

THE GOSPEL
according to
John

part 3

STUDY GUIDE

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Light of the World

- John 8:12-32

Suggested Questions from the Text

Read through the passage from Sunday. These questions are designed to help you consider the text as you read.

John 8:12 – “I am the Light of the World”

- Why is Jesus' claim so offensive to those who don't follow Him? How do friends/family respond to these claims?
- How have you experienced 'walking in darkness'? What can stop us from 'walking in the light'?

John 8:13-19 – “My testimony is true”

- How does Jesus' unique testimony encourage us as we follow Him and walk in the Light?
- How can we be tempted to charge Jesus with the requirement to prove Himself to us?

John 8:21-32 – “then you will know that I am he”

- Do you recognise the weight of your sin? How can we be tempted to ignore our failures to focus on 'bigger' issues?
- Why is the cross not just where we 'start' as Christians, but the place we must always come back to?
- What practical methods do you use to keep the message of the Cross central in your view of Jesus?

Sermon Overview (Light of the World)

A correct understanding of God surely is the most important piece of knowledge a person can have. How we live, and plan our lives is shaped by our belief and understanding of God. To be able to say: “I know God – I know His character, His nature and His expectations of me. And I am happy, peaceful and free!”, is the most incredible thing any person can say. There can surely be no indifference to this statement – the expected responses broadly being: a) believing it is nonsense; b) fascination and investigation into the claim; or c) agreement and joint understanding. This is the boast of any Christian – any one whom the Son has set free.

The Light of the World (verses 12).

The Jewish Temple is filled as the people celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles – one of the major feasts God had commanded following the exodus from Egypt to celebrate God's salvation plan. During this festival there were many visual, sensory stimuli - great candelabras, glowing torches and flames lighting up the Temple. In this context, Jesus called Himself the Light of the World. Many had made a pilgrimage to the Temple, and Jesus claims that life is like this pilgrimage – and either walking in darkness, or in the light by following Him.

If you are to walk in the light, to see clearly, you need to follow Him. This was offensive to those listening to Him and is offensive to people today. To walk in the light means to follow Jesus. This means that to not follow Jesus is to walk in darkness. Darkness can allow our imaginations to run wild – as we can't see what is there, we instead imagine the worst, cultivating fear and anxiety. Also, darkness creates an environment which accommodates shame – hiding and wallowing in misery – leading to bitterness and isolation. People live their lives in darkness, fearing the worst, bearing a heavy cloud, hiding their shame. Jesus has given us the gift of being able to share our sins and be able to bring our fears and failures into the light. He wants us to enjoy this freedom.

Jesus' Testimony is True – Because He Knows (verses 13-19).

The Pharisees thought they were right about God – believing they were seeing God clearly – and yet as He stood in front of them, they missed what was under their noses. To the Pharisees, Jesus was just a man talking about himself – and so had no weight to his claims. Jesus appears unremarkable and looked like any other man – but in His true nature He is the very same person who spoke the first spoken words in the Bible: “Let there be light”. The light Jesus offers is faith, it is the new birth to be born again, to see the Kingdom of God, to follow Jesus is to walk in the light. What we see with our eyes is temporary, but what the Light of the World illuminates in our hearts is eternal (2 Corinthians 4:6).

Jesus is the only person who has entered into the creation from another existence. He knows where He came from and knows where He is going. Jesus existed outside of Creation – before the universe existed, He was there. Unlike us, Jesus truly knows his origin, and can fully testify of Himself. He is not limited by the rules and protocols of the Pharisees. Jesus challenges their claim to know God, and their right to testify – because they do not know Jesus and who He is. The Pharisees couldn't accept His testimony – and Jesus tells them they are blind to God, unable to see Him in front of them.

The Result of our Spiritual Blindness (verses 21-24).

Jesus repeats three times the same phrase: “you will die in your sin”. The Pharisees were masquerading as men of light – but were spiritually blinded and in their sin. Jesus is warning of the power that is enslaving the people, speaking to every individual. They have obsessed about their religious apparel but have ignored the perilous condition of their souls. We can obsess over the state of the world, a cosmic evil and other people's faults, and ignore or miss the perilous condition of our own souls.

How can We Lose Our Spiritual Blindness? (verses 28-32).

Spiritual blindness dissipates as we look to the cross. Looking at the darkest moment in the history of the world is the only way we can see the light that overcomes all. You cannot bypass the Cross to get to God. We cannot become like Jesus until we embrace

His death. Until we see the Cross, we cannot see Jesus for who He is, and we cannot know God.

Jesus repeatedly draws attention to the Cross – and as Christians we need to continually view the Cross, and know He first loved us. The gospel tells us this God was lifted up and humiliated, resurrected and exalted, this is our truth, and it has set us free.

Truth and Freedom

- John 8:30-59

Suggested Questions from the Text

Read through the passage from Sunday. These questions are designed to help you consider the text as you read.

John 8:30-33 – “You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free”

- What differing ways can people understand the term ‘truth’? How do these compare to the truth Jesus offers?
- How do friends/family respond to the Christian claim of truth and freedom found only in Jesus?
- How do you react to ‘truth’ in God’s word that conflicts with your beliefs/behaviours/desires?

John 8:34-40 – “if the Son sets you free, you will really be free”

- What does the image ‘slave of sin’ suggest to you? Have you felt bound/captive/controlled by sin?
- How does the description of sonship reflect your relationship with God?
- How can we be tempted to remain in slavery to sin, rather than embracing the freedom Jesus has provided?

