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John 11:45 - 12:50

The Path to Glory Lies Through the Grave

This past Monday, July 14th, Pastor John McArthur, a world-wide famous Baptist pastor, passed away at the age of 86. I know many of you are familiar with John McArthur, and his faithful ministry; many of us have benefited greatly from his ministry over the years. He left a legacy of faithful, expository biblical preaching and teaching and pastoral ministry. It's worth pausing and reflecting and honoring his memory, especially since I think it provides an excellent opportunity to review and put into practice some of what we saw from our sermon last week. McArthur was a solid believer, strong in the faith and his love for the Lord, and he ran his race well; now that he has finished his race, there's a sense of sadness at his passing, especially for his loved ones and church family, whom we should pray for. But there's also a great sense of joy and peace, because we know that he has gone to be with the Lord in glory. McArthur's death is but the path to life and glory, just like it is for every faithful Christian, every true believer in the Lord Jesus Christ.

And this is true because it was true of Christ: Jesus's own path to life and glory was through the grave, through His own death, which He died to gain victory over Sin, Satan, and even Death, so that we can share in His victory and have salvation and eternal life in Him! He bids us to come and join Him in life and glory! But that means He also calls us to follow Him down that same path with Him, the path through the grave, because it alone truly leads to glory and life everlasting. The path to glory lies through the grave, both literally and figuratively. That's exactly what we see in our passage this morning, John 11:45 - 12:50.

The chapter begins with responses to Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead, which we looked at last week: many believe, but others still reject Jesus, refusing to believe even now. They want to kill Jesus and stamp out His glory. We continue to see references back to Lazarus even through chapter 12, for we see a turn in the story here, turning us toward Jerusalem, Passover, and Jesus's coming death. But what we see is that Jesus's path to the grave is actually His path to glory, victory, life, Kingship, and salvation for His people. John shows us that in 5 scenes along Jesus's path to Calvary, preparing for His upcoming death; and these 5 scenes are meant to prepare *us*, as the readers, for Jesus's death, so that we will truly understand the significance of it and respond rightly. First, we see in point number one....

I. Jesus's death plotted: A substitutionary sacrifice to save sinners (11:45-57)

Our passage this morning begins where we left off last week. Chapter 11 shows Jesus displaying His glory, as the resurrection and the life for those who believe, by raising His friend Lazarus from the dead, after 4 days in the grave. It's an amazing miracle with massive repercussions. Verses 45 and 46 show us the different ways people responded. Many of the Jews who saw the miracle "believe in Him" (v.45) "But some of them went to the Pharisees and told them what Jesus had done" (v.46) They went and told on him to the Jewish religious authorities, the Pharisees and chief priests, who gathered together "the council," most likely an official meeting of the Sanhedrin, the official Jewish leaders and religious authorities, who had a measure of legitimate legal power and authority underneath Roman rule. Because of Roman rule, though, they have to be careful: their place of authority, prominence, and power could easily be taken away by the Roman rulers if there were some kind of Jewish uprising or revolt of masses of people follow Jesus as the Messiah and rightful King of Israel; they feared that Roman would see this as a rebellion - just like had happened in Israel before under foreign occupation - and would step in to crush it. This is, in fact, what would happen a few decades later, when Rome crushed Israel and destroyed Jerusalem and the temple. It is fear of this kind of Roman response that drives the Jewish leaders to refuse the evidence of who Jesus is; they want to just kill Him instead, regardless of whether or not He is from God, because they know His miracles and teaching are so powerful and convincing it will cause "everyone to believe in Him" (v.48).

So they ask one another, "What are we to do?" They refuse to believe, despite all the evidence. But then one of them, Caiaphas, the high priest, stands up and speaks John tells us that he was high priest that yet, because though the chief priest was meant to serve for life, the Romans were known to remove and appoint new chief priests whenever they felt like it, so that there were multiple chief priests alive at that time. It shows just how precarious their place of authority really was. And Caiaphas, giving into fear and self-interest, proved to be a ruthless man. He proclaims, in vv.49-50, "You know nothing at all. Nor do you understand that it is better for you that one man should die for the people, not that the whole nation should perish." In other words, he thinks the answer is obvious: just kill Jesus, no matter the evidence of His miracles proving Him to be the Messiah from God; kill him to save the nation from destruction. Ironically, John tells us, he was unwittingly prophesying, that these words originated not from him, but from God. Though he meant to stamp out God's work, he was still high priest, and God used his

position to prophesy that Jesus would indeed die in the place of the people, indeed not just the nation of Israel, but for all “the children of God who are scattered abroad,” but not in the way that Caiaphas thought. He was the one that knew nothing and prophesied unwittingly. Christ’s death wasn’t an accident, but was the fulfillment of the Father’s plan of salvation. This shows God’s sovereignty, even over the most wicked and evil of circumstances, to bring about His plan and the greatest act of love and mercy imaginable.

