

The Work of the Cross John 12:31-33

Well, we are in this portion of Scripture where certain Greeks ask for an audience with Jesus, and what happens is that we have this paragraph where Jesus teaches about his coming death. We see Jesus is deeply grieved. But he will not cower from the will of the Father. He has come to glorify God, and he has come to make him known and loved, and to cause men and women to glorify him. And then a voice comes from heaven from the Father saying Jesus has glorified God through his ministry and will glorify himself. And Jesus said the main reason for this voice from heaven is not for him but for them. And God is so gracious in giving us precious words of comfort time and time again that all that takes place is for his glory. It is for their benefit that they may know that Jesus is the Christ.

And then we have this little section of teaching or monologue of Jesus in verses 31-33 speaking about what is going to come to pass in just a few passing days. And this is the glory of the Father and of Jesus in what will come to pass. And it is amazing when we look at earthly and man's glory in the here and now because it is always in some accomplishment. It might be someone breaks some sort of sports record. But there is always someone else that breaks that record. And the person who breaks it does grow old and feeble. His glory fades. It is sometimes in military successes and political power that earthly glory comes and goes. I can remember reading about an artifact that was recovered in the sands of Egypt that bragged about a king and his power. But the only thing is that history had forgotten all about the king and his glory. No one knows when he reigned or anything about his reign other than that recovered artifact. He was not forgotten. And man's glory and accomplishments quickly come and go. They never endure.

But Jesus' glory is different. Jesus' glory is still today. You think of all the followers of Christ throughout the history of the church and it far outstrips any political following or any earthly glory. There are still huge throngs of people following and revelling in the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ today. And his glory is of such a different and magnificent nature than any earthly glory that would take man's breath away. When you look at earthly glory, it is man has ascended to some sort of stature above others. He has shown himself to be a cut above others and to be noticed and applauded. But look how Christ ascended in verse John 12:32-33, **"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."** John interprets his words so there is no ambiguity as far as his meaning. It is not talking about his resurrection, or that some will recognize him as king in the coming age. He is talking about being lifted up on that cruel Roman cross to pay the penalty for our sin. He is not treated as one above people but one who is below people. It is as Isaiah 53:3 says, **"He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not."**

This is where the glory comes from. It comes from the death of Christ, and his subsequent resurrection and ascension. It comes from the manner in which Jesus would be lifted up. But it is not enough to say that Jesus would be glorified through

him being lifted up on the cross, but asking how he is glorified - how the Son of God is lauded and praised, and his personhood and character announce so clearly that he is worthy of all worship? How does his death make plain and apparent his glory? And this is where we see his glory and the glory of his Father come chiefly two ways. And as we keep these clear in our head it should cause us to revel and rejoice in Jesus who truly is the author and perfect or of our faith.

1. Jesus is glorified through being lifted up by the judgment of the cross. V. 31.

Now many times we do not see the glory in judgment. One of the reasons is none of us like to be judged. In other instances, we have seen people judged harshly or severely. The infraction or suppose infraction and the punishment or condemnation does not seem to match. So we think judgment is something necessary in the economy of God, and something an all perfect God must do, but certainly there is no glory in it. Certainly there is nothing praiseworthy in it. And God takes no delight in condemning people to eternal punishment.

But think of what glory is: it is a public display of the character and attributes of another that leads to worship and adoration, and may I say a joyful adoration of the one who is worthy of all worship. And through the judgment of Jesus we see his character and we see his glory. And we comes to adore him. Jesus is glorified by all that he does, because all that he does is good, just and righteous and worthy of praise. We want people to come to Christ, and we want Jesus to be praised by their faith and trust in him. But that does not mean that Jesus is not glorified in his perfect judgment. And that is what this passage is about - him being glorified.

