

Chapter 23: The Preparation of Jesus

John 11:45–12:11

Of the great doctrines of the Reformation, Martin Luther's understanding of the difference between the theology of glory and the theology of the cross is lesser known, but was crucial to the Reformer's understanding of how human beings relate to God. After nailing his 95 Theses to the door of a church in Wittenberg on October 31, 1517, Martin Luther received an opportunity to elaborate on his views in April of 1518 in an event known as the Heidelberg Disputation. There, Martin Luther famously argued, "A theology of glory calls evil good and good evil. A theology of the cross calls the thing what it actually is." He explained what he meant this way:

This is clear: He who does not know Christ does not know God hidden in suffering. Therefore he prefers works to suffering, glory to the cross, strength to weakness, wisdom to folly, and, in general, good to evil. These are the people whom the apostle calls "enemies of the cross of Christ" (Phil. 3:18), for they hate the cross and suffering and love works and the glory of works. Thus they call the good of the cross evil and the evil of a deed good. God can be found only in suffering and the cross, as has already been said. Therefore the friends of the cross say that the cross is good and works are evil, for through the cross works are dethroned and the "old Adam," who is especially edified by works, is crucified. It is impossible for a person not to be puffed up by his "good works" unless he has first been deflated and destroyed by suffering and evil until he knows that he is worthless and that his works are not his but God's.²

Luther continued, writing this:

Because men do not know the cross and hate it, they necessarily love the opposite, namely, wisdom, glory, power, and so on. Therefore they become increasingly blinded and hardened by such love, for desire cannot be satisfied by the acquisition of those things which it desires....The remedy for curing desire does not lie in satisfying it, but in extinguishing it. In other words, he who wishes to become wise does not seek wisdom by progressing toward it but becomes a fool by retrogressing into seeking "folly." Likewise he who wishes to have much power, honor, pleasure, satisfaction in all things must flee rather than seek power, honor, pleasure, and satisfaction in all things. This is the wisdom which is folly to the world.³

The theologian of glory lives for seeking, acquiring, and protecting his own personal glory. The theologian of the cross, however, recognizes that God has revealed himself not through displays of glory and power, but of weakness. Jesus did not enter the world in pomp and circumstance, but born to a poor, virgin Jewish girl in a stable for animals. Then, Jesus was not worshiped and obeyed, but

persecuted and crucified. The theologian of glory sees the cross as a negative verdict against Jesus, while the theology of the cross sees Christ's suffering as God's true glory.

There is perhaps no more vivid contrast between these two theologies—that is, these two ways of living—than in John 11:45–12:11. Here, we see two groups of people who are seeking after Jesus' cross, but for entirely opposite reasons. The chief priests and the Pharisees *plot* Jesus' crucifixion from a desire to preserve their own glory, since Jesus represents a threat to their power, privilege, and wealth. They are theologians of glory *par excellence*. Mary, the sister of Martha and Lazarus, also seeks after the cross of Jesus, but not because she wants to lose her Master. Rather than clinging to Jesus in order to protect someone she loves—or to protect her position as someone with close personal ties to Jesus—she willingly sacrifices great wealth and her own personal dignity to honor Jesus by anointing his body for burial. Although we are not given insight into exactly what she was thinking, her actions tell us that she is a theologian of the cross. In these two consecutive stories, we see these two ways of living and of relating to Jesus, with substantial insight into what each requires of us and offers to us as its reward. In this passage, John illustrates that *both wolves and sheep seek Jesus' cross, but for opposite reasons*.

The Theology of Glory (John 11:45–57)

Immediately on the heels of Jesus' miracle to raise Lazarus from the dead, those Jews who came with Mary to witness the miracle believe in Jesus (John 11:45). This is not surprising, given the extraordinary nature of the miracle. The bigger question, then, is whether *all* of those who witnessed Jesus' miracle end up believing in him, since John then adds, “but some of them went to the Pharisees and told them what Jesus had done” (John 11:46). When John writes that “many of the Jews...believed in him” (John 11:45), the phrase he uses for “many of the Jews” is identical in Greek to what he wrote in John 11:19: “and *many of the Jews* had come to Martha and Mary to console them concerning their brother,” which has led some commentators to believe that *all* of the “many of the Jews” who came to console Martha and Mary now believe in Jesus after this miracle.⁴ If so, then the Jews who report Jesus' miracle to the Pharisees do so not to denounce Jesus, but “in order to convince these opponents of Jesus that they were surely wrong in their opinion about him.”⁵

