

## SEEING THE LION John 17:1-5

In his book, *A World of Ideas II*, Bill Moyers relates a conversation he had with philosopher Jacob Needleman. Needleman had the privilege to do something that would be on my bucket list except it is now impossible. He got to witness in person the launch of Apollo 17, the final lunar landing mission, which took place just after midnight on December 7, 1972. He said, “It was a night launch, and there were hundreds of cynical reporters all over the lawn, drinking beer, wisecracking and waiting for this 35 story high rocket (to be launched). The countdown came, and then the launch. The first thing you see is this extraordinary orange light, which (is so bright it) is just at the limit of what you can bear to look at. Everything is illuminated with this light. Then comes this thing slowly rising up in total silence, because it takes a few seconds for the sound to come across. You hear a WHOOOM (that is so loud) it enters right into you.

“You can practically hear the jaws dropping. The sense of wonder fills everyone in the whole place as this thing goes up and up. The first stage ignites this beautiful blue flame. It becomes like a star, but you realize there are humans on it. And then (it is gone and) there is total silence.

“People just get up quietly, helping each other up. They’re kind. They open doors. They look at one another, speaking quietly... They were suddenly moral people because of the sense of wonder.”

I dearly wish I could have seen that. I saw it on television, but in person it must have been a spectacular sight to see that 350 foot tall Saturn V blast off for the moon. Needleman says that such a sight profoundly impacted people. It humbled them. But as memorable and powerful as that would have been, there is something else than we can experience that is more powerful and will have an even greater impact on us. We’ll see this as we look at John 17:1-5.

### JESUS TOOK THE ROUGH ROAD TO GLORY

Jesus prayed in verse 1, “Glorify your Son.” In John 12:23 Jesus said, “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.” He was referring to his impending execution. That was the same in 17:1 when he said the time has come and asked the Father to glorify him. He was referring to what was about to happen to him on the cross. By saying, “Glorify your Son” he was accepting what was about to happen to him and saying, “The time has come. I’m ready. Let’s do this.”

How could he refer to being executed on a cross as being glorified? Do you associate such a violent and ignominious death with glory? There is nothing glorious about being tortured and killed like that. No one in the first century would have considered being

nailed to a cross glorious. Crucifixion was about the worst thing they could imagine. It was a total catastrophe. It involved indescribable pain, but also total denial of the worth of an individual. It was complete rejection. The ancient Romans had other ways of punishing people. The cross was designed to be the most humiliating, the most horrifying and therefore the ultimate rejection. It declared publicly that the person being tortured and killed was the worst of the worst. It was intentionally horrific because it was designed to be a deterrent.

The humiliation of crucifixion was incomprehensible and the physical pain was worse. So why would Jesus have thought of it as something that would glorify him? No one else on the planet thought he would be glorified by it. It was because the cross was necessary to do two things. First Jesus had to experience the cross in order to establish beyond question who he was. He had continuously demonstrated power over nature, over disease, over human limits, including death, yet even his own followers still didn't understand completely who he was. He had to do something inconceivable to finish that picture. That unimaginable feat was conquering death. But in order to defeat death he had to die, and he had to do it in a very public way. His defeat of death established with an exclamation point his glory as the divine Son of God.

On January 4 this year the Kansas City Chiefs played the Indianapolis Colts in an NFL playoff game. When the Chiefs scored a touchdown early in the third quarter the game seemed to be over for all intents and purposes because that TD put them ahead 38-10. Colts quarterback Andrew Luck had thrown 3 interceptions and appeared to be overwhelmed by the Chiefs. It appeared all that was left for the Colts was to try to pull it together and play well enough in the remaining minutes to make it look somewhat respectable. And then the seemingly impossible happened. Andrew Luck suddenly got hot. He ended up passing for 443 yards leading his team to 5 touchdowns in less than two quarters and the Colts won 45-44. That comeback has already brought great glory to Luck. The magnitude of the deficit the Colts had to overcome is a big part of the glory. The magnitude of the deficit Jesus had to overcome, measured by the cross and the tomb, established his identity as the Son of God thus displaying his glory.

A second factor is that the cross was essential for Jesus to accomplish his work. In verse 4 he said to the Father, "I have brought you glory on earth by completing the work you gave me to do." That work was rescuing the human race by taking the punishment for all of their sin. Romans 6:23 tells us the wages of sin is death. That penalty had to be paid. If Jesus was going to complete that work he had to pay the penalty. The cross was essential to his work. If he did not undergo it the task would not have been completed.

