

Unless a Kernel of Wheat...

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Preacher: Joshua Winters

[0 : 00] All right, well, we've been working through the Gospel of John, and we're just now coming to John chapter 12, verse 20. So if you have your Bible with you, you can open it up to John chapter 12, verse 20.

Last Sunday, we heard about how Jesus rode into the city of Jerusalem on a donkey's back to shouts of Hosanna. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Blessed is the King of Israel. It was a royal coronation kind of procession, parading him into the city with celebration. And we watched as the crowds led him into the city, and we saw how the Pharisees were seething with frustration and anger about this.

See? This is getting us nowhere. Look how the whole world has gone after him. And there was some truth to that, says John. Let's pick up the story in verse 20 of chapter 12.

Now, there were some Greeks among those who went up to worship at the festival. They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, with a request. Sir, they said, we would like to see Jesus.

[1 : 22] These Greeks are an example of how news about Jesus is spreading. About how people from all over the place are going after Jesus.

You know, it's easy for us, maybe, to take for granted. We're so used to knowing Jesus in our own culture, having the scriptures in our own language, worshiping in our own way.

But there was a time when it was not that way. Paul reminds us of this in his letter to the church in Ephesus.

Ephesians chapter 2, verse 12. Paul's writing to those who he refers to as Gentiles by birth. And he says this to them. He says, remember that at that time, you were separate from Christ.

In other words, you had no share in the Messiah. You were excluded from citizenship in Israel. You were foreigners to the covenants of the promise.

[2 : 32] Without hope. And without God in the world. I often tell you to put yourself in the story. But in a very real sense, if we could, none of us would have been among Jesus' disciples.

We'd be like these foreigners. Like these Greeks who had no connection with Jesus. We'd be hearing the news about Jesus wherever we happened to live in the Roman world. But it would probably have sounded very different to us.

News of a Jewish Messiah. Doing all sorts of miracles and signs and wonders. Even if we happened to be Gentiles who lived in the region.

In Israel. We would still very much have felt like outsiders. Looking in on all of this. Jesus in his work. And ministry.

Came first to the Jewish people. Those who are by blood. Descended from Jacob. And even though Jesus has been talking a lot about how. What he is coming to do is for the people of the world.

[3 : 42] How they will come to be included in what's going on here. It hasn't really happened yet. Now don't get me wrong. Jesus has not been shutting the Gentiles out.

Or turning away the non-Jews. But the main focus and the main following of Jesus has been Jewish. And so this is a significant moment here.

Some Greeks work up the courage to ask to meet with Jesus. And there's lots of speculation about who these Greeks were. Most of it is just that. Speculation.

All we know is that they were Greeks. That is ethnically Greek people. And that they were among those who went up to worship at Passover. Passover. We don't even know if they were from Greece.

Or if they happened to live somewhere else. Because by this time Greeks lived all over the Mediterranean world. Some have suggested that they were Jews born in Greece. Others have suggested that they were Greeks who converted to Judaism.

[4 : 41] Both are doubtful. Because there were other words John could have used to describe that. If that was the case here. Best we know they were just God-fearing Greeks.

And we know that they were God-fearing. Because they went up to Jerusalem to worship at Passover. You didn't do that as a Gentile. Unless you believe something significant about Yahweh. The God of Israel. So they came to Philip, these Greeks. Who was from Bethsaida in Galilee with a request. Sir, they said.

We would like to see Jesus. Philip went to tell Andrew. Andrew and Philip in turn told Jesus. For whatever reason the Greeks don't come straight to Jesus.

Perhaps they didn't know if or how they would be received. After all, they were Gentiles. And Jews didn't associate with Gentiles. So they first go to Philip.

[5 : 45] One of the twelve disciples. And here again, there's lots of speculation. Why Philip? Philip was a Jew. But he had a Greek name. Was that the reason? Maybe.

We don't know. Philip seemed to have some hesitation about what he should do about this. And so he goes and kind of talks to Andrew about it. Why the hesitation? Again, we don't know.

But it probably shows us at the least that this is a big deal. What's happening here? This is out of the ordinary. What's they're asking? And finally, Philip and Andrew come to Jesus together.