While this is possible, it is unlikely. By definition, the word “many” reflects a part of the whole. In John 11:31, we do not read that “many” of those Jews followed Mary to Jesus, but that “When the Jews who were with her in the house, consoling her, saw Mary rise quickly and go out, they followed her, supposing that she was going to the tomb to weep there.” Here, “the Jews” represent the *whole* group of the “many Jews” who had come down from Jerusalem (John 11:19). By contrast, when we read that “many of the Jews therefore...believed in him” (John 11:45), we are again dealing with a part of the whole. This time, we have a part of the whole group of the “many of the Jews” who came down from Jerusalem, but not all of them. Instead, John tells us that the response to Jesus' miracle is divided in two: *many* of the witnesses believe in Jesus, but *some* went to the Pharisees to report what Jesus had done. These witnesses who tell the Pharisees about Jesus do so not by faith, for they are *not* part of the many who believe. Despite what they have witnessed, they do not believe in him. They go to convince the Pharisees to take “drastic action...against the miracle-worker.”⁶

The Dilemma of the Pharisees

In response to this report, the chief priests and Pharisees gather the council of the Sanhedrin to ask themselves, “What are we to do? For this man performs many signs. If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation” (John 11:47–48). This question reveals at least three aspects about both their minds and their hearts as they consider what to do with a man who has just raised another man from the dead. First, these leaders believe that they possess sufficient power to allow Jesus to continue, or to stop his progress: “What are we to do?...If we let him go on like this....” They do not even consider the possibility that Jesus is manifesting the glory and power of God, so they believe that merely “by active exertion they may stop his progress.” God is working, and they are brainstorming the actions they can take to stop him! They recognize, in other words, that *they cannot out-glorify Jesus*.

Second, they acknowledge that Jesus performs many signs, but they nevertheless refuse to believe him: “For this man performs many signs.” On two separate occasions, the Jews demanded that Jesus show them a sign—first, to prove his authority to cleanse the temple (John 2:18), and second so that they might believe in him (John 6:30). At this point, Jesus has provided a variety of signs, including giving sight to a man born blind (John 9) and raising a man dead for four days back to life (John 11:43–44). Contrary to their earlier statements, these signs do not prompt them to submit to Jesus’ authority or to believe in him. Instead, these remarkable signs only drive them to find a way to get rid of him.

Third, they recognize that Jesus represents a serious threat to their own power and authority—that is, to their *glory*: “If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation.” By “place,” they probably mean “temple” (cf. Acts 6:13; 21:28).⁸ Because *they* do not believe in Jesus, it would be dangerous for everyone *else* to believe in him, since such faith would erode their power over the nation. Although they couch their lust for glory by appealing to the public good (“the Romans will come!”), they are only worried about their own personal power.⁹ A literal translation of the Greek makes this clear: “the Romans will come and they will take away *our* both place and nation.” We might bring out the meaning of the emphatic position of the pronoun “our” by translating the passage this way: “both the position and the nation *that are ours*.”¹⁰ They are only worried about losing what belongs to *them*, and *Jesus’ glory threatens their glory*. Ironically, the Jews do successfully put Jesus to death (although they were less successful in keeping him that way), but the Romans will come anyway to destroy their place and nation in 70 AD.¹¹

Fundamentally, the Jews care more about protecting their power than they do about honoring God. They do not consider whether God is working, even to the extent that they dismiss the significance of the miracles that Jesus has worked. While they pretend to be the servants of God, they do not really care about what God is doing in their midst. By contrast, God’s people ought to consider only what God has commanded, and then boldly follow him wherever he leads, for “contrary to the expectation of all, God blesses that firmness which is founded on obedience to his word.”¹² The power of God is only a dilemma for those who set themselves against it.

Better for One Man to Die for the People

At this, Caiaphas rebukes the rest of the Sanhedrin, saying, “You know nothing at all. Nor do

you understand that it is better for you that one man should die for the people, not that the whole nation should perish” (John 11:49–50). John tells us that Caiaphas was the high priest “that year,” which may simply mean “that fateful year.”¹³ Originally, the high priest remained in office until his death (cf. Num. 20:22–29; 35:25, 28). The Romans, however, deposed priests whenever they deemed it expedient, so that Caiaphas’s father-in-law, Annas, who formerly served as high priest (Luke 3:2), is still alive “that year,” during the high priesthood of Caiaphas (John 18:13).¹⁴ This phrase does not suggest that the term of office for the high priest was only one year long.