That act is the most glorious thing God has done since the creation of the heavens and the earth. It is the greatest act of love, kindness and grace that has ever been performed. It brings glory to both the Son and the Father because it reveals the majesty of their character and the infinity of their goodness, grace and love.

Last week our nation awarded the Navy Cross, the Navy's second highest medal, to Marine Gunnery Sgt. Richard Jibson. On August 28, 2012 he was with a team of Marines, Georgian army and Afghan army troops clearing a village in Helmand province in Afghanistan. A group of Marines nearby who were working to neutralize a bomb came under heavy fire. Jibson led members of his team to their defense, placing himself in the line of fire between the enemy and the other Marines. Among other things, the citation says, "When a fellow Marine was shot in the head by an enemy sniper, Gunnery Sergeant Jibson fearlessly charged into a hail of enemy machine gun fire, pulled the exposed wounded Marine to cover, and then assisted a corpsman in rendering emergency measures to stabilize him." Jibson led the troops in what turned out to be a 5 hour long firefight. The citation praised his decisive actions and his undaunted courage. He was given glory because he put himself at risk to protect and save others. No one has ever done more to save others at enormous cost to himself than Jesus.

Jesus himself said there is no greater love than to lay down one's life for another person. The cross revealed the unfathomable greatness of the love of God. There for all to see is God's holiness, justice, grace, kindness, wisdom and love. No human being would ever have come up with the cross as a plan to rescue a hopeless and rebellious race. Only God's glorious love could create that.

#### JESUS GRANTS ETERNAL LIFE

Verse 2 should read, "just as you granted him authority." This is not the reason that Jesus asked the Father to glorify him. It is a parallel. Jesus was saying, "Just as you granted the Son authority over all people, now also grant him glory, the glory that is over all." The authority that the Father had granted to Jesus was the authority to give eternal life to all who believe in him. In John 5:22 Jesus said, "The Father judges no one, but has entrusted all judgment to the Son." What a profound statement. There are many who say that all religions lead to God, they are all equal as long as one is sincere in his faith. Jesus' statement in John 5:22 and here directly contradict that idea. He said he will judge the world, and gaining acceptance is all about belonging to him, and we know from John 1:12 that comes about by believing in him.

John 17:3 states it explicitly. "This is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent." Jesus said if you don't know the true God, if you don't know Jesus Christ, you don't have eternal life. John repeated that message in a letter he wrote. In 1 John 5:11-12, "This is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He who has the Son has the life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life."

Jesus has the authority to give eternal life to anyone who believes in him. He is the one in charge of eternal life. I have mentioned before the odd story of something that happened to us a number of years ago when Laurie and I were staying at a really cool hotel while

on vacation. This was a place we had seen in the past but knew we'd never be able to afford to stay at. To our total shock we had bid on Priceline and got this place at a rate that was closer to Motel 6 than typical resort rates. We were just happy to be staying there. We had seen the beach cabanas they had that looked really cool, but they cost money to rent and such things are not in our budget.

While we were there we were befriended by one of the employees at the hotel. He took a liking to us for some reason. He brought us fresh pineapple for free, ice water, and spent time talking to us. Then he brought by a fellow named Victor and introduced him to us. Victor was a really nice man and we talked to him for quite a while. It turned out that Victor was the recreation director at the hotel. Among other things he was in charge of the cabanas. In other words, he had authority over the cabanas. Our friend informed us that Victor had decided to give us a beach cabana every day for the rest of our stay there at no charge! He could do that because he was in authority over the cabanas. He had the power to give them away if he chose to.

This passage says Jesus has the authority over eternal life. No one else does. That is contrary to what our culture believes, but we considered this back in John 14:6 so I'm not going to spend time on it today. What we should see today is that Jesus has the power to give eternal life to someone if he chooses to. So the good news is that he says if we believe in him he will give us eternal life!

### JESUS HAS RETURNED TO GLORY

At the end of this little section Jesus asked the Father to glorify him with the glory that he had before the world began. That is a powerful request. It tells us something about Jesus that would likely have been stunning for the disciples. Jesus existed with the Father before the world began and in that circumstance he had glory.

There are people today who want to say that Jesus was a great man, but he was only a man. It's pretty hard to see him as a great man when he said he existed in glory with God the Father before the world was ever created. He claimed he existed before he was born as a baby. He existed before Genesis 1 happened. C. S. Lewis brilliantly broke down the alternatives that statement leaves us. It could be that Jesus genuinely thought he had existed before Adam and Eve lived in the Garden of Eden. Or it could be that he knew that was not true but was trying to create a bigger persona than the disciples had perceived up to that point. In the first case the only thing great about Jesus were his delusions. He was as mentally unbalanced as a guy who's convinced he's George Washington. In the second case he was nothing but a charlatan.

