

Glory Through Suffering

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[0 : 0 0] Good morning, church. Our sermon text today is from John chapter 17, verses 1 through 5. It can be found in your pew Bibles on page 849. And here we continue with Jesus on the last night of his earthly life.

He has just finished a long session teaching the disciples where he explained that he is the way, the truth, and the life. And because of this, he told the disciples that they should abide in him like a vine's branches abide in the vine itself.

And Jesus further prophesied his own imminent departure from this world. But he also gave assurance of his victory on the cross, even while warning about coming tribulations.

And lastly, Jesus spoke to the disciples about the arrival of the Holy Spirit, who would soon come and turn the disciples' grief into joy. Now, in the passage we have before us, Jesus carries out one of his final acts before he is arrested.

He prays a prayer. And before we read his prayer, let's offer up a prayer of our own to God. Father, we come to you today in the name of your son, Jesus.

[1 : 1 7] Father, we're about to read one of the last things he prayed before he was crucified. And we ask that you give us insight and discernment about his prayer.

Teach us, Father. Teach us, through the prayer of Jesus, to be like Jesus. Teach us to pray like him, to desire what he desired, and to give you glory like he gave you glory.

And we pray this in his name. Amen. So Jesus' prayer goes like this. Again, we're in chapter 17, verse 1 through 5 of the Gospel of John.

When Jesus had spoken these words, he lifted up his eyes to heaven and said, Father, the hour has come. Glorify your Son, that the Son may glorify you.

Since you have given him authority over all flesh, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him. And this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.

[2 : 2 0] I glorified you on earth, having accomplished the work that you gave me to do. And now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed.

What is glory? Jesus' whole prayer centers on this concept of glory. Jesus asked the Father to glorify him, that he may glorify the Father.

He says that he was in the glory of the Father before the world existed. And he requests that he be glorified with that glory once again. But what is glory?

Our world will say that glory is that which is honorable or prestigious or that which is eminent or majestic or beautiful. And today, glorious things and glorious deeds and glorious people are those who are famous and attractive and wealthy and powerful.

And in a way, at least, Scripture agrees with this definition. God is glorious. And that means he is majestic. He's indescribably beautiful.

[3 : 32] He's unimaginably powerful. He possesses more honor than we can put into words. And this is witnessed throughout all the Scriptures. For example, we heard all these things in the passage that was read earlier today from Revelation chapters 4 and 5, that famous heavenly throne room scene where John is taken up by the Spirit into the throne room of God himself in heaven.

And he sees God seated on a throne, surrounded by a rainbow. And from the throne come flashes of lightning, peals of thunder. And spread out before the throne is a sea of glass like crystal.

And in the throne room are an uncountable number of angels focused on God and worshipping him. It's quite a glorious scene, isn't it?

Even by the world's definition of glory. But was this the glory that Jesus was praying for in his prayer? Is this the glory that Jesus meant when he said, Father, the hour has come.

Glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you. Was he asking for power and authority and majesty? Friends, what I'm going to say today is that when it comes to true glory, the world, as with so many things, has understood part of the issue, but is missing out on perhaps the most vital point.

[4 : 55] The glory that Jesus is praying for in our passage before us, the true glory that Jesus asked for, it does involve beauty and majesty and splendor and power.

And Jesus is no doubt alluding to that glorious throne room that we heard about in Revelation, where everything is focused on God. But there's something else too, something so important, in fact, that it involves the entire Christian message.

And if we pay attention to the words of Jesus' prayer in our passage today, I think Jesus himself gives us a clue about this missing aspect of true glory. You can find it in verse 1, where Jesus says, Father, the hour has come.

Glorify your Son. Remember the hour it was when Jesus prayed this prayer. He prayed this the hour before he was going to be arrested and crucified.

And so the hour, the hour that had come, was the hour when Jesus would sacrifice himself for the sins of the world. And this sacrifice is inextricably linked with the glory that Jesus prays for.

