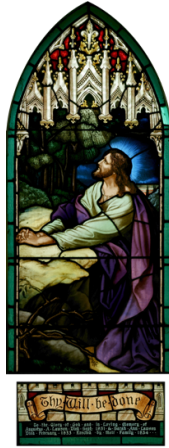


***The Gospel of John***  
***Session Ten – The Passion Narrative – Part I***  
***(John 17 – 18:12)***



*St. Johns Ashfield Stained glass – Wikimedia Commons*

***Glorification***  
***Origins of John's Passion Narrative***  
***The Arrest of Jesus***

***Glorification***

Whatever the relationship between Jesus and God entails, glorification is a substantial part of it. In 7:39 we learn that believers have *not yet* received the Spirit because Jesus has not yet been glorified. The bestowal of the Spirit in John is entirely dependent upon Jesus' death and resurrection. In John, the death and resurrection are not a denigration of any sort; rather, they are described in terms of coronation, exaltation, and glorification. What was yet to be in 7:39 is now realized as Jesus says, "Father, the hour has come" (17:1). The glory buildup starts in chapter 12 with the end of Jesus' public ministry and his turn to his closest companions. The process starts with Mary anointing Jesus' feet for his burial and Jesus' indication that "the hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified" (12:23). It's an interesting feature of John that the passion, resurrection, and ascension are all considered as one moment rather than individual, linear, discrete events. We call chapters 1 – 12 the Book of Signs and chapters 13 – 21 the Book of Glory. "Glory" (*doxa*) and "glorify" (*doxazo*) appear forty-two times in John, most of them in chapters 13 – 21. More than one-third of all NT occurrences of the verb "glorify" occur in John.

While most occurrences appear in the latter part of the Gospel, from the beginning the reader is made to understand that seeing Jesus in the flesh means seeing the glory of God: "And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's son, only son, full of grace and truth" (1:14). The rest of the Gospel details the evidence of that glory and, more surprisingly, our own

participation in it. God's glory in John is like being at the very heart of a fireworks display rather than watching it on TV. You see the light, feel the thunder, find yourself breathless, caught up in the majesty and power and wonder and extraordinary transcendence of it all. You look around and find that others have come seeking something of this wonder too; so for a moment you're connected with other pilgrims who have braved the journey rather than settling for a secondhand account of the thing.

John's notion of God's glory is informed by the Old Testament, which speaks much about the "glory of the LORD." Exodus looms large in the author's imagination. Consider Exodus 40:35: "Moses was not able to enter the tent of the meeting because the cloud settled upon it, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle." The "glory of the LORD" is God's presence. The word for tabernacle here in the Greek version (LXX) of Exodus (*skenk*) is the same word that appears in John 1:14, which tells us that the Word became flesh and "tabernacled" among us. Jesus becomes the locus of God's presence. Then Jesus draws us fully into that presence. With every word, the author of John pushes to intimacy. The incarnation, glory, love, father, mother, son, one, knowing – every last word declares that God created this world, with the help of Jesus, for the single purpose of unity with all of creation. Jesus models and completes that unity. Jesus glorifies God by completing the works God sent him to do.

The baton gets passed in the same way of course, from Jesus to believers, who will do greater works than Jesus. Now believers glorify God when they reveal God's loving presence to the world God created and will love to the end (3:16), even as that world shows resistance, even hatred. No matter, the job is done, Jesus has conquered the world (16:33). John's tenses are confusing to us, because he often speaks as if something that is in the process of happening, or has not yet happened, has already happened. But from God's perspective, these things are so certain that they can be spoken of as already complete. This is why believers go forth in confidence, with undying hope, despite the way things appear.

The author has not given up on the world. Jesus prays for the world later in chapter 17. If he had given up on the world, Jesus would not have equipped the disciples with power equal to his own to do their part in unifying the world to God. Believers do indeed belong to Jesus, have been given to him; but everything belongs to God and will ultimately be drawn to God through Christ's work (12:32).

– Jamie Clark-Soles (*Reading John for Dear Life: A Spiritual Walk with the Fourth Gospel*, Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville, KY, 2016)

## ***Origins of John's Passion Narrative***

Readers of the Fourth Gospel must always be aware of the fact that it was written on two levels. One level tried to recall the original Jesus. A long time had passed between the crucifixion and the writing of this text, so that task of recollection was not easy. The second level sought to understand Jesus as he was filtered through the Johannine community, a group that inevitably interpreted Jesus through the lens of the traumas which engulfed them in their own time near the end of the first century.

