

Chapter 25: The Glory of Jesus

John 12:27–50

In our discussion of John 11:45–12:11, we examined Martin Luther’s distinction between the theology of glory and the theology of the cross. The theologians of glory seek the glory, power, wisdom, and wealth of this world, while the theologians of the cross recognize that God reveals his wisdom and power not through the structures of this world, but through the weakness, foolishness, and shame of the cross. This theological distinction does not mean that Jesus is without glory, but only that his glory is revealed in a very different way than how worldly people seek to amass their own glory. Jesus is glorified contrary to all expectations—glorified through his earthly fear, failure, his faithfulness to seek the exclusive glory of another, his Father. Everything that *should* detract from Jesus’ glory not only fails to do so, but all those seeming detractions from his glory actually glorify him in a way that no worldly path to glory possibly could. Therefore, *Jesus reveals his glory through the disgrace of the cross.*

The Glorious Fear of Jesus (John 12:27–36)

In the previous passage, the approach of the Greeks who sought to see Jesus (John 12:21) triggered Jesus to recognize that his “hour” has come to be glorified (John 12:23)—that is, to die on the cross in order to bear much fruit (John 12:24). Jesus embraced this mission as the means by which he will gain his kingdom; however, we should not think that Jesus will approach the cross without fear, anguish, and agony. After saying that his “hour” to die has “now” come, Jesus tells us of his anguished fear for what must befall him “*now*.” Jesus says, “Now is my soul troubled. And what shall I say? ‘Father, save me from this hour’? But for this purpose I have come to this hour” (John 12:27). The interpretation of this verse is complicated and controversial, so we must wrestle with what Jesus says here in order to gain a fully developed Christology—that is, a fully developed understanding of the humanity of the Son of God.

The Fear of Jesus

What does Jesus mean when he says that his soul is “troubled”? At first, this passage seems to “differ widely” from what Jesus said in the preceding passage, where he “displayed extraordinary courage,” since now he speaks of his great fear.² By now seeing his fear, do we have here two conflicting depictions of Jesus? Does this fear detract from Jesus’ glory and power as the Son of God who has come in the flesh? To answer these questions, it is helpful to know that classical theologians make an important distinction between two kinds of fear: natural fear and unnatural fear. John of Damascus (676–759 AD) writes that “fear is natural when the soul is unwilling to be separated from the body, on account of the natural sympathy and close relationship planted in it in the beginning by the Creator, which makes it fear and struggle against death and pray for an escape from it.”³ Natural

fear is a good and holy impulse that clings to the goodness of life and shrinks from the evil of death. The natural fear that Jesus experiences here` regarding the prospect of his own death corresponds to the furious grief he experienced at the death of Lazarus (John 11:33–35, 38). In fact, the word Jesus uses to describe being “troubled” (*tetaraktai*) is a different form of one of the same words that John used to describe Jesus as “deeply troubled” (*etaraxen*) at the graveside of Lazarus (John 11:33).

Unnatural fear, on the other hand, “arises from treachery of reasoning and want [i.e., “lack”] of faith, and ignorance of the hour of death, as when we are at night affected by fear at some chance noise....This our Lord did not assume. Hence He never felt fear except in the hour of His passion....” Jesus is not cowardly or anxious. He does not suffer because of a lack of faith. He embodies perfect love, which casts out all unnatural fear (cf. 1 John 4:18). His fear does not arise from ignorance of what will happen, but from a precise knowledge of the horrors that he will endure. R. C. H. Lenski writes:

His was not to be a death like that of the Christian for whom the terrors of death have been removed by the cancellation of sin and guilt; nor like the death of the unbeliever who is blind or realizes only in part what awaits him. Jesus was to die with all the world’s sin and guilt upon him. The curse and damnation of that guilt was to strike him and to crush out his life. All the dreadfulness of this impending death was fully revealed to him. He saw all that was awaiting him.⁵

Jesus sees the full extent of God’s wrath against human sin that he must endure, and he shrinks from what awaits him.

