

John 12:20-33

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[0 : 0 0] Our scripture reading today is taken from the book of John, chapter 12, verses 20 through 33. Again, that's the gospel of John, chapter 12, verses 20 through 33, on page 875 of your pew Bibles.

Please stand for the reading of God's word. Now among those who went up to worship at the feast were some Greeks.

So these came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and asked him, Sir, we wish to see Jesus. Philip went and told Andrew. Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus.

And Jesus answered them, The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. 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. Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life.

[1 : 1 0] 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. 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. Father, glorify your name. Then a voice came from heaven.

I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again. The crowd that stood there and heard it said that it had thundered. Others said, An angel has spoken to him.

Jesus answered, The voice has come for your sake, not mine. Now is the judgment of this world. Now will the ruler of this world be cast out. And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.

He said this to show what kind of death he was going to die. This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. Thanks be to God. I suppose if I were to give the Gospel of John a title, and a title that would distinguish it from the other three Gospels, I might have a go at something like this.

[2 : 4 1] The Gospel of John, by way of title, The Global Gospel. For of all the four Gospels, it's John that seems to present Jesus most often in terms of his significance for the world, the global perspective.

Indeed, the world, as a term, is a favorite of John. It was referenced in the very opening verses of the Gospel, where in chapter 1, verse 9, we read, The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world, in immediate recognition of a global Gospel.

He was in the world. The world was made through him. And the world did not know him. That's the way the Gospel opens, with this global perspective.

Interestingly, the Gospel closes, in John's unique way, with a reference to this same term. Chapter 21, verse 25, Now there are also many other things that Jesus did.

Were every one of them to be written down, I suppose that the whole world itself could not contain the books that would be written. So, by way of bookends, John, the global Gospel, concerned with the significance of Jesus for the world.

[4 : 17] On the front end, the world was made by him. On the back end, when you view the world as a repository, it was not sizable enough to contain all the books that would be written about him.

The world makes a number of appearances in between. In John, others will say of Jesus, indeed, the great prophet who has come into the world.

Jesus himself will say, I have overcome the world. In the 14th chapter, Jesus will claim that the things he did, he did so that the world would know that he loves the Father.

And yet, when he speaks to his disciples a chapter later, he will tell them, if you were of the world, the world would have loved you. The most familiar reference of the world is, of course, John 3, 16, for God so loved the world.

Yet, Jesus, when he stands before Pilate, will say, My kingdom is not from this world. So, it would appear that John loved the multivariiegated use of the world.

[5 : 34] His is a global Gospel. The term for him at least means this place, this globe, as it were, this ball of wax, that which we call home.

But it's more than place. It's almost a province. And by that I mean a realm where there is a rule established. The world is an environment where a rule is being exercised.

But at other times, he uses the term world simply to refer to people. All of these things in John. That said, it shouldn't surprise you when you look at the Scripture reading for today, which begins at verse 20, to find that it comes on the heels of a statement concerning the world.

And indeed, in that sense, the world in regard to the people. Verse 19 of chapter 12, The Pharisees said to one another, You see that you are gaining nothing.

Look, the world has gone after him. I suppose today then, I would want to direct my thoughts on this Lenten text along three lines, and they are all in relation to the world.

[7 : 06] Three sayings in our text, more particular. First, what Jesus had to say on the day that the world had gone after him.

That's verses 20, really through 26. Then, what the Father would say when Jesus was departing from the world and preparing to return to him.

The middle voice there, particularly verse 28. And then, third, it comes back to the voice of Jesus again, what Jesus, his own statement on what his death will mean for the world.

And so, three sayings. First, what does Jesus say to the world on the day when, according to John, they had all gone after him?

verses 20 and 22. Now, among those who went up to worship at the feast were some Greeks, so they came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and asked him, Sir, we wish to see Jesus.

[8 : 31] So, Philip went and told Andrew. Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus. I understand those verses simply to be functioning in a way as evidence for the claim that had just been made that the whole world had gone after him.

