

The Humble Glory of the Cross

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We all love stories. It is interesting how many of our stories: our folk tales, our epic poems, our fairy tales, our great literature, and many of our movies is very often a basic idea of the two ways of living life. In our stories, the evil characters usually seek to get their way through domination, cruelty, violence, trickery. But they try to climb up the ladder of success or wealth or power by their own selfish way. But the good characters, the heroes usually give themselves up for others, accepting sacrifice, humility, pain, difficulty so as to rescue or help, or save another. And in most of our stories, the proud fall as they try to go up the ladder, while the humble are exalted because of their sacrifice.

Behind these stories lies a great principle of reality: glory is either obtained selfishly through pride, or sacrificially, through humility. The Bible teaches that the origin of evil was a created angel seeking glory. Evil glory, satanic glory is all about grasping power, gaining glory through domination. The story of the Bible is that evil grasps for independent life, and lives and breathes pride, selfish ambition, envy. Evil fights for position, jostles for fame, and expects honour to come from beating others. That's what gives us a world of grievous envy, competition, hatred, despair, looking for worldly accolades.

But the principle of love, rooted in the very Tri-une life of God, is the principle of self-giving. God's glory is a self-giving, sharing, serving, glory. And now in a fallen world, that self-giving life is a way of humility. In a fallen world, there must be death before life, self-surrender before victory.

That principle is uppermost in this passage. Here we reach the great moment in Jesus' life when the reason for Jesus' coming comes into view. Like when you've travelled down to the sea for hours, there comes that moment when it finally comes into view. So Jesus has lived as a man among men for thirty-some years, ministered for three and a half years, but the great work of Atonement has been hidden beneath the horizon. Now it is as if it comes into view, and Jesus sees it. He sees the Cross, and He sees its point: God's glory through humiliation. He sees the upside-down reality of the Gospel, the great paradox of God's Gospel principles: glory through suffering, victory through defeat, life through death, exaltation through humiliation. Instead of grasping for glory, Jesus accepts the way down is the way up.

Jesus has ridden in to Jerusalem on Palm Sunday presenting Himself as King Messiah for the nation to observe and scrutinise. Many shouted “Hosanna!”, “save now”, expecting a military Messiah, Messiah Son of David, come to conquer through power, glory through domination. But He is actually coming as Suffering Messiah, Isaiah 53 Messiah. He is the Messiah Son of Joseph, the Messiah that is humbled before He is exalted.

But many then, and many today have no category for humility in their understanding of life. They could not then, and they cannot now, embrace the principle of the Cross. It's funny how often we cheer for the humble hero in the story, and boo the proud antagonist, but we are slow to do that in our own lives. If life were a story, and you were one of the characters, would you be one accepting the way of the Cross, or the opposite? Here the Lord will unpack for us one of the deepest realities by explaining what His upcoming death will be about. The Cross will be a paradox, it will be pain, and it will be power. Those three realities of true glory are still true for us today.

I. The Paradox of the Cross

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It is Passover, and around 2 million pilgrims have come up to Jerusalem. Among them are some Greeks. These are not just Greek-speaking Jews; these are Gentiles. They are what were called God-fearers, Gentiles who had not fully converted to the faith of Israel, but were drawn to it, attended the synagogue, and tried to practise it. Some of them would come up for the feasts, though they were not allowed to enter the part of the Temple area reserved for Jews. There was a middle wall of partition that separated the Court of the Gentiles, with a sign warning that any who crossed into that area would be put to death. Perhaps they had heard that Jesus cleansed the Temple and reminded everyone that it was to be a house of prayer for all nations. Perhaps they had heard Jesus was teaching in the Temple grounds every day. But the fame of Jesus had spread to other nations, and now these Gentiles want to see Jesus. Someone said that wise men from the East came to the cradle, and now wise men from the West came to the cross.

They approach the apostle who has a Greek name, and is from Bethsaida which was a town in Galilee with much contact with the Graeco-Roman cities of the Decapolis, on the east side of the lake of Galilee. Philip seem to have trouble with decision-making, so he refers this request to Andrew, and they take it to Jesus.

Jesus responds with a strange answer: the hour has come that the Son of Man should be glorified. All along, Jesus has been saying that His hour has *not* yet come.

Jesus said to her, “Woman, what does your concern have to do with Me? My hour has not yet come.” (John 2:4)

Therefore they sought to take Him; but no one laid a hand on Him, because His hour had not yet come. (John 7:30)

These words Jesus spoke in the treasury, as He taught in the temple; and no one laid hands on Him, for His hour had not yet come. (John 8:20)

But here He says the hour has come. In fact the word for *come* in the Greek is placed at the beginning of the sentence emphasising that this is the point: the time is now. What is there in this request for an interview with Jesus that sparks this response?

