enough. Peter and James and John see it, but they don't get it. They don't understand it. They can't enter into it.

And Peter runs off his mouth, and in verse 33, Luke says, in a kind way, he didn't know what he said. Because what they need is a word, because spiritual clarity comes through the ears, not through the eyes.

It's very important for us. We live in a culture which is tired of words. We live in a time where words are used to manipulate, to advertise, to soothe.

We hear thousands of meaningless words every day. What we want, what we really need, is glory, that glory that comes from another world. But what we need in the end is words from the heart of God, words that God will stand behind and that's what happens.

Two things are said. First, in verse 34, which is over the page on page 3. Verse 34, God himself speaks audibly from the cloud and you see at the end of verse 35, this is my son, my chosen one, listen to him.

[9 : 55] God doesn't say look at him. He doesn't say picture him. He says listen to him. And I think it's a very kind thing that God does here.

He does it for our benefit. You see, unless God speaks, all we have together is human opinion. And who's to say your opinion is any better than mine when it comes to glory or to spiritual things?

What we need is the voice of God to interpret what's happening. It's what the angels do at the birth of Jesus and that is why God speaks now. That's the first voice. And the second voice is back there in verse 31 where we hear, we overhear what Peter, sorry, what Moses and Elijah are speaking with Jesus about.

and in verse 31 they spoke about his departure. Now I've translated the word there. Literally in the Greek it's Exodus.

And it's not a minor detail. Oh, by the way, they were talking about the weather and how deep the snow was. We're allowed to listen to the conversation for a reason.

[11 : 11] Moses and Elijah have appeared in glory for this purpose to speak with Jesus about his Exodus that he was about to fulfill in Jerusalem.

Jesus had just said to his followers that he was going to suffer many things, that he was going to be rejected by the leaders of Israel, killed on the third day and raised again.

And you might think that's a great pity. It's a terrible waste to allow that glory to be snuffed out like that. But the key to understanding Jesus' death is that in Jesus' view and in the view of heaven it is our true Exodus.

It is our real freedom. It is through our death, through his death, that Jesus brings us to glory. The real Exodus in the scriptures takes place as Jesus is nailed to the cross.

As he dies in our place, as he dies for us, we are brought out of slavery and into freedom, freedom to enter the glory of God and to enjoy him forever.

[12 : 20] Ever since his first sermon in Luke's Gospel, Jesus has been talking about liberty and freedom. And now we know it's not just a vague spiritual thing, it's a very specific and particular blessing of entering his glory and it will only come through faith in his death because the baby born for us is the man born to die for us, a saviour who is Christ the Lord.

And I'm not sure exactly how the conversation went between Moses, Elijah and Jesus on that day but if you would allow me a little bit of liberty, I think it might have gone something like this.

Moses would have said to Jesus, Jesus, how can you possibly top the Prince of Egypt? How can you possibly do better than the Exodus in the Old Testament?

We, you know, the sea was parted. The angel, the Passover angel came. We had manna in the wilderness. We defeated the most powerful army of the day.

There was a pillar of cloud and fire. The Lord rescued people from debilitating and degrading slavery to the great freedom on the mountain and Elijah might have said, but Moses or Moe.

[13 : 39] As amazing as that first Exodus was, it didn't really work. You got the people to Egypt, into the land but they were still slaves deep down.

The Lord was able to take them out of Egypt but he didn't take Egypt out of them. And no sooner did you turn your back on the people up the mountain than they were bowing down to the golden cow in the valley.

They were powerless over their own evil. They were filled with arrogance and unbelief. And Moses, all the prophets say that that first great Exodus is a picture and a preparation for a greater Exodus that's coming.

A trial run for a better and true Exodus. One that's not just going to change circumstances but it's going to change our hearts. One that's not just going to save a nation from political bondage but from guilt and from death.

One that's not just going to lead to Palestine but to lead into this glory in which we share. And that is what Jesus' glory is all about.

[14 : 49] It is about our Exodus, our freedom, our liberty. And you might say well if it's all that simple and straightforward why don't we just naturally receive Jesus?

I mean if we were made for glory why don't we just love Christ when we see his glory? And there is a second glory in this passage. It is a glory which enslaves.

And I want you to look down the bottom of the page you see in verse 44 Jesus speaks about his death again. And then two verses later in verse 46 near the bottom of page 3 I read and an argument arose among them this is the disciples as to which of them was the greatest.