Though they plotted to kill Jesus unjustly and wrongly, they cannot stamp out God’s plan but instead actually accomplish and bring it about, unwittingly and ironically. It is, indeed, God’s plan for Jesus to die to save the nation and gather into one the children of God. This scene serves as a microscope for us, zeroing our focus in on the significance and purpose of Jesus’s coming death on the cross: He was to die as a substitute sacrifice in the place of His people. The significance and meaning is further highlighted by the transition of vv.55-57, as the time moves closer to Passover, the last passover of Jesus’s life, as the time draws near to the very week of Jesus’s death. Passover was the annual celebration of the Exodus of Israel from Egypt, where God’s people were saved from the wrath of God and the angel of death, so long as they were covered by the blood of the sacrificial lamb; all covered by the blood of the lamb, who died in their place, were “passed over” by the angel of death, receiving mercy and grace. And so the time draws near, where at Passover, Jesus, the true passover lamb, would willingly go like a lamb to the slaughter, dying by the hands of sinful man on the cross, unjustly tried and crucified, one innocent man dying in the place of ruined sinners - like you and me. He died as a substitute, taking our place, bearing our sins and the full wrath and punishment and judgment from God that we so rightly deserve, giving His death as a sacrifice to make atonement for us, so that all who are covered by the blood of the lamb by repenting and believing in Him alone shall be saved! This is why Jesus brings about resurrection and life: He defeats death, the symptom, by defeating the root cause: *sin*! This is the heart of the gospel, the good news of salvation in Christ. And this is the heart of the significance of Christ’s death.

And the sacrifice of Christ should move us to give all that we are to Christ; to respond in the very way we see Mary responding in vv.1-8, bringing us to our second point...

II. Jesus's anointing: Christ is worth more than our most valuable offerings (12:1-8)

As the Passover week dawns, Jesus comes back to Bethany, a village right outside Jerusalem, to the house of Lazarus, the man Christ just raised from the dead in the last chapter,

and his sisters, Mary and Martha. We see a sweet, heart-warming picture in this household, of the grateful family throwing a dinner party for Jesus, their friend, Savior, and Lord, who literally brought life out of death for them. Their response to Jesus is as stark a contrast as possible to the Council's decision to reject and kill Jesus. Martha, in her gratitude, serves them dinner while Lazarus is seated with Jesus and his disciples. Mary, however, in her gratitude, is not at the table, or serving the table - she's seated at the feet of Jesus. And she's not just listening to his teaching, as we see her do elsewhere: she's lavishing an expensive thank offering on Jesus. We read in v.3: "Mary therefore took a pound of expensive ointment made from pure nard, and anointed the feet of Jesus and wiped his feet with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume." This perfume of pure nard would have been incredibly expensive, costing around a full year's worth of income for the average working class man. It's a lot of money - and she pours it on Jesus's *feet*, the most dirty part of the body. But then she stoops even lower - literally - and wipes his feet with her hair. Why does she do this?

She is humbling herself at Jesus's feet, showing her inexpressible gratitude and devotion toward him, implying that she could never give back what Christ deserves, never give more than He is worth. She lays it all at Jesus's feet, no matter the price or value - even her worldly riches, even her own hair, the glory of woman, laying her own dignity and glory and all that she has at the feet of Jesus. She is saying that the most honorably and glorious aspects of herself are beneath even the least honorable part of him. And that's not all: she is symbolically *anointing* Jesus, whether she realized that at the moment or not. She meant this as an act of humble, costly gratitude and devotion - yet God used it to symbolize more, as well. Judas Iscariot, the disciple who would very soon betray her, objects to this lavish display. He complains that this is a waste, that the perfume should be sold instead and the proceeds given to the poor. While that sounds good and holy, it's not. For starters, John informs us in v.6 that Judas didn't care about the poor; he was a thief and liked to help himself to the moneybags, and he wanted that money for himself, in his greed. She is lavishing her treasures on Christ, giving it all to Him, while all Judas cares about is hoarding more for himself. But even his comment is off, too. Jesus says, vv.7-8, "Leave her alone, so that she may keep it for the day of my burial. For the poor you always have with you, but you do not always have me."