John 8:53-59 – “before Abraham was, I am”

- How can we be tempted to justify ourselves, and promote our own credentials, rather than focussing on God?
- How does the description of God as self-existent, creator, immutable and unchanging affect your view of Him?

Sermon Overview (Truth and Freedom)

This session follows on from Jesus’ declaration that He is the light of the World. As Jesus brings light to the world, fear and shame are cast out - and freedom comes. Jesus is still talking to this same crowd of people and speaks to them about truth and freedom. He challenges them, and their world view – wanting them to see real truth and real freedom. However, as this truth confronts people’s beliefs and identity – many struggle to believe and accept Him.

Slave or Free (verses 30-33).

As Jesus promises freedom, those around immediately harden their hearts – and are defensive. They feel challenged as their idea of truth is challenged. As far as the Jewish Leaders are concerned, Jesus has no ability to improve their life, because their truth rests on Abraham, and their freedom is because of this – but their own statement is not true. Their claim to have never been slaves is in direct contrast to the very reason they have gathered. The descendants of Abraham have repeatedly been slaves, captives; they are celebrating their ancestors’ release at Passover; and at this time in history are a nation occupied by the Roman Empire. Their argument for not needing Jesus’ truth and freedom is not based on truth itself.

Jesus has promised 'the truth will set you free'. This phrase has been used to encourage honesty, or to give strength to people to own their own 'truth'. However, Jesus' offer of truth is not an internal truth. The truth that will set you free is not one that changes for each person - an individual truth that is relative and dependant on circumstances, up-bringing, feelings or emotion. The truth that sets us free comes from Jesus, and is found by continuing in His word. By allowing this truth to shape our lives - rather than shaping truth from our lives - we are free.

Son or Slave (verses 34-38).

The Jewish leaders are holding on to their heritage - looking back to Abraham. Their good standing with God rests solely on their family tree - but Jesus knows the problem is not restored through Abraham. Jesus describes two options, slaves and sons - and while they are of Abraham's family, their actions are not those of a son of the Father. Instead, everyone who commits sin is a slave of sin and has no rights to the household. A slave is bound, captive and held down - with no freedom of their own. Slaves are the property of their master who see the all benefit from their slaves' labour. This is how the Jews are living.

Jesus parallels a slave to a son - one who has a home and place to belong; one who has rights to the inheritance. Jesus promises freedom from slavery for all who the Son sets free. Because of the work on the Cross, we have been set free by the Son. We are no longer bound, captive and controlled by sin - we are really free. When the Son sets free, we move from slavery to sonship. Jesus died in our place, and has made us co-heirs with Him. If the Son has set free, we receive an inheritance, and freedom.

Jesus is Glorified By The Father (verses 54-56).

The Jews challenged Jesus, wanting to know His credentials to make these claims. Rather than glorifying Himself, making Himself look impressive, Jesus directs the glory to the Father. Society encourages us to portray our best side. Jesus knew, if He glorified Himself it would mean nothing. Instead, Jesus focussed on His Father - knowing that one day He would stand before God - and would be glorified by Him. There is a freedom that comes from not needing to glorify ourselves. Rather than showing our best appearance, we can live lives that glorify the Father. Taking attention from ourselves, and directing attention to God. If our desire is to be glorified by the Father, and to glorify Him, we no longer worry about how the world sees us, and the pressures that come from pleasing man.

Before Abraham Was, I Am (verses 57-59).

Jesus has been direct with those listening. He has called them liars, called their father the devil, described them as slaves. Yet it is this claim that really offends: '*...before Abraham was, I am.*' (v58). The Jews were looking back to Abraham, but Jesus responds that Abraham looked forward to Jesus. Jesus can claim to bring truth and freedom because He is the One who called Abraham, who spoke to Moses, who led the people from captivity. When God spoke as 'I am', and Jesus repeating it, describes himself as: self-existent and not dependant; creator and sustainer of all things; immutable, is not

- and never has been - in the process of becoming anything other than what He is; unchanging. This is the same God we can come to today - and can worship now.

Was Blind but Now I See

- John 9:1-49

Suggested Questions from the Text

Read through the passage from Sunday. These questions are designed to help you consider the text as you read.

John 9:1-5 - "so that God's works might be displayed in him"

- What are the assumptions that the disciples made in these verses? What do these reveal about their understanding of God and suffering?
- How do friends / family respond to the issue of suffering? What are the common assumptions of God/pain we encounter in our cultures?
- What encouragement can we take from God's purposes - even during times of suffering?

John 9:6-12 - "The man called Jesus made mud..."

- What shocking and unexpected methods has God used to transform your life? What happened?
- Consider times when life has been tough - how did God use these moments to show His glory?
- Do you find it easy to share how God has worked in your life? What can make this difficult for you?

John 9:35-41 - "Do you believe in the Son of Man?"

- How can we be at risk of elevating physical healing and miracles and forget the greater miracle of salvation?
- How can we keep our focus on the greatest miracle we have received through Jesus' work on the Cross?

Sermon Overview (Was Blind but Now I See)

As Christians, there are a two moments that are really epic in our lives. There are other life changing moments that we get to experience, but these two have a huge impact on the lives of every Christian. The first is when we see Jesus by faith, and everything about our life changes. The second moment that has incredible effect on our lives is when we get to see Jesus face to face, and the culmination of glory as Christ returns. The whole theme of this passage is how we can see Jesus, and when we do see Him, our lives are affected in epic ways.