Spurgeon: "Surely, the coming of a few Greeks to see him was not very much in the way of glorification. But, to him, the coming of these Greeks was a sort of prophecy of the myriads of other Gentiles who would, by-and-by, come to his feet; and, therefore, he looked forward to that death which should be the means of their salvation." Jesus sees in their seeking of Him the beginnings of what the Cross will bring: millions of people from around the world, finding the Jewish Messiah.

But this glory is not the glory which human pride expects; it is not the glory of selfish ambition, the glory of a violent conqueror. It is that paradoxical glory of God. It is the glory that will come through the cross. So to explain this to His disciples, Jesus gives an illustration, followed by an application, and a promise.

His illustration is from nature. The principle is simple: new life actually comes from death. A plant must go through all its growing, budding, flowering phases, until it finally dies, and drops its fruit or seeds to the ground. Then those seeds, which appear to be nothing more than dead, hard, shells, actually contain within them all that is needed for new life.

But seeds don't start growing while they are still on the plant. The death must be complete, and the seed must drop to the ground, as if it is discarded and useless. It must end up with some soil around it, under it, over it, some water landing on it, some sunshine on it, and this glorious process begins: life from death.

A single seed that does not undergo a fall and a burial/ death, remains an unfruitful, singular seed. But if it dies, it brings forth much fruit. Someone has calculated that if you plant one wheat seed, take the crop and plant all the seed from that crop, plant all the seed from the next crop, and so on., that it would take only fourteen years for the whole land space of the earth to be filled.

Here's the application: He who loves his life will lose it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life.

This is actually the most repeated phrase said by Jesus in the Gospels.

³⁹ He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for My sake will find it. (Matthew 10:39)

²⁶ "If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple. (Luke 14:26)

²⁴ For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will save it. (Luke 9:24)

Now this is a Hebraism: love/hate as a Hebrew idiom simply means prefer one over the other. Jacob I have loved, Esau I have hated does not mean malice and antipathy toward Esau; it means Jacob is preferred over Esau.

If you *prefer* your independent life lived for this world over a life lived for God's glory and eternal life, then you are like the wheat kernel hanging on to the branch. You want this life, and this life now, and you want it without humility, without giving anything up. You don't want the submission, the sacrifice, the self-denial, even the suffering.

But Jesus says, if that is you, then you will lose your life. Not just physically, because that is no surprise to anyone; we all know that we are going to physically die. No, Jesus means, if you prefer hanging on to your own way of living, then ironically, the real meaning and joy and fulness of life will evade you. It will weaken, and then yes, eventually perish physically. And then you go on to face an eternity of your own making: an eternity of living in your selfishness, with all the others who lived in their selfishness. There, in that world, it is always winter, and never springtime. No one wanted to die to self, so now everyone will live in their own eternal death.

But, Jesus said, if like Me, you surrender to God, you submit to God, you deny self, you sacrifice your selfish life; if you prefer eternity over this world, God's righteousness over self-righteousness, God's glory over self-glory, if you prefer God over self, then you will keep your life for eternal life.

But to do this, you must copy, you must imitate this paradoxical principle seen in Jesus. That's what the Lord says: ²⁶ If anyone serves Me, let him follow Me; and where I am, there My servant will be also.

A servant is not greater than His Master. If the Father appointed the cross before the crown for the Son, then so it must be for Jesus's servant. A servant of Jesus follows Jesus, which means he goes where Jesus goes and does what Jesus does. In ancient battles, kings were known to sprint ahead of their men, exposing themselves to the greatest danger, and showing the greatest bravery. And so the cry would come, "to the king! To the king!" In other words, protect the king! If the king is throwing himself at the enemy in self-sacrifice, can we do any less?

Something like that is meant here. If the king accepts this humiliation, this death to self, then can we, his servants, do any less? But then see the promise attached: If anyone serves Me, him *My Father* will honor.

You want honour, to be remembered, known, to have achieved? The Father will not fail to honour those who embrace the Calvary Road for the sake of the Son. You want honour, follow Jesus to the cross. What goes down will come up.

II. The Pain of the Cross

²⁷ "Now My soul is troubled, and what shall I say? 'Father, save Me from this hour'? But for this purpose I came to this hour. ²⁸ Father, glorify Your name." Then a voice came from heaven, *saying*, "I have both glorified *it* and will glorify *it* again." ²⁹ Therefore the people who stood by and heard *it* said that it had thundered. Others said, "An angel has spoken to Him." ³⁰ Jesus answered and said, "This voice did not come because of Me, but for your sake.