This anointing was in preparation for Jesus's burial, symbolically. Jesus is about to enter Jerusalem, on the road to calvary, to His own death on the cross. Mary is anointing him with

perfumes, such as a body is anointed in preparation for burial. This act looks forward to Christ's upcoming death and burial, in preparation for it.

We must pause and reflect on this beautiful example we see in Mary's humble, grateful, costly devotion to Christ. Her response to Christ must be *our* response to Christ. The more we realize the depth of Christ's selfless, sacrificial love for us - in that He willingly suffered and died in our place for our salvation - the more we should be moved in our hearts to want to value Christ over all else; like Mary, we should want to respond by lavishing our very best, our most precious and valuable of treasures and resources and gifts and skills, for the sake of Christ; we should see that *nothing* as too good or too valuable to give Christ and lavish on Him: He deserves and is worth all of our time, money, resources, reputation, service - whatever we can give Him, it is never too much, and still pales in comparison with what He has given us: the priceless gift of His own life and death for our sins so that we can receive untold riches of grace lavished upon us for eternity: that's a debt we could never afford. Let us lay it all - all that we have, all that we are - at the feet of Jesus Christ, our Savior who selflessly went to the Cross as a sacrifice in our place, that we may be saved from our sins.

But this anointing serves a double purpose. Kings were also anointed. And it is striking that Jesus is anointed *right before* his triumphal entry into Jerusalem as a King. Which brings us to scene number 3...

III. Jesus's Triumphal Entry: Christ is the glorious promised King (12:9-19)

In verses 9-11, the crowds begin to learn that Jesus is back in Bethany, hanging out with Lazarus's family, and of course their intrigued; his miracle of raising Lazarus from the dead was so amazing that everyone wanted to come and see both Jesus and Lazarus, the walking and living evidence of the miracle that took place. But the Jewish authorities still refuse to accept it, even though they know that it happened; their answer is to not only kill Jesus, but they even plot to kill Lazarus now, to take away the evidence for believing in Jesus, showing that they irrationally refuse to change their minds and believe no matter how powerful and irrefutable the evidence is. Yet they cannot stamp out Christ's glory - the crowds gather to see and praise Him, as He enters Jerusalem like the triumphant King He is; though they will even succeed in killing Jesus, even this, too, will lead to His glorification, for the path to the cross is Christ's path to the throne and crown.

On the next day, in vv.12-10, the large crowd gets even bigger; Jerusalem is packed with pilgrims there to celebrate Passover, and as they hear that Jesus is coming, they go out to meet him, grabbing palm branches to wave as they rejoice and praise Jesus as the promised King of Israel and He proceeds into Jerusalem. They cry out, “Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, even the King of Israel!” (v.13). This is quoting Psalm 118, which Cliff is going to preach on next week, so I’m not going to steal his thunder, but spoiler alert: the crowds rightly recognize that Jesus fulfills that scripture. And Jesus doesn’t hide his glory this time: he makes clear He is indeed the promised Messiah and King, coming into the city, by intentionally fulfilling another prophecy of Old Testament scripture, Zechariah 9:9-10, by riding on a donkey, as it is written: “Fear not, daughter of Zion, behold, your king is coming, sitting on a donkey’s colt!” The disciples figured out the significance of what he was doing later on, after his death, resurrection, and glorification: that Jesus was indeed entering into Jerusalem in glory, as the triumphant King, the one anointed and promised by God.

And so we, as disciples of Christ, just see and recognize Jesus’s glory for what it is! Praise Jesus as the true, glorious King of Kings! He is the fulfillment of God’s promises: the anointed one, the Messiah, great David’s greater Son, who will rule and reign in righteousness before God forever, as the Son of God. That is who Jesus is! Our great and glorious king! And so it is right and fitting for us to respond by praising Him, bowing down to Him, serving Him, obeying Him, and glorifying Him. So let us cry Hosannah, in our own hearts and with our lips! Let us cry, “Hail to the Lord’s anointed, great David’s greater Son, His reign on earth begun!”

But we just read that Jesus is going to die this same passover week. How is Jesus anointed both in kingship and in death? Is he on the road to glory or death? The answer is: both, as we see in scene 4...

