

Glory & Death

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- [0 : 00] Let's pray as we stand. Heavenly Father, we pray that through your living word this morning, that you would make us alive to you, that you would wake us up by your glory, that we might be free to serve you with gladness and joy in our salvation.
- We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Please be seated. Well, beginning this service talking about frozen pipes reminds me of a very memorable time when my pipes in my place froze.
- It was a number of years ago in the church that I was at before I came to St. John's. And in God's timing, my pipes froze the night before Sunday, Sunday service that I was preaching.
- And also in God's providence, it was the hot water pipe that froze. And it was one of those mornings where I really absolutely had to take a shower.
- Otherwise, I would no longer have been rector of the church the next morning. So that morning, I took the world's fastest shower.
- [1 : 20] It was incredibly cold. It was the coldest experience I've ever experienced in my life. And I didn't know whether I would survive that shower. But the great thing is, if you do survive a shower like that, you are really, really awake.
- And so I was very bright for my sermon that Sunday morning. And I tell that because this passage that we heard is a wake-up call to Jesus' disciples.
- In the most powerful way that you can imagine, Jesus is calling his disciples to wake up spiritually. I want you to look at the beginning of the passage that we had for today.
- It's Luke chapter 9, verse 28. And here at the beginning, Jesus brings Peter and James and John, who are going to be the leaders of the church after Jesus ascended to heaven.
- And he brings them up to the mountain to pray. And showing their spiritual qualities, their super spiritual qualities, all three of these men promptly fell asleep.
- [2 : 34] Now, we don't know if it was because it was late at night that they were praying or because of the warm afternoon sun. But either way, the passage tells us they were heavy with sleep.
- In verse 32, they were drowsy. Now, there's no reason for Luke to put in that detail other than to maybe embarrass the disciples. But it's more likely that he is telling it because it is a sign of spiritual drowsiness.
- You see it again in the Garden of Gethsemane, don't you, where the disciples fall asleep. There is a spiritual sleepiness that happens for the disciples.
- And this is a condition that you and I are susceptible to as well. And it's not just because it's Sunday, early Sunday morning, and the snow is out there.
- It is something that happens to us just like it does for the disciples. We, like the disciples, are close to Jesus. But the eyes of our hearts also can droop.
- [3 : 37] They can get heavy so that we are not conscious of the truth and the power of Jesus. And that happens because of the cares of the world that happened to us.

Or it is because of a worldview that is around us that ignores God, that is blind to God's glory and his power. These things cause us to have an expectation and understanding of Jesus that is weak at best.

It's not God's understanding of Jesus. And that's what spiritual sleepiness is. So the disciples sleep as Jesus prays.

Now we don't know what Jesus prayed in that time, but it is very likely that at least part of his prayer time was spent on his disciples, asking God to open the eyes of their hearts to the truth of who he is.

And you remember from last week's sermon that it is just after Jesus prays that Peter is able to make his incredible confession. Jesus said, Who do people say that I am?

[4 : 47] And then he said, Who do you say that I am? And Peter got it right. You are the Christ, the Christ of God. It is God's own work that opened his heart, that gave him the light of his truth.

And so it's likely that Jesus is praying for his disciples here. And as he prayed, Jesus' whole appearance was changed. And his clothes become dazzling white.

Literally, it's like lightning, is the way that the original language is. And it reflects the extraordinary light that is coming from Jesus' face. And I want you to notice in verse 30 that Luke wants you and I to pay a special attention to what he's about to say.

He says, Behold, in verse 30, which literally means pay attention. And what he says is that two men talked with Jesus, Moses and Elijah, who appeared in glory and spoke of his departure.

And literally, the original says, spoke of his exodus, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem. Now, as Luke says, these are very important words for us.

[6 : 03] Heaven is open to you and I at this moment. We are looking into eternity as we see Moses and Elijah in their glorified bodies.

And several things become clear. First, Moses and Elijah knew Jesus and his mission. And of course, that means that Jesus came from heaven, that he preexisted before he was born.

And that both Moses, the giver of the law, and Elijah, the greatest of the Old Testament prophets, are actually witnesses to Jesus here.

Just as in God's word, through Moses and Elijah, Jesus is witness to as well. You remember at the end, when Jesus rose from the dead, he spoke to the two disciples who couldn't believe that Jesus has risen.