The Big Question (verses 1-2).

The disciples are walking with Jesus and see a man who is blind from birth. Their question asks Jesus about suffering - and is shaped by their culture and assumptions. Their question has a number of assumptions: that God exists; that God is good, just and holy; that God is in control of the suffering; that God treats people as they deserve - and that the suffering is a direct result of sin. These assumptions are seen in some world views today - karma, prosperity gospel and work-based religions all

assume that what you get is based on what you put in. Somebody, either the man or His parents, is responsible for the blindness.

Today, we commonly see a secular response to suffering, which does not assume God – or a greater power – exists. Instead of assuming somebody is responsible for this suffering, the secular response is to use this scenario as a reason to not believe in God. The big question that many in our culture would ask in this situation would be ‘If God exists, why are people born blind?’. Whatever our assumptions, suffering continues to prevail as the big question that needs an answer.

The Big Answer (verses 3-5).

Jesus immediately dispels the idea that this suffering is a direct result and punishment for sin, and rejects the disciples assumed position on suffering. Jesus answer is that the suffering is to allow His power to be displayed. A man has been born blind, suffering from birth, no welfare, no opportunity for work, begging as it is his only way to get money and survive – and Jesus response is that it is so that His power could be shown. God displays His works, and so could have healed the man before he was born blind. God could have removed the blindness, so that the man hadn’t suffered at all – but He didn’t.

This response is tough – and is a challenge for everyone who suffers. However, for a Christian, to accept this answer and to rejoice in it, is to find meaning, purpose and hope in even the most horrible situations. It’s what empowers Christians to rejoice even in suffering – knowing the truth that we exist for His Glory.

A Shocking Solution (verses 6-7).

Jesus solution to this man’s suffering is shocking. This is a bizarre miracle – a blind man, and Jesus adds insult by wiping mud and spit in His face. Jesus knows exactly what He is doing – and brings about a miraculous transformation through the most unlikely of means. Like filling purification jars when running out of wine or taking a boy’s lunch to feed thousands – it seems that Jesus took great delight in confounding and confusing everyone around Him.

In the Kingdom of God, before we are lifted up, we are brought low – the darkest hour of the night comes just before the dawn of day. All of us must come to that place, to accept our need to be made clean. All who come to see Jesus – who have their eyes opened by Him – are empowered to do so miraculously by His appointed means. The cross is the shocking solution: God’s means of securing spiritual sight for all who are washed and cleansed through the blood of Jesus.

The Response to His Work (verses 11-41).

A blind man received sight, and so everyone wanted to know how it happened. His response is simple, saying what happened. He made no apology, or clever explanation – instead he simply told others what had happened. We all have our story of what God has done in our lives – and don’t need to get philosophical with answers to every question to allow us to share our story.

Jesus was not finished. While his physical eyes were healed, Jesus went back, found him, and leads him through to true sight – to open the eyes of faith. The miracle of healing the flesh allowed the man to see Jesus as God, worthy of praise and worship. The greater miracle was not healing the flesh, but the one that saves him from everlasting destruction.

The Good Shepherd

- John 10:1-18

Suggested Questions from the Text

John 10:1-6 - "Truly I tell you..."

- Why do you think the disciples were so confused by what Jesus said in verses 1-5?
- Why do you think Jesus began this famous sermon with such a simple illustration?

John 10:7-10 - "I am the gate for the sheep"

- What 'fake gates' can we be tempted by - which seem to offer abundance but lead away from God?
- How do our friends / family respond to Jesus' claim to be *the* gate - while all others lead to death and destruction?
- How would you define 'abundant life'? Would this definition be one someone who isn't a Christian could use?

John 10:11-18 - "I am the Good Shepherd"

- How can Jesus' description of His followers as 'sheep' be a challenge to how we view ourselves?
- Have you experienced times when the Good Shepherd wrestled with you? How did it feel at the time, and afterwards?
- How are we encouraged by the abundance we have received - to know Jesus, His death and His resurrection?

Sermon Overview (The Good Shepherd)

In the last chapter, Jesus showed us how people come to know God through unusual methods. Jesus used spit and mud to heal a blind man and used this to illustrate how we come to know God. Like the unexpected spit and mud, we come to know God through the pain and suffering on the cross. This section follows this miracle and continues Jesus' explanation of how we come to know God - and how that changes our lives.

Something Confusing (verses 1-6).

Jesus' disciples - who are constantly with Him and learning from Him - know that when Jesus says this phrase 'truly I tell you' they need to be alert. When Jesus uses this turn of phrase it always anticipates a highly significant comment. He continues to talk, and yet the disciples did not understand what He was telling them (v6). It is not that His teaching is complicated, and beyond their understanding - it is very familiar. The reason they didn't understand isn't because the picture is profound or complex but because it is so simple and ordinary - His remarks are stating the obvious. That they appear to come abruptly and without qualification heightens the curiosity and confusion.

This isn't random - it's brilliant. He arrests their attention, establishes a tension, creates a sense of intrigue and most crucially an eagerness to listen carefully for an explanation – Jesus is a brilliant communicator. He begins by outlining some basic ideas of shepherding, so that with those images fresh in their mind He might proceed to deliver the key message. Well looked after sheep are protected in the pen by 'the gate' and the 'gate keeper', but they are especially protected by the Shepherd – whom they know, trust, and are led by. Without these they are easy targets, for thieves, wolves and are likely to be stolen, killed or lost.

