

Dying with Jesus: The Way to Life

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[0 : 00] Well, I want to echo James' welcome to you, and congratulations also if you finished the race this morning, the Vancouver Sunrun, early and came to church.

That would be quite a thing if you did that. Maybe some of you ran here as well, which might have been quicker, but it's good to have you here gathered. We've been looking at a series of John, on the Gospel of John, and we're on page 900, or I should say 899, 899, and we're just going to look at a few verses here, but they are verses of incredible importance, of deep meaning and relevance to our lives, as well as to the lives of the whole of people throughout history.

So it's an amazing little passage that we're looking at, and I want to tell you that the context of it is very important, because if you look just before our little passage on verse 19, the Pharisees are very worried.

They feel threatened. They say about Jesus, look, the world has gone after him. And that's the theme in this time of Jesus' life. Remember we talked a couple weeks ago about how the chief priest said the whole world is going to go after him.

They will all believe in him, and the Romans will come and take away our place. And then at the very end of our passage, just a few verses past it, in verse 32, if you look down there, Jesus says these amazing words.

[1 : 35] He says, when I am lifted up from the earth, which means when I am crucified on a cross, on a tree, I will draw all people to myself.

I will draw all people. It's an extraordinary thing to say, because his death, as we saw a couple of weeks ago, is a death in our place, so that he is our Passover lamb, so that we might live.

And what he's saying is that that death, followed by the resurrection, attracts people from all over the world. And this is a promise that we see being kept over and over again today.

This is why we have missionaries all over the world, why we have ministries that we are in partnership all over the world here at St. John's. And I want to ask you a question this morning, and that is, what draws you to Jesus?

What attracts you to him? If I were to ask all of you to give a little testimony about your relationship with Jesus, it would all be very different. There's some of you who are interested.

[2 : 48] There's something about him that you want to check out, even though you haven't trusted him yet. Some of you have been trusting and believing him since before you can actually remember anything in this life, growing up in a Christian home.

Some of you have become a Christian where you follow Jesus more recently, but all of you have a story about what has attracted you about Jesus.

These seven short verses where Jesus tells us what he is all about, the purpose for his ministry, and his coming to earth. These verses have deep implications for you and me because they actually tell us who Jesus clearly is and what he is all about.

It tells us the veil is taken away as to who this Jesus is who has attracted us to himself. And the vital scene begins in verse 20 with some Greeks who want to see Jesus.

Now remember, we're just about five days away from Jesus' death and the Passover feast that's coming up. So lots of people are coming from all over the world to Jerusalem.

[4 : 03] This was one of the most important annual feasts in the Hebrew faith. And so they are people not just from Israel. They are people who come from all over, traveling a great distance.

And these Greeks could have been from Greece or they could have been from Greek cities that were established in Jordan and Syria, what is now Jordan and Syria.

We don't know for sure where they're from, but we do know they are from that dominant culture. And the Greek culture was such that many Greeks were searchers.

They were searching. They wanted to know what the world thought of things. There was a curiosity. And likely these were men who had probably become disillusioned by Greek pagan religions, the mythology.

Often there was good insight into who we are as humans, but there was an immorality about it and certainly a lifelessness that the religion got you nowhere.

[5 : 09] And they began to be drawn to this Hebrew understanding of God. They were drawn to this pure faith that believed in one almighty God who created the world and speaks clearly to his people.

They were probably also drawn to the high moral standards of Judaism. You know, especially the family life, which was a real mark of Judaism, that high morality.

And so they came to the temple this year. And when they came there, Jesus was trending on social media of the day. That's all we heard.

That's all they heard was talk about Jesus. He had raised this man from death. He was one who came into Jerusalem riding on a donkey.

And there was a large crowd that welcomed him and said, this is the king. This is the Messiah. And so their question was, could this be him?

[6 : 18] Could this be the Messiah? So in verse 22, they went to Philip because they knew he was one of Jesus' disciples and he had a Greek name and knew the Greek language, Greek culture.

And so they said to him, we want to see Jesus. And it wasn't just they wanted to see him. It's like they wanted backstage passes. You know, they wanted to see the person who was up front, who everybody was talking about, and have a conversation with him, to know him.

And I think that there's something here for us, just as a bit of an aside, that there's a real insight here as to how people come to see Jesus or to approach him.

Often it is through people with whom we have some natural connections. You see, the Greeks felt very comfortably going to the disciples who had Greek names.

And there are probably people in your life that you are naturally connected to that don't know Jesus yet. And that's because of a common work or because of common interest that you have, might even be on the golf course, which often is a place where Jesus can come up.

[7 : 34] Often, when I was in the fire department, they asked me, what is the swear word you hate the most? I said, it's when you take the name of Jesus.

I don't care about the other stuff. It's that one. And they said, okay, we'll say everything but that one. But in those natural connections, there is a bridge for them to see Jesus.

And they might be your neighbors. They might be the parents of your child's friend. These are open doors. These are the people that they feel comfortable.

In fact, maybe the only person that they would come to to ask a question that has to do about Jesus. That's what happens here. And Philip and Andrew go to Jesus with the request.

But Jesus doesn't answer the request directly. Or he doesn't seem to. He says something very strange, it seems, in verse 23. He says, The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.

[8 : 40] Well, what does this mean? And I think that Philip and Andrew must have thought that at first, too. It's not a direct answer. What does this mean? And we should ask that question today as well.

Because throughout Jesus' ministry, Jesus has talked about the hour. It's at the background of his ministry all the time in John. And all of his ministry, when he talks about the hour, is about an hour that is to come.

It hasn't come yet. So you remember in the wedding at Cana that Jesus' mother said, We need more wine. And what does Jesus say? My hour has not yet come.