And he explained to them from Moses. Moses and the rest of the prophets why he must suffer and die. So what is happening here is that Moses and Elijah are witnessing this.

[7 : 13] Now secondly, their conversation is about Jesus' exodus, that he would accomplish or fulfill at Jerusalem. So the topic of their conversation is Jesus' mission, how he fulfills God's plan, that Jesus would suffer rejection and die and then be exalted, just as he said to his disciples in verse 22.

It's all talked about in the context of glory. Jesus' death on the cross is his glory. Now, I want you to bring your minds back a year, because if you remember, a year, last year, we started a sermon series on the book of Exodus.

And we learned in Exodus that God's rescue of his people from Egyptian slavery was a rehearsal. It was a rehearsal of an ultimate rescue that God would do for the whole world in Jesus Christ.

That ultimate rescue is the exodus that Jesus is talking about to Moses and Elijah. And it's going to be accomplished in Jerusalem. It will set the world free from slavery to sin and death.

A much more binding, deeper kind of slavery. And anyone, no matter what their ethnicity or their moral qualities or their status is, will come into the family of God, to the people of God, to the nation of God, when they trust Jesus for their spiritual rescue.

[8 : 42] They become part of a people who are freed to serve God through the forgiveness of their sin. This is the glorious rescue work of Jesus. And you see it in people's lives all the time.

If you're able to talk to people around you about what is happening in their lives. Last week, we had seven baptisms. And at the 11 o'clock, two of those baptisms were adult baptisms.

Baptism is a sign of being freed from sin and death and rising to a new life with God through Jesus Christ so that we might serve Him. And as a church, we want this gift of Jesus' exodus in everyone's lives who come here, whether they are children or whether they are adults.

And that's why we have Sunday school and youth group and Bible studies and sermons and times to pray. It is so that we will see Jesus release and rescue in their lives.

The two testimonies at 11 o'clock from adults testified to that. They spoke about what it means to them to be alive to God in Christ and how God has brought them to that point.

[9 : 55] They have become part of the people of God that Jesus has created through the power of His death and resurrection. Well, the disciples are understandably very excited about what they are seeing.

You know, Jesus talking to these heroes of faith and in the Bible. And they want to preserve the moment. So, Peter proposes building three tabernacles for Moses, Elijah, and Jesus.

He wants them to set up camp and just kind of revel in this glory. But of course, if this happens, Jesus cannot go to Jerusalem to die. And Luke says Peter didn't know what he was saying.

Now, I think this is a nice way of saying that Peter was spectacularly wrong at this point. He is so spectacularly wrong that God Himself corrects Peter.

So, if you look further down, you see that the cloud in verse 34 comes and overshadows them and they're afraid as they entered the cloud. And a voice came out of the cloud saying, this is my son, my chosen.

[11 : 06] Listen to him. And what God said at that moment are three things from God's word from the Old Testament. He's saying Jesus is the king.

He is God's son from Psalm 2. He is God's chosen servant from Isaiah 42. Utterly faithful to the mission that they were just talking about. And therefore, they must listen to Him.

He is the word of God. He is far superior to Elijah or Moses. He is one to listen to. In other words, to hear and to obey.

Now, you cannot get a bigger, better endorsement than that. It is God's great yes to Jesus. And we will see that yes perfectly fulfilled in the resurrection.

God confirms that Jesus, as He suffers and dies and is rejected, shares the very glory of God Himself. So whatever happens, God's saying, listen to Jesus.

[12 : 09] And that is a word for you and I this morning. When we hear the gospel of Jesus with humility and we obey it, we are obeying God's voice here.

This is the way that we accept God's word, that Jesus is king and God's chosen one. It is the way that we worship. It is the way that we wake up out of any spiritual drowsiness we might have.

It is to heed, to listen, to obey Jesus Himself. Now, at the end of this incredible scene, Peter, James, and John are alone with Jesus and there is silence.

silence. And I think there is something right about that. I think I would have been silent as well. You know, what do you say? They've been just given a taste of the majesty and the glory of God in Jesus.

And how would they wrap their minds around the great fact that Jesus, the man who they are so familiar with, is God Himself whose majesty they could not comprehend.

[13 : 13] Well, there is probably a hope here that the disciples really wake up. But that's not the case. If you look at the last part of our passage, verses 37 through 50, Luke is going to show us incredible spiritual sleepiness.

