

From
Glory
into
Glory

54 DAILY BIBLE READINGS
FOR LENT & EASTER

Tom Parsons

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Introduction

I have long been drawn to the later chapters of John's Gospel. They invite the attention of my adult self with the same appeal the deep end of the swimming pool held for me as a very small child. The exhilaration of diving as deep as I can into them is intensified by the awed awareness that the bottom is out of reach. I hope that as you read John 13–21 in conjunction with these daily thoughts and prayers, you will find that sense of wonder gripping you too.

These fifty-four readings have been structured to coincide with Lent and Easter. If you start on Ash Wednesday and read one per day to the end, you will be closing the book for the last time on the Sunday after Easter. Likewise you will reach John's account of Easter morning on Easter Day.

As I have written each daily section, I have assumed that the relevant Bible passage is fresh in the reader's mind. You will notice that the same biblical text is sometimes set for two or three days in a row. That's deliberate. Revisit John's narrative every day, even if you are tempted to take a short cut. Let the word of Christ dwell in you as richly as possible. And feel free to make the prayers personal, switching the 'we/us' to the 'I/me' form.

Speaking about personal matters, I'd like to give an introductory encouragement to anyone who has not yet become a committed

follower of Jesus. I have written primarily for those who have taken that momentous step already. However, please read on. I hope that as you consider Jesus' words, God will bring new life to birth within you. I pray that interest will develop into understanding; that understanding might grow into conviction; and that conviction will lead to life-giving faith.

John's account of the cross first grabbed hold of me as I prepared to conduct student performances of Bach's classic, *The St John Passion*. It stunned me that Jesus viewed the cross as the hour of his *glory*. This is a perspective we will explore often. I have tried to capture its centrality in my title. The cross is not a prelude to glory; it is glory. Jesus enters into the glory of the resurrection from the glory of the cross.

In more recent years, I have had the privilege of exploring John's Gospel with my friends at Christ Church, Sidcup. These daily notes were originally written for their use. I dedicate this book to them, my dear sisters and brothers, in thanksgiving for twelve years of fellowship and love.

I have brought you glory
on earth by finishing
the work you gave me
to do. And now, Father,
glorify me in your presence
with the glory
I had with you before
the world began.

John 17:4-5

Jesus knows that his hour has come.

He had often spoken about this moment of destiny, but it always lay in the future. Now, he embraces the shame of crucifixion with three glorious purposes in mind.

First, the hour has arrived for Jesus to go up again to the Father.

His mission is in the shape of the letter ‘V’. He left the heights of the Father’s heavenly glory and came down to us into the depths of our need. Then, he ascended to the same exalted rank he held before.

His appointed hour – like the sharp point at the base of the V – marks both the lowest extreme of his descent and the beginning of his ascent. It is simultaneously his ground zero and his launch pad.

We are going to marvel that, in the very instant he is lifted on the cross, embracing the lowest place of a condemned criminal, he is already moving upwards on his glorious ascent to the Father.

Second, the hour has arrived for Jesus to enact God’s love to the ultimate degree.

God loved the world so much that he sent his Son to bear the extreme consequences of our sin. That’s the only way he could lift us into the infinite glory of the Father’s presence.

Read on, then, and expect to see God’s love fully outstretched as we watch Jesus love his disciples to the end (verse 1).

Third, the hour has arrived for Jesus to overcome the powers of darkness.

The way John has structured verses 1–3 makes that point clearly. He's created a sandwich. Verses 1 and 3 tell us that Jesus knew he was empowered to accomplish God's purposes. In the middle stands verse 2, informing us of the evil alliance between Satan and Judas.

John wants us to know that this destructive plot is held within Jesus' knowledge and control. As a result, it is not only doomed to fail, but to serve God's purpose.

John begins his account of the appointed hour inside Jesus' mind. To worldly eyes, the cross is shameful, hopeless and hateful. But Jesus foresees that it will be glorious, victorious and overflowing with love.

Let's read and pray through John's account over the weeks of Lent and Easter, asking that we might understand the events more deeply and embrace their significance as Jesus did.

Father God, may the Spirit, who inspired John to write, give light to our minds. As we watch Jesus return to the Father through the shame of the cross, may we see love fully expressed and darkness decisively defeated. In the name of Jesus, who embraced his hour for your glory and our salvation. Amen.

The first step on Jesus' journey up to the Father's glory leads him downwards into a close encounter with his disciples' dirty feet.

Foot washing was a task reserved for slaves. Picture Jesus there on his knees and hold the image in mind. He intends this act of servanthood to provide an explanation of what his imminent death means for us all.

Peter, the lead disciple, doesn't like what he sees. He's mortified when Jesus takes his heel in hand and attends to his toes. He protests, 'Lord, are you going to wash my feet?' (verse 6).

Peter is horrified that the usual order of things has been reversed. Lesser people serve greater people. That's just how it is in this world. So Peter stiffens his protest: "No," said Peter, "You shall never wash my feet" (verse 8).

Peter doesn't understand what Jesus is doing. The foot washing symbolises the greater act of service Jesus is soon to perform. By his death Jesus will provide true cleansing, washing away sin, guilt and shame.

No wonder Jesus is uncompromising in his reply. Peter must accept Jesus' service. If he refuses the symbolic washing, how will he receive the real thing? And without that ultimate cleansing, he can have no relationship with Jesus at all.