As high priest, Caiaphas is the leader of the Sanhedrin. As the leader, he rejects their uncertainty by providing them with a direct course of action: to keep the nation safe (not only from the Romans, but also from the common people who are increasingly believing in Jesus), only one man needs to die. They have tried confronting Jesus, debating with Jesus, questioning Jesus, and investigating Jesus, but their problem (Jesus) has grown stronger through every attempt. If Jesus dies, however, their problem will go away. The fact that they do not have proof of any actual crime is inconsequential. As Lenski observes, “It is an old trick to present two extreme alternatives in order to force acceptance of the one desired, as though no third possibility exists. Here either one man dies, or the whole nation is destroyed.”¹⁵ Rather than continuing to wring their hands in helpless angst, Caiaphas proposes decisive action, and he gets his wish: “So from that day on they made plans to put him to death” (John 11:53). That is, *to protect their glory, Jesus must die.*

As dark and sinister as this speech is, John gives us an additional detail: “He did not say this of his own accord, but being high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus would die for the nation, and not for the nation only, but also to gather into one the children of God who are scattered abroad” (John 11:51–52). This does not justify what Caiaphas has said, but only expands beyond what Caiaphas intended: “Caiaphas poured *one* meaning into his words; God, *another*.”¹⁶ Caiaphas plots murder against the Son of God whom the Father consecrated and sent into the world for the salvation of the world, but God uses Caiaphas’s wicked intentions as a part of bringing salvation to the world. Jesus will indeed die so that the *nation* does not have to die, for Caiaphas says *people*, but John substitutes the word *nation*.¹⁷ The difference is important, because Caiaphas is speaking of the people of Israel as a political unit, while John speaks of a nation whose boundaries transcend old covenant Israel to include *all* “the children of God who are scattered abroad” (John 11:52).¹⁸ That is, Jesus will die for *all* the elect, whether Jew or Gentile. This is explicitly a claim that Jesus will die for the elect, since, as Morris notes, “they are called ‘children’ even before they are gathered together.”¹⁹ Just as Jesus promised that he, the Good Shepherd, will gather to himself *one* flock under *one* shepherd from the many folds of people around the world (John 10:16), so now John tells us that it is Jesus’ death which will gather into *one* the children of God who are scattered abroad.²⁰ Here is the twist that even Caiaphas could not foresee: *In his death, Jesus is supremely glorified, and the glory of his enemies is supremely condemned.*

The Definite Plan and Foreknowledge of God

Given this statement, is Jesus’ death an act of wicked men, or the righteous plan of God? Was it sin to murder Jesus, and if so, then why would God send Jesus for this purpose? This is the mystery of God’s providential work. The Apostle Peter puts it this way in his sermon on the Day of Pentecost: “this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men” (Acts 2:23). The Jews present at Pentecost were the

same Jews who demanded Jesus' crucifixion, and Peter tells them that they are accountable for that death; however, Peter also insists that this did not happen by chance, but according to the "definite plan and foreknowledge of God." It is not that God himself took part in the sin, or authored the sin, or tempted anyone to sin (cf. Jas. 1:13–15). Rather, God providentially ordered the sin toward his own purposes: the salvation of his elect.

When Jesus died, he became a substitutionary sacrifice for the children of God. On the cross, Jesus endured punishment for our sins, dying the death that we, the nation of God, deserved. Our Shepherd laid down his life for his sheep so that we might live through faith in him, who is the Resurrection and the Life. God is not the author of sin, but he is also not passive and powerless in the face of sin. God sovereignly, powerfully ordains everything that happens—"not by a bare permission," but through his wisdom and power, and toward his own holy purposes.²¹ At the cross, as everywhere, God sovereignly guided how the wickedness of these humans would express itself, without himself becoming the author of sin. Furthermore, God also did not allow their wickedness to transgress any further than what he decreed by his wisdom.

If God's wise, holy, and righteous power providentially ordered even the suffering and the death of his own Son, then what excuse do we have to doubt God's goodness in the midst of our own suffering?

