
JOHN 1:14 : GOD'S SUPREME REVELATION [5]

... his glory ...

No. EE110

When we hear the word "glory", we tend to think of splendour and majesty. And that is not wrong. The Bible often uses the word in this sense. But the question is, is this what John is talking about here?

The apostle is using the word "glory" in this verse to indicate essentially who and what Jesus was. Yet contrary to Matthew, Mark and Luke, the apostle makes no mention in his gospel of the one and most unforgettable occasion where they did in fact see Jesus in his full splendour and majesty - the transfiguration on the mount. It is also true that the life of our Lord was characterised by simplicity and humility, rather than splendour and show. This is what the apostles emphasise over and over again.

Let us therefore take a closer look at our text.

HE MADE HIS DWELLING AMONG US

□ John's verb in the phrase, "made his dwelling among us", is a significant key. Basically the Greek word used means to pitch a tent, or to live in a tent. The apostle says, in other words, that the Word lived with us in a tent.

□ Many think that John chose these words to indicate that Jesus dwelt among us for only a short time. Of course He was on earth for only a short time, but John also uses this word to indicate permanent residency - specifically in heaven. And

what can be more permanent than that? (Rev 7:15; 12:12; 13:6; 21:3).

GOD'S "SHEKINA"

□ John's use of words would not have evoked the image of an ordinary tent in the mind of the average Jewish reader. No, they would have thought in terms of *the Tent* - the tabernacle. Before the temple was built, the tabernacle played a dominant role in the religion of Israel. It was basically a huge tent that could be pitched and struck as they moved around, and was known as the Tent of Meeting (Ex 40:34-38).

□ The glory of the Lord appeared to all the people when the tabernacle was used for the first time. And this happened again on other occasions (Lev 9:23; Num 14:10).

In the Jewish mind the Tent of Meeting - and later the temple (1Kings 8:10-11) - was the place where the glory of God dwelt. This gave birth to a new word, "Shekina", which combines the two concepts - "tent" and "glory". It denotes the glory of God in the tabernacle or temple as manifested to man.

□ John combines in v. 14 these two concepts, "tent" and "glory". In so doing he says this: *God's holy glory which was displayed in the tabernacle and the temple on more than one occasion in Old Testament times, came in full bloom in the person, the life and the work of Jesus Christ.*

THE GLORY OF HUMILITY

□ How is God's glory revealed to us in Christ? What did the disciples experience? John describes this in his gospel.

Contrary to what we might have expected, He does not portray Jesus as a powerful and spectacular prince of glory who triumphantly subjects foe after foe. On the contrary, John (as well

as the other three gospel writers) portrays for us a humble man who, after years of manual labour in the poor and rural area of Galilee, offers up his life in a selfless manner in service of his fellow man.

- What do we see in the gospel of John? We see how Jesus brings joy to some simple, poor labourers during a wedding in Cana. We see Him spending time to show an immoral Samaritan woman the way to everlasting life. We see how He heals a dying boy, returns sight to a blind man, and brings Lazarus back to life. We see how he feeds thousands of hungry poor people. And so we could go on with our list.

- He helps those in need, he heals the sick, He teaches the ignorant, He feeds the hungry.

He is always on the lookout for people in need - those who know how dependent they are on God's mercy, those who hunger and thirst for righteousness. We find him among people like these again and again - rather than in palaces. He does not frequent the mansions of the self-sufficient rich - and when He does, it often gives rise to the Lord's criticism of His host's religious complacency. No, in the words of Luke, He "came to seek and to save what was lost" (Luke 19:10; Mt 18:11).

- And right at the end of his life here on earth Jesus gave his disciples a practical lesson they would never forget. The night before his crucifixion he washed their feet in the upper room (a courtesy customarily bestowed on dinner guests), and so performed a task normally assigned to the most humble of the slaves in a household. On this occasion there was no such slave, and Jesus took the place of one. Of course, this has nothing to do with dirty feet as such. On that night, after all, the feet of Jesus never were washed. No, it is all about self-denial, self-sacrifice and servanthood.

It is clear from what follows. Jesus said to his followers, "Do you understand what I have done for you? ... You call me "Teacher" and "Lord", and

rightly so, for that is what I am. Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. I tell you the truth, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them" (Jn 13:12-17).