All this means that Jesus is both like us and unlike us as he experiences terror about his approaching death. He is like us by experiencing fear and sorrows, and he experiences those emotions at a depth which we will never know. Through his incarnation, the Son of God subjects himself to the fullness of extraordinary fear, and “when we learn that He had not within him a hardness like stone or iron, we summon courage to follow him, and the weakness of the flesh, which makes us tremble at death, does not hinder us from becoming the companions of our General in struggling with it.” Whenever you experience natural fear—fear in the face of your death in the face of the death of those you love—remember that the Son of God himself endured the agony of true, natural fear as he approached the cross.

Still, Jesus is also unlike us in his experience of fear. To start, we experience unnatural fears that stem from our sin, lack of knowledge, lack of faith, and overactive imaginations in a way that Jesus did not. But even in the realm of natural fear, Jesus’ fear reaches a different degree than ours ever will. Jesus cannot pray for deliverance (“Father, save me from this hour”) in the same way that the Psalmist could pray, for example, “My soul also is greatly troubled. But you, O LORD—how long? Turn, O LORD, deliver my life; save me for the sake of your steadfast love” (Ps. 6:3–4). The Psalmist may pray in the hopes that God will grant his request and spare his life, according to his will.⁷ We may also pray the words of the psalms, expecting in faith that God will either spare our life or grant us a glorious entry into his eternal kingdom of life. Jesus, on the other hand, knows that he must die under the condemnation of his Father *so that* his people may be saved. Herman Ridderbos writes, “His entry into the hour is precisely why others before him and after him have not prayed, and will not pray, in vain: ‘Father save me from this hour!’ Only in Jesus’ death lies the security of their life.”⁸

By uniquely securing our life through his death, Jesus experienced fear so that we would not have to.

The Obedience of Jesus

In light of Jesus' extraordinary fear, the controversial question of interpretation in John 12:27 surrounds whether Jesus actually prays, "Father, save me from this hour" (KJV), or whether he simply mentions that prayer as a possibility that he immediately rejects (CSB, ESV, Message, NASB, NIV, NET). We can legitimately translate the Greek either way, so this isn't a question of simple grammar. Instead, we must grapple again with our Christology in order to understand what is happening here. To start, we should acknowledge that, whatever we make of this phrase, Jesus would not be sinning if he prays to be saved from his crucifixion. The other Gospels tell us that when Jesus prays in the Garden of Gethsemane, he prays explicitly that, if possible, his Father would let the cup of his crucifixion pass from him (Matt. 26:39; Mark 14:36; Luke 22:42). There cannot be an absolute theological argument against Jesus' praying, "Father, save me from this hour" any more than there can be an absolute theological argument against Jesus' praying for his Father to let the cup pass from him.⁹ Insisting that Jesus would sin by praying to avoid the cross represents a confusion between natural and unnatural fear.

On the other hand, we must note that Jesus immediately recognizes that his Father will *not* save him from this hour, which is why he resolves himself to obedience in his task: "But for this purpose I have come to this hour." Dying on the cross is the mission for which the Father sent Jesus into the world, and it is unthinkable for Jesus to avoid it. Jesus is fully human, and it is good and holy and righteous for Jesus in his human nature to fear the cruelty of death—or, as John Calvin puts it, he may "lawfully entertain a dread of death."¹⁰ But, Jesus is also fully God, so it is also good and holy and righteous for the will of his human nature to obediently, submissively, and willingly obey the will of his divine nature as the Son of God who came to lay down his life for his people. John of Damascus is worth quoting again on this subject:

So, then, He had by nature, both as God and as man, the power of will. But His human will was obedient and subordinate to His divine will, not being guided by its own inclination, but willing those things which the divine will willed. For it was with the permission of the divine will that He suffered by nature what was proper to Him. For when He prayed that He might escape the death, it was with His divine will naturally willing and permitting it that He did so pray and agonize and fear, and again when His divine will willed that His human will should choose the death, the passion became voluntary to Him. For it was not as God only, but also as man, that He voluntarily surrendered Himself to death. And thus He bestowed on us also courage in the face of death.¹¹

In the end, there is no clear answer to our question of whether Jesus actually prayed this prayer, although with one major qualification. While there is nothing preventing us from interpreting John 12:27 as Jesus' prayer to avoid death out of natural fear, there is *everything* preventing Jesus from nurturing rebellious thoughts against his Father's will. Jesus can *both* pray to escape death *and* resolve to carry out the mission. We see true courage in Jesus, for he fully fears *and* fully obeys.