And they tell him about these Greek guys who would like to meet with him. And Jesus responds in verse 23 by saying, The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.

Well, that's an interesting response, isn't it? It doesn't really answer the question. Will he meet with the Greeks or not? Why this response?

[6 : 50] The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. What does Jesus mean by this? Well, we've heard Jesus say something similar to this quite a few times in the Gospel of John.

Maybe you'll recall back to John 2, verse 4. The wedding in Cana. Jesus' mother was trying to get him to do something about the wine shortage there.

And he answered her saying, My hour has not yet come. Or you might think back to John chapter 7. There he said a similar sort of thing.

His brothers were trying to convince him to go and do a bit of a Judean miracle tour and connect with his followers before the festival began in Jerusalem. They said, Leave Galilee.

Go to Judea. So that your disciples there may see the works you do. No one who wants to become a public figure acts in secret. Since you're doing these things, show yourself to the world.

[7 : 56] And Jesus responded saying, My time is not yet here. My time has not yet fully come. So Jesus seems to have this awareness of God's schedule.

Of God's timeline for when and how things should unfold for him. At the beginning, my hour has not yet come, seems to refer to the hour for him to go public.

To begin to do all these signs and miracles. And then here in John 7, Jesus' time seems to refer to his going up to Judea and getting into the spotlight of the world.

My time for that has not yet fully come. Though we found out that Jesus did end up going up for the festival later in chapter 7.

And he got into almost some trouble there with the religious leaders in the temple courts. John tells us in John 7 verse 30, he was there teaching, but no one laid a hand on him because his hour had not yet come.

[9 : 06] Then again in chapter 8, while he was teaching in the temple courts, a different time, things seemed to be heating up again. And John told us there, no one seized him at that time because his hour had not yet come.

So now John is telling us that there is an hour coming for Jesus. And this hour has to do with Jesus being seized and arrested.

So now finally, chapter 12, we come to the moment where Jesus says, the hour has come. And yet it's not quite the hour that we expected, the way he describes it.

He says, the hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Well, what kind of hour is this? Is this the time to show yourself to the world that's finally come?

Or is this the hour in which you're going to be arrested and captured by your enemies? Or is this the hour in which you will be glorified? I think the answer is all three.

[10 : 16] All three of these things are coming together all at once. Here are the Greeks, the outsiders, the foreigners, these people of the world who are now seeking after Jesus.

It's not just the attention of Israel that Jesus holds anymore, but people from the world. And here also, we see the religious leaders, their opposition to Jesus is at an all-time high. They are fed up with him and ready to kill him. And yet, in the midst of all this moment, Jesus looks at that and he refers to that as the hour for the Son of Man, for me, to be glorified. Huh. That's surprising. To be glorified means to be exalted. It means to be lifted up. To be worshipped. To be praised.

To have the spotlight put on you in usually a positive way. How does that fit with being captured and killed? Well, John is getting to that.

[11 : 23] For now, we'll wait with the disciples until we get to that part. So these Greeks who have come to see Jesus, they are an indication that things are right on schedule.

That everything is going according to God's plan and timing. Jesus has the attention of the world now as he's supposed to at this moment.

And then Jesus tells us about what's coming next for him. What seeing these Greeks reminds him of. Verse 24. The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.

Very truly, I tell you, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds. Jesus gives them an illustration from farming. something that's so basic that all of us can understand it.

[12 : 31] This is Farming 101. And yet, Jesus is not trying to teach us about farming. He hones in on a very specific reality of farming.

He zeroes in on how it goes for a single seed, a single kernel of wheat. It falls to the ground and dies. And from it springs up a whole plant which will bring many more kernels of grain into existence.

From one seed comes many. But here's the catch. It's an exchange. You can't have the many without the one dying.

You must give up and lose that seed to gain the harvest from it. Now for you farmers and agronomists, you might notice that Jesus said the seed dies and you might be thinking, well actually the seed is alive and it's just kind of developing according to the plant it was made to.

Well I think we all know that Jesus is not intending to write a science textbook here. And he's not saying that the seed physically or biologically dies either. He's just giving an illustration.