Jesus No Longer Walked Openly

From this point on, Jesus can no longer walk openly because of the threat to his life, so he goes into the wilderness, to a town called Ephraim, to stay with his disciples (John 11:54). He does this not out of fear, in order to avoid death, for Jesus has spoken about his impending death throughout his ministry. Rather, Jesus must wait until the hour comes for the Son of Man to be glorified through going to the cross (John 12:23). Until that time, Jesus must wait with his disciples.

This all takes place right as the Passover is about to begin (John 11:55). When the Jews start to arrive in Jerusalem from the pilgrimages, they are all on the lookout for Jesus, gossiping and speculating whether Jesus will dare to come to the feast at all (John 11:56). The plans of the Sanhedrin are not hidden, but open: "Now the chief priests and the Pharisees had given orders that if anyone knew where he was, he should let them know, so that they might arrest him" (John 11:57). No longer do they make any attempt to hide their opposition to Jesus, but in their rage against God's appointed Messiah, they enlist the help of the many Jews flooding into Jerusalem to find, arrest, and kill Jesus.

The Theology of Glory

Rather than perceiving the power of God that Jesus is manifesting in their midst, they see only one thing in Jesus: a threat. They have worked hard over the course of their lives to achieve, possess, control, and enjoy their own, private glory. If they allow Jesus to continue calling people into *his* kingdom, then they will necessarily lose the subjects of *their* kingdoms, weakening them significantly. They have done everything they can think of to discredit Jesus in the eyes of the people, but only one more solution remains: they must kill him. Their actions, therefore, stand as a warning to us. What will we do to acquire and protect our own private glory? Are we also willing to reject, deny, and even do violence to Jesus in order to remove him as a threat to our glory?

The Theology of the Cross (John 12:1–7)

In the midst of all this plotting against Jesus, the scene of the dinner party in Bethany is an oasis of calm before the storm. Every Gospel includes a story of a dinner party interrupted by a woman who anoints Jesus with perfume, but with some differences (Matt. 26:6–13; Mark 14:3–9; Luke 7:36–38). The accounts of Matthew and Mark are nearly identical to each other, and they line up closely with the account that John gives us here. If Matthew, Mark, and John all record the same event, then we learn from Matthew and Mark that this dinner party in Bethany takes place in the house of Simon the leper (Matt. 26:6; Mark 14:3), that Mary broke the alabaster flask containing the ointment in order to apply it (Mark 14:3), and that Mary used enough anointing perfume to cover Jesus' head as well as his feet (Matt. 26:7; Mark 14:3).²² The account of Luke, however, is different altogether. That story takes place in the house of a Pharisee (Luke 7:36), and the concern is not about the cost of the ointment used, but about the sinful status of the woman (Luke 7:39–50). Almost certainly, these four accounts of Jesus' anointing represent two different events: one anointing by a sinful woman at the house of a Pharisee (Luke), and one anointing by Mary at the end of Jesus' ministry in the house of Simon the leper, with Martha and the newly resuscitated Lazarus present (Matthew, Mark, and John).²³

Honoring the Resurrection and the Life

Only John brings out that the purpose of this meal is to honor Jesus: “So they gave a dinner *for him* there” (John 12:2).²⁴ The response of these friends of Jesus to the resuscitation of Lazarus is strikingly different than the responses of the Sanhedrin: instead of plotting to kill Jesus, they throw him a party! Rather than feeling the need to compete with Jesus for glory, they rejoice because they recognize that *they need a Savior who out-glories them*. Even when we explain their gratitude by recognizing that these three were the primary beneficiaries of the miracle, we should nevertheless see the appalling plot of the Pharisees in new light. What possible sense does it make to seek to put Jesus to death for raising Lazarus from the dead? What reasonable person would see that as an appropriate response, rather than siding with Mary, Martha, and Lazarus to honor Jesus for his extraordinary miracle? The devotion, love, and thankfulness of these siblings appear normal and sane in contrast to the bizarre, egomaniacal rage of the Sanhedrin and of Caiaphas in particular.