The Gate (verses 7-10).

Gates are both barriers and access points. Gates usually have locks, and only authorised individuals may open them, gaining access to a place of interest, an exclusive place, like a garden, or an estate. Jesus says "I am *the* gate" – not *a* gate. There are many gates in the world, but I am the gate – to *the* exclusive place. The question that follows: what is Jesus the gate to? Jesus is the gate - all who enter through Him are saved and will be well fed (v9). Jesus would focus every eye that is looking for rescue - upon him. Whatever answer people are looking for. Be it meaning, hope, happiness, freedom, security – whatever our need – Jesus knows our need and desires. He is the place we must go to – and the gate to this place.

Jesus compares Himself to thieves and robbers. There is a message we hear in this world which promises to meet our desires, but they are thieves, with the sole intent to steal, kill and destroy. They are all fake gates, drawing us away from Him. Gambling, pornography, alcoholism, self-achievement, success – all promise to meet our needs and desires – but ultimately let us down. Instead, Jesus promises that we can come to Him, and have life in abundance. This is for all who come to Jesus. Not a future promise, or reserved for the special devoted church leaders. Life in abundance is promised for all Christians now, but unless we understand the true abundance (not abundance that the thieves would lead us to), and walk in it, we can feel let down by God.

I am the Good Shepherd (verses 11-18).

A good shepherd knows the sheep, cares for them, protects them, fights for them, and seeks out the lost sheep. This means that we are sheep. In times of loneliness or fear, feeling detached or un-noticed, abandoned or dis-orientated, losing purpose or meaning – we need our shepherd. In these times we can turn to the deceptions in this world – but they steal our joy. Sometimes we need the shepherd to wrestle with us and take control – which isn't a comfortable experience. The shepherd wants us to know abundant life, and He will lead His sheep.

Abundant life is to be known by Jesus, and to know Him. The thieves of this world would promise abundance by many other methods – greed, family, success, money. Yet Jesus promise of abundance rests solely on knowing Him. The Apostle Paul centres the Gospel around his knowledge of Christ (*Phil 3:10, 1 Cor 2:2*). The good news is knowing Jesus' death and resurrection. To know Jesus in his death is to know the gate - the cross is the way into abundant life. To know Jesus in His resurrection is to know

hope a greater day is on the horizon. With the knowledge that Jesus has defeated death, comes the promise that He has overcome pride, bitterness, greed, and sin – and He can defeat this for us too. We boast in His death, His ultimate victory, and boast in His resurrection which is our ultimate hope. The Holy Spirit is the one who makes this happen in our hearts today – He brings us to our Shepherd to walk with Him always.

The Testimony of the Signs

- John 10:19-42

Suggested Questions from the Text

John 10:19-25 – “I did tell you and you don’t believe”

- What expectations do friends / family have of God? How do these affect their view of who Jesus is?
- How can we limit God by focussing on how we want Him to meet our needs / desires?

John 10:26-33 – “My sheep hear my voice...”

- What sources of false hope do you friends / family hold onto, missing the eternal hope in Christ?
- How can we be tempted by the false promises of this world offers? How does this false hope lead us away from God?
- How do your friends / family respond when you share truth that confronts their view and understanding of the world?

John 10:34-42 – “This way you will know and understand...”

- How can we be distracted by our own questions and desires – and miss the answer found in Jesus?
- Do you feel confident sharing how God has transformed you? What truth can you share through your experience?

Sermon Overview (The Testimony of the Signs)

Jesus has just announced that He is the Good Shepherd. His promise to be the hope for all of Israel – and beyond – has challenged the view of His listeners. Their response is hopeless division and unrest. Accusations against Jesus and confusion leads to a stalemate amongst the Jews. Unlike other Gospel accounts, John records nothing for the next three months. John returns to the story in winter, three months later.

A Disappointing Question (verses 24-25).

Having spent so long considering Jesus’ promise, the Jewish leaders respond with a disappointing question: “are you the Messiah?”. Jesus has been telling them all throughout His ministry who He is. They still can’t see it; they still don’t understand. They seem to be incapable of processing what Jesus is saying.

The Jews had a rich heritage, they had immense national pride. At this time, the Jews are celebrating the re-dedication of the temple in Jerusalem – a reminder of the Maccabean Revolt, where the Jewish people overthrew the Syrian King who had dared to defile the altar of the living God. Yet, the irony is the Jews were again living under occupation. The Jews were hoping for a saviour, but their hope was in a military Messiah, for an anointed man, a descendant of David, who would overthrow the regime, become king and would restore the nation of Israel.

Their response is disappointing because they've clearly not understood who Jesus is. They are essentially saying: "are you going to be the person we want you to be?". They are only interested in Jesus if He's willing to serve their ends, their purposes.

The Hope in Christ (verses 26-33).

Jesus is pretty emphatic here: this particular crowd in the temple were not His sheep. They had heard the truth and they hadn't believed. Notice He's not answering their question - He didn't need to defend himself. His works, the miracles He had done stand as testimony that He is the Son of God, and that what He says about Himself is true. The success of Jesus' ministry didn't depend on acceptance from the religious rulers. Jesus came so that He could call His sheep - so that they had a chance to hear. The ironic thing is that the hope that is found in Jesus, in responding to His call, is so much greater than the hope found in any false version of the truth out there. Trading the hope Jesus offers - one of eternal life, that will never perish, and is always secure - they choose a hope they have constructed. The hope that Jesus promises is often replaced with a false promise from relationships, success, and possessions. Things that will ultimately pass away attempt to replace the hope that lasts forever.

