

AND WE BEHELD HIS GLORY - Studies in John's Gospel

Part forty-eight - Sunday, June 16th, 2024, 10 a.m.

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THE STRANGE LOGIC OF DISCIPLESHIP - HOW LOVING OUR LIVES IS THE SUREST ROAD TO RUIN

John 12:20-36 - “Now among those who went up to worship at the feast were some Greeks. [21] So these came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and asked him, “Sir, we wish to see Jesus.” [22] Philip went and told Andrew; Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus. [23] And Jesus answered them, “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. [24] Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. [25] Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. [26] If anyone serves me, he must follow me; and where I am, there will my servant be also. If anyone serves me, the Father will honor him. [27] “Now is my soul troubled. And what shall I say? ‘Father, save me from this hour’? But for this purpose I have come to this hour. [28] Father, glorify your name.” Then a voice came from heaven: “I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again.” [29] The crowd that stood there and heard it said that it had thundered. Others said, “An angel has spoken to him.” [30] Jesus answered, “This voice has come for your sake, not mine. [31] Now is the judgment of this world; now will the ruler of this world be cast out. [32] And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.” [33] He said this to show by what kind of death he was going to die. [34] So the crowd answered him, “We have heard from the Law that the Christ remains forever. How can you say that the Son of Man must be lifted up? Who is this Son of Man?” [35] So Jesus said to them, “The light is among you for a little while longer. Walk while you have the light, lest darkness overtake you. The one who walks in the darkness does not know where he is going. [36] While you have the light, believe in the light, that you may become sons of light.”

“Now among those who went up to worship at the feast were some Greeks”(John 12:20). Those opening words of our text don’t seem to have much excitement in them. Another group of people is cramming through the packed city of Jerusalem at Passover. And, like a host of others, they want to “**see Jesus**” (21). Why does John select this event for his gospel account? Why tell us about these nameless “**Greeks**” wanting an interview? With all the buzz around Jesus who cares about this? And what can it possibly have to do with us?

- 1) **JOHN’S DESCRIPTION OF THESE GREEK WORSHIPERS PAVES THE WAY FOR THE VERY FIRST TIME WE READ “THE HOUR” FOR JESUS DEATH HAD FINALLY ARRIVED**

IPAD TEXT - John 12:20-23 - “Now among those who went up to worship at the feast were some Greeks. [21] So these came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and asked him, “Sir, we wish to see Jesus.” [22] Philip went and told Andrew; Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus. [23] And Jesus answered them, ‘The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.’”

Notice the way John’s introduction of these Greeks launches and links up with Jesus’ declaration of His glorious death. John wants us to see it’s the introduction of these Gentiles that **makes** the death of Jesus so **glorious**. Let me explain.

To follow John's logic we need to know who these "**Greeks**" are. They are people of Gentile (non-Jewish) birth who spoke the common Greek language. And they were at the Passover because they had converted to Judaism from the pagan religions into which they had, no doubt, been born.

Judaism, while rejecting Jesus, the Christ, still had an attractive side to it. People like these **Greeks** - **Cornelius (Acts 10)**, the **Roman centurion (Acts 11)**, and **Lydia (Acts 16)** - were drawn to the worship of **one** God rather than the **multiple** competing deities in pagan religions. They were attracted by the appeal to **moral righteousness** rather than the **immoralities** often associated with corrupt pagan worship. And they were often drawn by the direct revelation of the **Old Covenant law** of God as opposed to the conflicting Greek **philosophies** of the day. Judaism was attractive to many thinking, God-fearing (though still unregenerate) Gentiles.

The strange thing about John's account is he never actually tells us whether these Greeks ever got the interview with Jesus they sought. That's because John has something much more urgent on his mind as he retells his story of these Gentiles in Jerusalem. These Gentiles are John's red flag Jesus' "**hour**" had come.

There's no missing the link in John's mind between these Greek seekers of Jesus and Jesus' instant proclamation that **His "hour had come"** - **John 12:21-23 - "Philip went and told Andrew; Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus. [23] And Jesus answered them, 'The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.'**" - **IPAD TEXT**

So Philip and Andrew tell Jesus these Greek Jewish converts want to see Him. And Jesus doesn't even **mention** any interview appointment. According to John He just launches into this announcement about His "**hour**"(23). This is the very first thing Jesus says upon hearing of these religious Greeks. Why is this? Why does John link the approach of these nameless Gentiles with the decisive arrival of Jesus' hour?

Here's the connection John wants us all to see. Think back to John's account of Caiaphas' prophetic words in **John 11:51-52 - "He [Caiaphas] did not say this of his own accord, but being high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus would die for the nation, [52] and not for the nation only, but also to gather into one the children of God who are scattered abroad."** - IPAD TEXT

Notice, Jesus had to die for the **Jews** ("**the nation**") and for the **God-fearing Gentiles** ("**the children of God scattered abroad**"). And as these **Greeks** come looking for Jesus in our text today John is instantly reminding us that as converts to Judaism they are still only coming into the **old covenant**. They may have the **commandments**. And they may have a morally superior **monotheistic religion**. But they are still without a **Redeemer**. And admiring a good religion doesn't save anyone.