Of course there is one other alternative. That was that Jesus genuinely believed it because it was true. Jesus is claiming to be divine here. Of course as we have just seen what he was about to go through he took on in part to specifically prove that was true. What a mind boggling statement this must have been for the disciples when they heard it. "Jesus

existed with the Father before the world was created? But he's only 33 years old. How can this be?" It also causes me to wonder what Jesus was actually conscious of. Did he have recollections of what his existence was like before he was born into this world? This statement suggests he had some awareness of that pre-incarnation existence. Whether he actually had memories of it we can only speculate. But that certainly causes me to think it must have seriously impacted how he viewed his life in this world.

In John 1:1 calling Jesus "the Word," John said, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." How did John know that Jesus was with God at creation and that in fact somehow he was God? He heard it from Jesus himself. That's where he got the idea. John and the others saw some of the glory of Jesus that was manifested to them on earth, but there was an even greater glory that they did not see. Jesus asked to return to that greater glory.

Do you think the Father answered Jesus' prayer? These verses begin with a request from Jesus for the Father to "glorify your Son." It ends with the same request in verse 5, "And now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began." The Father did indeed answer those prayers. We can start with the fact that Jesus did die on that cross and rise from the dead. He was glorified in those actions.

Paul tells us in Philippians 2 that Jesus humbled himself to the point of death on a cross. Then in verse 9 he said, "Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name." In verse 11 he said that someday every tongue will "confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

How do you picture Jesus? I usually think of him as that former wood worker turned itinerant preacher. I see him as a strong man with typical semitic features, dark hair and a beard, wearing a robe and sandals. But Jesus has been glorified. He ascended into the spiritual realm where today he exists in glory that we cannot imagine. One thing that appears to be characteristic of him right now is brilliant light. Paul is quoted in Acts 26:13 telling the story of his conversion when the risen Jesus confronted him saying, "I saw a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, blazing around me." When he appeared to Paul the light was so bright and piercing that Paul was temporarily blinded. In Revelation 1 John tells us he was given a vision of Jesus as he exists right now. Verse 16 says, "his face was like the sun shining in all its brilliance."

When I was in college one day I played in a baseball game on a bright sunny afternoon. I was playing first base. The batter hit a pop fly in foul territory to my left. I tracked the ball to the spot where I knew it was going to come down, but as it was descending it got right in line with the sun. I blocked the sun with my glove, but then I couldn't see the ball. I tried to change the angle so I could see the ball, but the sun's glare was overpowering. In that situation you can try squinting, but it doesn't help. The sun is literally blinding and all I could do was close my eyes against its brilliance. I had no hope

of following the ball and catching it and now was afraid that I had put myself in a position where the ball was going to conk me on the head. That would hurt and my teammates would have no end of amusement at my expense if I let that happen. I realized my only hope was just to duck out of the way. I was just starting to duck when the ball somehow landed in my glove. My point here is the sun is so blazing bright that you cannot look at it. Paul and John both tell us that Jesus lives in a light more brilliant than that!

When Paul encountered the risen Lord he said he fell to the ground. In Revelation 1:17 John said, “When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead.” Jesus’ glory is so awesome, so powerful it is overwhelming and caused them to fall before him. That is how Jesus exists today.

We serve a glorified Jesus Christ. He is no longer the somewhat ordinary looking young man from Nazareth whom you would have difficulty picking out of a lineup. He is awesome, majestic, powerful. In the Narnia books C. S. Lewis chose a lion to depict him, with good reason. When we visited Michael and Carissa back around Christmas we all went one day to the Georgia Animal Safari. There we got up close and personal with zebras, giraffes, antelope, bison, rhinoceros, rams, and many others. But they also had in an enclosed area a couple of tigers, a liger, yes, it exists, and a lion. We didn’t get close to the lion and it wasn’t doing much, but what a magnificent animal. You’ve seen them at the zoo. They are truly impressive aren’t they? Did you know they can run close to 50 miles per hour? Just resting in its enclosure the animal was majestic and intimidating. You know looking at it that this was not something to mess with. It could tear you to shreds in a matter of minutes. This is not a bad image for the risen, glorified Jesus Christ. Beautiful, powerful, majestic, not someone to be trifled with.