John tells us the roles of each of the siblings at this meal. Only Lazarus reclines with Jesus, since women would not recline with men in public, but also because Lazarus is the reason for honoring Jesus at this meal.²⁵ Although John does not make much of it, it is possible that this story of Lazarus reclining at table with Jesus is reflected in some way in the parable of Lazarus's reclining in the bosom of Abraham in heaven (Luke 16:19–31).²⁶ Martha serves the meal, which accords with her work of serving the meal the other time we read about a dinner party involving Martha and Mary (Luke 10:38–42). This does not mean, however, that Mary is not helping to serve this time around, but John explicitly informs us about Martha's role in this dinner party because he will spend so much time focusing on *Mary's* role, and he does not want to ignore one of the sisters.²⁷

The spotlight, of course, falls on the actions of Mary: “Mary therefore took a pound of expensive ointment made from pure nard, and anointed the feet of Jesus and wiped his feet with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume” (John 12:3). John does not need to make explicit the fact that Mary's actions to anoint Jesus and to wipe his feet with her hair would have been

considered inappropriate by the standards of this culture.²⁸ In any culture, these actions would be a shocking demonstration of extraordinary devotion. More than this, John wants us to see Mary in contrast with “the disciples who, in the very next chapter, have to be *taught* to wash one another’s feet, and by Jesus himself (13:1ff).”²⁹ Mary goes beyond washing Jesus’ feet by anointing them with costly ointment made of pure nard, and she wipes those feet with her own hair. As Herman Ridderbos writes, “Never did the Son of God dwell more gloriously among humans than at that last banquet, and nowhere else was the response of their faith and love to his presence more vivid and eloquent.”³⁰ At a dinner party thrown in Jesus’ honor, the fragrance of Mary’s honor for her Master fills the entire house.

Theology of Glory in the Church

John 12:4–5 begins with a rambling section that includes several modifiers to tell us exactly who Judas Iscariot is: “But Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples (he who was about to betray him), said, ‘Why was this ointment not sold for three hundred denarii and given to the poor?’” (John 12:4–5). This is a strong rebuke against the lavish actions of Mary, but it is also a rebuke against Jesus himself: “Judas implies that Jesus is robbing the poor; that he is lavishing upon himself what should be devoted to charity; that for his own glorification he allows a waste that is wrong; that his example is harmful to others—and that Judas is the man who knows what is right, proper, charitable, and is not afraid to come out with it!”³¹ Judas knows that Jesus has raised up a man from the dead, but his heart does not perceive the glory of Jesus in that miracle. Like the Pharisees, he does not perceive the glory of God as Jesus manifests it. Because of this, Judas does not think that his Master deserves any kind of honor, especially not something that would cost the equivalent of a laborer’s annual wages!

Judas, however, is not merely prejudicially apathetic about his Master’s glorification. Primarily, he is greedy: “He said this, not because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief, and having charge of the moneybag he used to help himself to what was put into it” (John 12:6). Earlier, Jesus warned about the thieves who work their way into the sheepfold (John 10:1), and now John explicitly identifies Judas as one of those thieves. He has already told us that Judas will eventually betray Jesus (John 6:71), but now we learn that Judas’s treachery does not materialize all at once. Judas has been a thief among the sheep, stealing what he wants through his entrusted position as the treasurer. By pouring this ointment out on Jesus, Judas recognizes that he has lost an opportunity to steal an extraordinary amount of money that could have been entrusted to him. Judas is not a Pharisee, but a part of the group of Jesus’ close disciples. Nevertheless, he behaves just like the Pharisees, for he cares nothing for Jesus, but only for his own personal gain and glory.

Anointing the Resurrection and Life for Burial

Jesus both rebukes Judas and reveals that, in the midst of a party celebrating Jesus’ miracle of bringing Lazarus back to life, Jesus himself must die: “Leave her alone, so that she may keep it for the day of my burial. For the poor you always have with you, but you do not always have me” (John 12:7–8). The phrase “so that she may keep it” is difficult to interpret, but probably does not mean that Mary held back some of the ointment for Jesus’ actual burial. Rather, the grammar most likely suggests only that she has kept the ointment until now, and that by keeping it anointed him for burial in advance.³²

Does Mary actually know what she is doing here? Is she simply moved by devotion in such a

way that she communicates more than she understands, just as Caiaphas did (John 11:51–52)?³³ Or, is her humble heart of devotion and obedience capable of understanding the frequent references Jesus has made to his own death (John 7:33; 8:21–23; 10:11, 17, 18), along with the public actions of others to try to kill him (John 5:18; 7:1, 19; 8:59; 10:31; 11:53, 57), when all the “dull-witted men failed” to do so?³⁴ John does not say, but her actions speak loudly enough with or without her understanding. In this event, Mary gloriously prepares Jesus for his burial after the crucifixion when he will be lifted up to die. Her life’s orientation is toward the cross, but with very different motives than the Pharisees and chief priests. She *treasures* Jesus in the midst of his looming crucifixion, willing to lavish an extraordinarily expensive gift on him and to debase herself in the eyes of the other guests for him. Mary is willing to sacrifice everything because she knows that *Jesus’ glory revealed through suffering is her only hope*. Furthermore, she recognizes that *to save her, Jesus must die*. She does not hop off the Jesus bandwagon because her Master is about to die; rather, she understands that *in his death, Jesus gives her life as she suffers by faith*.