The whole world had gone after him. We are introduced to Greeks who have come from various corners of the world to see him, to have an audience with him.

I don't know whether they were Greeks in the sense of educated Hellenists, or they were just Gentiles generally, or whether they were Jews who resided in other parts of the world but had come back to worship.

The text, quite frankly, doesn't give us any indication. It could be any number of things, but I think that what's clear there is they stand as evidence for the statement in verse 19, Look!

The world has gone after him. And so some Greeks came and wanted audience with him. So what does Jesus say in the hour when the world had gone after him?

[9 : 45] Verses 23 and 24, And Jesus answered them, The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. 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. What a stunning claim in response to the attributions that the people had laid before him in the previous text.

The previous text in verse 13, All the crowds were crying out, Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, even the King of Israel.

In other words, for them, his hour had come. And the hour was to be one of coronation. A king. Indeed, the religious leaders almost seem at a loss at this point, for indeed, the whole world was ready to claim him as king.

And on that day, in that hour, when he stood at the moment of highest earthly preeminence, this is what he had to say to the world.

[11 : 00] Well, my hour has come. Yes, you are right to attribute it to a time of glory, but truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, and on he goes with this, not coronation language, but condescension language.

Not a throne, but a bulb in the season of fall that is planted into the earth and put away.

What a striking thing to say. But this is what Jesus said when all the world would come after him. What does this hour mean then?

In John's gospel, he seems to connect the hour and the hour of his glory with his death. You may recall early in John's gospel, chapter 2, at the wedding at Cana, he said, my hour has not yet come.

We wondered what hour that might be. Also, in John chapter 7, and I believe in verse 6, at the feast of the booths, he says, my time has not yet come.

[12 : 36] His hour was not yet there. Here, in our own text, he connects this moment of coronation with his hour and his glory and a proverbial saying about the death of the seed.

When you link that further in John's gospel, to chapter 17 and verse 1, it is obvious that for John and Jesus, the hour of his glory was the day of his crucifixion.

For he says, in John 17, the high priestly prayer, he lifted up his eyes to heaven and said, Father, the hour has come. Glorify your Son, that the Son may glorify you.

And what hour was that? It was the hour of his betrayal, of his being handed over, his arrest, his death, his crucifixion. This is what Jesus would say if the world today were to come after him.

You want Jesus? him as king? Well, remember, his coronation, his condescension, his glory is his cross, his death is your way.

[14 : 04] His death it's as if Jesus says, I'm on a death walk for the purpose of giving life to many.

It seems to be the purpose of giving life, but it actually indicates that it does bear much fruit. So I ask you then, in this sense, when you begin to think about what it might mean for those who would come after Him, verse 25 and 26 move from the statements about His coronation to what it would mean for you.

He says, whoever loves his life loses it. And whoever hates his life in this world, there's our global gospel again, will keep it for eternal life.

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.

What does it mean then for you? On this, the week before Palm Sunday and then the racing onslaught of Good Friday, what does it mean for you and for me were we to come after Jesus?

[15 : 42] What would it look like? It seems to be a Semitic idiom, this love and hatred of life.

I mean, you just can't press that too woodenly that he's advocating for self-hatred. It's rather a way of speaking about your priorities in life.

You love your life more than anything else, you're going to end up losing it. You lose your life for my sake and the gospels, you end up gaining it. This is what it means for you and for me.

He speaks, in other words, in the terms of deepest affection, the language of love and hate. And while we are in this world, we are marked with this idiomatic expression that we are to almost have a movement away from self.

A losing of our life. That eternal life might be had. For those who try to keep their life, lose everything in eternity. I mean, this must have been one of the kinds of verses that Jim Elliot launched his phrase out of, although he kind of inverts the language here, where he says he was a missionary many, many years ago.

[17 : 11] He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose. Jesus puts it a little differently here. You love your life, you're going to lose it.

So what does it mean? In the language of proverbial wisdom, never sacrifice the eternal on the altar of the immediate. What in the world do you want?