So look at this verse here once again, and notice there are two being judged here and both of them relate to Jesus being lifted up on the cross, **“Now is the judgment of this world; now will the ruler of this world be cast out.”** We see two judgments. One of the world and the other happens to be the ruler of this world is cast out. So how are these judgments related to the cross of Jesus Christ? Well, let’s look at the judgment of the world first of all. How is the world judged? And one is that the cross shows how evil and ugly and sinful sin is. It is only through Jesus coming and living that perfectly sinless life and then dying and suffering the full wrath of God with all it horrors that the penalty of sin can be atoned for. Our problem is we just to not meditate on how awful and evil and wicked sin truly is and what it deserves. Ralph Venning, the Puritan writer, wrote a whole book on *The Sinfulness of Sin*. He wrote in it, **“Nothing is so evil as sin; nothing is evil but sin. As the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that should be revealed in us, so neither the sufferings of this life nor that to come are worthy to be compared as evil with the evil of sin. No evil is displeasing to God or destructive to man but the evil of sin. Sin is worse than affliction, than death, than Devil, than Hell. Affliction is not so afflictive, death is not so deadly, the devil not so devilish, Hell not so hellish as sin is. . . The four evils I have just named are truly terrible, and from all of them everyone is ready to say, Good Lord, deliver us! Yet none of these, nor all of them together, are as bad as sin. Therefore our prayers should be more to be delivered from sin, and if God hear no prayer else, yet as to this we should say, We beseech Thee to hear us, good Lord.”**

It is amazing that people have even lost the word “sin” from their vocabulary. We have a whole list of dysfunctions and the such to excuse our behaviour. We excuse sin with all of its horrors and evil done against God. And we empty the cross not only of its glory that we are delivered, but we stop seeing the horrors of our sin and the absolute glory, holiness and righteousness of our holy God. The judgment here shows the magnitude of our sinfulness. It shows the evil of sin.

But there is another way that the cross judges the world, and that it shows that just as Jesus is worthy of worship, the world is worthy of judgment. It shows the extent and saturation of sin in the whole person. We many times talk about the cross as the triumph of God over the penalty of sin and it is. But it was also the triumph and victory of sinful man. You look at the joy and almost festal atmosphere, and also the hatred and malice at the cross against Jesus. And here is Jesus who comes and gives sight to the blind, gives healing to lame, cures disease, and teaches the people the truth of God. And the natural person hates him for that. Light has come into the world but man rejects that light, and that is where the judgment comes in. Listen to what is recorded a little earlier in John’s gospel (John 3:19-20), **“And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil. For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed.”**

So think of it: if sinful man rejects the all glorious and worthy one than how can Jesus not be glorified and his character and person vindicated and magnified through this perfect judgment against all who reject Jesus? And his judgment is never be over the top or undervaluing the seriousness of the offence. It will be and is a perfect judgment. Sin and the sinner will be given exactly what is just and righteous. It will show the character of the judge. It will glorify the judge. Listen to what Mark Jones writes in his book *Knowing Christ*, because this would bother so many people but it ought not, **“All are created for Christ (Col. 1:16), even he’ll itself. If it did not, it would not exist.”**

But there is also another judgment in this verse. Look again at verse 31, **“Now is the judgment of this world; now will the ruler of this world be cast out.”** Now we realize the ruler of this world is none other than Satan. Listen to Ephesians 2:1-2, **“And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience.”** Satan is the power and the inspiration behind this Jesus hating world. And the question becomes: how is Satan cast out through the death of Christ? And it’s is amazing that when you look at the cross, it does look like a satanic victory. None other than the professing people of God execute Jesus. And this is the thing about Satan is that he is cunning but also foolish. He really thinks that he can be successful. And here the cross becomes the means in which sinful man is not only delivered from the penalty of sin but the power and tyranny of sin and the devil. Listen to how that passage in Ephesians continues (Ephesians 2:4-5), **“But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ— by grace you have been saved.”** God gives new life to believe on Jesus and he breaks the hold and sway that Satan has over our hearts. He is cast out.

The greatest defeat of Satan was not that he will eventually be thrown in the Lake of Fire, but that Jesus was put through that fire of judgment for us. Consider Colossians 2:13-15, **“And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross. He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him.”** He disarmed the devil with all his minions and put them to open shame. Listen to Hebrews 2:14-15, **“Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery.”** Doesn't the beauty and glory of Christ shine through this judgment, that the great adversary is defeated through his dying to liberate our lives from his shackles and slavery? The devil is shown to be who he is but Christ's character and strength are shown and displayed for all that see. All we can do is fall before him. And this is all in the context of judgment. But there is another way that he is magnified and glorified through being lifted up.