So here in our text John describes a packed city of Jerusalem. It's full of devout **Jews** and **God-fearing Gentiles** who are drawn to Judaism. Why are they all there? They are **purifying themselves for Passover** - **John 11:55 - "Now the Passover of the Jews was at hand, and many went up from the country to Jerusalem before the Passover to purify themselves."** - IPAD TEXT

And John would say, ***“Make the mental connection!”*** ***This*** is the hour for which Jesus came into this world. The ***Jews*** can't get to God without Jesus' redemptive death. And the ***Gentiles*** can't get to God by converting to ***Judaism***. We're ready to see the ***“glory”*** of Jesus' death. The whole scene is crying out for - setting the stage for - Jesus' hour of crucifixion.

John means for us to see this hour of Jesus' crucifixion is the only way anyone of ***any*** race or ***any*** religion will ever be able to come to Father God. This final Old Testament Passover was about to be ***permanently replaced***. This was ***“the hour!”*** It was the perfect divine time for this ***new*** covenant to be set forth - the full, final, complete revelation of God's redeeming grace.

The rest of the New Testament celebrates the arrival of the “*hour*” Jesus describes in our text. This is exactly the background for understanding the Apostle Paul’s rich words in **Ephesians 2:13-18** -
“But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. [14] For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility [15] by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, [16] and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility. [17] And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near. [18] For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father” - IPAD TEXT

And what Paul is celebrating looking *back* to the cross, John pictures looking *forward* to the cross as the *glory* that is about to be revealed.

- 2) **IF YOU WANT TO SAVE YOUR LIFE FOREVER YOU HAVE TO DENY IT FOR A SEASON**

IPAD TEXT - John 12:24-25 - “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. [25] *Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life.*”

You’ll notice I chickened out. I said we would have to **deny** our own lives in this world. In truth, Jesus said we would have to “**hate**” our lives in this world. That’s tough to hear in a culture pumping **self-love** and **self-esteem** into our veins like an addict’s drug. What can this mean? It doesn’t seem wholesome or natural to encourage anyone to **hate** himself. Could there be a more **counter-intuitive** recommendation?

To help us make sense of His meaning Jesus, in typical fashion, takes our minds back to one of the most basic truths of the created order - the **germination of a seed** - **John 12:24 - “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.” - IPAD TEXT**

There's no missing Jesus' double reference to **death**. The seed can't grow without **dying**. It's only by ceasing to be a seed that a seed becomes a fruitful plant. A seed that doesn't **die** is a seed that can't be what a seed is intended to be. What looks like the seed's demise is, in fact, its richest future. In short, the seed - **any** seed - must **die** in order to **become**.

But Jesus isn't giving a lesson on agriculture. He's speaking of the development and germination of His highest life and purpose for His disciples. In the words of **Rudolf Bultmann** in his extremely liberal commentary on John, "***Life is of so peculiar a character, it so completely eludes any desire to have it at our own disposal....it is lost precisely when we desire to hold it fast, and it is won exactly when we give it up.***"

That's brilliant. Carve those words deeply into your cranium - "***...it is lost precisely when we desire to hold it fast.***" And Jesus unpacks this idea more fully in **12:25 - "Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life *in this world* will keep it for *eternal life.*" -**
IPAD TEXT

This clarifies greatly Jesus' intended meaning. His meaning is all bound up in those two **time phrases** - "**....in this world,**" and, "**...for eternal life.**" The "**hating**" of self Jesus recommends isn't some morbid beating up on our own created worth. Quite the opposite. This "**good hate**" recommended by Jesus is the ultimate **protection** of Father God's intended dimension of life in all its fruitfulness.

Jesus isn't **against** a good life. He's teaching us how to **find** it. And, more precisely, He's warning us our own reflex pursuits for a good life will **destroy** it before it can even begin to germinate.

So what's the bottom line? Jesus pleads for deep discernment in all our hearts this morning. If I live most of my life devoting my mind and my energy to satisfying the screaming demands of my **immediate desires** for security, power, popularity, wealth, sex, recreation, sports, fashion, or entertainment - if **those** are my goals I will **ruin my life.**

On the other hand, in those rare and precious hearts that fix attention on **eternal priorities** even while living in a culture cramming our hearts with the **agenda of this present life**, God will ensure maximum joy and fruitfulness in this age and in the age to come. Always remember the **bad love** and the **good hate.**

On a slightly different side note, my personal opinion is we should never teach our kids **“hate”** is a bad word. It’s a **Bible** word. **God** hates all sorts of things, and **says** so. Are you going to let this confused, fallen world - this world that doesn’t understand the meaning of basic terms, such as **love** or **tolerance** or **truth**, dictate the vocabulary for your family?

