

Death and Glory

Introduction

"A picture is worth a thousand words," they say. But I think they have seriously underestimated the value of a picture. There are some pictures you will never be able to put into words.

For example, you are planning a trip to Arizona and you Google the Grand Canyon. You find a map of Grand Canyon National Park. Along with the map, there are images of the canyon. You can see it at sunrise and then at dusk, from high above in an airplane or from deep below on the river. To capture this wonder and beauty in language is difficult. Instead, you just sit there and stare. Picture after picture evokes a beauty that is hard to put into words. When you look at the world around us, a picture is worth much more than a thousand words.

This is true not only of the world around us but also of the world inside of us. Just as photographers have mapped the physical landscape, neuroscientists are now mapping our mental landscape. Using functional magnetic resonance imagery (MRI), scientists are mapping activity in the brain. To put it simply: They are looking at changes associated with the flow of blood in the brain as you respond to stimuli. Those changes are color coded so you can see what it looks like for a person to laugh, to cry, to be afraid, to have empathy.

In one study, scientists have mapped the brain activity of people listening to different kinds of music. Classical, rock, pop, folk, jazz. Each musical experience has a different pattern. By scanning all of these patterns, they can identify what kind of music a person is listening to simply by looking at the brain.

Pictures open a window for us. They invite us to gaze into experiences of the world. The world around us. The world within us. All of these things can be seen in a picture—a picture that is hard to put into words.

Getting to the Heart

But what about our spiritual world? our relationship with God? What does the picture of being loved by God look like?

This is what we will consider as we draw closer to Easter.

Today, we are beginning a series of sermons called *Crucified. Glorified.* This series follows Jesus during the last week of his life. Each sermon will focus on one particular moment in the Passion—a picture, if you will. A picture worth more than a thousand words.

We will see Jesus as he enters Jerusalem, as he celebrates Passover with his disciples, as he prays in the Garden, as he dies on the cross. Yet, these are more than just moments in the last week of his life. They are monuments. Pictures of what it looks like when God loves. These sermons, like pictures, will take us from the depths of sin and destruction—Jesus dying on the cross—to the heights of glory and restoration—Jesus rising from the dead. Crucified and Glorified. Jesus will reveal to us the everlasting work of God's love in the world.

For years, the church has recognized that the last week of Jesus' life was significant. Momentous. They have called it Holy Week. *Crucified. Glorified.* is about remembering the last week of Jesus. For that last week was a week when everything came together.

Sometimes, it's amazing to think about the difference a week can make. Consider what happens to parents when they learn they are going to have a child. For parents, the week before you knew and the week after you knew are almost like two different worlds. The week before you knew you were going to have a child, you didn't care about the extra bedroom or how far you had moved away from your parents. The week after you knew, however, suddenly that extra bedroom becomes a nursery and the short phone calls to your parents become long video chats. One week can change so much about the world.

The same is true with our relationship to God. In one week, Jesus reveals what God has promised for ages to do. After God created the world, Adam and Eve fell into sin and brought the rest of the world with them. Every day, we can look at our lives and see the messes that we have made. Things we have done that can't be undone. Lies that can never be untold. Hurt that cannot be bandaged up and made better. Without God, we would be lost in a lifetime of sin.

But, God made a promise to do something about our sin. When Jesus came into the world, he came with a mission. As he says in the Gospel of

Luke, he came “to seek and to save the lost” (Luke 19:10). And this mission is most clearly seen in the last week of his life.

This week had been foretold by the prophets. Jesus would be “pierced for our transgressions” and “crushed for our iniquities” (Isaiah 53:5).

Isaiah 53:4-5 (NIV)

⁴ Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering, yet we considered him punished by God, stricken by him, and afflicted. ⁵ But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed.

This week had been predicted by Jesus. After Peter confessed him to be the Christ, Jesus taught his disciples that the “Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised to life” (Luke 9:22).

Foretold by the prophets, predicted by Jesus, we see Holy Week. It is a week filled with pictures of God's everlasting love. This is the week when God does something about your sin and makes the certainty of his love crystal clear to you. For that reason, we will spend the next few weeks meditating on one week of Jesus' life. A week that gives us a vision of God's love.

So, let's consider our first picture. A picture of death and glory.