[6 : 07] And so the true glory for which Jesus prays is the glory of laying down his life as a ransom for many.

This is the perfection of glory. And any definition of glory, any explanation of real, true, authentic, and eternal biblical glory, any seeking after the glory of God must understand that true biblical glory involves humbly submitting to suffering.

Jesus teaches us in his prayer that to obtain true glory, you must forsake earthly power and majesty and honor and even lay your life down for others.

This is why in his earthly ministry, Jesus would say the Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many. That is, Jesus did not come to gain earthly power and majesty.

He came to lay his life down as a ransom for many and by that to gain the perfection of eternal glory. And this is also why, in that glorious heavenly throne room scene in Revelation, with all the splendor and beauty and power and fame and honor that's given to God in heaven, there also is Jesus standing on the throne of God as a slain lamb.

[7 : 30] Do you remember that part of the passage that we heard earlier? All the majesty of heaven is described in that passage, the beauty and the grandeur, and yet there on the throne with God is a slain lamb, our dear Jesus, who suffered for the sins of the world.

And the passage says that all heaven cries out about Jesus, worthy are you for you were slain. Worthy is the lamb who was slain to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory.

Jesus is worthy to receive all these glorious things because he was slain for us. You see, church, glory is not just what the world says it is.

True, biblical, godly glory is gained by joyfully suffering and especially by suffering for the sake of others. This is the glory that Jesus asked for when he prayed to the Father, the hour has come, glorify your son.

And God answered his prayer. He did glorify him through the cross of his suffering. Brothers and sisters, is this the glory you are seeking in your life?

[8 : 51] Or are you seeking after the world's glory, the glory that will not suffer and that will not risk and that will not sacrifice? The kind of glory that lords it over everyone else.

Because to seek the glory of God is to suffer for others like Jesus did. And this biblical glory is not unique to the Son of God. This glory is also shared by God the Father.

If we turn to Jesus' prayer, we can see this very clearly. Jesus prays in John 17, verse 1, The hour has come. Here Jesus asks for that glory that we've spoken of, that suffering glory.

But notice that just as Jesus the Son possesses and seeks that long-suffering, self-sacrificial glory, so the Father also possesses that same sacrificial glory.

The Son has this glory because he suffered by laying down his life. But the Father has this glory because he so loved the world, he sent his one and only Son to suffer.

[10 : 01] You see, church, Jesus' prayer for glory reveals this wonderful truth, that God's glory is made perfect in suffering. The Son knows the glory of sacrificing himself for his enemies, and the Father knows the glory of sending his Son to die for his enemies.

Therefore, God knows both what it is to sacrifice himself and what it is to send his beloved Son as a sacrifice. And in this, God's glory is perfected because he knows both of what it is to suffer and what it is to have someone you love suffer.

Friends, I wonder, how are you suffering today? Is God using that suffering in your life and working it into eternal glory like he did with his Son?

There are many kinds of suffering in this world, and we have many kinds of suffering in our church. But whatever you're suffering today, whatever it may be, all of it, whether you, when you humbly submit it to God, will be used by God to make you more like God and to share in his glory.

This is the great secret of the Christian life, that as a Christian, whenever you humbly submit to suffering, then you draw closer to the one who humbly suffered for you, and he will use your suffering for his glory and also for yours.

[11 : 31] And this is true whether your suffering is in the form of physical pain or mental pain. It's true whether you've been harmed accidentally or harmed intentionally. This is even true if you're suffering because of your own sin.

Then, if you repent and submit your suffering to God, God is so glorious and powerful that he will redeem your suffering and make it work for good by the power of Jesus Christ.

And so today, whether you're suffering because of the faith or because you made a mistake, whether you're suffering because someone you love is hurting or even because you've hurt someone you love, whatever the cause of your suffering, Jesus knows what it is like to suffer.