## IMPLICATIONS

### WE KNOW A GLORIFIED LORD

At times I wish the Lord would give us just a brief glimpse of the Lord Jesus in his glory. I have a feeling that just one look would be all it would take. I suspect that one brief image would forever change us. I had a conversation years ago with my Dad. He talked fairly openly about his experiences when he served as part of the occupation force in Japan following World War II. However, he also served in combat in Europe prior to that and he spoke very little of his experiences there. On this occasion I did get him to talk about what it was like when he first went into the front line. I had seen war movies and it always seemed like the men in those movies talked about how they wanted to get into the action and do some damage to the enemy. I asked him if that’s how it really was. He told me there were some guys in his unit that talked like that. He said it ended immediately when they saw their first real action. The terror of combat was so intense and awful that after one day in actual fighting all such talk ceased and everyone was only focused on somehow trying to survive and go home.

I thought of that because I think seeing Jesus Christ as he actually is might have a similar effect on us. We sing, *What A Friend We Have In Jesus*. And we do have a friend in him. We saw how amazing and how important that truth is in John 15. However, I think we have a tendency to think of Jesus as my buddy, my wingman. Yes, he's our friend but he's also the awesome Lion of Judah, the King of Creation. When we begin to see Jesus as he is right now it will affect us big time. Seeing Jesus as the glorified Lord, awesome and majestic will totally transform us.

It will seriously change how we think about our world. We face some real concerns in this world. Vladimir Putin appears determined to restart the Cold War. A couple of weeks ago I had the chance to visit with a friend who is a former Marine. This guy did three combat tours in Iraq. He said after all they did there Al Qaeda is once again in control of Fallujah and the nation is imploding. He believes it is only a matter of time before the Taliban takes over Afghanistan again. Radical jihadis are still determined to destroy Israel and the United States. China is flexing its military muscle.

Meanwhile our leaders seem to be in full retreat. And maybe of more concern they seem incapable and unwilling to address serious problems in our own country. A national debt keeps climbing out of control, a debt that at some point will engulf us. Our freedoms are being taken away as government control is being exerted over every aspect of our lives.

It is all worrisome, except for one thing. Jesus Christ is the glorified Lord! Should Mr. Putin, Al Qaeda leaders, the Taliban, the leaders of China and our own leaders get even a glimpse of the glory of Christ they would fall before him as though they were dead! Even a momentary glimpse of his glory would cause us all to say, "I'm not worried about any of that because Jesus Christ is Lord."

Psalms 2:1-2 says, "Why do the nations conspire and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers gather together against the Lord." Yes, that is scary. But look at verse 4. "The One enthroned in heaven laughs; the Lord scoffs at them."

Imagine Paul, suddenly confronted by the risen, glorified Jesus, blazing in his all of his glory. What do you suppose he was worried about at that moment? Do you think he was concerned about how his mission in Damascus would go? Do you think he was fretting about whether his investments were doing well? Do you imagine he was focused on his annoyance with the Roman presence? Do you think he was dreaming of increasing his status and role in Israel? All of that just went away. He could see very clearly that none of that was important. None of it mattered. He saw with stark clarity that what matters, all that matters, is the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ.

It's interesting to me that on a clear night when you're away from the city and you look up you see all those brilliant stars shining like diamonds in the sky. But where are they right

now? Can't see them. Why not. Does someone turn them off in the daytime to save energy? We want to be environmentally correct you know. Of course that's absurd. No one turns those lights off. What happens is the sun comes out and it is so brilliant it just overwhelms all those stars. Let the stars represent all the things that cause us stress, fear, anxiety, annoyance, anger, even confusion. When the glory of the Son of God blazes in our world it will overwhelm all those stars. They will fade in his glory.

Even in our little church we deal with lots of issues in people's lives. There are financial and job struggles, there are marital problems, there are family and relationship stresses, there is concern about kids, there are health concerns. We would see all of it rather differently I think if we saw Jesus as he is right now. Knowing he is the glorified Lord would transform our hearts and make them much more peaceful and more joyful.

I also think it would seriously impact how we worship. When we were at that animal safari park I also noticed there was an enclosure with two tigers. They were also large, magnificent and intimidating animals. At the far end of their enclosure was a fence that separated them from the open area where the safer animals roamed freely. While we were looking at the tigers an antelope came along and walked right next to that fence the entire considerable width of the tiger enclosure. As it did so one of the tigers paced right along with him. The antelope was so nonchalant about it. To me it looked almost like he was taunting the tiger. I could almost hear him saying, "Neener, neener, neener, what are you going to do to me?" Can you imagine his reaction if he were to discover there was a tiger wide hole in that fence? I am sure it would be very different.