Now, we can't be too hard on the disciples. I want a disclaimer here because they do not have the benefit of seeing the death and resurrection of Jesus. But having said that, the disciples do not come off well.

So, the next day, they are back in the crowds and they are faced with a boy who had a demon that the disciples couldn't cast out. And remember, at the beginning of the chapter, Jesus has said, I give you authority to do this.

And what Jesus does is He rebukes them. It may seem a bit unclear in the passage, but Jesus is rebuking the disciples, first of all, for being faithless and perverse is the way that He puts it.

And perverse means that you have diverted from Jesus. You have diverted yourself from the focus of Jesus and His authority. Diverted from trusting in Him.

[14 : 27] And then He turns to the demon and rebukes him as well, a demon who has created all kinds of havoc in this boy's life. He heals the boy and gives him back to his dad completely restored.

this instantaneous, powerful change and transformation takes place. Now notice in verse 43, people were astonished at the majesty of God.

It's the same thing that the disciples witnessed, the majesty of God in the transfiguration. But while they're all marveling at everything He did, He has to speak to His disciples.

He has to explain that majesty to them. And He said to them this, He said, let these words, in verse 44, sink into your ears. It's just sort of out there.

It's just sort of washing over them, Jesus' word is. He said, let it sink into your ears that the Son of Man is to be delivered into the hands of men.

[15 : 30] You can't get any clearer than that. Jesus is saying He will be rejected, He will suffer, He will die. And that is His glory. Now, there is a complete denial of this.

They don't understand what He's saying. It's concealed from them. They can't perceive it. And in their denial, they are actually afraid to ask Him about this saying. They don't want to get the wrong answer.

They don't want to get something that's uncomfortable for them. And just to show how sleepy they are, they are able to talk about their own greatness.

If you notice here, an argument rose among them as to who of them was greatest. But when Jesus perceived the thoughts of their heart, He took a child and put Him by His side. Now, what's happening here is that they're diverting towards a worldly way of thinking.

And they are rejecting the fact that Jesus must die. as I was working on my sermon yesterday, speaking of a child, my son Alexander came and wanted to talk to me as he sometimes does when I'm preparing.

[16 : 42] And he said to me, now, tomorrow morning, do we get crosses at church? I said, no, no, I think you're thinking about Palm Sunday, which is just the Sunday before Easter.

Another big Sunday as well. And he thought for a second, he thought, yeah, but the cross does have something to do with Christmas, doesn't it? And I said, yeah, it does actually because the reason Jesus came to Bethlehem was for one purpose, to die for us on a cross.

And he said, great, we should have crosses tomorrow then. But the disciples needed to understand this, isn't it? The reason Jesus came is to die for us.

They could not grasp that Jesus is saying that His majesty and His glorious status would be revealed in His rejection and death. And so to really prove the severe case of spiritual sleepiness, they have this argument about who's the greatest.

And with this child next to Jesus, Jesus says, whoever receives this child in my name receives me. And whoever receives me receives him who sent me.

[17 : 51] For he who is least among you, all is the one who is great. And what Jesus does is he deals with this master stroke with a worldview that ignores God.

He undermines all the Roman world took for granted regarding status and social relations. And he tells his followers that whomever Jesus welcomes is great.

And that true greatness comes through knowing and trusting in Jesus, the one who has suffered and rejected and rises again. True greatness comes from Jesus welcoming you through the forgiveness of the cross.

And this makes you great even though you are considered to be nothing in the eyes of the world, as this child would have had that status at that time. And so when you extend the honor of hospitality to someone of low status whom Jesus welcomes, you are honoring Jesus.

You are worshiping Him. And of course, this affects our whole life. We now have a life of service, of seeking to give to those the honor of hospitality, even though the world might say it's not deserved.

[19 : 03] Now just to show they really don't get it, the passage ends with John in verse 49 saying, he'd like to deny an outsider permission to work in Jesus' name. This guy doesn't have the status we do.

He shouldn't be doing the work that you called us to. And isn't that amazing? Jesus has just implored the disciples to honor those of no status of all, but they refuse partnership with one who didn't share their status.

And so you see what's happening. And Jesus, of course, says, welcome that ministry. Continue it. And what we have as we leave this passage is a spiritual drowsiness that comes from being diverted from a vision of the majesty of Jesus.

It's a spiritual drowsiness that comes from not fully allowing our ears to take in the good news that Jesus is Lord and Savior, one who dies in glory that we might live with him.