Peter doesn't yet grasp the symbolism. He's thinking too literally, as his over-enthusiastic request for a full-body bath demonstrates. The meaning of this event would only become clear with time.

Let's dwell on Peter's reluctance for a moment and examine ourselves. Do we find it easy to accept Jesus' service, submitting to the washing he provides by the cross? We need to be alert to the pockets of resistance that hold out against him from the deep hideouts of our hearts.

Pride resists the Servant's approach, asking, 'Am I really so dirty? Can I not at least have the dignity of washing myself?'

Fear shrinks back, dreading what might be exposed if Jesus is allowed to wash us too thoroughly.

Embarrassment rises within us, tinged with guilt that the God of heaven should put himself out for us.

Yet it is a perverse sense of dignity that stands against the tide of God's overflowing love. Drop any reluctance and let the Servant do his work in you.

Glorious Father, we praise you for sending your Son into the world not to be served but to serve. Forgive our reluctance to receive him. Cleanse our hearts and minds by the blood he shed for us. Renew our lives by the power of the Holy Spirit and set our consciences at rest before you. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Two verbs—doing words—leap out from this passage: to know and to do.

First, knowing.

Jesus *knows* his destination and he *knows* what authority rests in his hands. He *knows* Judas' plan too. By contrast, Peter doesn't yet *know* what Jesus is doing. Later Jesus asks if his disciples *know* what his action means.

Then, doing.

Jesus doesn't only know things; he also acts. Again, Peter doesn't understand what his master is *doing*. So later, Jesus asks if they understood what he had *done*. Finally, he commends his example for their imitation: 'I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you' (verse 15).

The two key verbs come together in verse 17: 'Now that you *know* these things you will be blessed if you *do* them' (my emphasis).

To know and to do: in the Christian life it's vital that the two go together.

It's possible to pour out our lives in service without first knowing the joy of Jesus serving us. This *doing* without *knowing* leads to exhaustion, resentment and self-righteousness.

Or imagine the opposite. Suppose someone else knows Jesus' life-cleansing power – or thinks they do – yet makes no active attempt to serve others. Their lack of *doing* shows that they don't really *know* at all.

Not only must the two verbs be held together, they also need to be placed in the right order. Knowing comes before doing. It's the knowledge that Jesus has served us that gives us the spiritual power to serve others.

Picture a horse and cart. 'Knowing' is the horse; 'doing' is the cart. Hitching them in the wrong order results in a stationary cart, and a justifiably irritated horse!

Paul also recognised the centrality of this sequence to the Christian life. He wrote, 'The only thing that counts is faith [to know] expressing itself through love [to do]' (Galatians 5:6).

Knowing what he knew, Jesus did what he did. He did it for us. Opportunities for service will present themselves today. Knowing such great love, how can we not take them?

Father God, by the Spirit's enabling, give us the energy and imagination to serve others. May we find blessing in both knowing and enacting the glorious love of our Saviour and Lord, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Betrayal is a murky business. By its very nature, it is shrouded in a cloak of darkness.

Take, for example, the betrayal of William Tyndale, the great translator of the English Bible. In 1535, Tyndale was working undercover throughout what is now Belgium. An English student named Henry Philips gained his trust, only to hand him over to the authorities. Tyndale was tried, condemned and burned at the stake.

It is almost certain that a powerful figure in England sent Philips on his vile errand. But who? To this day, no one knows for sure. By contrast, Jesus knew all the details of his betrayal before it took place. The time had come for him to alert the disciples to the presence of a traitor.

With hindsight, they would see in this sobering announcement a clear revelation of Jesus' all-knowing divine identity (verse 19). Perhaps they could appreciate how ironic it is that Jesus demonstrated his reliability by predicting history's most famous act of treachery!

Yet at the time, the announcement is crushing. Suspicion and self-doubt now intrude. Which one of their friends is not their friend? *Or – and this is more disturbing still – maybe it's me; am I going to crack under the pressure?*

Simon Peter gets John to press Jesus for an identification. ('The disciple whom Jesus loved' in verse 23 is John's way of referring to himself.) Jesus answers, 'It is the one to whom I will give this piece of bread when I have dipped it in the dish' (verse 26).

It seems that only John hears Jesus' words and that he doesn't understand them, because when Jesus hands the bread to Judas, no one thinks anything of it. The disciples blandly note the betrayer's departure and assume that Jesus has sent him on an errand in his capacity as treasurer.

They have no idea what Jesus is setting in motion as he despatches Judas to his appointed task. He is handing Satan the opportunity to crucify him.

And they completely miss the spiritual significance of the night-time hour (verse 30). Darkness engulfs Judas as he turns his back on Jesus, the Light of the world.

Betrayal is a murky, secretive and disorientating business. But the darkness is as day to Jesus. With full knowledge, he identifies his betrayer. With selfless love, he sends him on his errand.

As we turn to prayer now, enjoy the rich benefits of hindsight. Be reassured that, no matter how the darkness threatens to overcome Jesus, his light only shines more brilliantly.

Lord Jesus, our hearts are deceitful above all things, and we dare not trust the strength of our own faith. Anchor our lives firmly to your Father's unchanging faithfulness, and shelter us under the refuge of his wing by the might of the Holy Spirit. Let us never wander from the light of your presence. For your name's sake. Amen.