What message will our kids grow up with when all they hear is, **“No, we never say the word ‘hate’?”** How will they grow up with any hatred of child-abuse or idolatry or religious persecution? Don’t think for a moment there isn’t a relativistic agenda behind this world’s bleaching the word **“hate”** from human speech. We are already seeing the first-fruits of a generation void of any **visceral strength** in their opposition of visible sin. No wonder they’re all growing up with the much blander, **“Well, I personally wouldn’t agree with that, but that’s just me. I wouldn’t want to impose my convictions on anyone else.”**

Where does that kind of thinking come from? That’s all there is left when a generation has been raised **not** to express hatred for visible sin. We are now witnessing the dominance of a generation with no strong moral feelings about anything **except intolerance**.

My opinion would be to teach them to ***hate sin*** and teach them to know it's ***good*** to hate sin. Not ***people***. But ***wickedness***. Reserve hatred for the right things. Don't use it carelessly. To say, "***I hate loud music in church!***" is an abuse and waste of a good word. To say, "***I hate it when the name of Jesus is blasphemed!***" is righteous and beautiful in God's eyes.

Back to our text:

3) **GOOD WORKS MUST NEVER BE A REPLACEMENT FOR DEVOTION TO JESUS CHRIST**

IPAD TEXT - John 12:26 - "If anyone serves me, he must follow me; and where I am, there will my servant be also. If anyone serves me, the Father will honor him."

It is striking the way Jesus ***differentiates*** between ***servicing*** and ***following***. He speaks of them as ***two*** things rather than ***one***. It is true for sure that no one can ***follow*** Jesus without ***servicing*** Him. Lip service and a denominational label aren't enough. There must be a life of service behind any profession of following Jesus.

But I'm not sure we've done as good a job at telling people ***all the humanitarian good works in the world aren't the same as specific, informed devotion to Jesus Christ as crucified and risen Redeemer and Lord.*** Do serve Jesus with all your strength.

But don't trust in your performance as a ***substitute*** for faith in Jesus Christ and the revealed truths of His divinity, crucifixion, resurrection, second coming, and personal Lordship.

4) **KNOWING THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN INITIAL IMPULSES AND COMMITTED OBEDIENCE**

IPAD TEXT - John 12:27 - "Now is my soul troubled. *And what shall I say? 'Father, save me from this hour'?* But for this purpose I have come to this hour."

Are there any passages taking us deeper than those where Jesus is at prayer? The Trinity in ***recorded conversation***. It's a mystery hard to imagine. And it gets deeper in this wonderful verse. Don't rush over those words, ***"And what shall I say?"*** Incredibly, we're watching Jesus ***sort out the content of His prayer.***

There's more. John must have seen **teaching value** in recording Jesus' mental process in this prayer. That's why John makes this prayer **observable** for all his readers. And the point John emphasizes is the distinction between what Jesus **could** have said and what He actually **chose** to say. It's the difference between **natural instinct** and **settled conviction**. It's the difference between **first impulse** and **considered eternal direction and obedience**.

This is going to happen to all of us. The **circumstances**, of course, will be different, but the **process** will be the same. We all carry personal desires into our praying. And that's fine. What we call the "**Lord's Prayer**" certainly makes room for requesting "**daily bread**."

But personal desires **can** get in the way of fruitful praying. Jesus shows us how to **hold on to the big picture** in our asking. There's a wonderful revelation of this distinction between what He sees as a perfectly normal **first impulse** and what He knows will bring the most glory to His heavenly Father. Look **down the road**. Focus on the **eternal picture**. Keep the glory of God at the burning center of your praying. That's where the richest fruit grows.

5) THE VOICE FROM HEAVEN AND WHY IT MATTERED

IPAD TEXT - John 12:28-36 - “Father, glorify your name.” Then a voice came from heaven: “I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again.” [29] The crowd that stood there and heard it said that it had thundered. Others said, “An angel has spoken to him.” [30] Jesus answered, “This voice has come for your sake, not mine. [31] Now is the judgment of this world; now will the ruler of this world be cast out. [32] And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.” [33] He said this to show by what kind of death he was going to die. [34] So the crowd answered him, “We have heard from the Law that the Christ remains forever. How can you say that the Son of Man must be lifted up? Who is this Son of Man?” [35] So Jesus said to them, “The light is among you for a little while longer. Walk while you have the light, lest darkness overtake you. The one who walks in the darkness does not know where he is going. [36] While you have the light, believe in the light, that you may become sons of light.”

There’s too much text and too little time. The one thing Jesus wants to emphasize is the voice from heaven was for the benefit of the crowd - **John 12:30-32 - “Jesus answered, ‘*This voice has come for your sake, not mine.* [31] Now is the judgment of this world; now will the ruler of this world be cast out. [32] And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.’” -**

IPAD TEXT

So what is it God so desperately wants this crowd to hear? There are two themes. ***First, His cross pronounces judgment on this world and Satan(31).*** And ***second, refuge from this judgment can only be found as people are drawn and respond to the message of the gospel(32).*** And now we find the full explanation of why people must ***“hate”*** their lives in ***“this present world”*** if they want to ***“keep it for eternal life”***(25).

Never let anything keep you from the cross of Christ. To try to save your life in any other way will end in disaster.