There's a powerful effect on us as we behold the glory of Jesus. And we actually are beholding that in this passage today. When we listen to the glorified Jesus, when we receive into our hearts the good news of his dying and rising for our sake, Jesus leads us in an exodus.

[20 : 22] His great work and his purpose in our life is to release us from bondage of all types, to wake us up from spiritual sleep. We are now being freed to serve him.

And he is, according to the Bible, changing us into his glorious likeness as we listen to God's word to listen, to heed Jesus Christ.

And so Isaiah's words that we began the service with are so wonderful for us today. It's the thing we go away from with this passage. Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you.

Let's pray together. Amen. Amen. O God, who on the holy mountain did reveal to chosen witnesses your well-beloved Son, wonderfully transfigured, mercifully grant unto us such a vision of his divine majesty that we, being purified and strengthened by your grace, may be transformed into his likeness from glory to glory through the same your Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord.

Amen. Please sit or kneel to pray.

[22 : 03] They saw his glory. Lord Jesus, as we approach Christmas Day and celebrate your arrival on earth, sharing our trials and infirmities, we're thankful for this picture of the transfiguration and the clear evidence that you are both man and God, authorized by the Father, sharing eternity with the heroes of the faith.

In a world where there are bright neon lights and dazzling media sensations that distract us, keep our eyes fixed on your eternal brightness and brilliance, the true light of the world who illuminates every man, woman, and child who will look and listen.

Lord, in your mercy. Father, we pray this morning for pastors, missionaries, and lay people who have set aside bodily comforts and the company of friends and family to spread the glory of Jesus and serve men and women in societies far from their own.

we remember those from our own congregation, Sharon Thompson in West Africa with Wycliffe Bible translators, that you will ensure her health and safety and bring her the joy of a job well done.

we pray for Doug and Anna Marie Graham serving in Asia Pacific and ask that they will see a spiritual harvest for their labors.

[24 : 16] And we bring before you Brian McConachie and the Ratanak Foundation and pray for that work of courage and mercy that brings health and freedom from sexual predators to the poor and marginalized in Cambodia.

Lastly, Lord, we remember Catherine Gannett and her work with the North American Indian Mission on Vancouver Island. Bless her.

Make her service fruitful. Father, we do hold up these men and women of faith who have chosen and been chosen by you to bring good news and glad tidings.

Lord, in your mercy. Lord, we know it's not always easy to be a Christian. Help us when we're under pressure.

The butt of jokes are the most of the people and the persecution of our brothers and sisters and the persecution of our brothers and sisters. May this experience help us to pray and share more closely in the persecution of our brothers and sisters overseas.

[25 : 43] As we continue to pray for the persecuted remnant of Christian believers in the Middle East, we add to them our brothers and sisters facing attacks and suffering bloodshed in the Orissa region of India and the Joss region of Nigeria.

Father God, hear their prayers and cries. Be merciful. Spare them from further trials. We bring before you too the ravaged land of Zimbabwe destroyed by cruel and ruthless men.

Father, give wisdom to your church there and spare the land and its people from further suffering. We do give thanks for Brighton Malassa who has been appointed the new bishop in Malawi and pray for his ministry.

Lord, in your mercy, Lord Jesus, we turn our thoughts to our own country. We thank you for the extravagant gift we have received of living in a land of material privilege and the rule of law.

We confess in sorrow that Canada is increasingly moving away from Christian faith. Lord, give us, your people, a spiritual vision for this blessed but secular land.

[27 : 34] May our daily lives be committed to making a difference for Christ's kingdom. may our churches through the boldness of their preaching and the depth of their love and service to the community commend Jesus and the way of salvation.

As we enter a period of economic difficulty, we pray for those who face hardship and even hunger. Lord, help us to renew our efforts to build up Christian outreach to those in need, the poor, the sick, the troubled, the homeless, the addicted.

May we see them as Jesus does. May we serve them as he did. we do pray within our own parish for those in particular difficulty, whether it be emotional, economic, or health-related.

And bring before you our friends who need a particular gift of your presence. Lord, we pray for Paul, Rowena, Ben and Nancy, and Marguerite, and others known to us.

We think of our brother Mehran and pray for justice in his immigration appeal. Lord, graciously meet each of us in our hopes and in our anxiety.

[29 : 21] Lord, in your mercy. Amen.