The Glory of Jesus

In the next verse, Jesus prays not what we would expect him to pray: “Father, glorify your name” (John 12:28a). Feeling the full weight of fear in the knowledge of *how* the Father will glorify his name, Jesus nevertheless prays that the Father will move forward with his eternal plan for the salvation of his people. In response to this prayer, John writes, “Then a voice came from heaven: ‘I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again’” (John 12:28b). The Father has already displayed his glory by sending his Word into the world for all to see Jesus and hear him, and now the Father will display his glory further at the cross. By lifting Jesus up on the cross, the Father will condemn sin, destroy death, and demonstrate his love for his people. Through this work, the Father will glorify himself in his character, his wisdom, his power, and his love—that is, he will display his glory for all to see in the death of his Son.

Notice, though, that while Jesus prays for the *Father* to glorify his name, Jesus also displays his own glory. Jesus’ glory is not to move forward confidently from one magnificent victory to another, but that he obeys in spite of anguished fear. He feels real terror over what he must endure, but he does not turn back from it in cowardice. Instead, he courageously embraces his mission in spite of his fear out of love for his Father and for his people. In glorifying his Father by going to the cross, Jesus himself is glorified as he prays to finish his mission.

The crowd does not know what to make of this sound from heaven, so they debate whether they have heard thunder or the voice of an angel speaking to Jesus (John 12:29). This reaction is perhaps similar to what we find in Acts 9:7 where Saul alone sees Jesus, while the others with him only hear Jesus’ voice.¹² Although this revelation comes literally as a booming voice from heaven, not everyone understands it equally. The same phenomenon happens to this day, “for God speaks plainly enough in the Gospel,” since the voice of the Lord is like thunder (Ps. 29:3–9), yet the spiritually blind and deaf dismiss it entirely.¹³

The Judgment of Jesus

Jesus does not allow the crowd to ignore the voice they have heard: “Jesus answered, ‘This voice has come for your sake, not mine. 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’” (John 12:30–31). Certainly, the voice comes in part for the sake of encouraging Jesus that the Father will indeed be glorified through Jesus’ death on the cross; however, this voice comes also to confirm the truth of Jesus’ mission to all those who bear witness to it.¹⁴

In addition to God’s glorification, the cross is the “judgment of the world” where Satan, “the ruler of this world,” will be cast out. The cross is not the *final* judgment in time, but it is the *ultimate* judgment in significance. Since the cross bears witness simultaneously to God’s righteousness and love, as well as human sinfulness and helplessness, “the judgment of this world, both negatively and positively, takes place in the crucifixion–exaltation of the Son of Man—Jesus.”¹⁵ In Jesus’ death on the cross, God will *both* condemn the sinfulness of this world to uphold his own righteousness *and* exhaust the fullness of his wrath against his people. What Jesus takes upon himself need not be borne by anyone who looks to Jesus’ cross for salvation.