And if you submit it to God, then he will use it to make you more like him and you'll share in his glory. Therefore, church, if you're suffering in this hour, be encouraged by the suffering of Jesus and his prayer for glory.

Submit to suffering. Repent if you need to. And remember that there is an eternal weight of glory prepared for you and your suffering. This is why the Apostle Paul wrote these words to the Corinthians.

[12 : 47] He said, We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed. We're perplexed, but not driven to despair. We're persecuted, but not forsaken. Struck down, but not destroyed.

We always carry in our bodies the death of Jesus so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies. For we who live are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh.

So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison.

As we look for the things that are seen, as we look not to the things that are seen, but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.

In Jesus' prayer for glory, Jesus was looking for those unseen things in heaven where that eternal weight of glory was being prepared for him through his suffering.

[14 : 00] This is why we follow Scripture in calling Jesus the Lord of glory and why we confess that Jesus holds all the power and all authority on account of the glory that he's been given. If we return to Jesus' prayer in John chapter 17, we see that he speaks about this power which he has been given as the Lord of glory.

And also what our responsibility is to him because of it. He says, Father, the hour has come. Glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you since you have given him authority over all flesh to give eternal life to all whom you have given him.

Now notice what Jesus says here. First, Jesus, as the Lord of glory, is in charge. God has given him authority over all flesh. So it doesn't matter who we are or where we are.

It doesn't matter what color our skin is or what our language is. It doesn't matter what culture we are or even what our religion is. Whether we recognize it or not, Jesus has authority over us and everyone else.

But he uses this authority to give eternal life to all whom the God, God the Father, has given to him. God, in his mystical foreknowledge and from his great love, has rescued those whom he chose from the wrath that was coming because of our sins.

[15 : 22] And he's given us eternal life through Jesus Christ. The only responsibility that remains for us is to humbly submit to his judgment concerning the gift of eternal life.

But what is this eternal life? Jesus gives us the answer in verse 3. He says, And this is eternal life that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.

Jesus explains here that eternal life is to know God and Jesus Christ whom he sent. And as the Lord of glory, Jesus is the focus of all things. He's the focus of life itself.

He's the ultimate goal, meaning, source, the cause and result of all things. All things flow from him and all things flow to him. And so eternal life is to know him and God the Father who sent him.

Our responsibility, therefore, on this earth is to know Jesus. And let me tell you, there's nothing better than knowing Jesus. Jesus continues his prayer.

[16 : 24] In verse 4, he says, I glorified you on earth, having accomplished the work that you gave me to do. Jesus glorified God the Father on earth because he accomplished the work that the Father gave him to do.

But what was that work? What was it actually? Well, here is a beautiful truth, church. The work which God gave Christ to perform was you.

That work was to save sinners, even sinners like you. His work was to save you by defeating death on the cross and rising on the third day.

And according to Jesus' prayer, he finished the job. It's already done. I said that nothing could be better than knowing Jesus, the Lord of glory, but perhaps I can say the only thing better is if that work of bringing about a reconciled relationship with God is not just in the future, but has already been done by God on the cross.

And in a way, this wasn't just completed 2,000 years ago in Jerusalem when Jesus was crucified on earth. This work goes all the way back to the beginning of time itself. In verse 5, Jesus prays, And now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed.

[17 : 43] Jesus explains that not only did he exist before the world began, but he was in glory with God the Father before the world began. And we must all understand that by this glory, Jesus means that true, self-sacrificial, biblical glory that only comes through suffering.

You see, the Father and the Son had this kind of glory before the world began because before time, the Father, in his secret wisdom, knew of his plan of salvation. He knew that he would send his Son to die and the Son knew that he would lay his life down.

This is why I think the best translations of Revelation 13, 18 say that Jesus is a Lamb of God who was slain before the foundation of the world because in a sense, he was.

All of God's own suffering was known by God with certainty in his hidden wisdom before the world began. And so, in a manner of speaking, that suffering was known and experienced by God and therefore, the Father and the Son were in glory with one another from the very beginning.

