

“Disgracefully Glorious”

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Third in a Lent series on John 12

John 12:27-36

March 24, 2019

Please read the Scripture by clicking [here](#).

We began our worship singing, “May Jesus Christ Be Praised!”¹ But if you know what happened to him, praising Jesus doesn’t make much sense. In a bit, we’ll be singing “Lift High the Cross.”² But you know what a cross is! Celebrating a cross is crazy. We will finish worship today promising to “Bear the Cross.” Who would want that?³

Peel off twenty centuries of Christian worship, art and theology. Get to what everyone knew about crosses in Jesus’ day, when they were not atop buildings, or on Communion tables, or around our necks. What do we find?

Crucifixion was a state-sponsored means of execution. But there were quicker ways. Crucifixion was a method of torture. But there were more efficient approaches. Yes, Crucifixion ended a life. Yes, it inflicted agony. But its point was to deliver a message.

Crucifixion was an advertisement.⁴ It was a billboard, a stripped, gasping, writhing, bleeding, defecating, suffocating, moaning, then dead, rotting, bird-pecked and dog-torn billboard. It was posted in public, by busy roadways, for maximum exposure.

Disgusting, right. Crucifixion was designed to disgust you, to fill you with disgust for the person crucified!

Crucifixion shouted a message. This is a “thing,” a non-person, an un-human. This “thing” is cursed by God and despised by people. This “thing” has no dignity. This “thing” is a disgrace. This “thing” is cast out. This “thing” is finished.

Crucifixion was reserved for a particular breed of scoundrel: unruly slaves, crushed enemies, vanquished rebels, busted traitors. It screamed: “*Don’t be this ‘thing.’ Turn from it. Flee from it. Forget it. Everyone else has. Certainly God has.*”

II

Jesus knew all this, and he knew it was for him.

¹ “When Morning Gilds the Skies” [Voices United #339](#).

² “Lift High the Cross,” [Voices United #151](#).

³ “Bear the Cross” by Matt McKenna.

⁴ “Debasement resulting from public display was a chief feature of the method, along with the prolonging of agony. It was a form of advertisement, or public announcement – this person is a scum of the earth, not fit to live, more an insect than a human being.” Rutledge, 92.

It's no wonder the folks following Jesus were bewildered. They hoped he was the redeemer, the messiah, the "human one" who'd bring God's victory and hope.

It's no wonder Jesus was troubled. Yet he went on, knowing what lay ahead. What for?

It's been observed that, "*Christianity is the only major religion to have as its central focus the suffering and degradation of its God.*"⁵ We celebrate it. Why?

Let me unpack some of what it means, why Jesus chose to endure it, and why the crucifixion is his glory, and so ours too.

III

Jesus went to his cross to be condemned.

He was condemned by religion and by politics. He was condemned by the elites and those on the streets. He was condemned by those who should have known better, by those who knew nothing. Only those judged, found guilty and condemned were crucified.

But we heard Jesus say: "*Now is this world judged.*"

This world, our world, us . . . that steals God's name, twists and spits it with venom. This world, our world, us . . . that lays waste life, clear-cuts forests and cities, pollutes the air and the airwaves. This world, our world, us . . . that tramples the poor, accuses those already beaten down. This world, our world, us . . . that hurls poison from left and right.

Jesus said, before his cross, "*Now is this world judged.*"

Ours is the judgement, the guilt. But it is Jesus who chose to endure condemnation.

So if you are living with guilt, if you are grieved by wrongdoing you have done, do not be afraid. You belong to Jesus who, though innocent, was condemned. God will not condemn you.

This is Jesus' glory! His innocence for us.

IV

Jesus went to his cross to be cast out.

They cast him outside the city, to where only the despicable, the spat upon and sneered at are fit to be found and finished off. His companions at the end? Two bandits with blood on their hands.

⁵ From the 1981 PBS documentary, The Christians, quoted in Fleming Rutledge, The Crucifixion: Understanding the Death of Jesus Christ (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2015), 75.