They are surrounded by the glory of Jesus and his miracles. They are reminded that Christ is going to go and die in shame and dishonour. But you know what's uppermost in their minds?

It's their own glory. They are enslaved. They are addicted to their own status and prestige and looking good.

[16 : 06] They care more about their own glory than the glory of the Son of God. It's a very grubby scene and we recognise ourselves in it. It's very helpful you see because status and prestige and accomplishment and wealth they are all devices of self-enslavement.

you cannot pursue your own glory and the glory of Christ at the same time. You cannot live for your own glory and the glory of Christ at the same time.

And if you do live for your own glory the glory of Jesus is a menace. It's a threat. It has to be discounted and discarded and disregarded. And those who live for Jesus' glory have to be discounted as well because they love something more than they love you.

We can be polite and polished and popular and privileged and utterly enslaved to our own glory. And the evidence of our slavery is our spiritual powerlessness against evil.

And that is why the miracle in verses 37 to 42 is so important. I hope you noticed as we read through it what a sad story it is.

[17 : 26] Jesus comes down from the mountain with the disciples. And a man from the crowd runs up and says, I have a desperate need. My son is in the grip of an obvious evil.

Verse 39. It seizes the boy. He convulses till he foams. It shatters him. And the man said, none of your followers can do anything about it.

It's a brilliant picture you see. This is why Jesus has come to earth. We are impotent in the face of evil. We are so committed to our own glory that we cannot deal with the destructive forces that arise from within ourselves.

We cannot confront the force of evil that tears our families apart. And the church can't do anything about it. All the sermons and services in the world won't fix it.

Positive thinking and adequate rest and holidays and sunshine won't do it. What is needed is the freeing power of Jesus' glory. And like a number of miracles in Luke's gospel, this is an enacted parable.

[18 : 37] As we read in verse 41, Jesus says, O faithless and perverse generation, how long am I to be with you and bear with you?

Bring your son here. Jesus is clearly distressed. These are stunning words. things. He looks at the family torn apart by this evil. He sees the hopelessness and the impotence.

And before he heals the boy, he takes a moment to give us clarity. Because what lies behind our powerlessness and our spiritual impotence, Jesus says, is our unbelief.

The reason we worship ourselves is unbelief. The fact that we do not naturally believe Christ, the fact that we live for our own glory and do not instantly recognize his glory is a demonstration in Jesus' mind of our own spiritual perversity.

And this is not confined to some specially twisted evil individuals, but to that whole generation and not just that generation. Jesus says, you have things upside down spiritually.

[19 : 51] When we hear about the glory of Jesus Christ, we ought to say to ourselves, this is what I've been waiting for. This is what I can live for. But we're still trying to figure out how to be the greatest.

We seem to believe so easily in our own glory and we seem to find it so hard to believe in Christ. And in Jesus' mind, that is just perverse. And it's fascinating.

This is exactly the charge that came up against Jesus at his trial. He was accused of perverting people, of twisting people, of turning them upside down. And we now know of course he was.

He was freeing them from slavery. He was turning them the right way up. And so to demonstrate his glory again, Jesus takes the boy and with a word he heals him and gives him to the family, restores the family.

God. And in verse 47, in the last two verses, Jesus turns to the disciples. He deals with them so patiently and kindly.

[20 : 56] And a number of commentators think that the child in verse 47 is the boy he's just healed. He takes a child and puts him by his side, verse 48, and he said to them, whoever receives this child in my name receives me, and whoever receives me receives him who sent me.

For he who is least among you all is the one who is great. So on this night tonight, we are not just drawn to Jesus' glory, we are being drawn by his glory.

It's Jesus who has come for us. It's not so much we who are seeking him, but he has come to seek us and save us. He's come to share his glory with us.

He's come to liberate us. He's come to open the doors so that we might receive his love and his grace and his joy. But so long as we hold on to our own glory, we will not be open to his glory.

And what we need is a fresh revelation of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. For it's only as we begin to believe and understand this glory that we are broken from the power of our own self seeking glory.

[22 : 22] There is no comparison with his grace and his kindness, with his life and his death, his resurrection and the future hope that we have.

And tonight as we join together, we celebrate that grace and we pray for one another that he would help us enter into that glory. Let's just bow our heads and pray.

We pray, Heavenly Father, that your Holy Spirit would take the words that you have written deeply into our hearts to make room for the glory of Christ and that our own love of ourselves would be overwhelmed by love of you.

Help us to understand your grace and your goodness so that we might have the joy of the angels. And we ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.