Additionally, the cross represents the ultimate judgment against the ruler of this sinful world, Satan himself. At the cross, Satan is “cast out” of the world, experiencing “a sudden dethronement”

from holding the whole world under his power.¹⁶ The Greeks who asked to “see Jesus” (John 12:21) represent the loosening of Satan’s binding hold over the nations outside of Israel.¹⁷ Although the entire world stood guilty before God (cf. Gen. 11), God chose one man, Abram (Gen. 12:1–3), from whom he raised up a nation to bless and reveal himself, so that salvation comes only from the Jews (John 4:22). The other nations were left to languish in darkness until this hour when the light of the world, a Jew, will go to the cross to save not only his own people, but individuals from every tribe, language, people, and nation (Rev. 5:9). The cross, then, marks the beginning of the millennium that the Apostle John speaks about in Revelation 20, where the ruler of this world is not only “cast out” (*ekballō*; John 12:30), but also “cast” (*ballō*) into the pit “so that he might not deceive the nations any longer” until the thousand years (symbolic for the New Testament age) are ended (Rev. 20:3).¹⁸

Therefore, it is when Jesus is “lifted up from the earth”—a statement that explicitly describes his death on the cross (John 12:33)—that he draws “all people” (that is, people from all nations) to himself. The cross of Jesus is our Lord’s glory because it is the scepter that he uses to shatter Satan’s kingdom of this world in order to reclaim the world as his own. Anthony Hoekema describes the Bible’s teaching on this matter well as he summarizes the connection between John 12:31 and Revelation 20:

The binding of Satan described in Revelation 20:1–3, therefore, means that throughout the gospel age in which we now live the influence of Satan, though certainly not annihilated, is so curtailed that he cannot prevent the spread of the gospel to the nations of the world. Because of the binding of Satan during this present age, the nations cannot conquer the church, but the church is conquering the nations.¹⁹

The ruler of this world is cast out and cast down into a pit where he is bound and unable to deceive the nations as he did in the past! The cross is the power of God unto salvation and the glory of God because it overthrows Satan’s dominion not through brute force, but through the crucifixion of the Son of God.

The Light of Jesus

Regardless of all that the crowd fails to understand (both here and throughout the Gospel of John), the crowd somehow seems to recognize that Jesus is speaking about his looming death. Therefore, they ask him, “We have heard from the Law that the Christ remains forever. How can you say that the Son of Man must be lifted up? Who is this Son of Man?” (John 12:34). Now, it is difficult to know exactly what the crowd is referring to in “the Law” where they learn that the Christ remains forever, but it is likely that they are speaking about the revelation of the Son of Man in Daniel 7:13–14, who takes possession of “an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom...shall not be destroyed.”²⁰ Additionally, we do not know exactly why the crowd makes a seamless transition from the “Christ” to the “Son of Man,” since many first century Jews thought that these would be two different figures.²¹ Furthermore, Jesus uses neither title to speak about himself at this point!

Nevertheless, their question is clear. If the Son of Man lasts forever (which he does), then how can he be lifted up on the cross to die? Their question, “Who is this Son of Man?” does not ask for a simple identification, but we might better translate the verse as “What kind is this person—the Son of

man?”²² They want to know how Jesus could possibly claim to be the Son of God if he is about to die “in ignominy and under the curse of God.”²³ This scene of tragic, lost confusion is the last time that John mentions the “crowd” in this Gospel. As Morris writes, “To the end they remain confused and perplexed, totally unable to appreciate the magnitude of the gift offered to them and the significance of the Person who offers it.”²⁴

Instead of answering this question with a theological rationale, Jesus calls the crowd one last time to faith: “The light is among you for a little while longer. Walk while you have the light, lest darkness overtake you. The one who walks in the darkness does not know where he is going. While you have the light, believe in the light, that you may become sons of light” (John 12:35–36a). In contrast to their question of whether the Son of Man should remain “forever,” Jesus tells them that he, the light, will remain among them only “for a little while longer.”²⁵ This is the same message that Jesus has preached before in this Gospel (John 8:12; 9:4–5; 11:9). The light of the world is about to set like the sun after a brief, fleeting day. Before he slips away from them, they should put their faith in him, for if they do not believe him when they can see him, how will they believe him without seeing (cf. John 20:29)? As if to foreshadow his imminent departure, after Jesus says these things, he departs and hides from the people (John 12:36b).

