

## A Very Different Coronation!

John 12:20-36

Can you imagine the scene, you're at a fantastic dinner party for an honoured guest, the food is fantastic, the wine is flowing, it's a great party.

Suddenly, the local undertaker comes in, pulls out his tape measure and begins to measure the honoured guest. He's measuring them up for their coffin!



This guest is well known, a great healer and teacher, just days ago he'd raised a local man Lazarus from death to life!

Well that's like the scene which happened just 2 sections ago in John's gospel to Jesus, as (in Jesus' words) Mary prepared his body for burial.

We are in our lent series, we're building up to the cross and Easter time, but John's eyewitness account has Jesus' death and rising again in chapters 19 and 20, we're just over half way in chapter 12! Why are we looking at this bit? Because, already in chapter 12, Jesus is thinking about and heading to his death.

But it's not what most people are thinking and seeing as they watched Jesus. Last week we saw his arrival in Jerusalem where he was heralded as a king, and people's hope was that he would overthrow the Romans! But, he is a misunderstood and unexpected king, Jesus is humble and riding on a donkey.

People are just not seeing Jesus, in the way that he wants to be seen, and known and understood. I hope that today's passage, which is all about seeing Jesus right, and seeing ourselves right, will help *us* to avoid that mistake.



I think quite a number of people here wear glasses. If that's you can you remember back to when you first wore a pair of glasses. A friend of mine talks about how wonderful it was, he suddenly saw things clearly. As if he'd never seen before. Colours were bright and vivid, edges were crisp and sharp – it was as if he could see every blade of grass, and as he looked out across the fields the view was more spectacular than he imagined. (I don't know if you have the same experience, you might be able to imagine it). The thing is, my friend is quite lazy, and doesn't clean his glasses very often. The lenses get dirty and cloudy, and the world loses that zing. So, he needs to clean them! Because everything he sees, he sees through those lenses.

In our passage today, Jesus prescribes spectacles for us all. We learn that the Christian needs to look through the lens of the cross, to *see Jesus rightly*, and in order *to see themselves rightly*.

The cross is so important, that we need to grasp hold of it, and we also need to see other things in the light of it – like lenses that we look through it changes how we see everything.

And it could be, spiritually speaking, you need to (actually) get a pair of glasses with these lenses in, or it could be that you already have them, but you need to clean them up, so things look crisp and true.

The first of my two points this morning is this:

**The cross should dictate how we see Jesus and his glory.**

There are two intriguing things in our passage, which John doesn't make a huge deal of, because his focus is on something else.

The first one is these Greeks in v20, they asked to see Jesus but we don't really know whether they *do*, or what happens to them, did you spot that?

The second is the booming voice from heaven; God the Father speaks to Jesus, and everyone hears. I might have expected something like that to become the front page headline(!) But in some ways it is just mentioned in passing.

**The** big thing here, is the cross, Jesus is heading to the cross, and it's glorious.

George Bernard Shaw was a brilliant playwright, but he was very anti-Christian. He once said that he quite liked Christianity but really hated what he called 'Crosstianity'. Now I've read some of his explanations, to understand what he means, it's a little puzzling. But he seems to be saying, he likes some things about the Christian religion, but really dislikes a constant focus on, talking about, and theology of the cross.

The problem is, in order to understand Christianity at all, in order to understand Jesus, to see him(!), We need to grasp that Christianity **is** indeed Crosstianity!

So let's think about these Greeks, look down at v20

"Among those who went up to worship at the feast were some Greeks, so these came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and asked him "Sir, we wish to see Jesus".

They want to speak with him, they want some time with him.

I guess they ask Philip because of his name, it sounds Greek, although actually he is from a *Jewish* place, but these foreigners ask Philip to get them close to Jesus. Philip isn't sure, he checks with Andrew, and together they go and ask Jesus.

And we fully expect Jesus to say yes, and perhaps to have a wonderful encounter, as the inclusive Jesus, welcomes the outsider!

But that's not what happens. Listen to Jesus' answer:

v23 Jesus answered them "the hour has come for the son of man to be glorified. Truly truly I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit"

What a strange answer. Jesus uses the language of the garden.

Are you into gardening? I think the way gardening happens *now* is very different to what Jesus is talking about.

These days, if you want a couple of roses in a bed, you go and buy a rose bush, already grown and pruned. You just plant the Bush, put a bit of fertiliser in, and it's job done.