But we heard Jesus say: *“Now the ruler of this world is cast out.”*

This world, our world, us . . . held enthralled and enslaved by . . . what can we call it? Evil, devil, accuser, deceiver, satanic? What do we make of it? I wish it was just a superstition of simpler times. If only. We do seem seized — us together, and divided — by something that’s more than us, that stalks, beguiles, seduces, tricks, tempts, and turns us on each other, ourselves and God. Even those who think they rule are ruled.

It’s interesting: the other accounts of Jesus — Matthew’s, Mark’s and Luke’s — relate many times when Jesus cast out the demonic. But in this Gospel of John we are reading from, there are no exorcisms. Except this one, Jesus’ crucifixion. Is it the only one needed?⁶

Jesus said, before his cross, *“Now the ruler of this world is cast out.”*

It held us captive, enslaved, chained, possessed. But it is Jesus who chose to be cast out

So if you are facing evil, don’t be afraid. You belong to Jesus. The so-called ruler of this world, Jesus has already dethroned. Sure, it can still assail us. But it cannot rule over us, anymore.⁷

This is Jesus’ glory! His casting out for us.

V

Jesus went to his cross to be rejected.

I’ve described how crucifixion was designed to repel people away from the person crucified. Any sympathizers they had, any movement they led, any hope they’d offered, crucifixion shattered.

But we heard Jesus say: *“When I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw all people to myself.”*

His disciples would betray and deny him. Most would flee. The handful who would stay

⁶ Frederick Dale Bruner, *The Gospel of John, A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 718.

⁷ Augustine pondered the continued power of evil. “But then, says some one, since the devil is thus cast out of the hearts of believers, does he now tempt none of the faithful? Nay, verily, he does not cease to tempt. But it is one thing to reign within, another to assail without. . . . And what else do we ask, when we say, ‘Lead us not into temptation,’ but that he who thus lies in wait for us, or assails us from without, may fail on every side to effect an entrance [within], and be unable to overcome us either by fraud or force?” Quoted in Bruner, 727.

would, for the most part, keep their distance.⁸

Jesus said, before his cross, *“I will draw all people to myself.”*

Ours is the rejection. But it is Jesus who chose to be rejected.

So if you are experiencing rejection, don't be afraid. You belong to Jesus. God accepts you. If a cross is where God does some of his best work, then there is no place anywhere, nor is there anyone, beyond God's reach.

This is Jesus' glory! His welcome for us.

VI

Jesus went to his cross to be shamed.

Shame says that, not only have we done wrong, but we are wrong. Shame tells us that we are fundamentally wrecked, that we are no good. Crucifixion shames the crucified. There is nothing good on a cross.

But we heard Jesus say to God the Father: *“glorify your name.”*

Then a voice came from heaven — the only time we hear God the Father speak in all of John's Gospel: *“I have glorified My Name, and I will glorify My Name again.”*

They took names very seriously. Your name wasn't an accident, it was who you were. God was saying that everything Jesus had done until then had been a celebration of God, a revelation of who God is, a glorification of God's Name. And, everything he still had to do would celebrate God, reveal who God is, and glorify God's Name.

Even crucifixion. Especially the cross.

Ours is the shame. But it is Jesus who embraced shame.

So if you are living with shame, don't be afraid. You belong to Jesus. He has already taken your guilt, taken your captivity, taken your rejection, taken your disgrace. And he gives you his vindication, his liberation, his acceptance and his splendour. All a gift. All by grace.

Doing this for you, and for us all, was Jesus' glory! His glory for us.
Thanks, and glory, be to God!

⁸ The synoptic accounts, Matthew and Mark in particular, tell us that some of the women disciples watched from a distance. However, John's Gospel reports that three (all named “Mary”) were closer, along with “the disciple Jesus loved.” I've tried to encompass this diversity of reports.