In this, we should not think that Jesus sets up as an ordinance that we should perpetually ignore the poor in order to pour out lavish worship to him. What Mary does here is very unique and unrepeatable, since she anticipates the day of Jesus’ actual burial.³⁵ In that culture, it was common to spend great amounts of money on a funeral, especially for the ointments whose perfume would mask the odor of the decomposing body, and Mary is the first person to spend her money on Jesus’ burial—even before Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea (John 19:38–42).³⁶ Mary’s actions do not establish a pattern, but she provides a shadow that gives way to the reality now that Jesus *is* resurrected from the dead: “The odor of his resurrection has now sufficient efficacy, without spikenard and costly ointments, to quicken the whole world.”³⁷ That is, it is through the preaching of the gospel of Jesus as the God-man who was crucified and resurrected, that we spread “the fragrance of the knowledge of him everywhere...to one a fragrance from death to death, to the other a fragrance from life to life” (2 Cor. 2:14, 16).

The Mixed Multitude (John 12:9–11)

When the large crowd learns where Jesus is, they come to Bethany. John tells us that they do not come only for Jesus, but also to see Lazarus, whom Jesus had raised from the dead (John 12:9). For this reason, the chief priests made plans to put Lazarus to death also because many of the Jews were going away and believing in Jesus on account of Lazarus (John 12:10–11). On the surface, it sounds as though Jesus is gaining in influence, while the Pharisees are experiencing exactly what they feared.

The Mixed Multitude in the Church

But do these people *really* believe in Jesus? In the context of the Gospel of John, their faith is suspect. John has already told us of many who eagerly, but falsely, believed in Jesus since the very beginning of his Gospel (John 2:23–25; 4:43–45, 48; 6:26, 60–66). With a few exceptions, the faith of the crowd is not enduring, but fickle. When Jesus seems to be their ticket to glory, they “believe” in him. When Jesus disappointingly continues to move toward the cross, they abandon him (John 6:66) or—within a week from this time—insist that he be crucified (John 19:15). While some likely do believe in Jesus, on the whole, we should see that many of these people are theologians of glory

willing to follow Jesus only insofar as he is useful and valuable to them as they pursue their own glory.

The crowd is a mixed multitude of people purporting to follow, and as such, they force us to ask: What are *we* following Jesus for? Do we believe that he will bring us some kind of glory (even if we aren't engaged in outright abuse or theft like Judas), or are we trusting him as he walks us through the path of the cross in suffering? Do we fight against suffering, doing absolutely *anything* necessary to avoid losing our comfort, wealth, and power, or do we pray for the grace to “count it all joy” when we suffer, knowing that just as God used Jesus' suffering to redeem his people, so he uses our suffering to make us “perfect and complete, lacking in nothing (Jas. 1:2–4)? It is not only possible to be a theologian of glory in the church, but Judas and the falsely believing crowd demonstrate that theologians of glory have existed in the church since the very beginning. Martin Luther protested against the theologians of glory in his day, and we must protest against them in our own day. Let us seek to endure and embrace suffering not for its own sake, but because God, in his wisdom, has chosen to reveal himself in the weak, foolish things of the world, and not through outward displays of glory and power.