In his letters, the Apostle Paul speaks about God's glorious plan of salvation which he made before all eternity for glory. He says in 1 Corinthians 2, 7, 8, But we impart a secret, the hidden wisdom of God which God decreed before the ages for our glory.

[19 : 08] None of the rulers of this age understood this for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. And Paul also says in his letter to the Colossians, 1, 26 through 27, he says, The mystery hidden for ages and generations but now revealed to the saints.

To them, God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. Friends, the sum of what I'm saying is this, just as God had plans for his own glory before the foundation of the world, so he also had plans for your glory and just as he had plans to use his own suffering for glory, so he also has plans to make your suffering into glory too.

Church, if you're suffering today, I want to tell you that you are not forgotten by God. For in the same way that God knew of his own suffering, so he knows of yours also.

And in the same way that God redeemed his own suffering, so he will also redeem yours. Your hardship and your suffering were known by God before the beginning of the world.

Every drop you have bled, every tear you have shed has been known by God and is known by God from all eternity. And just as the Father and Son were together in glory from the very beginning, so God is welcoming you into his own life through his suffering.

[20 : 37] And then through your suffering, he's preparing and strengthening you to carry an eternal weight of glory. Friends, Jesus' prayer has covered many important points in our Christian life.

glory, eternal life, knowing God, the power and sovereignty of Jesus, the exclusive devotion we owe to Jesus. And there are many ways that these comfort us.

But I want to turn now to address those of us who may not find all of these truths about the authority of Jesus and his sovereignty to be comforting, or perhaps to those who struggle with explaining these truths to others in our community and our world.

And let me give you some examples. Our world often claims that there are many ways to God and many paths. And because of this, our world at times can recoil from the idea that Jesus has authority over everyone or that he's the only way to God as Jesus prayed in his prayer.

Often also, our world and even our fleshly selves, we desire to be in power, we desire to be in control, we want to be in charge, and so the idea that eternal life ultimately, as Jesus prayed, ultimately depends not on us but on God and whom he chooses can grate against us and rankle us.

[22 : 05] Often we want to be the ultimate arbiter and decider of our fate. And thirdly, the world can also be aggravated by the idea that for Christians, eternal life is to know God and Jesus Christ as Jesus makes clear in his prayer.

this kind of knowing or this kind of knowledge can make Christians sometimes come off as arrogant know-it-alls and sadly, we can all think of times when this has happened.

So these three truths that Jesus prays about in his prayer can for some be troubling instead of comforting. The notion that Jesus has authority over all people or that he gives eternal life to those whom God has chosen or thirdly, that eternal life is to know God and Jesus Christ.

But friends, if you're troubled by one or all of these, if you find some of them difficult to accept, then I want to suggest a different way of looking at them, a way that I hope will help you appreciate their beauty and their glory.

Let's start with Jesus' power and authority over all flesh. As we've read this morning in Jesus' prayer, he possesses power over all peoples and over all nations, over every tribe and over every language.

[23 : 13] Jesus has authority over all of them and he will be their judge on that day when he returns. But if you're troubled by this, remember the particular judge we're talking about here is the one who loved the world so that he laid his life down.

Church, if you're concerned or worried about your friends or family or anyone else in this wide world who has not heard the gospel, be comforted. The one who has been appointed as judge is the very one who in his compassion did more to save the world than we can imagine.

As scripture says, it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. But scripture also says that that very God is the one who sacrificed himself for those in his hands.

What better judge of the world is there to have than that? If we can trust him, we can trust that he's able to save all whom he calls. And for this reason, that final judgment as adjudicated by Jesus will not only be the most just but also the most compassionate judgment.

Take comfort in that. And now in Jesus' prayer, he has also made it clear that eternal life is given to all whom the Father has given him. But some people are uncomfortable with the idea that ultimately our salvation depends on God's will and not our own.