IV. Jesus's Hour to be Lifted Up and Glorified: Christ's path to glory is the cross (12:20-33)

In verses 20-26, a group of Greek Gentiles seek out Jesus. They would have stuck out during Jerusalem, the city of Jews, especially during the Passover. And when they come, Jesus takes it as the sign that His hour has come. All throughout John, He has hid his glory, not speaking plainly and clearly, often withdrawing when crowds wanted to proclaim Him as the Messiah. He kept saying, “My hour has not yet come.” But it’s no longer the time for subtlety. The hour for speaking plainly, the hour for His glory to be revealed, has finally come. He says

this clearly in v.23, “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.” That’s why He has proceeded into Jerusalem openly as the coming King. But His hour of glorification will not be what everyone expects it to be. In v.28, Jesus says that his soul is “troubled” that this hour has come, but He will not ask the Father to save Him from this hour, because it is “for this purpose I have come to this hour.” He is consigned to fulfill His task for the glory of God the Father. And then, a voice from heaven, the very voice of the Father resounds in v.28, “I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again.” The crowd is in awe of the thundering voice, trying to piece it all together. Jesus’s hour of glory has come, it’s the purpose of God - then why is Jesus’s soul troubled?

He explains why in vv.31-33: “Now is the judgment of this world; now will the ruler of this world be cast out. 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.” In other words, Jesus’s hour of glorification refers to Him being lifted up from the earth *on the cross*, suffering and dying. Yet His death leads to *victory*, not defeat. It is through His own death, as the substitutionary sacrifice for sinners, that Christ will defeat Sin, Satan, and Death! It is through His death on the cross that Christ brings judgment on the wicked and casts down Satan, the ruler of this world, and ushers in His own glorious Kingdom, the Kingdom of God! Suffering and humiliation gives way to glory, defeat gives way to victory, death gives way to life! The path to the throne and glory lies through the Cross and the grave!

If you’ve ever read or watched Lord of the Rings, I think we see a vivid illustration of this principle in the *Return of the King*. Aragorn, the long-lost heir to the throne, is on his way to save the kingdom, defeat the armies of evil, and ascend the throne. But to get there, he must first travel down through the paths of the dead, through ancient tombs in the deep places under the mountains, where he conquers over the dead, pardons their past sins, and leads them out of the grave to go and conquer. And all of Aragorn’s friends, who would follow him to battle and victory and glory, must first travel the paths of the dead with him.

And so it is with us and Christ. Christ’s hour of death, resurrection, and glorification was for *our sake*, to save us from our sins. He was “lifted up from the earth” on the cross to “draw all people to” Himself (v.32). And that means that if we would follow Jesus into the path of victory and glory and life everlasting, we must first follow Him to the Cross. And Christ calls us to join him on this path, in vv.24-26. He says, “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. Whoever loves his life loses

it, and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. 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 honor Him.” (vv He’s teaching the counter-intuitive gospel principle that death leads to life; loss leads to gain. In order for new wheat to grow, an old grain of wheat must first fall to the earth and die; but through dying, it’s seed is planted into the ground and gives forth to new life. We see this principle in nature all the time. The death of vegetation in Fall and Winter leads forth to new life and renewal in Spring, year after year. In the same way, he who tries to hold onto his life in this world will lose it; the one who truly wants eternal life must be willing to give up life in this world to gain it.

This is the great exchange Christ offers us: we exchange comfort and pleasure in this world for *infinitely better* comfort and pleasure in the world to come; we exchange life in this world, which is fleeting and temporary and full of struggle and strive and sin and suffering, for life in the world to come, which is everlasting and perfectly peaceful forever; we exchange the glory of this world for the glory of the Kingdom of Heaven. This is what Christ offers you. This is the call to be a disciple of JEsus: if you would share in what He offers you, then you must pick up your cross and follow Him; you must give up your life and lose it in order to gain it; you must die to yourself and all your worldly desires and aspirations in order to truly live; you must lay down your entire life, all that you are and all that you have, at the foot of the Cross. And whatever you lose or give up to follow Christ will be worth it, for what you *gain* will be far better than you can imagine! The Christian life is one of war and battle, not only against Satan, but even your own sin and desires; but it shall end in victory. It is one of suffering and sorrow and even humiliation at times; yet it shall result in glory! The path to life lies through the grave; the path to glory begins with laying down your life and dying to self; to gain life you must lose it; you must serve if you would be honored; you must follow Christ into death if you would join Him in eternal life. So let us follow Christ through the grave into eternal glory with Him!

Because Jesus’s death *demand*s a response from us, as we see in our final point:

V. Jesus's Death and Glorification Demand a Response: Salvation for those Who Believe and Judgment for Those Who Don't Believe (12:34-50)

The crowd didn’t understand what Jesus was saying. They essentially ask, in v.34, how can the Christ, the promised Messiah and Son of Man, be lifted up to die if he is also prophesied to reign forever? But Jesus replies, in vv.35-36, that if they would walk in the light, and not

darkness, then they must believe in the light: in Jesus, the light of the world. After he was done, we see in vv.37-43 that despite all the miracles Christ has done, despite all the evidence of who Jesus is, “they still did not believe in Him” (v.37). But John assures us that even this is part of God’s plan, to fulfill Old Testament prophecy, such as passages quoted here, Isa. 53:1 and Isa. 6:10. Isaiah saw the very glory of Jesus, the suffering servant, yet it was prophesied of old that the Jews would not believe, so that God’s plan would be fulfilled: that they would crucify the Son, the Suffering Servant and Savior, Jesus Christ, so that He could die to save all who would repent and believe in Him, not just from the rebellious house of Israel, but in all the earth! But *only* those who repent and believe in Him can be healed and saved.