The Glorious Failure of Jesus (John 12:37–43)

From a human perspective, Jesus’ mission is an almost total failure, since his appeal has no effect on the hard-hearted crowd. In spite of the many signs that he has performed in their midst, they persist in their unbelief (John 12:37). Nevertheless, John looks at this widespread rejection of Jesus and calls it Jesus’ “glory” (John 12:41). If we judge the immediate results of Jesus’ ministry according to the flesh, the results are clear: Jesus is a failure. Nevertheless, John opens our eyes to the glorious power of God unto salvation in this rejection of Jesus, explaining that the unbelief of the crowd fulfills the prophecy from Isaiah 53:1: “Lord, who has believed what he heard from us, and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?” (John 12:38). The Scriptures always foretold the way in which the Messiah would be rejected, and “Therefore,” unsurprisingly, “they could not believe” (John 12:39). God has brought his word by many prophets to his people, only to be spurned and rejected. Why would there be a different result when God sends his Word to become flesh and dwell among his people? John himself told us at the beginning of his Gospel that Jesus will be rejected: “He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him” (John 1:11).

Blind Eyes and Hard Hearts

Then, John quotes a modified version of another passage from Isaiah: “He has blinded their eyes and hardened their heart, lest they see with their eyes, and understand with their heart, and turn, and I would heal them” (John 12:40). The original passage, where God instructs Isaiah about how to conduct his prophetic ministry, runs like this: “Make the heart of this people dull, and their ears heavy, and blind their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their hearts, and turn and be healed” (Is. 6:10). The purpose of Isaiah’s preaching to ancient Israel was not to open eyes, ears, and hearts to the Lord, but rather to harden *further* the people’s already hard hearts. Notice, though, that John’s quotation does not focus on the preaching ministry of Jesus, so that there is no mention of hearing and ears, but he emphasizes only that the eyes do not

see, and the hearts to not understand.²⁶ Although the people of Israel during Jesus' day do *not* listen to Jesus' preaching, the true scandal of their unbelief comes in the way that they fail to *see* his signs and to *understand* that he truly is the light of the world, the Son of Man sent from the Father.

This does not mean that Jesus, Jesus' words, or Jesus signs have *caused* the unbelief of the people. Just as God promised to harden Pharaoh's heart (Ex. 4:21; 7:13; 9:12; 10:20, 27; 11:10; 14:4, 8, 17) in response to Pharaoh's wickedness (Ex. 1–3) and concurrently with the hardening that Pharaoh does to his own heart (Ex. 8:15, 32; 9:34), so Jesus now hardens the hearts of his people alongside the people's own heart-hardening.²⁷ It is not as though the people are desperate to believe in Jesus, but the Lord turns them away. Quite the opposite—he promises that he will *never* cast out any who come to him (John 6:37). The responsibility for the crowd's hard hearts falls exclusively on the *crowd*, and not on Jesus. John Calvin explains it this way:

But it ought to be observed, that it is accidental to the word of God, that it blinds men; for nothing can be more inconsistent than that there should be no difference between truth and falsehood, that the bread of life should become a deadly poison, and that medicine should aggravate a disease. But this must be ascribed to the wickedness of men, which turns life into death.²⁸

It is not the nature of God's word to blind eyes and to harden hearts; rather, it is the corruption of our own hearts that twists God's word to become death instead of life.

But at the same time, we must not soften the *purpose* in the prophecy from Isaiah that John quotes. Jesus blinds their eyes *so that* they do not see and understand and turn to be healed. Their own wickedness perverts the gracious light of Jesus into blindness, but Jesus blinds them so that they will not turn to him. Once again, it is not as though Jesus is turning away eager followers; the Scriptures bear witness to something much more profound and convicting. William Hendriksen describes this reality well:

The terrible consequence of hardening ourselves against the solemn admonitions and warnings that come to us is here pointed out. Again...*the fault lies not in any sense with God!* He is the God of love. He is not a cruel monster who deliberately and with inward delight prepares people for everlasting damnation. On the contrary, he earnestly warns, proclaims the Gospel, and states—as Jesus did repeatedly during his earthly ministry—what will happen if people believe, also what will happen if they do not. He even *urges* them to walk in the light. But when people, of their own accord and after repeated threats and promises, reject him and spurn his messages, then—and not until then—he hardens them, in order that those who were *not willing* to repent may *not be able* to repent.²⁹

Although this doctrine of God's judicial hardening of hearts is not popular in our culture, we must teach it clearly for two reasons. First, God himself gives us this doctrine in his Scriptures, and it is wicked arrogance to believe that we understand these realities better than God, or that God needs our help in his public relations department. Second, this doctrine is a warning to all those who toy with Jesus. This is a summons to whole-hearted faith and obedience, warning us that if we persist in unbelief, the day will come when we are not only unwilling to believe, but unable, hardened in our

own hardness of heart. Instead, seek the Lord while he may be found!

The Glory of Jesus

All this rejection, however, does not detract at all from the glory of Jesus. John tells us that Isaiah wrote these prophecies about Jesus, but not with disappointment. Rather, John tells us, “Isaiah said these things because he saw his glory and spoke of him” (John 12:41). In shame, humiliation, failure, and rejection, Isaiah did not see the failure or limitations of Jesus, but Jesus’ *glory*. Beyond simple unbelief, remember that the first passage from Isaiah that John quoted in John 12:38 is from Isaiah 53:1, directly in the middle of the most direct prophecy from the Old Testament about Jesus’ crucifixion, from Isaiah 52:13–53:12. Only a few verses *before* the verse that John quotes, Isaiah writes, “Behold, my servant shall act wisely; he shall be high and lifted up, and shall be exalted” (Is. 52:13). Then, only a few verses *after*, Isaiah writes, “But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed” (Isa. 53:5). The lifting up and exaltation of Jesus on the cross is our Lord’s anguish and shame, but the cross is paradoxically also our Lord’s glory.³⁰

Still, the self-evident nature of this glory is so powerful that John does not want to leave us with the impression that *no one* recognized it for what it was. Indeed, many believed, and even many of the *authorities* believed in Jesus. Nevertheless, they did not confess their faith publicly in the fear that they would be excommunicated from the synagogue (John 12:42). John then explains their fear this way: “for they loved the glory that comes from man more than the glory that comes from God” (John 12:43). Even among those who believe at this stage, they fail to recognize the supreme worth of the glory of Jesus over and above the glory that the Pharisees can offer to them. Although this faith is in some sense proof of the glory of Jesus, it also further demonstrates the paradoxical nature of Jesus’ glory—even his believers do not love him as much as they should.

The Glorious Faithfulness of Jesus (John 12:44–50)

At this point, Jesus emerges from hiding (John 12:36b) to “cry out” with one final element to his testimony (John 12:44). This phrase “refers less to the volume of his voice than to his act of openly testifying within the hearing of all (cf. 1:15; 7:28, 37).”³¹ The final note he sounds before departing from the sight of the crowd until his public crucifixion is to insist that *his glory* represents not himself, but ultimately the glory of *his Father*. Jesus cries out, “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” (John 12:44–46). Notice that Jesus is echoing the prophecy from Isaiah, as quoted just a few verses earlier—he speaks of *belief* (heart) and *sight* (eyes). The reference is still to those who believe upon Jesus after beholding the light of his glory.

But instead of claiming (or even hinting) that people ought to believe in Jesus on the basis of his personal, individual, private glory, Jesus ties this theme of *his glory* back to the Father’s glory. He is not a rogue agent or a lone wolf bringing about salvation for his own personal glory; rather, he is the faithful servant who reveals his Father who sent him. Therefore, to believe in Jesus is to believe in the Father, and to see Jesus is to see the Father who sent Jesus. As Jesus has stated so many times throughout the Gospel of John, Jesus again insists that he comes not of his own accord, but in order

to reveal the Father to the world. This connection is so close that no “division or separation is possible between them. To see the Son is thus in full reality to see the Father who did send him” (John 5:19, 30; 8:19; 14:9).³² The Father and the Son work jointly to reveal the glory of God’s salvation to the world. The Father sends, and the Son is seen, glorified, and believed upon in order to reveal the glory of his Father who sent him.