I think at times we sort of wander in to a worship service, assuming we didn't have something really important on our agenda like a soccer game or a desire to just go out to brunch, sort of halfheartedly sing our little songs, have our minds wander all over creation when someone is praying, fall asleep during the sermon or just wish this guy would hurry up and finish, then we check the worship box on our to do list and merrily go on our way. We are awfully nonchalant about the whole thing. I suspect if the Lord of glory were to break through into our world, which he could do at any moment, our response would be very different. When you read Revelation you see a very different kind of scene. There is awe, wonder, humility before the Almighty and true adoration. I suspect as we see the Lord as he really is as the glorified King, it will make a big difference both in how important we think it is to gather to worship him and the way we do it. We should worship as though the tiger might break through the fence at any moment, for the glorified Lord is with us right here, right now, and at any moment he could, if he so chose, break into the visible world.

#### JESUS WANTS US TO HAVE ETERNAL LIFE

When I say this most Christians will likely have a "well duh" sort of response. We know that Jesus came to this world to live, die, and rise from the dead so that we might have eternal life. We tend to define this as when I die I'm going to heaven and live eternally.



That is true and it is more important than anything else you and I will ever deal with. But Jesus was actually saying something more than that. Yes, he was saying that, but there's more to it. Where we short circuit what Jesus was talking about is in our understanding of eternal life. We see this as being able to live forever.

In John 5:29 Jesus said that all people will be raised from the dead. Some will be raised for eternal life, others for condemnation. In other words, all people are going to live forever. That means that eternal life is more than just continued existence. Eternal life is life in God's kingdom. So it might help you to think eternal life as "kingdom life." The eternal life Jesus had authority over that we all long for is living the way one will live in God's kingdom. But what is this kingdom life like?

God's kingdom is any place where God reigns. As far as God's rule extends that is God's kingdom. Now in one sense all that exists is God's kingdom because he rules over all of it. But amazingly, God has chosen to let some in his kingdom live in rebellion. Ever since Eden this world has been the site of a civil war in which the residents have chosen to secede from the kingdom and establish their own kingdom.

God right now rules in heaven, or in the spiritual realm. In Matthew 6:10 Jesus taught us to pray, "your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven." In heaven God rules so it is right now a part of his kingdom. When Jesus walked on the planet the Father ruled totally in him, so the kingdom of God existed on earth perfectly in the person of Jesus. At some point in the future God will reclaim his creation, including this world, and his kingdom will exist even here, though it will be a new earth.

Life in God's kingdom will have a particular quality. It is the place where God's will is always done at every moment in every little thing. Think about what that would be like. God is utterly and totally good. He is perfect love, in fact love is the motive of everything he says and does. God is kind, he is just, he is patient and gentle. He is full of grace at all times and always truthful. These qualities are not just his character, they are also his will. It is how he wants everyone to be.

So if God's kingdom is that place where God's will is always done it will be a place where everyone is good and everything they do is good. In his kingdom everyone will always act out of love in everything they say and do. It is a place where people are always kind, patient and gentle. It is a place that is always just. Everything people would say would be true with no dishonesty or phoniness.

Because God is all powerful in his kingdom there is no fear in his kingdom. His power protects at all times so we live in complete safety. We would live in total awe of God and love for him because he is so good. Kingdom life is a life of love, gentleness, kindness, goodness, truth, grace, and real peace.

The key to having that kind of life is knowing God. That means knowing him as he is. It is a knowing that is more than merely an intellectual knowledge. It is an experiential knowledge. It is experiencing the Almighty, the Lord of glory, as he is. It is living in his presence and seeing all of life from the perspective of one who serves and knows God. Remember kingdom life is life lived in his kingdom, which is to say in the place where he rules. The obvious implication of this is the better we know God, the more we live with him as Lord of everything we are, think, say and do, the more we will experience kingdom life.

To the degree that I let God rule in my thoughts I will experience kingdom life there. To the degree that I let God rule in the way I relate to my wife both of us will experience kingdom life in our marriage. To the degree that I let God rule in what I say there will be kingdom life there. To the degree that I let God rule in how I relate to each of you we will experience kingdom life there. So let's let God's kingdom come right here in each of these temples that are our bodies.

I have been having a problem lately with lateral epicondylitis. It's not terminal. It sounds bad but it just means tendonitis in the elbow, often called tennis elbow. I have learned that it is a very stubborn condition. They say rest it, ice it, and let it heal, but somehow it doesn't seem to be getting better. This is not uncommon. Imagine someone could say, "Here is a pill that will heal this problem. Just take this pill and your elbow will heal and be fine." Do you think I would be willing to do that? That would be a slam dunk. Just do this and you will be healthy. Here's the pill, not for tennis elbow, but for true kingdom life. Live knowing the glorified Lord, letting your life be his kingdom, and you will experience kingdom life.