At this point, Jesus reports His great grief and groaning in His soul as He looks toward the Cross. The word for troubled is the same word for what Jesus felt at the tomb of Lazarus. Inward turmoil, inner distress, a sense of danger. He is going to speak like this again when in the Garden of Gethsemane.

³⁸ Then He said to them, "My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death. Stay here and watch with Me." (Matthew 26:38)

Jesus begins to experience the same kind of things He will experience in Gethsemane. His soul is troubled. He is not troubled by the physical agony of the cross, though that is certainly not something He looks forward to. He is not troubled by the rejection and the persecution He will face, though this is certainly emotionally distressing. What Jesus is troubled by is that this hour, this time, involves Him, who is the Life and the Light, accepting death and darkness for us. He who is Life, will willingly surrender His perfect Life as a covering for all whose sin had earned them death. He will take on our Guilt, and face not only physical death, but spiritual death on the cross. He will taste death for every man.

Unless He does this, there is no resurrection, which means no new life, and no conquering of sin and death. If Jesus holds back, if Jesus asks the Father to save Him from this hour, then He is like that corn of wheat hanging on to its branch, and refusing to fall to the ground. If Jesus says no to the

death, then He says no to resurrection, and no to glorifying God.

And that wouldn't make sense, because Jesus came for this purpose: to die for sins, defeat death and sin, and rise victorious, granting life and victory to His people and greater glory to God.

In fact, the whole Incarnation, from leaving Heaven's glory, to taking on humanity, to accepting the role of a servant, to going to the cross, is one step after another of surrender, submission, sacrifice, going down before you can come up.

⁵ Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, ⁶ who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, ⁷ but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, *and* coming in the likeness of men. ⁸ And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to *the point of* death, even the death of the cross. (Philippians 2:5–8)

Jesus' life was one of not claiming His preferences, not insisting on His rights, not serving Himself, not choosing His comforts. Instead, He kept giving them up, which is a kind of death: a sort of loss, a separation, something slipping away. His whole life was the life of a Servant, sacrificing His own for the glory of the Father, and for the good of mankind.

That whole life of small deaths now came to the Great Death. A few days later, Jesus would be in Gethsemane, sweating drops of blood as the full weight of Calvary now began to break in upon Him.

Some take verse 27 to mean that Jesus is asking rhetorically if he should pray “Father save me from this hour?” and not actually praying it. I suggest that misunderstands the text. Jesus is not being histrionic, and over-dramatic. I think he really is praying this prayer, “Father, save me from this hour” just as in Gethsemane, He will say, “Three times He would pray: “³⁹ He went a little farther and fell on His face, and prayed, saying, “O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; (Matthew 26:39)

But then just as in the Garden, where Jesus says, nevertheless, not as I will, but as You *will*.”, Jesus says the same thing here in another way: Father, glorify your name.

Jesus chose the principle of humble glory by praying for the whole purpose of the whole thing. Father, glorify your name. That means: Father, enable me to see my work through, through my death and resurrection.

And then, in one of only three occasions, Jesus hears the audible voice of Heaven, the *bat qol*, as the rabbis called it. The voice spoke at Jesus's baptism, at His transfiguration, and now at this moment. Other people hear an indistinguishable sound like thunder, or the faint shape of a voice. We're reminded of when Christ spoke to Saul of Tarsus, and Saul's companions could hear a sound, but not understand anything. But only Jesus can hear the clear words of the Father: ““I have both glorified *it* and will glorify *it* again.” This is both assurance and promise. I have glorified it in the past, and I will enable you to finish your task and glorify Me.

C. S. Lewis: “Give up yourself, and you will find your real self. Lose your life and you will save it. Submit to death, death of your ambitions and favourite wishes every day and death of your whole body in the end submit with ever fibre of your being, and you will find eternal life. Keep back nothing. Nothing that you have not given away will be really yours. Nothing in you that has not died will ever be raised from the dead. Look for yourself, and you will find in the long run only hatred, loneliness, despair, rage, ruin, and decay. But look for Christ and you will find Him, and with Him everything else thrown in.”

The pain of the coming cross requires assurance and comfort that it will be worth it. And so, for our sakes, the Father's comfort was heard, to show that it is a reality. God will exalt His humbled Son, and God will save the one who loses his selfish worldly life for Christ.

III. The Power of the Cross

³¹ Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be cast out. ³² And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all *peoples* to Myself." ³³ This He said, signifying by what death He would die. ³⁴ The people answered Him, "We have heard from the law that the Christ remains forever; and how *can* You say, 'The Son of Man must be lifted up'? Who is this Son of Man?" ³⁵ Then Jesus said to them, "A little while longer the light is with you. Walk while you have the light, lest darkness overtake you; he who walks in darkness does not know where he is going. ³⁶ While you have the light, believe in the light, that you may become sons of light." These things Jesus spoke, and departed, and was hidden from them.