Their response is total and utter rejection - they picked up rocks to stone Him. The Jews are angry - to the point of murder - because Jesus is challenging their understanding of reality. Jesus emphasises His works, because He knows their truth doesn't know what to do with them. They are not willing to let go of their way of making sense of the world - so they get angry.

The Inescapable Choice (verses 34-38).

Instead of confronting the works, they pull out another argument, the blasphemy card, and Jesus immediately disarms that argument. It's not about blasphemy - it's about protecting their truth, their way of life, and they are feeling threatened. People are quite happy to live suppressing the deep questions of life, and avoiding the inconsistency of their worldview, they don't want their way of life to change. The moment we state an objective truth, or say something that challenges or questions another's worldview, or their way of life, we get vilified.

Jesus presents them with a clear choice, in a completely open handed, and non-manipulating way. If the miracles He has done are not of the Father, don't believe Him. But if they are, and you don't believe or even understand the things He is saying, you can still believe the works. The works are a sign of who He is, and if He is who He says He is; it doesn't matter whether you understand everything He's said at this point - you can still believe.

The Powerful Testimony (verses 39-42).

Like John the Baptist, we are witnesses to the truth of who Jesus is. We don't need to do any signs to prove He's who He says He is. We don't need to explain complex theology or be prepared to answer any possible question. Nothing in this world has the power to produce lasting change like one encounter with Jesus Christ does. Your story is a testament to that power. We have been commissioned, to bring hope and

share truth. We have been entrusted with a message of eternal significance. Let people hear the voice of The Shepherd calling through your life and let your transformed life bear testimony.

The Resurrection and the Life

- John 11

Suggested Questions from the Text

John 11:1-7 – ... the sisters sent a message..

- What are some of the 'temporary comforts' that people turn to, seeking hope in tough times?
- How do you respond when God doesn't act as / when you expect Him to?

John 11:17-22 – “Yet even now I know...”

- How can we comfort each other in difficult times, helping one another to focus on Jesus?
- How can our questions (particularly during suffering) attempt to take our focus away from God?
- How can we share truth about Jesus with each other, and with friends / family, when facing trials?

John 23-27 & 38-44 – “I am the resurrection and the life...”

- What situations are you facing that feel out of control and beyond hope? What have you given up hope for?
- How can we be tempted to put our hope in, and to wait for, a future event / change of circumstance?
- Have you known Jesus to move in 'hopeless' situations in your life? How has this brought glory to God?

Sermon Overview (The Resurrection and the Life)

Recently in John's Gospel we have seen Jesus interact with the crowds that are against Him and putting pressure on Him. Twice we have seen the Jewish rulers look to stone Him for the claims He has made about Himself. He has performed miracles and healing, and has made great claims on who He is, and His relationship with God the Father. It is because of His claims, not His actions, that the rulers are seeking to kill Him. We continue with an account which focuses on the reason for Jesus' ministry.

Reacting to a Crisis (verses 1-7).

Jesus is not in Bethany, but there is a family that Jesus knows very well – they are described as ones that Jesus loves. They are friends with Jesus – and something has happened in the family. Lazarus is sick – a crisis for the family. Their immediate reaction is to send for Jesus. When something serious arises, they turn to Jesus; they know He is the One that they need near. In a moment of crisis, we can turn to many things – but our 'solutions' provide a temporary fix. Instead, Mary and Martha respond by sending word to Jesus – knowing that He can offer a complete solution.

Jesus hears the message – His close friend is ill. Yet His response is not how we would expect Him to react – He stays two more days. Jesus does not respond with franticness or panic or unsureness. He knows exactly what is going on in Bethany and does not respond to a crisis out of surprise. Jesus works *for the glory of God, so that the*

Son of God may be glorified (v4). The sisters were hoping Jesus would come make their brother well. Jesus could have gone and made Lazarus well as soon as He heard. However, Jesus is not just aware of God's purposes – He is also fully aware of God's timing.

Comfort in a Crisis (verses 17-22).

Martha and Mary are being comforted by the community. They are mourning their brother and are grieving. Their friends and family have come to support the sisters. When Martha saw Jesus was on His way, she rushed to Him. Martha is still grieving, and upset by the loss of her brother, and runs to Jesus – the One she knows can really bring hope and answer her questions.

Martha's interaction with Jesus is powerful. She is grieving and struggling with the situation, but does not come to Jesus in anger, or with accusations. She starts by acknowledging who He is - Lord. She is honest with her struggles; had Jesus arrived earlier, this grief would not be needed – Jesus could have prevented this suffering. Yet Martha continues to trust Jesus as Lord. Even in these circumstances, she knows the truth of who Jesus is has not been changed. Even in loss and grieving, Jesus has not changed.

It's not wrong to have questions with suffering. Our natural response to a crisis is to wonder what is happening, but it is important that we hold onto the truth of Jesus. Knowing the comfort that comes from God is not hindered by worldly situations. Even in the darkest times, who Jesus is does not change. Even in our emotional struggles, Jesus remains constant. The truth of Jesus – that He is good, is purposing all things, is shaping and transforming us – does not change. This truth brings us comfort.

Glory through a Crisis (verses 23-27 & 38-44).