The week starts on Palm Sunday. or if you have hear me teach on the puzzles of the passion week you know that I believe Jesus entered Jerusalem on Saturday, the 10th of Nissan, was crucified on Wednesday evening the 14th of Nissan as it turned to the 15th and rose from the grave 3 full days later and thus left the tomb empty on that Sunday morning when they came to the tomb.

Jesus enters Jerusalem (Mark 11:1–10).

Mark 11:1-11 (NIV)

Jesus Comes to Jerusalem as King

11 As they approached Jerusalem and came to Bethphage and Bethany at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two of his disciples, ² saying to them, “Go to the village ahead of you, and just as you enter it, you will find a colt tied there, which no one has ever ridden. Untie it and bring it here. ³ If anyone asks you, ‘Why are you doing this?’ say, ‘The Lord needs it and will send it back here shortly.’”

⁴ They went and found a colt outside in the street, tied at a doorway. As they untied it, ⁵ some people standing there asked, “What are you doing, untying that colt?” ⁶ They answered as Jesus had told them to, and the people let them go. ⁷ When they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks over it, he sat on it. ⁸ Many people spread their cloaks on the road, while others spread branches they had cut in the fields. ⁹ Those who went ahead and those who followed shouted,

“Hosanna!^[a]”

“Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!”^[b]

¹⁰ “Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David!”

“Hosanna in the highest heaven!”

¹¹ Jesus entered Jerusalem and went into the temple courts. He looked around at everything, but since it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the Twelve.

Get a picture of this: Jesus is on the Mount of Olives overlooking Jerusalem. He sends his disciples ahead of him to get a colt and bring it to him. Then, he rides down from the Mount of Olives into Jerusalem. The crowds are gathering. They take off their outer garments and place them on the road for Jesus to ride over. The children are going out into the field, gathering palm branches and waving them in the air. The people are crying out to God, “Hosanna!” which means “save.”

It looks like a picture of glory. Jesus, riding into Jerusalem to bring about salvation. And yet, there is one small detail that does not make sense.

Jesus does not ride on a horse. He does not come as a conqueror.

Instead, Jesus rides on a beast of burden—a colt – The Foal of a Donkey.

Fulfilling Zechariah’s prophecy

His salvation will be different than anything that anyone expected.

Zechariah 9:9 (NIV)

The Coming of Zion's King

⁹ Rejoice greatly, Daughter Zion! Shout, Daughter Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you, righteous and victorious, lowly and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.

Here is where death and glory meet. Rather than come to Jerusalem on a war horse and bring about the Kingdom of God through glorious battle, Jesus comes to Jerusalem on a colt, a beast of burden, and brings about the Kingdom of God by his death. He will die for the sins of all believers and that will be the glory of God. God will make known his glory in the death of Jesus.

John writes that "God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16). And that is what happens this week. Jesus dies to bring about forgiveness of sins. He rises from the dead to bring about life eternal. His death is his glory because this is the work that will set us free. Free from sin. Free from death. Free to live a new life in him.

In picturing the human brain, scientists have looked at changes in blood flow. By watching the flow of blood in the brain, they can figure out what is going on. So, too, in picturing the love of God, we look at the flow of blood. The blood Jesus poured out on the cross is the work of God that brings forgiveness, life, and salvation to you and to me.

Taking It Home

In the Kingdom of God, death and glory are brought together. God takes the hatred of the world and turns it into love. God takes defeat and makes it victory. God takes weakness and makes it his strength. God takes what is weak in the world, what is despised, what is forsaken, and makes it his own, to be loved and cherished and never forgotten. This is the work of Jesus that we carry with us every day.

Late in his life, Paul wrote a letter to a young pastor named Timothy. As he began writing, he reminded Timothy of this wonderful working of God. Paul writes,

1 Timothy 1:12-17 (NIV)

The Lord's Grace to Paul

¹² I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has given me strength, that he considered me trustworthy, appointing me to his service. ¹³ Even though I was once a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man, I was shown mercy because I acted in ignorance and unbelief. ¹⁴ The grace of our Lord was poured out on me abundantly, along with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus.

¹⁵ Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the worst. ¹⁶ But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his immense patience as an example for those who would believe in him and receive eternal life. ¹⁷ Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory for ever and ever. Amen.

Paul remembers that he persecuted the church of God. Paul remembers how he held the coats of those who were stoning Stephen. Paul remembers his hatred and his sin.