What do you want? What do you love? What are your highest aspirations? For yourself.

It seems that we are told here, when Jesus is to be made king, he is condescending to death, and we who are to follow, or in the language of the text, whosoever or whoever is to do it, there is a complete sacrifice of self in this world.

There is a surrender. This is one of the beauties of Lent. This calling intentional reflection back upon self-denial.

[18 : 36] That this world is not my home. I'm just a passing through. In other words, it looks more like a funeral service, or a burial of a bulb in a garden.

That's what you're to do with Jesus as your king. You take all your life, all your aspirations, all your goals, all your loves, and rather than try to find a way to manufacture them in glory, surrender them, sacrifice them to his will.

It's to go into the ground. I mean, just look at the language of the text if you want to press it. He says, If anyone serves me, he must follow me, and where I am, there will my servants be also.

Well, where was he? Where is the where I am? He's the seed of wheat falling into the ground that it might bring life.

That we wed ourselves and our aspirations in life to his kingship, but primarily in his death. We die to an aspiration in the world.

[20 : 12] Imagine how you handle that. I don't know, if you do gender study, what would they say?

What does a woman need to die to to follow Jesus? We just bounce off these words so quickly, but he actually says it in these ways.

If you love your life, you're going to lose it. What does it mean to serve him? What does it mean to follow him? For every man, every woman, every child under the hearing of my voice.

What does it mean? Evidently, it means complete, total sacrifice to all the aspirations that would elevate you in the world. He was king and went to the ground.

How would we follow him and go anywhere else? You know, it's interesting, the season of Lent, you think of maybe even making a list, you know, what do you want out of life?

[21 : 27] I think of things like the three Ps, you know, which are pretty potent. Sorry, couldn't resist. prestige, elevation of self, pleasure, got to be the basis of them all, but the one we traffic in so readily, or permanence.

you want to do something that outlives you? All that somehow has got to be tamped down into the ground, put away, put away for another day.

I'm supposed to live for something else. I think of Lent in terms of how some Sundays in Lent are actually associated with different figures in church history.

I don't know if it's the fourth or fifth Sunday of Lent, but it could be actually this Sunday, I'm not sure, the Sunday of St. John of the Ladder, L-A-D-D-E-R.

One of the Sundays of Lent is associated with a sixth-century monk who wrote a book called The Ladder, and in it were 30 prescriptions of climbing into fellowship with God.

[22 : 58] And the first rung is the renunciation of worldliness. And the last rung, well, you grab hold of the love of God, but the love of God begins with this renunciation of worldliness.

holiness. I mean, what an irony when you think of it that way, because the book is written in a sense of ascent. It's the ladder of ascent.

But what you really have here is this stairway down into a tomb. It's a 30-step march down to the participation in Christ's death.

It's the burial of it all. It's not buying the stairway to heaven or better yet, Dylan, you know, if I could build a ladder to the sky and climb on every rung.

As much as I love it, it's this descent. An intentional descent of the soul from all things that are worldly. That's rigor.

[24 : 06] Rigor. that's rigorous. That's got meat on the bone. What that meat is for you, I don't know.

But that's where we begin. The complete renunciation of all things world. We move in a bit unresolved way.

Jesus doesn't quite tie everything up there. It almost looks like verse 27 just kind of bounces off. I'm not quite resolved on how I'm supposed to do all that. But the promise is clear that God will honor me if I do that.

And you move from what Jesus had to say on the day the world came after him to what the Father would say when he was departing the world and returning to him.

Jesus says, 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. Father, glorify your name. And then here we have a voice from heaven.

[25 : 19] I have glorified it and I will glorify it again. The crowd that stood there and heard it thought that it had thundered. Others said an angel has spoken to him.

These are the words that the Father would have us know as Jesus is departing the world and returning to him. Namely, I have glorified his name in the past.