The Judging Word

If John 12:44–46 represents a promise of salvation, the next two verses represent a warning of judgment for those who do not repent and believe: “If anyone hears my words and does not keep them, I do not judge him; for I did not come to judge the world but to save the world. 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” (John 12:47–48). Jesus earlier affirmed that he does not judge the world (John 8:15), but instead has come to save the world (John 3:17). Paradoxically, Jesus also claimed that he *alone* judges, since the Father has entrusted all judgment to the Son (John 5:22–23, 27), although Jesus qualified this statement by saying that he does not judge on his own, but according to the will of his Father who sent him (John 5:30).

Jesus seems to employ a similar paradox here. On the one hand, Jesus says that he does not judge, since he came to *save* the world—and, by implication, not to judge the world (John 12:47). On the other hand, those who reject Jesus and refuse to receive his words will not go free. Instead, the word that Jesus has spoken will judge unbelievers on the last day (John 12:48). Do not miss the authority that Jesus entrusts to his *word*. He does not entrust similar judgment to the institutional church nor to purely individual conscience. Jesus even goes out of his way to differentiate his *own* authority from the authority of the word that he speaks. The word is what creates the church, governs the church, and judges the church, which is why we must diligently study Jesus’ word. And what does Jesus’ word proclaim? That he is glorified through his crucifixion in order to draw people from all the world to himself (John 12:32). Listen to the word: look on Jesus in faith and be saved! This word will judge all those who reject Jesus, but to those who embrace Jesus by faith in his word, this promise yields “an invaluable consolation, that to whatever extent they may be now condemned by the world, still they do not doubt that they are already acquitted in heaven; for, wherever the faith of the Gospel has its seat, the tribunal of God is erected to save.”³³

The Word of the Father

Why should Jesus assign the word he speaks such a great significance? As in the rest of this final section, Jesus is eager to glorify his Father who sent him. Here, he teaches us that his word is not his own, but that he speaks what the Father has given to him: “For I have not spoken on my own authority, but the Father who sent me has himself given me a commandment—what to say and what to speak. And I know that his commandment is eternal life. What I say, therefore, I say as the Father has told me” (John 12:49–50). Just as the Father has entrusted all authority to the Son to judge (John 5:22–23, 27), but that the Son only judges as he hears from his Father (John 5:30), so the *word* that Jesus speaks will judge (John 12:48) because it is the Father’s word.

Still, Jesus does not here focus on the judgment of his Father’s word, but on the promise—his Father’s commandment is *eternal life*. How is the Father’s commandment eternal life? Because the Father’s commandment is that the Son must go to the cross to die to purchase eternal life for the

world. Jesus obeys his Father's word in his own life just as he demands that we believe the Father's commandment about eternal life, that all who look on the glory of the Son lifted up on the cross and believe in him shall be saved (John 6:40).

We have therefore come full circle in this passage in the mutual glorification of the Father and the Son. Jesus begins by expressing his fear and anguish about going to the cross, yet resolving himself to do so (John 12:27) and praying that the Father will glorify his name through the cross (John 12:28). That is, Jesus glorifies the Father by going to the cross in obedience to the Father's commandment. But at the cross, the Father lifts up and glorifies Jesus (John 12:41) by destroying the kingdom of Satan (John 12:31) and by drawing people from all the world to Jesus (John 12:32). As Jesus draws people to himself, they are not believing in Jesus exclusively, for all who see and believe in Jesus believe in the Father who sent Jesus (John 12:44–45).

At the cross, Jesus glorifies the Father, and the Father glorifies Jesus. In the physical and spiritual darkness of the cross, the light of the world shines for all to see and believe in Jesus, that we may see and believe in the Father who sent him. The cross is the glory of the Father *and* the Son, as well as the hope of the world.