[24 : 44] Sometimes this is sort of a raw fleshly rebellion but other times it's a philosophical one with carefully reasoned objections.

But friends, if you're troubled by this then I want to assure you what this means is that at bottom your salvation doesn't depend on you, it depends on the work of God.

So when you sin or mess up and we all do, it doesn't mean that you've blown it. It doesn't mean that when you're struggling, when you're wrestling with your sinful self, when you've stumbled in the race or you've strayed from the way, it doesn't mean that you've fallen from grace because it is Jesus who saves.

He's the author and perfecter of our faith. And as the Apostle Jude writes, God is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy.

My friends, how wonderful it is to have our eternal life procured and protected by God himself. He is the one who will bring you to repentance. He is the one who will make you to stand on that day when he judges all flesh.

[25 : 55] And he's the one who will pick you up when you have fallen and will give you fruits of repentance. As I said earlier, Scripture declares that it is a terrible thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

But Jesus also says, I give them eternal life and they will never perish and no one will snatch them out of my hand. How terrible it is to be in the hands of God but how wonderful it is also.

The Apostle Paul explains this mystery of our salvation depending on God yet also intertwining with our will. He exhorts the Philippians, he says, work out your salvation with fear and trembling for it is God who works in you both to will and to work for his good pleasure.

Now lastly, Jesus in his prayer says that eternal life is to know God and his son and some people interpret this by claiming that Christians have some kind of special knowledge that is only available to a few.

And if you encounter a Christian who thinks this is the kind of knowledge Jesus is talking about, they sometimes can come off as a sort of holier-than-thou, know-it-all kind of person.

[27 : 13] But this isn't the knowledge that Jesus is talking about here. The kind of knowledge that Jesus has in mind is not informational knowledge, it's relational knowledge. The knowledge that he's speaking about is that kind of knowing that you experience when you know a person intimately heart-to-heart and face-to-face.

And in this case, the person that you know is God himself. And when you know him, then you understand just how little and insignificant you are. And you see the gravity of your sins and you understand God's righteous anger, but also his love and his mercy.

And then you're humbled. And then you begin to realize that what really matters is not what you think about God, but what God thinks about you. And you understand that God does not like the sins you have been committing.

And then, as he leads you to repentance and you feel his forgiveness, you realize that nothing compares to knowing God and his Son, Jesus Christ, and being known by him.

But friends, after all this, if you are perhaps still hesitant to share the good news of Jesus with others, out of fear that you may come across as arrogant or mean-spirited, if that's a challenge you're facing, then here's what you should do.

[28 : 43] Remember the glory for which Jesus prayed and seek after it. Father, he prayed, the hour has come. Glorify your Son. And then he went to the cross for the sins of the world and then the world was changed.

So you also, when you seek after the glory of Jesus, when you lay down your life for others, then your neighbors will listen to you.

When your friends and your neighbors see the love of God poured out in your heart, when they see your patience and your humility, when they see your long-suffering, your joy and hardship, your willingness to forgive, your quickness to repent, and your desire to bear the burdens of others, then they'll also see Jesus in you and then they will listen to you.

Friends, hear an exhortation from the book of Hebrews. Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight and sin which clings so closely and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.

Let's pray. Father, we ask in the name of your son Jesus that you would make us to know his glory, that you would prepare us for that eternal weight of glory.

[30 : 28] Father, I pray for those right now who are suffering, who are in despair, who are perplexed. I pray, Lord, that you would give them immense comfort now. I pray, Father, that as the sufferings of Christ overflow in their lives, that the joy of Christ would also overflow in them.

Father, I pray that as a church we would be united together in the fellowship of the sufferings of Jesus. Father, I pray that you would teach us how to weep with those who weep, how to mourn with those who mourn, and how to rejoice with those who rejoice.

Father, I pray that you would perfect us whenever we suffer, that you would help us to run the race with perseverance for the joy that is set before us. And we pray this in the mighty name of Jesus.

Amen.