Preparing for the Last Battle

Additionally, this final section forms an appropriate close to the narrative, for here John draws the battle lines for the final showdown between Jesus and his enemies. The enemies of Jesus are seeking to kill Jesus and anyone who bears witness to Jesus; Jesus' followers are standing with him in devotion, and offering costly sacrifices to him; and Judas himself is in Jesus' presence, treacherously waiting until the time when he will betray his Lord. Even the crowd is doing what the crowd always does: rushing as a mob to the next greatest thing. Here, they want to glimpse Lazarus; tomorrow, they will demand Jesus' crucifixion. All the pieces are in place and prepared for the day of Jesus' glorification on the cross.³⁸

And yet, Jesus must still finish the week. He must be manifested through his triumphal entry and hailed as king (John 12:12–19). He must be sought out by the Gentiles who are there at the feast (John 12:20–21). He must wash his disciples' feet to teach them that they ought to love one another as he has loved them (John 13:1–20; 31–35). He must be betrayed by one his disciples (John 13:21–30) and denied by another (John 13:36–38). He must reveal to his disciples his union with the Father in the strongest possible language (John 14:1–14), and he must teach them about the new Helper who will come to them, the Holy Spirit (John 14:15–31). He must tell them about the suffering they will endure in the coming days (John 15–16) and pray for them (John 17). Then, Jesus must finish his work by going to the cross, dying, and rising from the dead on the third day (John 18–20).

There is much work to be done and much *true* glory to be revealed. The battle lines are drawn, and now Jesus will march as a warrior out to his final battle—not as a strong man who will conquer by a display of his strength, but as a weak man who will destroy the powers of this world by submitting to suffering, sorrow, and death as he waits upon the power of God to manifest itself in his resurrection on the third day. Carl Trueman, reflecting on Luther's *Heidelberg Disputation*, writes this:

When theologians of glory read about divine power in the Bible, or use the term in their own theology, they assume that it is analogous to human power. They suppose that they can

arrive at an understanding of divine power by magnifying to an infinite degree the most powerful thing of which they can think. In light of the cross, however, this understanding of divine power is the very opposite of what divine power is all about. Divine power is revealed in the weakness of the cross, for it is in his apparent defeat at the hands of evil powers and corrupt earthly authorities that Jesus shows his divine power in the conquest of death and of all the powers of evil. So when a Christian talks about divine power, or even about church or Christian power, it is to be conceived of in terms of the cross—power hidden in the form of weakness.³⁹

As we await Jesus' return, our lives must follow the same path. We do not seek to magnify our power, wealth, and glory, as though we believe that by doing so we will build ourselves a tower up to reach God in heaven. Rather, we recognize that it is only by our suffering that God puts us on the right track for life, for only there do we recognize our great need for Jesus Christ and him crucified. Trueman closes his article with this stunning application of Luther's theology of the cross: "In short, great blessing will come through great suffering."⁴⁰ Do we, therefore, see suffering as a hurdle to overcome, or as the means by which God brings great, eternal blessing into our lives?

Discussion Questions

1. What does the theologian of glory seek in life? List as many ways of seeking private glory in this life that you can think of.
2. What does the theologian of the cross seek? List as many places of suffering in this life that you can think of.
3. What do you need to repent from for seeking your own glory, even inside the church?
4. What suffering is painful for you right now? How might God use those places of suffering to make you "perfect and complete, lacking in nothing" (Jas. 1:4)?

Notes

1. Martin Luther, *The Heidelberg Disputation*, #21. Available online: <<http://bookofconcord.org/heidelberg.php>>
2. Ibid.
3. Luther, *The Heidelberg Disputation*, #22. Available online: <<http://bookofconcord.org/heidelberg.php>>
4. Lenski, *The Interpretation of John's Gospel*, 820.
5. Lenski, *The Interpretation of John's Gospel*, 821.
6. Hendriksen, *Exposition of the Gospel According to John*, vol. II, 161.
7. Calvin, *Commentary on the Gospel According to John*, vol. I, 449. Available online: <<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom34.xvii.vi.html>>
8. "By 'place' the city may be intended, but more likely the temple is meant (cf. Ac 6:13; 21:28). Here, for the first time in the conflict between 'the Jews' and Jesus, a political element comes to the fore. Earlier it has

always been Jesus' claim, which they regard as blasphemous, that he is the Son of God that has driven them to act against him (cf. 5:18ff.; 10:33, 36; see also 19:7). How justified their fear of Roman intervention because of Jesus was is not clear from what follows. But even if they had no reason to think that Jesus was aiming at political power, they could find occasion in the popular movement around him for acting against him as a claimant to power who would be dangerous to the state." (Ridderbos, *The Gospel According to John*, 408.)

9. Calvin, *Commentary on the Gospel According to John*, vol. I, 450–51. Available online: <<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom34.xvii.vi.html>>

10. Lenski, *The Interpretation of John's Gospel*, 824.

11. Hendriksen, *Exposition of the Gospel According to John*, vol. II, 163–64.

12. Calvin, *Commentary on the Gospel According to John*, vol. I, 451. Available online: <<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom34.xvii.vi.html>>

13. Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, 502–03.