But imagine you do the whole thing from seeds, all the beds are cleared and the soil turned over and prepared. And you plant seeds everywhere.

Now what I want you to imagine, is that you are gardening with someone who doesn't understand or know what you're doing. Let's imagine you do the gardening with a young child.

When you bury that seed, it looks like nothing happens, now the seed isn't dead, but it's **as if it is**, it's buried in the ground.

The whole garden has the appearance of nothing, it looks like your work has achieved nothing. Actually of course, once the seed grows, the plants, the fruit, the flowers – they're so wonderful and so beautiful, you wouldn't have imagined such a small seed would produce something so fantastic. That's what Jesus is talking about, his death on the cross is the planting of the seed, buried in the ground it looks like it is nothing, and a waste of time. But from it, comes life and fruit and tremendous beauty.

His answer to the question "can the foreigners see me?" is "yes, *but* I must die to bring such fantastic fruit and beauty". To make it possible for them to be included.

In fact, the cross is so important that Jesus has been building up to it all his life. His *hour*, or his *time*, has been mentioned again and again in John's Gospel, and usually "his hour has *not yet* come" – but in v23 "the hour has come".

So I guess we might expect Jesus to be really excited. His hour is coming and he is going to be seen in all his glory.

When we think of glory, we might imagine someone on the winners podium shaking and spraying champagne everywhere. We might imagine the team lifting the trophy. Perhaps you think of yourself receiving the certificate, or having your achievement publicly recognised.

So does Jesus feel excited?

Look down at v27

"Now my soul is troubled, and what shall I say? Father save me from this hour? But for this purpose I have come to this hour."

He's obviously very distressed, even though it will be glorious.

But what actually *is* his hour of glory?

Is it the thunderous and booming voice of God, recognising and proving that Jesus is the son of God?

v28 "Father, glorify your name." **Then a voice came from heaven:** "I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again." *Is that it?*

<sup>v30</sup> Jesus said, "This voice has come for *your* sake, not mine.

[So it's not the voice, the voice is not for his glory, it's to help *us* to understand]

<sup>31</sup> Now is the judgment of this world; now will the ruler of this world be cast out. <sup>32</sup> *And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself."*

That's his moment, *when I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw all people to myself.*

Jesus' glory is the cross.

Not lifting a trophy, not lifting a Cup, not lifting his hands in victory – but his body lifted and nailed onto a wooden cross.

Being killed on a cross was actually one of the most shameful things that could happen to you back then. If you were a Roman citizen, you weren't allowed to be crucified, because it was so shameful, it was beneath true citizens. Why is it glorious?

*Because*, like a seed going into the earth, it bore fruit.

Jesus draws people to himself, people from any background, people who've done anything wrong, can find forgiveness through the cross, and by faith can become part of God's family.

In the college where I trained to become a vicar, they had a wooden lectern in the chapel with an inscription on it. “Sir, we wish to see Jesus”.

The idea was that the preacher would be reminded just before they stood up to preach, that their job is to show people Jesus.

Jesus says, if you want to see me, you need to see my cross, to understand who I am, and what I’m doing. The cross is like the lens in our glasses.

So people who teach Jesus is a great example, and a great teacher, as was someone who showed us the right way – but they don’t speak about his death, and don’t speak about the cross - well they don’t show his glory and they dishonour him by doing that.

The parts of the church which speak about his resurrection, and the new life he brings, with great power to change, but don’t speak about his suffering; the fact that he suffered punishment for the sins of his followers, well they don’t show his glory and they dishonour him by doing that.

Still other parts of the church focus on our good works, they encourage people to be busy and serving, without stopping and marvelling at a great saviour.

Christianity is Crosstianity, and to understand and see Jesus, we need to see a saviour, who would die on the cross, lifted up publicly, and suffering punishment in the place of those who trust in him – that is how we can be friends with God – and so great is his love and the Father’s love for us, that he is willing to do that – it’s glorious.

Do you ever doubt God’s love for you? Jesus died, he gave his life, like a seed in the ground, so that you could be part of his fruit – and live a fruitful life! Look at him, his love, through the cross!

But there’s more, the cross shouldn’t simply dictate how we view Jesus, but it should also dictate how we view ourselves.