[13 : 44] He's speaking with the language of phenomenon. We do this all the time. I still hear people say the sun rises, the sun comes up, the sun goes down.

I have yet to hear anybody say, I'll see you tomorrow when the earth turns to face the sun. It's the language of phenomenon. It's not technically correct, but that's what we see from our vantage point.

And Jesus is just doing the same kind of thing here with the seed illustration. From the vantage point of the farmer, he must give up the seed and lose it in order to get more from it.

From the vantage point of the seed, it must die, it must give up its seed-like existence for there to be a plant that comes from it and bears more seed.

Here's the point. An exchange is required. There cannot be a harvest. There cannot be many more unless the one dies.

[14 : 46] this is what is on Jesus' mind right now as the Greeks show up, as the attention of the world comes to rest on him.

The hour has come for me. Yes, it's the hour for me to be glorified, but the glory of the plant that will be, the glory of the harvest that will come, will not happen unless I die first.

as we'll see next week. This is not Jesus just giving us some kind of academic sage-like wisdom about how to get more than what you've got or about farming or about economics.

this is the reality of what's about to happen to Jesus in the days ahead, this very week, striking home to his heart.

It's like the Greeks show up and all of a sudden the writing's on the wall and Jesus sees it right, the time is here, my death is right around the corner, but it has to be.

[15 : 56] there's no way around it. If I do not die, there will be no harvest. If I do not die, the human race will perish at the judgment, all of them, and there will be no people of God.

All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. No, there must be this exchange. I must die for there to be.

a harvest so that I can redeem them. And there's a sense in which this matters even more for these Greek men.

Why? Because they cannot become followers of Jesus. They cannot be included in the harvest unless the dividing wall that exists between Jew and Gentile is destroyed unless that barrier is broken down and that cannot be done unless Jesus first goes to the cross and dies.

Let me read you the rest of what Paul wrote to the Ephesians back in Ephesians chapter 2. We'll take it back up to verse 11 there. this is what Paul came to write later.

[17 : 20] He said, remember that formerly you who are Gentiles by birth and called uncircumcised by those who call themselves the circumcision. Remember that at that time you were separate from Christ.

you were excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise without hope and without God in the world.

But now in Christ Jesus you who were once far away have been brought near how?

By the blood of Christ. for he himself is our peace who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier the dividing wall of hostility by setting aside in his flesh the law with its commands and regulations.

His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two thus making peace and in one body to reconcile both of them to God how?

[18 : 37] Through the cross. Down a couple verses in verse 19 he goes on to spell out the implications of this for us Gentiles. He says consequently you are no longer foreigners and strangers but fellow citizens with God's people and also members of his household.

Listen without Jesus death without Jesus blood shed for us without Jesus body broken for us Gentiles would still be outsiders to all that God was doing with Israel.

We'd still be foreigners on the outside looking in without hope without God that us non-Jews can have salvation too forgiveness too and be considered citizens with God's people members of the family of God it's a sheer gift of grace and mercy and it could only come for these Greeks and for us through Christ in Christ and what happened to him at the cross his death how easily we take this for granted don't we very truly I tell you unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies it remains only a single seed but if it dies it produces many seeds now

Jesus is about to take this and explain how this also applies to his followers how there's a sense in which they too must die in order to get something better but we're actually going to save that part for this afternoon after the potluck I typically give a bit of a devotional at the start of the meeting and we're going to save verse 25 and 26 for then I invite you to join us whether you plan to stay for the meeting or not stay for lunch and then you can hear that after that's where Jesus will drive this home and tell us what we really need to do in light of all this but for this morning let's apply it to our hearts in this way have you been taking for granted that Jesus is your Messiah your King God is absolutely free he says I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy I will have compassion on whom

I will have compassion and in God's freedom he chose one man and his family to reveal himself to long ago to bless and to make a people for himself from he chose one family's descendants to make into a great nation and he promised the Messiah the King who would come to that people to Israel Jesus was and is that Messiah that King but apart from the grace of God and the compassion of Christ Jesus which took Jesus to the cross we Gentiles would be left out we'd be lost forever forever excluded and it wouldn't have been unfair it would just be us getting the justice we deserve and so we must praise and give glory to Jesus that he was willing to fall to the ground and die so that we too might be included in the harvest that his death brings these