14. Keener, *The Gospel of John*, vol. 2, 854.

15. Lenski, *The Interpretation of John's Gospel*, 827.

16. Hendriksen, *Exposition of the Gospel According to John*, vol. II, 164.

17. Lenski, *The Interpretation of John's Gospel*, 830.

18. Hendriksen, *Exposition of the Gospel According to John*, vol. II, 164–65.

19. Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, 504–05.

20. Hendriksen, *Exposition of the Gospel According to John*, vol. II, 165.

21. *Westminster Confession of Faith*, 5.4.

22. Hendriksen, *Exposition of the Gospel According to John*, vol. II, 176.

23. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 425–26.

24. Lenski, *The Interpretation of John's Gospel*, 836.

25. Hendriksen, *Exposition of the Gospel According to John*, vol. II, 173–74.

26. Beasley-Murray, *John*, 200.

27. Lenski, *The Interpretation of John's Gospel*, 837.

28. Hendriksen, *Exposition of the Gospel According to John*, vol. II, 176.

29. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 427.

30. Ridderbos, *The Gospel According to John*, 415.

31. Lenski, *The Interpretation of John's Gospel*, 842–43.

32. Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, 514–15.

33. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 430.

34. Lenski, *The Interpretation of John's Gospel*, 846–47.

35. John Calvin, *Commentary on the Gospel According to John*, vol. II, trans. William Pringle (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2005), 13. Available online: <<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom35.ii.i.html>>

36. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 430.

37. Calvin, *Commentary on the Gospel According to John*, vol. II, 13. Available online: <<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom35.ii.i.html>>

38. "If we now survey the entire story we can hardly escape its double meaning. On the one hand, this banquet is a high point at which Jesus' glory in the midst of his own has come to a climax (see above on vss. 1–3). At the same time these are the last of the twelve hours of his day (cf. 11:9). Judas is present and in a characteristic manner betrays his secret intentions, intentions known, however, by Jesus. At the same time Jesus also speaks of his own burial, prompted no doubt by the anointing, which was an appropriate gesture of respect before burial. Above all, however, his words disclose the degree to which the approaching end becomes ever more vividly real to him and how intensely and graphically he involves his fellow guests in that end in order to open their eyes to its reality, which is increasingly important for them as well. Mary has an inkling of

it. While in Jerusalem the tensions and threats surrounding Jesus grow increasingly more ominous and as Jesus still moves in the fullness of his glory among his own in Bethany and is still “with her,” she has grasped the urgency of the moment and has seized the opportunity while it is still available. Thus she gives Jesus the loving response of his own at the appropriate time, doing so vicariously, as it were, for all generations who will remember and honor her for it as long as the gospel is proclaimed (Mk. 14:9).

But for Judas and others who thought that Mary’s money could be spent on better causes, the time was no less urgent; time, that is, to believe in the light while it was still with them and thus to escape the darkness of night (cf. 12:35, 36). That is the profound content of the seemingly innocent saying with which the story ends: ‘but me you do not always have.’ Again coming to expression in this statement is a motif that is characteristic of the Fourth Gospel and that has gained increasing clarity as the story has progressed: that of the caesura in the manifestation of Jesus’ glory, of the temporality and the meaning of his glory ‘in the flesh.’

According to many interpreters, the lines of Jesus’ earthly and heavenly glory increasingly merge, especially in these stories involving Lazarus. They claim that Jesus, with Lazarus at his side, already displays features of the Risen One and that his burial is mentioned here as the way of his hidden glory, on account of which his disciples already pay homage to him. But this entails a radical reconstrual of the thrust of these stories. The lines, far from blurring, in fact grow sharper. The Evangelist’s intention in this repeated reference to the end of Jesus’ manifestation of glory in the flesh—with “the day of his burial” as the point of no return—is to underscore its uniqueness in its controlling significance for the church’s faith; at the same time he presents it as the break between faith and unbelief, a separation realized in relation to this end, as that comes most radically and exemplarily to expression in the contrast between Mary and Judas.” (Ridderbos, *The Gospel According to John*, 419–20.)

39. Carl Trueman, “Luther’s Theology of the Cross.” <http://www.opc.org/new_horizons/NH05/10b.html>

40. Ibid.