2. He is glorified by being lifted up through his efficacious grace. V. 32.

This is such a precious verse because of the word at the beginning of the verse, which is “I.” This is what Jesus is doing and what he will accomplish through being lifted up. Notice right after he gives that truth, he says, **“I will draw all people to myself.”** And notice who is doing this is the one who is lifted up by crucifixion. And this verse not only speaks of his death, but also his coming resurrection, and the outcome of that work on Calvary.

Now let me make a number of comment about this phrase right here. One is that this is not talking about universalism, “will draw all people.” He has just said that he will judge the world. And we told through out this gospel that those who reject Christ can expect and will receive eternal punishment. In fact, the word “people” is actually added. It is literally “I will draw all.” And what the meaning is that Jesus will draw all that the Father has given him. In other words, all those who have been chosen before the foundation of the world. And think how this glorifies both Father and Son, because the sacrifice of Jesus will not be potentially effective. People might come but they might not come, here Jesus says it will be effectual. There are those who will call on the name of the Lord, and bow the knee to Christ as Saviour and Lord. We sing of that truth every Sunday. All the elect and only the elect will be drawn by the power of Christ through the Holy Spirit. Again, the “all” here means “all.” And it means all of those given by the Father to the Son. Listen to John 6:37 where Jesus says, **“All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out.”** There is that word “all” again. Jesus is glorified and magnified through those chosen before the foundation of the world.

And we also noticed the word “drawn.” Often Calvinism is often portrayed as those who are chosen come reluctantly. It is almost like a tug a war with God. They do not want to come but they are forced to come. And there are others who are not God's elect who want to come but can't because of the doctrine of election. Such could not

be further from the truth. Those who do not come do not want to come. They choose freely and cognitively not to come. They do not want Christ. And those who come, come freely. They really want to come. But the reason is they are drawn to the Son through the power of the Father working through the Spirit. God works so wonderfully on our inner wills not only to show us our sin, but we see Jesus is altogether lovely and trustworthy as a Saviour and we want to come. Every impediment that stood in the way of coming to Christ is removed. R.C. Sproul writes, **“The Spirit changes the recalcitrant heart of the sinner, making the unwilling willing to come to Christ. He makes the indisposed disposed to Him, the disinclined fully inclined. Our salvation is entirely of God - God the Father, God the Son, and God the Spirit.”** Joel Beeke writes on this, **“In saving sinners, the Spirit does not supersede the normal process of thought and choice. He does not overcome the sinner, but transforms him. The Spirit irresistibly draws the elect to Himself with loving kindness and omnipotence... This, then, is the amazing truth of God’s grace: God makes the will willing to will God in response to His call. That amounts to what theologians call effectual calling.”**

And if this is true, which it is, then in the salvation of sinners Jesus is magnified, the Father is glorified not just in the offering of Jesus on the cross, but in all of salvation. We often say that salvation is monergistic rather than synergistic. Synergistic is the sinner doing his part and God doing his, but monergistic is salvation is all of God and his grace. So in all of salvation from the sacrifice of Christ to him drawing us personally to Jesus, who is glorified and magnified? It is God. He is shown to be gracious, and good and loving and forgiving. Salvation is not about our goodness or our character but despite our character and goodness. It reveals and screams out that one is not only worthy to be trusted with the eternity of our souls, but is worthy of unending praise and glory.

I think what we try to do many times is try to conjure up warm and loving feeling about Jesus and the cross work. We know that we should love and adore him. But that glory comes through knowing - knowing the glory of Christ in how it manifests his character, his personhood and his work. And you see it right here. We see the enormity of the sin problem through his perfect sacrifice. People are worthy of judgment because there is one that is worthy of praise. But God through Jesus being lifted up condescends to save some and draw them effectively to himself. And again, this says more about him than it does us. It should rivet our attention and love on Christ. It should cause us to say, shout and mean from the deepest recesses of our hearts (Revelation 5:12), **“Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!”**

The cross displays his glory. None is like the Lord. He is in a category all on his own. When Christ is this glorious, sin loses its grip and all we can do is praise the one worthy of all praise.