THE SUPREME GLORIFICATION

□ It is most significant that the Lord Jesus referred on at least two occasions in the book of John to his forthcoming crucifixion as his *glorification*. In Jn 12:23 He said, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified", and in his High Priestly prayer his words were, "Father, the time has come. Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you" (Jn 17:1). How are we to understand this?

□ In those days death by crucifixion was looked upon with utter disgust.

The Romans only executed their own citizens in this most cruel manner in exceptional cases of treason. In the case of non-Romans, execution by crucifixion was limited to convicted murderers, rebels and armed robbers.

As for the Jews, they made no distinction between a tree and a cross. They accordingly believed that the curse of Dt 21:23 rested on everyone who was crucified: "... anyone who is hung on a tree is under God's curse." This is why they could not accept that the Messiah should die in this shocking manner.

Yet to us who are familiar with the whole of the New Testament and understand God's council, it is clear that the Lord Jesus could never have served his people in more complete surrender and with more profound effect, than when He surrendered Himself on their behalf to this despicable way of execution and cruellest of deaths.

Do you see? The glory that the apostles saw in the life of Jesus was the glory of selfless love and

servanthood. So in the case of the Lord Jesus, the cross was not an instrument of shame, but a throne of glory!

A FEW POINTS OF APPLICATION

1. Every Christian has an inescapable calling to live a life of self-denial.

The message is clear, the calling inescapable. We are saved by grace alone, on the basis of the merits of Christ alone, through faith alone. But true, saving faith must, or rather *will* always result in good works. And in a nutshell, these good works comprise self-denying and loving servanthood on behalf of others. And who are these "others"? In the first instance the Lord Himself, but also our brothers and sisters in Christ, in fact everybody with whom we come into contact.

This truth was engraved on John's heart. He never forgot it. In his first letter he writes: "Whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did" (1Jn 2:6). It therefore boils down to this: If you say that you are a Christian, you either live like Jesus did, in integrity, or you live the life of a hypocrite. Of course, in the latter case you do not have genuine faith. And, take note, we are talking here of more than mere obligation and duty; we are talking of sincere and enthusiastic willingness that follows the Lord Jesus from the heart.

Keep in mind that John gave as reason for writing the letter, "... so that you may know that you have eternal life" (1Jn 5:13). He writes elsewhere: "We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love our brothers. Anyone who does not love remains in death. This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers" (1Jn 3:14,16).

2. That is why we talk of the "ministry".

When they talk of "the ministry", people often think

in terms of things like status, learning, titles and even a special way of dressing. Nothing could be further from the Biblical concept! When the Lord calls somebody to be a minister in his church or a missionary, it is his intention that such person should in fact spend his life in voluntary slavery - a concept that is often applied to Christian service in the New Testament. And let us remind ourselves that slaves have no rights or privileges - and least of all status.

3. Here is *the* hallmark of a genuine church.

It is too easily accepted that any group of people who call themselves a church are in fact a genuine church of Christ. But a tabernacle in which Christ lives in glory is without exception characterised by members who lay down their lives for each other in humble servanthood. Where selfishness and wilfulness rule, you do not have a true church, but a cave of hypocrites.

Why do we have here an infallible acid test for a true church? Why does such a serving church glorify Christ? Because only He can change a bunch of selfish sinners so that they sacrifice their lives for one another in love.

Always remember this: *true glory is not to be found in splendour, show, greatness and grandeur, but in humility and self-denying service.*

Nico van der Walt

- Nico van der Walt subscribes to the historically respected and internationally recognized 1689 Baptist Confession - like most Reformed Baptists worldwide - as well as the Confession of Sola 5, an association of God-centred evangelicals in Southern Africa.
- Subscriptions, changes of address, cancellations and correspondence: E: duplessismh@telkomsa.net; P.O. Box 35289, Menlopark, 0102, South Africa. Tel. 012-804 0316; 083 5544 941.
- www.reformed.org.za www.antipas.org.za www.sola5.org
- Weekly a sermon like this is sent world-wide and free of charge in Afrikaans or English by e-mail to 2000 people who have requested it.
- No copyright. Please duplicate or forward electronically.
- Past E-sermons can be found on the first two websites above.
- We gladly send an introduction to the sermons to those E-addresses you might wish to send us. However, we only put those people on our mailing list who request so personally.