But then he also remembers the love of God. God sent Jesus to enter Jerusalem. Not on a horse to triumph over evil by war, but on a donkey to bear the punishment of sin and bring forgiveness to all believers. This work of God is amazing. It is glorious. It is a picture worth more than a thousand words.

So, we find Paul telling his story, how God saved him from sin and brought him into God's favor. And we find Paul giving us an example of how to tell our story.

Believe it or not another picture came to my mind that helps me understand death and glory. It's a short speech from an unlikely movie called THE REPLACEMENTS. In it Keanu Reeves plays a quarterback leading a team of no bodies in a championship game because they had replaced the professionals who what gone on strike. Towards the end as they are in the huddle and just before the big play that would put them back in the game, Reeves character, Shane Falco gives his players these words of enouagement.

*I know you're tired. I know you're hurting. And I wish I could say something that was classy and inspirational, but that just wouldn't be our style. **Pain heals. Chicks dig scars. Glory lasts forever.***

I get what he is saying... In order for them to walk away with the glory of winning the championship game they will have to push through the pain, knowing that it will heal, if they have to sacrifice by getting a few scars it will be worth it because they will have a story to tell but the glory of winning the game will last forever.

Now let's dig a little bit deeper into those three thoughts...

Pain heals... Unfortunately not all pain heals. Some pain stays with us forever and some pain kills. That's why we needed someone to come and take our pain upon himself. Jesus came to heal our pain

Isaiah 53:4 (NIV)

⁴ Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering,

Chicks dig scars... Scars are reminders of the pain that has been endured. But for most people scars are not a thing of beauty to look at.

Isaiah 53:2 (NIV)

² ...He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him.

Jesus suffered our pain and has the scars that prove his love

1 Peter 2:24 (NIV)

²⁴ "He himself bore our sins" in his body on the cross, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; "by his wounds (scars) you have been healed."

Sometimes, our bodies carry scars from things that have happened to us. The wounds may heal but the scar remains. Years later, we can point at the scar and tell a story about what happened. We live and hope even though our body bears a scar. What scars do you have in your life? How can you use those scars to tell the story of God's love and work in your life, a picture of God at work in death and glory?

Glory is forever...

1 Timothy 1:14-17 (NIV)

¹⁴The grace of our Lord was poured out on me abundantly, along with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus.

¹⁵Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the worst. ¹⁶But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his immense patience as an example for those who would believe in him and receive eternal life. ¹⁷Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory for ever and ever. Amen.

Christ's pain, sacrifice and death won for himself and for us a glory that is forever. God's work is glorious. Each of us has a story of how God saved us from sin. As we enter the world, we go as his messengers. People who have a story to tell. Across the world, there are millions of people telling millions of stories. Why?

Because this picture of God's love in Jesus is worth more than thousands of words. As John wrote at the end of his Gospel, "Now there are also many other things that Jesus did. Were every one of them to be written, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written" (John 21:25). Amen.

Running the Wrong Way

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On New Years Day, 1929, Georgia Tech played California in the Rose Bowl.

Late in the second quarter, Roy Riegels recovered a fumble for California. In his excitement he became confused and began running in the wrong direction — for sixty-five yards.

He thought he was about to score. Instead, one of his teammates tackled him at their own 2 yard line.

This meant that his mistake put California 98 yards away from where they needed to be; 98 yards away from where they *could* have been had he had a better sense of direction.

The mistake was serious. A few plays later, Georgia Tech got the ball back and scored.

In the locker room at half time, Roy Riegels sat in the corner with his face buried in his hands, humiliated. The rest of the room remained silent. The coach didn't make his usual half-time speech, but shortly before they were to take the field again, he said, "The starting team will begin the second half."

The players all left the locker room, except for Riegels, alone on the bench, his head hung in shame. He said, "I can't do it, Coach. I can't play. I've ruined the team."

The coach simply said, "Get up Riegels. The game is only half over. You belong on the field."

He *did* take the field that afternoon, playing what he later referred to as the best half of football in his college career. He said, "I gained true understanding of life from my Rose Bowl mistake. I learned you can bounce back..."

It's a lesson we can all put into practice. Even if all your life has been spent running the wrong way, even if your missteps have you 98 yards away from where you need to be, **you belong on the playing field. There's still some game left to play.**

This reminds me of what the Apostle Paul said...

But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 3:13-14)