

You Will See the Glory of God

† If you believe (vv.38-40)

† If you do *not* believe (vv.40-45)

In the name of Jesus, God's greatest **Glory**, dear bright, shining family of God:

This may be my last sermon. It's true. Two funerals in two weeks, my father-in-law in hospice – I'm remembering Moses' prayer in Psalm 90: ***“Teach us to number our days aright, that we may gain a heart of wisdom.”*** (v.12 NIV84) Cemeteries are powerful teachers. One pastor took his Catechism classes to the cemetery and had the kids lie down by a gravestone. Then he described how we will all finally end up there – unless our Lord Jesus comes sooner. For you or for me, this could be my last sermon.

A cemetery 2000 years ago saw death defeated by the One who said, ***“I AM the Resurrection and the Life.”*** Jesus waited until His friend Lazarus died. Grieving sisters Martha and Mary thought Jesus came too late. ***“Jesus wept”*** (11:35) because of death's violent intrusion into God's perfect world, but that does not mean He was helpless. Human hearts always question God. Today we see again how God's power and love always work for good and blessing. **You Will See the Glory of God – If you believe.** But this is also true: **You Will See the Glory of God – If you do *not* believe.** Faith first.

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Martha objected when Jesus said, ***“Take away the stone.”*** According to Jewish burial custom, the body was wrapped in spices and linen, but not embalmed. More literally she said, “By now he stinks! He's a four-dayer.” Jesus: ***“Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?”***

The Holy Spirit inspired John to use *pisteuw* (*to believe*) at least eight times in Chapter 11 alone (11:15, 25-27,40,42,45,48). Eighty-six times, *faith* is a major emphasis in John's Gospel. We sing his theme in our liturgies: ***“But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.”*** (20:31 NIV84; Cf. CW pp.30,40) It's all about *faith*.

The story is told of a man who had to cross a frozen river. He got down on his stomach and crawled, terrified every time the ice cracked and shifted. Frozen water does that. Soon he heard whistling. He carefully turned around to look. A team of horses was pulling a heavy sleigh right onto the ice while the driver whistled merrily by and disappeared in the trees on the other side. Who had faith?

A man on a bus was growing more tired by the minute. He was watching a woman clinging to her packages to keep them from falling off her lap. Finally the man said, “If you put your bundles on the floor, the bus will carry both you and them.” Have faith! Lay your burdens down. ***“Cast your burdens on the LORD, and he shall sustain you: he shall never let the righteous be moved.”*** (Psalm 55:22 TPA).

God's *glory* in the New Testament comes from a Greek word meaning *to think* (*dokew*). If you say, “It seems to me,” you have an opinion. Everyone has an *opinion* about God even if he or she claims to be an atheist. But only believers can have a good opinion about God. When believers express a good opinion about God, it's called, *“praise.”* We sing many hymns about how great and good God is. The basis for your good opinion of God is His excellence that deserves our praise for His ***“glory.”*** Come the Judgment Day, everyone **will see God's glory.** But who will survive?

You don't have to be at New Life too long before you see jokers on the right and jokers on the left. “Pastor,” someone said recently, “We need a Bible Study on *Indiana Jones – Raiders of the Lost Ark.*” He was only partly kidding. There's truth in what he said. It's a rare instance of truth in Hollywood. The

bad soldiers at the end of the movie tried to look at God's glory in the ark of the covenant. Their faces and bodies melted into the ground. No one can look and live. **You Will See the Glory of God...**

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Our Lord of Life stood in the cemetery and called, "**Lazarus, come out!**" He must have floated, all bound up like that in linen with the burial napkin over his face. "**Let him go,**" said our compassionate Savior, "**Take off the grave clothes and let him go.**" Jesus sets us free from sin and death.

Sadly, not everyone approved. (v.48f) Plans are laid "**to kill Lazarus as well.**" According to tradition, this persecution of Lazarus continued after Jesus rose and ascended in to heaven. Reportedly, Lazarus and his two sisters left for Cyprus and also probably ministered in Marseilles, France. That's where the story breaks down; both places claim Lazarus is buried there. But the Bible is true. And everyone, even unbelieving enemies, saw **the Glory of God** when Jesus raised Lazarus from the grave.

An unbeliever, Robert Ingersoll ¹, told this story: "I was never nonplused but once. One night I was lecturing...to show that the resurrection of Lazarus was probably a planned affair to bolster the waning fortunes of Jesus. Lazarus was to take sick and die. The girls were to bury him and send for Jesus. Lazarus was to feign death until Jesus should come and say, 'Lazarus, come forth!' To emphasize the situation, I said: 'Can anyone tell me why Jesus said, "Lazarus, come forth?"' Down by the door a pale-faced man rose and with a shrill voice said: 'Yes, I can tell you. If my Lord had not said, "Lazarus," he would have had the whole graveyard of Bethany coming out to him.'" ²

Ingersoll was an American political leader, orator, and agnostic. One source blamed the liberal theology of his father for his lack of popularity in churches he pastored. In Madison, Ohio, his third wife led a church trial against him with sad results on his young son. "The Madison trial occurred when young Robert was nine years old, and it was the unjust and bigoted treatment his father received which made him the enemy, first of Calvinism, and later of Christianity in its other forms." ³ (Somehow they always blame Christianity for being unjust.) In a lecture entitled "The Great Infidels," he attacked the Christian doctrine of Hell: "All the meanness, all the revenge, all the selfishness, all the cruelty, all the hatred, all the infamy of which the heart of man is capable, grew blossomed, and bore fruit in this one word--Hell."

A century earlier, one of the world's greatest thinkers known as Voltaire died. Later a popular nurse was asked to provide hospice care for someone's friend. Before agreeing she asked, "Is your friend a Christian?" "Yes, in the highest sense. He lives in the fear of God. Why do you ask?" "Sir," she answered, "I was the nurse that attended Voltaire in his last illness, and, for all the wealth of Europe, I would never see another infidel die." ⁴ Voltaire ⁵ had boasted: "In twenty years Christianity will be no more. My single hand will destroy the edifice it took twelve apostles to rear." A few years after his death, his own printing press was used to mass produce the New Testament. ⁶

Are you just a "coaster for Christ"? Never bring anyone else to church? Never give your heart and soul to spreading the Gospel? No grief over missing members? No list of prospects to work on with Pastor? No prayer list of your own? Just sitting there waiting for someone to spill on you? Just trying to protect the bright shiny finish? "Coasters for Christ"? Not God's plan, not His call for His disciples. Speakers, proclaimers, prayer warriors, witnesses – that's what our Lord Christ has made you. He demands your whole life for preaching clear, compelling sermons. "**Only one thing is needful.**" Not "coasters," but mirrors, bright, beautiful, "**Christ in you, the hope of glory.**" (Colossians 1:27) Amen.

¹ Ingersoll, Robert Green (1833-1899). *American Heritage Dictionary*, 7th Printing. (New York, NY, 1971), p. 675.

² Rein, R.C. *Treasury of Themes and Illustrations*. Milwaukee, WI: NPH, 1983, ref. 1271.

³ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Robert_G._Ingersoll. Quotes from this article.

⁴ Rein, R.C. *Treasury of Themes and Illustrations*. Milwaukee, Wisconsin: Northwestern Publishing House, 1983, ref. 298.

⁵ *American Heritage Dictionary, op. cit.*, p. 1436 – Voltaire (1694-1778) - French poet, dramatist, satirist, and historian.

⁶ Rein, R.C. *Op. cit.*, ref. 116.