I will glorify his name in the future. And you need to know that. That is so hopeful. Because you've just been asked to participate in death.

death. And the word that comes forth is death is not the end. Your renunciation of worldliness is not the end. As you renounce worldliness, as you learn to serve the living God, as you learn to lay down your life and all your aspirations that were for yourself and give everything in your life to the Lord and begin to seek and follow him one step at a time, as death was not the end for Jesus, so too it will not be the end for you.

God had glorified his name in the past, he will glorify it in the future and that should give you hope. That's why the voice was for you, even though the people on that day weren't able to really know what to do with it.

[26 : 41] And then finally, those wonderful words to close. What does his death mean for the world? Look, you're back to Jesus, his own words.

Verse 31, this is what it means, this is what his death means for the world. Now is the judgment of this world. Now will the ruler of this world be cast out.

Two statements concerning what his death means for the world, and while they're two statements, they seem to be wedded together. His death means judgment of the world and the ruler of the world being cast out.

That's what it means. His death means that there was something in play on that day in history where there was a cosmic, you can't put it in any smaller terms, there was a cosmic battle that affected the powers of life.

And that in his death, judgment of all of the domain that is worldliness was pronounced and the ruler of that world cast out, overthrown, taken out of office, a new one installed.

[28 : 01] And this ought to be very encouraging for you and for me. If you're like me and you read the first part about going and dying, I can't do that! I'm of the world!

This is your pastor talking. I was born into the world. I cut my teeth on the world. I tasted the world.

I taste the world. I can't do renunciation of world. Unless judgment comes upon the world and the ruler who I once submitted to is cast out from the world, then perhaps there is hope for me in the world.

That's the gospel. Don't confuse this walk toward Good Friday and Easter. Yeah, it is as rigorous a walk.

It will take everything you've got. And yes, it is all and completely done by Christ. He pronounces judgment on that which you could not defeat.

[29 : 22] And as you draw near to Him, you come under a new rule, are given a new spirit, and willingly walk away from the world.

So what does His death mean for the world? A great cosmic reversal that gives hope to, according to verse 32, all people.

And He says, when I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw all people to myself. I love the narrator here, verse 33, he said this to show by what kind of death he was going to die, because I wouldn't have gotten that.

When someone talks about being lifted up from the earth, I'm thinking big time good stuff, ascension stuff. I mean, are we already at ascension Sunday? When you're lifted up from the earth, you're all the way up, you're out of here.

But just even think of the words of our song today. I don't know if the author intended it. Now I'm not going to be able to find it.

[30 : 32] you'll have to look back to it.

the sense of being lifted up to see his glory. I want to see you high and lifted up.

Have you ever thought of that in terms of the cross? I don't normally when I sing it. I want to see you high and lifted up. My mind is racing to heaven.

But think of reflecting on the words whether they were intended or not, I do not know. Think of seeing Jesus high and lifted up and he's on the cross.

Oh sir, we would see Jesus. Open my eyes Lord, open my eyes that I would see you, that I would behold you. Where? High and lifted up.

[31 : 34] Making substitution for sin. That the ruler of my life might be displaced and you might be crowned king instead and your spirit would enliven me to live joyfully for you.

What a wonderful, wonderful truth for us to reflect upon today. What would Jesus have you know at the time that all the world had gone after him?

he would have you know that yes, he is crowned king through crucifixion. What would the father have you know as you follow after him?

Yes, his name was glorified in the past and will be glorified in the future so you have no dilemma in your hour giving him glory and dying with him for as it was for him so too it shall be for you and what does the death of Christ mean for the world only the most important cosmic transfer of power that has ever taken place and you are to draw near to him look he's lifted up from the earth in the first part he's like a seed going down into the earth he's planted the earth that that cross is planted in the earth and right there in the earth you find meaning for the whole world may you live for him well this week by the strength of his power our heavenly father may we love you may we learn to love you help us to renounce worldliness through the power of the!

spirit that is greater than the power of the one who is in this world for indeed that one has been overthrown and we give our lives to you in praise and in thanksgiving and all of our sacrifices are sacrifices of praise and we do this in Jesus name Amen