[22 : 41] Greeks reminded Jesus of his death because he loved them because he loves the people of the world not just the Jews he knew they needed what his death would bring to be included to be his let's pray thank you Lord Jesus for going to the cross for us for loving us Gentiles too for laying down your life for us to welcome us into the fold so that we can be sheep to outsiders though we were may we not take our salvation for granted Lord may we continue to grow in that heartfelt knowledge of your great and deep love for us of your grace and of your truly undeserved mercy towards us we ask this in your name amen before

I get to the devotional I just want to say a quick word with regards to my message I was chatting to someone after the service and if you heard that it's possible that if Jesus hadn't died for us Gentiles to be lost and the Jews to still be saved you heard wrong if Jesus hadn't died nobody would be saved Jew or Gentile so I just hope that that's clear in fact you can probably back it up even further than that if Jesus hadn't died every promise that God ever made to bless anybody throughout all

human history would fall flat and God would be unjust for all the times that he did show mercy and forgiveness before Jesus died all of it requires Jesus death to bring about that new covenant so that any of us can be saved and you could even back it up one step further than that if it's not even possible for the plan that God came up with to save to fall flat or to fail because no plan of God ever does Jesus had to die and he was going to and he did so I just wanted to clarify that before I said anything more as promised we're going to come back for a moment to John chapter 12 verse 25 I'm going to start by reading it back up in 23 though just to bring in the context again the hour has come for the son of man to be glorified very truly I tell you unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies many seeds anyone who loves their life will lose it while anyone who hates their life in this world will keep it for eternal life whoever serves me must follow me and where I am my servant also will be my father will honor the one who serves me so

Jesus is not the only one who must make an exchange a loss of his life for a gain of a harvest he now turns to his disciples to us and lets us know that we too must make an exchange a loss of a life in order to gain or else in trying to keep to lose everything these are deep words anyone who loves their life will lose it while anyone who hates their life in this world will keep it for eternal life we need to meditate and chew on these words long and hard there's a lot here what is Jesus saying let's start with the outcomes there are two outcomes some people will lose their life others will keep their lives and attain to eternal life two outcomes some lose their life some keep it and attain to eternal life life that goes on forever some people will get that good gift of

God and others will not what makes the difference according to Jesus it's how we thought and felt about our lives here and now in this world if we love and cherish our lives in this world seek to hang on to them Jesus says we will lose our lives but if we hate our lives in this world and give them up we will be saved and attained to eternal life becoming a follower of Jesus is absolutely free in one sense there's no cost there's no amount of money that we must give there's no amount of good works that we must do all that's required is a simple childlike faith that comes from a repentant heart and if out of that trusting and penitent heart we ask Jesus to be our savior our good shepherd our king he will be it's that simple it is that free but there's also a sense in which becoming a follower of [28:17] Jesus will cost us everything Jesus speaks about this on a number of occasions our very lives there's a sense in which we must die to the life that we could otherwise have in this world in order to gain the eternal life that Jesus offers in the next why is it like this because Jesus is a good shepherd he is a righteous king and he's not content to leave us as the selfish sinners that we are in this world he makes us new he brings change in us he calls us and commands us to live differently than we otherwise would in this world we might think about it like this we may seek to be the masters of our own destiny and live for ourselves for our own aims and wants whatever that may be or we can put our faith our trust in Jesus and give our lives to him which means that he becomes the master and the king of our lives and we will live for him and for his aims and wants and these two really are mutually exclusive says Jesus we must die to the one in order to gain the other an exchange is required let's think about it practically for a minute in terms of say material possessions many people spend their lives here on earth just trying to gain more and more as king

Solomon said death and destruction are never satisfied and neither are human eyes we keep seeing we keep wanting we work we save we borrow to get get get to have that next thing that will make us happy or at least to scratch the itch that we feel inside but if you want to follow Jesus with your life it means caring so much about other things that can be done with your life and your money that your attitude towards getting the stuff changes you can no longer love to do that like our world does in fact to the world around you it looks like you hate yourself because at times you choose to deny yourself you don't live to fulfill yourself like the world does because instead you have your eye on what will last what will make a difference beyond this life so you make the difficult choice to give up going after that thing that you do like and would be nice to have so that instead you can give your time your money your energy your attention towards what