Our second point this morning is

**The cross should dictate how we see ourselves and our life**



I don’t know if you’ve seen the film “saving Private Ryan”? My parents took me to see it when I was quite young, and it’s pretty horrific. It’s a war film set during the Second World War, and it tells the story of a special mission to ensure that Private James Ryan makes it home from the war alive.

Throughout the film many men lose their lives to try and save James Ryan’s life, but no one works harder than Capt Miller, who eventually befriends Ryan, and dies saving him right at the last, as he dies there’s this moment as they look each other in the eye, he urges Ryan to live a life worthy of the sacrifices that have been made on his behalf.

The film ends with a scene at a World War II memorial, where private Ryan, now elderly and looking like he’s in his 80s breaks down and falls to his knees at the grave of Capt Miller and says something like “I tried my best, I tried to lead a good life”

Now you may think the comparison is overdramatic, but my point is this: in the film, Private Ryan’s life was transformed and defined by the fact that someone else gave their life for him.

He lived his life, aware of how lucky he was, and trying to honour those who gave their lives for him. And at the end of the film you see his longing to know that he has done that.

I could express it like this: When James Ryan made it home alive, the fact that those guys gave their lives for his, meant that he now lived for them – he saw his life that way.



His *old* way of living, the old James Ryan did die, like a seed placed into the ground. A new way of living sprung up.

For a Christian, how we view our lives should be defined by the cross, by the point where Jesus gave his life for us, so that we could be friends and not enemies with God, and enjoy an eternal life with him. Because of the cross, I am part of God's family.

The cross should dictate how we see ourselves and our life

Jesus himself was like a seed, placed in the ground, dying so that others would live. And the Christian servant, follows just like his master. We need to be like seeds too.

v25 "Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life."<sup>26</sup> If anyone serves me, he must follow me; and where I am, there will my servant be also. If anyone serves me, the Father will honour him"

"Whoever loves life loses it" doesn't mean we can't enjoy life, we *should*!

"Hate your life in this world to keep it for eternal life" doesn't mean you need to be miserable and grumpy.

He means that those who live their lives for themselves, who don't let God rule. Those who live under the national anthem of Frank Sinatra: I do it my way.

And that's the way *all* of us naturally live.

But Jesus invites us to turn to him, to serve him and follow him and do things his way. Not just become less selfish, self needs to be *replaced* by another, by Jesus.

v26 "if anyone serves me, *he must follow me*".

We need to be like the seed too, burying the old self, so it dies.

So, each of us need to understand what Jesus's words mean for us. What part of you he is and isn't talking about when he says

"whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life".

Because God doesn't want to take away your individuality, he doesn't want to make you less you – but more yourself, as you ought to be.

There are plenty of bits of me that need to die, that ought to have no future.

Like my pride, the attitude which thinks I can do a better job than someone else – it needs to go.

My impatience, which gets quickly frustrated when others do things slowly.

My selfishness which wants to spend time doing things I enjoy and is reluctant to spend time doing things Sam (my wife) enjoys.

But Jesus teaches me to put others before myself.

The Christian life is the life of putting self into the ground to die, and living for Jesus, following him. I find that hard!

And I'm not alone, your lives are full of these things too!

I explained this idea of your *self* dying, to some of our young people in confirmation preparation.

One of the lads really wanted to be a doctor, that was his main ambition.

He said "you mean I have to give over 'wanting to be a doctor' to Jesus, and just accept that he might give me that, and he might not. But I've got to just follow him and be ok with that"?

I said **yea** – but remember, Jesus didn't find it easy! And he's a wonderful saviour, who loves you, and wants your best – you really can trust him!

A very wise Christian man once said “If we really want to follow Jesus we must patiently allow God to put us to death”

Christianity is *inclusively exclusive*.

These Greeks want to see Jesus, but they are outsiders.

v25 says “**anyone** who hates their life in this world will keep it for eternal life.” And v26 “**whoever**” follows Jesus...

The point is that **anyone** can come to Jesus, and be saved, our faith is completely inclusive – anyone can come.

But it is exclusive too. You must come to Jesus, you must have faith in him, you must be drawn to him... You need to die – to self.

And not everyone will. So there are some who do love their lives, who do sing “my way” and do lose everything.

In next week’s verses, we’ll see that there are some who *ought* to have accepted Jesus, some of the religious types, who are amongst those who reject him.

But today we’ve seen the way in which outsiders can be included.

Through the cross we can see Jesus clearly in all his glory, and see ourselves and our lives rightly to.