Discussion Questions

1. What does Jesus fear? How is his fear similar to our fears? How is his fear different from ours? What does Jesus' fear teach us about our own fear? How does Jesus reveal his glory in the midst of his fear?
2. Why do the shame and failure of Jesus' rejection by his people fail to detract from his glory? How does Jesus' rejection enhance his glory? What does the nature of Jesus' true glory in the midst of his shame and failure teach us about our own lack of obvious fruit?
3. The world teaches us to pursue our own glory at all costs, but Jesus unwaveringly seeks the glory of his Father, according to his Father's word. How does Jesus' glorification of his Father serve to glorify Jesus? What place does Jesus' word actually have in your life, practically speaking?
4. The glory of God as revealed in Jesus' crucifixion represents a complete rejection of what the world teaches about glory. How does the world pull at you to gain glory for yourself directly in your life? What does the glory of Jesus's cross teach you about God's way to pursue lasting glory through faith in Jesus?

Notes

1. Lenski, *The Interpretation of John's Gospel*, 868.
2. Calvin, *Commentary on the Gospel According to John*, vol. II, 31. Available online: <<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom35.ii.v.html>>
3. John of Damascus, *Exposition of the Orthodox Faith*, trans. S. D. F. Salmond (London, UK: Aeterna Press, 2016), 120 (chapter 23).

4. John of Damascus, *Exposition of the Orthodox Faith*, 121 (chapter 23).
5. Lenski, *The Interpretation of John's Gospel*, 869.
6. Calvin, *Commentary on the Gospel According to John*, vol. II, 32. Available online: <<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom35.ii.v.html>>
7. Ridderbos, *The Gospel According to John*, 434.
8. Ridderbos, *The Gospel According to John*, 435.
9. Hendriksen, *Exposition of the Gospel According to John*, vol. II, 199.
10. Calvin, *Commentary on the Gospel According to John*, vol. II, 33. Available online: <<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom35.ii.v.html>>
11. John of Damascus, *Exposition of the Orthodox Faith*, 115 (chapter 18).
12. Lenski, *The Interpretation of John's Gospel*, 872.
13. Calvin, *Commentary on the Gospel According to John*, vol. II, 35. Available online: <<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom35.ii.v.html>>
14. Ridderbos, *The Gospel According to John*, 437.
15. Beasley-Murray, *John*, 213.
16. Lenski, *The Interpretation of John's Gospel*, 874.
17. Hendriksen, *Exposition of the Gospel According to John*, vol. II, 202–03.
18. Anthony A. Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, Co., 1979), 229.
19. *Ibid.*
20. Köstenberger, *John*, 385–86.
21. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 445.
22. Lenski, *The Interpretation of John's Gospel*, 878.
23. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 446.
24. Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, 533.
25. Ridderbos, *The Gospel According to John*, 442.
26. Hendriksen, *Exposition of the Gospel According to John*, vol. II, 212.
27. Beasley-Murray, *John*, 216.
28. Calvin, *Commentary on the Gospel According to John*, vol. II, 43 Available online: <<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom35.ii.vii.html>>
29. Hendriksen, *Exposition of the Gospel According to John*, vol. II, 212.
30. “Again we have the complex idea of glory. It points at once to the supreme greatness of Christ and to the cross as the supreme illustration of his greatness. Here it includes the thought of his rejection, for that, too, is part of his real glory. He, being what he is, stooped to a position where people might and did reject him. Only as we see this can we see what his glory implies. John says that Isaiah ‘spoke about him.’ Whatever other application the words of the prophet may have, for John the supremely important thing is that they speak of Jesus.” (Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, 538.)
31. Ridderbos, *The Gospel According to John*, 447–48.
32. Lenski, *The Interpretation of John's Gospel*, 893–94.
33. Calvin, *Commentary on the Gospel According to John*, vol. II, 52. Available online: <<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom35.ii.ix.html>>