Christ leads you to do instead it's a different kind of death it's a death to self it's a death to selfishness it's a death to the kind of life that we would live if our main goal was just to do what we want for ourselves anyone who loves their life will lose it while anyone who hates their life in this world will keep it for eternal life and this looks different for everyone everyone who chooses to follow Jesus must die in all kinds of different ways some have physically died for their faith at the hands of evil men some must die in the realm of their career because maybe living the kind of life that Christ calls us to leads us to make choices that sometimes may even cost us our job or our

reputation within the industry at other times we die in the realm of relationships sometimes serving Christ requires leaving those that we love to be with to instead serve and minister to those who are less lovely to be with at times following Jesus means that we must die in the realm of our dreams and aspirations because maybe the dreams and aspirations that you have are really just about you and what makes you feel good in life what makes you feel comfortable and happy and not so much about what God wants you to do with your life in fact following

Jesus means dying to ourselves in every area of life and that's why there's no middle ground here there's no third choice now it doesn't mean that we'll never enjoy anything good for ourselves in this life that's what the devil wants you to believe that it means God has filled our world and our lives with all kinds of joyful experiences and good things that yes are for our enjoyment but these things are often meant to come to us not because we live to go after them but as a byproduct of living the way God has commanded us to in this world living a life of love just like Jesus says it's better to give than to receive and that's really at the core of what Jesus is talking about here we can either love ourselves and our lives or we can love God and other people we can go after and get for ourselves or we can give to God and to other people dying to ourselves the first road leads to death and the losing of everything the losing of our very lives the losing of our souls the second road the road of Christ leads through death to eternal life and it's the one that brings ultimate joy and happiness forever so these words are worthy of much meditation and reflection do you see what kind of life Jesus is calling you to at times it does feel miserable to ourselves unfulfilling it may feel like death at times but the reward goes beyond our wildest dreams and imaginings there will someday come a great harvest if we choose to die to ourselves and follow Christ in this way we're not giving up and losing out in this world for nothing we do it because there's something much greater to gain we do it because we as servants of Christ have been given the opportunity to make a real impact in this world a lasting and eternal difference in the lives of the people that we serve and minister to we do it to bring glory to our God and to our King something that will not fully be seen until that final day when the fruit of our lives is ripe and God brings everything to its proper end and we give up our lives of course our claim to our own lives and surrender them to

[35 : 28] Christ because he has promised eternal life in the age to come what a deal so I want to encourage you this afternoon just to think deeply about these words of Jesus maybe you've heard and you've known this before but how easily we can settle back into just chasing after a comfortable life of self gratification I feel it I trust you do as well perhaps even now the Lord is convicting you of some things in your life that you do that are just mainly because it's about you and not about God and his concerns and what he wants you to do so I want to encourage you to talk to the Lord this week about these things ask him is there something I need to change Lord and how I'm following you let's finish quickly with verse 26 Jesus says whoever serves me must follow me and where I am my servant also will be my father will honor the one who serves me you cannot be a servant of

King Jesus and at the same time go your own way if you want to have Jesus for your king then you must follow him and where he goes is to his own death and so must we that is where the path of love for God and love for others leads and even though it's a hard road there is great reward at the end of it where I am my servant also will be these words probably didn't mean too much to the disciples right now while they're with Jesus but they will mean everything to them when they finally come to cross that threshold themselves and die and they will mean even more when he returns in glory to rule and to reign there is great reward at the end of this road of serving Christ of following Jesus with everything Jesus says my father that's

God the creator of our universe my father will honor the one who serves me amazing whatever you do in life that's not for yourself but for the Lord Jesus whatever you do in service of him God will honor someday he will honor you for doing it what an encouraging word father in heaven thank you for the amazing gift of your son Jesus I pray Lord that we would be able to reflect well on the past year but that as we look to this year ahead that we would consider how we might serve you how we might follow you in the decisions that we make even now I ask this in his name and for your glory amen