Martha knows Jesus to be the Messiah – and has faith in the resurrection which is to come. Jesus reminds Martha that her hope does not come from a resurrection that is coming; instead their hope is in Jesus - who is '*the Resurrection and the Life*' (v25). Even at the tomb, the sisters are convinced that it is too late for anything to happen. It is a hopeless situation, when the stench from the tomb is over-powering and evidence that it is final. At this point, it feels like it is too late – the situation is past any hope. Yet with Jesus there is no hopelessness.

Jesus could have healed a sick Lazarus, but instead He waited for the apparent hopeless situation. Jesus waited until the situation was completely hopeless, so that there was no question. Even in the midst of a hopeless situation – even to the point of death – when Jesus speaks there is hope. Lazarus did nothing to make this happen – he didn't work up enough faith, nor complete the right actions – he was dead. Instead it relied completely on Jesus speaking – and by His words, Lazarus was restored. Like at creation, Jesus words carried the power to bring life to Lazarus.

Martha had faith in a future event, but Jesus wanted her to know that the hope was not in this future situation, but in Him. This is the message of the Gospel – we were dead and completely hopeless. We don't achieve or earn God's blessing – and are far away – yet Jesus makes us alive. We can go to Him with our questions and struggles,

but we should hold on to the truth of who He is. This brings us life, freedom, gain, purpose and meaning – so that God is glorified, and the Son is glorified through Him.

The Triumphal Entry

- John 12:9-26

Suggested Questions from the Text

John 12:9-11 – *But the chief priests had decided to kill Lazarus also...*

- Do you recognise sin and/or Satan, preventing your witness to others, e.g. through distraction, fear, insecurity?
- How do friends / family / colleagues react to your personal stories of what Jesus has done in your life?

John 12:12-16 – *“Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord – the King of Israel”*

- Do you recognise friends, or other groups of people looking to find ‘salvation’, in other things but God? In what ways?
- Jesus looked on crowd with compassion, not confrontation. How can we bring hope & share truth with compassion?

John 12:20-26 – *“Sir, we want to see Jesus.”*

- Jesus reveals himself as a suffering servant who went to the cross, why is it important we remember this?
- Has God asked you to leave behind good things e.g. comforts/desires? How did/will you respond to this challenge?

Sermon Overview (The Triumphal Entry)

Jesus moves into His final week before He goes to the cross. It's a melting pot of tension, there are crowds everywhere, there is an enemy seeking to kill Him, and there is only one objective, to enter into to Jerusalem, as His hour has come. This week we're looking at the Triumphal Entry. This is a dangerous moment. It is important to know that Jesus knows exactly what is going on, exactly what awaits Him, He never looks back in hindsight, because He is always aware and in control. Despite certain death, Jesus boldly declares the truth of who He is, and tells His followers we must be willing to do the same.

The Conspiracy against the Truth (verses 9-11).

We already know the Pharisees were looking to kill Jesus for claiming to be God - but each time Jesus gave them the slip. Now they are conspiring to kill Lazarus also. The Pharisees are scheming and plotting in secret, and the crowd don't know it yet - but Jesus does. We read many had come not only because of Jesus, but also to see Lazarus – intrigued by the stories. The crowd that had been there when Lazarus came out the tomb, were telling everyone what Jesus had done. They were testifying to His power, and many more had come precisely because they had heard of this sign.

This Pharisees' conspiracy against Christ, and against Lazarus, was motivated because what they worshipped was being put at risk - they were losing influence and power. They were seeking to kill Lazarus because he was the reason many people were deserting the Pharisees and believing in Jesus. They worshipped their status and had made an idol of their success and power.

The Crowd are Seeking Something to Worship (verses 12-13).

The large crowd was vast – the place to be for the Israelites, as the people of God, a holy nation, to celebrate Passover. Not only were the Jews gathering, but the city was under Roman occupation, Greeks had joined in, and so many were flocking to this festival – and curiosity is piqued to know what is giving so many hope and purpose. Jesus has become an attraction for many.

The crowd start shouting '*Hosanna*' – save us now. This is not a discrete crowd gathering, but a desperate group – a people who want to be saved. They see Jesus as their hope and call Him king. A dangerous claim when the Pharisees are trying to kill Him. The crowd has heard about Jesus' signs, about Lazarus, and they come flocking to Him – hoping He will restore them, to rid them of their hardship, and release blessing upon them. They see Him as the coming King of Israel, the one the prophets pointed to, the Son of David - the Messiah. They were expecting a warrior King, a conquering King.

The Arrival of the Christ (verses 14-16).

The manner of Jesus' arrival is important here. The tension is high – Pharisees conspiring to kill Him, the crowd trying to make Him king - but He knows He must go Jerusalem to fulfil His mission. Jesus comes in the day time, when the city is at its busiest, when His signs have drawn the most attention to Him. He finds a donkey - a fulfilment to a prophecy in the Old Testament (*Zech 9:9*). Jesus boldly asserts His identity as the long-awaited Messiah, as the King of Israel. He comes on a donkey as a sign of the type of King He was going to be; a sign of His gentleness, of His humility. He is King, but His Kingdom will come about not through war but through peace - through His death on the cross at the hands of sinful men.

The language of Zechariah here is that of a tender father affectionately addressing his children; daughter Zion - dear Jerusalem - don't be afraid. Luke's record of the same event, it's recorded that Jesus weeps as He sees Jerusalem. Such is the power of this moment, His love for His people. His heart of compassion is stirred as He sees the crowd.