The Johannine community had faced, in order, three defining realities. The Christian faith was born as a movement within the synagogue. The followers of Jesus were known as "the followers of the way," a distinct subgroup, but there was no sense in which this movement wanted to be separate from Judaism. Obviously, any new insight or movement within a particular faith challenges the religion's status quo and produces tension. That was not the *purpose* of this movement, however: The followers of Jesus wanted only to expand Judaism to include Jesus, just as Judaism had been expanded many times in the past.

The tensions were at least tolerable until 66 c.e., when the outbreak of the Jewish-Roman war in Galilee did in fact make the price of any tension more costly and more threatening. When the war expanded to Judea, the city of Jerusalem and its Temple were destroyed by the Roman army in 70 c.e. At that moment, and as a direct result of that destruction, Judaism entered a struggle for survival. The Johannine community was forced to flee Jerusalem. Though we cannot be certain of their final destination, a strong tradition locates that community in the city of Ephesus, where they existed once again uncomfortably within the synagogue. The tensions increased between the orthodox leadership and this challenging revisionist movement until finally, somewhere around the year 88 c.e., the orthodox leaders of the synagogue expelled the followers of Jesus. A movement that had sought to define itself as an expansion of Judaism now found itself completely outside that framework.

How could they continue to relate themselves and this Jesus to the Hebrew scriptures, with their messianic expectations, if they were no longer to be a part of Judaism? They now settled into the post-Judaism phase of life, marked as it was with a deep and abiding hostility toward the synagogue leaders who had excommunicated them. This was when the phrase "the Jews" entered the Johannine writings as a symbol for the enemies of the followers of Jesus. This negativity grew to be a constant expression in the Johannine community as they sought how to define themselves not as an extension of Judaism anymore, but as quite separate from the Judaism from which they had been expelled.

Many of these formerly Jewish disciples might be able to see Jesus as the fulfillment of Jewish expectations, but could they go to the place where God and Jesus were so

closely identified that they could hear Jesus make the claim of oneness with the Father? Could they be comfortable with the suggestion that Jesus might have applied the divine name of “I AM” to himself? Another split occurred in the community. Some broke away and returned to the synagogue. To the Johannine community, those who did so were seen as traitors. Still others wavered between the two camps as doubters, as those who might abandon Jesus, might deny him, as those who were always on the verge of falling away before finally finding the courage to move into a new place and to embrace a new vision.

Finally, the hostility of the world had to be embraced and endured. This struggling Johannine community was separated from its Jewish roots and torn internally in its attempt to see Jesus as the determinative life for their vision of the future. Now, looking outward, they found themselves facing the Roman Empire. The human symbol of this world, the person who was the highest Roman official in Judea – Pilate – became the “face” of that world. When Jesus confronts Pilate in the passion story as told by John, there are many themes being addressed, from the meaning of truth to the meaning of kingship, but we need to be aware that everything in this gospel’s long confrontation between Jesus and Pilate refers to real issues in the life of the Johannine community many years after the crucifixion.

In this passion narrative John lays out clearly his purpose in composing this “new” gospel. It is to bring us into a dimension of life that we have never known before. It is to bind together the former Jewish expectations with a new sense of God as mystical oneness. It is as if John were saying: For those who have eyes to see and ears to hear, let them see and let them hear.

– John Shelby Spong (adapted from *The Fourth Gospel: Tales of a Jewish Mystic*, Harper One, New York, 2013)

### ***The Arrest of Jesus***

The story of Jesus’ arrest is, of course, found in all the Gospels. John’s version finds a parallel in the Synoptics that may bespeak its traditional origin. Although John’s account has its characteristic features, it does not seem to be derived from the Synoptics. Obviously, the narration requires a statement about Jesus’ and his disciple’s journey to the place where he was to be arrested, as well as the arrest itself.

Although in the Synoptics Jesus immediately begins to pray fervently that this cup (his imminent death) be removed from him (Mark 14:36 par.), no such prayer is found in John. Yet just prior to this scene Jesus has uttered a quite different prayer (chap. 17), and there is in John 12:27 just a hint that he knows the synoptic tradition of Jesus’ praying in anguish before his arrest and death (c. Heb 5:7 – 8). Needless to

say, such anguish does not fit John's portrayal of a Jesus who goes to die by his own intention (10:17 – 18).

Since the arrest is a discrete episode, complete in itself with obvious beginning and ending, on form - or tradition-critical grounds it looks like a separate unit of tradition. However that may be, it is difficult to conceive of such a unit's having been transmitted independent of the broader narrative framework of the Passion of Jesus. The existence of such a framework is already suggested by Paul's reference to the night on which Jesus was betrayed, or literally, handed over – apparently a reference to the arrest (1 Cor 11:23).

– D. Moody Smith (from *John: Abingdon New Testament Commentaries*, Abingdon Press, Nashville, 1999)

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