Despite all the overwhelming evidence, many of the authorities were blind and refused to believe. V.42 tells us that they even *did* believe in their heads, knowing Christ really was the Messiah, but “for fear of the Pharisees they did not confess it, so that they would not be put out of the synagogue, for they loved the glory that comes from man more than the glory that comes from God (vv.42-43). This is a sobering warning: it’s not enough to simply believe in your head that the Bible is true, that God exists, or even that Jesus really is the Messiah who died to save sinners. Even the demons believe that; even many of these Jewish authorities who rejected Jesus and crucified Him believed that. It’s not enough. We must *respond* in faith; we must repent and believe in our hearts and confess with our mouths and follow Him! If we don’t then it’s not true faith. Jesus warns later, in v.48, “The one who rejects me and does not receive my words has a judge; the word that I have spoken will judge him on the last day.” For this is the very Word and judgment of God the Father. There is no other way to eternal life except through faith in the Son.

Friends, don’t be like the Jewish authorities who believed Jesus really was the Christ but refused to confess faith or follow Him publicly because they valued the glory of man. They got it completely backwards. The glory of man is fleeting and temporary. The path to true glory is to follow Christ, even when that path lies through trial, humiliation, suffering, defeat, or even death! None of those are the end but are but the path to victory, glory, and life! Sure, they would have been put out of the synagogues for confessing faith in Jesus. They avoided that fate; they kept their reputation, kept their place and office, their titles, their comfortable life and the praise of men. But at what cost? At the cost of their souls, at the cost of life and salvation, at the cost of true glory. This should be a sober warning to us. First off, it’s possible to believe in our heads that Jesus really is Savior and Lord while not personally *repenting and trusting in Him* as our own

savior and Lord. Those are not the same things. We must believe in our heads *and our hearts*; if we truly believe we will, necessarily, publicly repent and confess our faith in Him, no matter the cost. We must follow Christ, for this is the path to glory and life. Even if confessing our faith costs us our reputation, it will be worth it. Even if confessing our faith costs us our relationships, it will be worth it. Even if confessing our faith costs us our jobs or titles or position, it will be worth it. Even if public faith costs us glory in this life, it will be worth it. Even if it costs us our very lives, it will be worth it! Believing in Christ and following Him, even through the path of the grave, is the true path to life and glory everlasting.

Christ assures us this and calls us to put our faith in Him in vv.44-46: “Whoever believes in me, believes not in me but in him who sent me. And whoever sees me sees him who sent me. I have come into the world as light, so that whoever believes in me may not remain in darkness.” Christ came to save the world! Anyone who repents and believes in Him *will be saved!* But, as v.47-48 warns, whoever does not keep Christ’s word, whoever does not repent of sin and believe the gospel and follow Christ in faith, will not be saved but will face the judgement of God to come. Christ died in the place of sinners, to take our place in death and bear the wrath and judgment we deserve for our sin so that we don’t have to! But His sacrificial death demands a response. There’s no room for neutrality. You can’t remain on the fence. Everyone must make a choice. And we can only share in His salvation, life, victory, and glory if we believe and follow Him. So let us heed Christ’s call to faith; let us respond to His invitation to follow Him, no matter where the path takes us, no matter the cost, because we know it will lead through the cross, beyond the grave, into life and glory everlasting by His grace!

If you have heeded Christ’s call to follow Him, through repentance and faith, then one way you can publicly confess your faith in Him, once again, is by coming to the Lord’s Supper, a tangible picture of our faith in His sacrificial death for our salvation. So if you are a baptized believer in good standing with a gospel believing church, we invite you to come to the Table with us in just a moment. But if that doesn’t describe you, then we invite you instead to heed Christ’s call: turn to Christ, repent of your sins, believe that He truly died to save you, and then follow Him as your Lord and Savior! And the way you publicly profess your new faith and begin this journey is through baptism. If that’s you this morning, or you have any questions about this, then we would love to speak with you after the service. Until then, let’s have a moment of silence as we prepare to come to the Table.