To See Christ as He Reveals Himself (verses 20-26).

The Greeks have asked to see Jesus – the whole crowd wants their saviour. Jesus once again focusses on the importance of His death on the cross. He must die, and in dying He produces much fruit. If we recognise Him as King, we're called to serve Him, to follow Him. Not just into dangerous circumstances where our beliefs could cause us problems - but all the way to the cross (see Matt 16:24-26 and Colossians 3:2-4). We must worship Christ more than life.

The crowd is the same today – hungry, thirsty, seeking signs of hope. They follow each other, placing hope in money, family and celebrity. We do not fight against the crowd – they are not the enemy. Having the compassion that Jesus has, we go into harm's way so that they can see Jesus. By laying aside our own lives – security, desires, comfort – we bring the hope of Jesus.

There is an enemy in the world who is seeking to suppress the truth, to take all the glory. We must be aware of Him. It's easy to forget, but we must be on our guard (see 1 Peter 5:9). There is an enemy even more subtle - a deceitfulness in our own hearts. Sin takes a good thing, designed to draw us to the majesty of God, and it draws us to counterfeit gods instead. We must be aware of the conspiracy attempting to lead us away from God; to battle the lies and deception to protect the truth.

God's Display of Glory

- John 12:27-43

Suggested Questions from the Text

John 12:27-28 - "Father, glorify your name."

- What are your primary concerns? What concerns drive your decisions and behaviour? Give examples.
- What would your friends/neighbor think of a God who seeks his own glory? How different is that to how we live?

John 12:29-36 - "Who is this Son of Man?"

- Can we take comfort from the promise of judgement of this world? If so, in what ways?
- How does our sin and rebellion against God lead us to seek our own glory over God's? Give examples.

John 12:37-43 - "For they loved human praise more than praise from God."

- What fears prevent us from sharing about Jesus and *glorifying Him in all things*?
- What practical steps can we take to seek God's glory rather than our own at work? ... with family? ... at the school gate?

Sermon Overview (God's Display of Glory)

What is the primary concern of God? Often our view of God is about what we can get: God wants us to have peace, God wants us to be healed, God wants us to live a fulfilled life; things that God cares about. We live in an individualistic culture - where we want to know what we can gain. Yet as we seek to follow God, it is important to know what His interests are. If our concerns were aligned with God's, our perspective are changed - and life becomes easier to navigate. This passage speaks about what God's primary concern is - and helps align our concerns with His.

God's Concern for His Glory (verses 27-28).

This passage starts with Jesus contemplating His future. He is fully aware of the death that is approaching - and the pain and suffering that is before Him. He is troubled by what lies ahead - and asks a rhetorical question: can He ask to be saved from this suffering? - should Jesus be protected from this death? Jesus' answer to His own question shows that He is convinced it is necessary. The primary concern for Jesus is not His protection and safety. He is sure that this time is needed - so that the Father would be glorified - lifted up, given the praise and honour. Jesus is saying that His primary concern in this moment - even greater than concern for His own life - is that the Father would be exalted and given praise and honour. In this moment, God the Father interjects. Something here is so important that a voice comes from heaven - and that voice confirms what Jesus is saying. Just as glory was Jesus' concern - God the Father is also concerned for His own glory.

For God to be focussed on His own glory seems to be self-centred. In today's society, we battle an attitude where everyone seeks their own glory - so to claim God is seeking His own glory seems hypocritical. However, unlike us, God deserves glory. If

God is a just God, who honours that which should be honoured – He is worthy of all the glory. He has achieved the greatest achievements by creating all of creation. He has the highest status as the ultimate being. If anything is worthy of glory – God deserves it. Yet this seeking of glory is not self-serving, but is spread across the Trinity, glorifying one another. As God seeks His own glory, it is not a selfish proud act – instead the three persons of the Trinity give honour to those who deserve it.

The Son of Man Lifted High (verses 29-34).

Having heard the voice, the crowd start debating. Some dismiss it as thunder. Others claim it as an angel. Jesus responds – and clarifies that the voice was not for Him. His response seems to speak of something else completely – and He makes some unusual, metaphorical statements. Jesus talks about how the rule of the world will be judged and removed – to be replaced by Jesus who will draw people to Himself. John relates this to His death – where Jesus was lifted up physically – where He was glorified to draw many to Himself.

The Son of Man is a crucial title which Jesus uses – which harks back through the Old Testament to Adam and the first sin. Despite man seeking his own glory - God promises that a descendant of Adam and Eve would crush this ruler of the world. Daniel (ch. 7) references one *'like a son of man'*, a title of one who would make right what Adam and Eve made wrong – for ever. The crowd are confused by Jesus' claim that *'the Messiah who will remain'* - will be lifted up. Jesus' response changes the metaphor – as an encouragement for them. They are looking for the Son of Man - and the light, the answer they seek, is with them for a short time so that they may believe in that light. Jesus' answer to their question is simply to trust Him.

The Perspective of Aligned Concerns (verses 37-43).

John reminds his readers of the words of Isaiah – who predicted that many would refuse to accept the Messiah. Isaiah, who died many years before Jesus was born, knew that some would not believe in Him. Isaiah didn't say these things to seek his own glory – as it did not come to pass until long after he had gone. John describes Isaiah's actions as a result of seeing and knowing the glory of God. Isaiah saw the Glory of God, and his perspective was shifted to see a far bigger picture.