Now Jesus speaks of three victorious effects of His humble cross-work.

First, the world is judged. The world thought it was sitting in judgement on Jesus. But now the world would have the ultimate indictment on it: the only righteous man ever to live was being unfairly put to death. All the sins of the world were on Him, and yet people repented not. Mankind's excuses for rejecting God were silenced before a loving God sending His own Son to save the world.

Second, the ruler of this world is cast out. This refers to Satan. It means his power over the world, exercised through Adam's family's bondage to sin, and fear of death would now be broken. Fear of death is removed, a promise of deliverance from sin exists. Satan is cast out from his place as unchallenged ruler of the world. Now Christ reclaims a people for Himself, until the day when His kingdom comes. Of course, even though Satan is cast out, he is still dangerous.

"Research was done a few years ago concerning people who had been bitten by dead snakes. The reason for the research came after admitting a patient who was bitten by a snake while gardening. The man had cut off a rattlesnake's head with his shovel. When he bent down to pick up the snake's head, it bit him. Research showed that 15 percent of those being admitted for snake bites were bitten by a dead snake. That was a surprise because most people did know dead snakes still bite. Snakes have a reflex action that continues even after being killed. For this reason, a decapitated rattlesnake can still bite up to an hour after death. That information can help protect us from venomous snakes. There is a spiritual application as well. The Bible calls Satan a serpent. He is still dangerous even though Christ has delivered a fatal blow."

The third effect of the cross is that all men are drawn to Christ. The phrase lifted up is a phrase that deliberately seems to include both the humiliation and glorification of Christ. On the one hand, it means lifted up on a cross, as verse 33 says: This He said, signifying by what death He would die ¹⁴ And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, (John 3:14)

²⁸ Then Jesus said to them, "When you lift up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am *He*, and *that* I do nothing of Myself; but as My Father taught Me, I speak these things. (John 8:28)

But on the other hand, it also suggests the Resurrection, and even the ascension. And John combines them in one, because that is the great paradox. Jesus says, through this Atonement, there will be the great victory of worldwide No longer only Jews, but all nations, all classes and ethnicities are being drawn to the Gospel. It is the goodness of God that leads me to repentance. Jesus said he did not come to condemn the world but to save it, and the sight of a loving God dying for rebel men will draw men to Himself.

Now the crowd, again, has no category for a suffering Messiah. They know verses like Isaiah 9:7 which says “Of the increase of His government and peace There will be no end,” They do not understand what Jesus means, and ask Him if the title He uses for Himself, the Son of Man, is some different title. Jesus doesn't answer them directly, because He has already explained this many times. Instead, He simply tells them that this moment, this hour is one to be seized.

You have light a little longer, meaning Jesus will soon be gone. Walk in the light while you have it, so that darkness does not overcome you. The one walking in darkness does not know where He is going. While you have the light, walk in the light, believe the light, that you may become sons of light. Put simply, Jesus is saying, you have seen enough and heard enough from me to know I am the Son of Man, I am the Christ. Now you must choose to believe, that even though I am going down into humiliation, I will rise to greater glory.

And that stands for us too. The days around us are getting darker. Christian truth is becoming rarer and more and more despised. The light is fading of a Christian culture and a biblical worldview. So while you are close to the light, these moments of seeing the truth: the paradox of the cross, the pain of it, and the power of it, and you see the nature of true glory, then believe it, receive it, walk in it.

Spurgeon: This was Christ's way to glory, and it must be our way to glory too. The grain of wheat must fall into the ground, and die, or else it cannot bring forth fruit. Just so must it be with you and with me, and in proportion as we learn to die to self we shall live to the glory of God. If you keep yourself to yourself, you will lose yourself.

Brethren and sisters in Christ, if we are really to glorify Christ on the earth, we must be willing to lose our reputation, our good name, our comfort, and indeed everything that we have, for Christ's sake. This is the only way truly to live. If, for your own sake, you begin to keep back anything from Christ, that is the way to die. You would then be like the grain of wheat that is laid by, and preserved, and which, therefore, can never grow or multiply. Surrender yourself; be willing to be nothing; be willing to die if only the truth may live. Care nothing about honour and glory for yourself; care only about the honour and glory of your Master. Learn the meaning of the Master's paradox. As you bury yourself, you will multiply yourself. As you are put out of sight, like a grain of wheat that is sown in the ground, you have your only opportunity of growth and increase; heavily-laden ears of corn shall spring up from the grain which has been buried in the earth.