The crowd around Jesus heard all this. Some still refused to accept – as Isaiah had spoken. Many others did believe in Jesus, but they did not confess their faith. They are worried that by admitting they believe Jesus – they would be cut off from their community, their control and the respect they had earned. Their perspective of God's glory and honour was over-shadowed by the Pharisees – and rather than seeking the praise and glory of God, they were concerned by the praise of man.

What is our primary concern? If we are interested in the praise of man, our actions work to protect our own glory. Spending our money / resources / time to build ourselves up. Seeking to fit in and be liked by colleagues / friends. Hiding our failures – and those areas that we fear others would not like. Yet – if we align our concerns with God – we do not need to worry about man's opinion. If we focus glory towards God – who ultimately deserves it – it takes the pressure of us to look good or be in control.

Be Saved or Be Judged

- John 12:44-50

Suggested Questions from the Text

John 12:44-45 – “the one who sees me sees him who sent me.”

- Consider Ephesians 1:3-10 – How can we know and share the truth of these verses to glorify God?
- Consider 1 Corinthians 15:24-28 – How can we remember the hope of eternal redemption when we face suffering?

John 12:46 – “I have come as light into the world”

- What encouragement can we know, accepting that Jesus knows the path and is lighting our way?
- When are you tempted to stray from the light? How can we encourage one another to stay close to the light?

John 12:47-50 – “I did not come to judge the world but to save the world.”

- Do your friends / family believe the church is non-judgmental? Why is this the case?
- How can we be tempted to judge others and treat them as if they are unreachable?
- How do we show the freedom that comes from Jesus welcoming us, rather than judging us?

Sermon Overview (Be Saved or Be Judged)

This passage continues on from the conversation we looked at last time. Previously, we considered the primary concern of God – His ultimate goal and purpose. We are approaching the last few days of Jesus’ life, with important things on Jesus’ mind. Jesus does not ask God to remove the challenge before Him - but accepts that it is important so that God would be glorified. God the Father and Jesus are working together to see that God is glorified. This passage continues that discussion, where some of the Pharisees have come to believe in Jesus, crowds have gathered, and there is a real interest in His words.

Not Just Jesus (verses 44-45).

John 8:58, Jesus identified Himself as ‘I Am’ – the same way God referred to Himself when speaking to Moses at the burning bush. John 10:30 Jesus states He and the Father are one. The rulers have been trying to kill Jesus, plotting His death, because He is claiming to be God. Verse 44, seems a little confusing in English, but the original could be better translated as “*whoever believes in me, believes not **ultimately/only** in me...*”. Jesus is still God, but distinct from God the Father. They have different missions to achieve their goal – separate in what they do, but all with the goal to glorify the Father. The mission Jesus is on, His purpose, is far more than gathering a crowd to Himself. We believe in the Son, are saved by the Son, so that the Father is glorified. Ephesians 1:3-10 gives further insight into Jesus’ mission. We see a glimpse of the relationship within the Trinity, and their work towards the same purpose. For

everyone who believes in Jesus, the words in Ephesians 1:3-9 are true. We have been blessed with every spiritual blessing. Jesus has been sent by the Father so that He would gather a people to Himself - so that Christ is glorified and exalted. Not because we have achieved any of it, but solely because we have been chosen. Verse 10 explains that this is so that - at the right time - everything would be brought together in Christ.

1 Corinthians 15:24-28 continues to put this into context. With everything under Christ's control, He brings it all to God the Father - so that God may be all in all. As Jesus is approaching the Cross, He knows the full story. He is not put off by the pain and suffering ahead but knows the goal. He would gather a people - the church - to Himself and bring that people to God the Father. The story is ultimately answered in the redemption God has planned; nothing can overcome His throne - when God is all in all.

Saving, not Judging (verses 47-50).

Jesus is the perfect judge and will judge all of creation - but here Jesus talks about what He is doing now. Jesus was confronting a culture that had a high focus on judgement. People were judged on their family line, their background, their heritage - to be welcomed in the temple, you would be judged, often on things you have no control over. Jesus mission was different - and judgement has no place. It doesn't matter what your background is, what family you come from, how well educated you are. Jesus does not come to judge and only welcome those deemed worthy. Jesus came to save - all by His works, not ours.

Jesus will judge and is clear about this future judgement. He is worthy - and He is right to take the place as judge. Yet His desire, His mission, is that many would gather to Him. Those who are considered unworthy - the outcasts, the sinners, the down-trodden - are welcomed by Jesus and saved by His actions.

Following The Light (verse 46).

Our belief in Jesus is leading us to the ultimate end - when everything is under His feet, and He hands the Kingdom to God the Father. Jesus knew what He was doing. He knew where His path would lead - through the pain of the cross - so that a people would follow Him.

We come as we are - and are changed by His grace and love. Grace changes us more and more to the image of Christ. We come broken, but receive healing. We strive to become more like Jesus, to want good and not evil - but not out of fear of judgement. As our hearts are changed, we start to want the things that Jesus wants - our desires are for the things that God desires. Jesus mission isn't to save those who are judged worthy - instead he makes worthy those whom He has saved.

Jesus has come that we are not left in darkness. We have the chance to follow the One who can see the path and knows the way. We are not stumbling about blind but, following Jesus, we are heading to the ultimate end. We want to go with Him, and follow closely with Jesus, because it is far safer in the light. Even when we cannot see the path, we can follow the Jesus who can see the path ahead clearly.

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