There were at least two situations where Jesus is teaching in the temple, or in Jerusalem. And the authorities want to arrest him. But they do not arrest them because his hour has not yet come.

God has not allowed it. Because in his timing, the hour of Jesus was not yet arriving. And I think that there's probably illustration in this in our Olympics that we had in 2010.

[9 : 54] Because you probably remember, thinking back that far, that we had a countdown clock downtown near the Vancouver Art Gallery that started counting down three years before the Olympics.

And so it was reminding everybody as they walked by and so forth that the big event was coming. You know, in three years, in two years, in three months, 40 days.

You know, coming down to this big event that was going to be happening. And this was, I suppose, meant to prepare us Vancouverites for the day that was coming.

For some of us, it was a preparation to get out of town at the right time. But now, Jesus says, the event in chapter 12 has come.

Everything that has been leading up in Jesus' life to this big event has come about. And in that hour, Jesus is glorified.

[10:56] That's what he says. And so you wonder, and probably the disciples are, well, does that mean that Jesus is going to be victorious? Will he be accepted finally as king and the Messiah who conquers all?

Well, Jesus keeps going in the next verse and says, no, that the glory is completely upside down. It's a completely different way.

And he uses a picture so that we can relate to it because it's so important for us. He says, verse 23, truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone.

But if it dies, it bears much fruit. Now, that is a picture that everybody at that time could relate to.

And maybe many of you right now can relate to as well because this is planting season.

I took a little detour as I was working on my sermon and I googled planting seeds. And I found out that there's a schedule, an almanac of when you're supposed to plant seeds.

[12:04] And this is the time. I've done nothing in my garden, but I found out that this is the time to be able to plant beans and carrots and broccoli and lettuce amongst many other things.

So now I'm motivated to plant seeds in my garden. But when you are planting seeds, this is a great reminder for you about what Jesus' glory is.

Because you are burying a seed. And of course, Jesus is saying, think of his death. And one day, hopefully, if you planted it right, there will be a plant that bears a lot of fruit, he says.

A lot of fruit. It's a very clear, simple message. But it actually tells you what Jesus' glory will be all about. He is telling them that the pathway to his glory is through death.

And so Jesus' message to us and to the Greeks is, I am going to bear fruit, including you Greeks and each of us, but I will not, and I cannot bear fruit in any way without dying.

[13:12] And this is Jesus revealing himself very clearly to those Greeks. This is what he is all about. That Jesus' death on a cross is a door that is opening to the Greeks and to all of the nations of the world coming to the living God.

That Jesus will die for the forgiveness of sins for every person in every nation or situation that they're from. Why is this glorious?

Well, I can think of dozens of things, but three things that I want to just bring out here that are very important for us to hear. One is that that death is so very, very powerful.

You see, what Jesus' sacrificial death does is to give real life to anyone who receives him. And there is a destruction of the power of sin and death that happens on that cross.

Anything that can separate us from God is destroyed in its power to do that. And that's revealed on that cross. Such power that's unimaginable.

[14:25] And secondly, you see an outpouring of love here to anyone that will receive Jesus. There is one reason that Jesus has this purpose.

And that is because God so loved the world. That is the only reason that Jesus goes to the cross. Because God so loves the world.

And he chooses to pour his love on people throughout the world who are dying. It is love. And then thirdly, you see glory here because there is a joy that is before Jesus.

And because of that joy that is before him as he prepares to go to the cross, he obeys the Father. There is a deep love for the Father, an obedience in going to the cross.

And it is a hard obedience too. I want you to look down at verse 27. He says, Now is my soul troubled. What shall I say? And many of you may have experienced some of this that Jesus is experiencing.

[15:34] That it is hard to obey God. It is hard to follow Jesus. Jesus understands what that is about. But there is a deep love that Jesus has for the Father that keeps him going to the cross.

And there is this joy of knowing the Father and what he has for him that keeps him going. But you see a costly love that is poured out on the world.

So you see this glory. You're actually seeing the heart of God. That God is glorious in that he gives eternal life to men and women through this costly, costly love.

Things about God that we never would have known are revealed in Jesus' death. Now the thing that we need to understand about his death as well is it's not just a terrible tragedy.

But the death itself is a triumph. So it's not a tragedy that's turned around at Easter. Even though the resurrection is the most important thing in Christianity, we need to remember that the very death itself is when Jesus shows what God's power is really about.

[16:44] That's where sins are forgiven. And we are forever and powerfully reconciled to God. And we know him. We know his heart. We know his love that's poured into our lives.

We enter his life in that death. And that's why Jesus continues to say as he goes on in verse 27, but for this very purpose I have come to this hour.

You see, when we look at the cross or when the world looks at the cross, we see and the world sees failure. If we're just looking at it in worldly ways. But but Jesus says something very different. He says, unless I die on a cross, then I am a failure. And so we praise God that the cross is the hour of his glory.

This is where Jesus succeeds in everything that he was about. Now, this is a glorious picture of God and it's something that is it is majestic.

[17:52] But what does it have to do with you and with me today and tomorrow and in the week to come? Well, Jesus gives the application for us because all of a sudden in verse 25 he turns to each of you and to me and he says that Jesus' glory and his death has everything to do with you.

I mean, he really is going to say in these next two verses that if you want to see me be prepared to become more and more like me. Be ready to follow on this road that I am going on and that your life must be cross-shaped.

Be cross-shaped like Jesus was. That's why Jesus says take up your cross. There will be a kind of dying in following Jesus and it will turn your life right upside down.

And we've heard a bit about that in 2 Corinthians. So verse 25 tells us this upside down life is hard. There is actually a sacrifice a kind of dying that comes with it but it's also absolutely glorious.

He says very strong words. Whoever loves his life loses it and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life.

[19:13] So what does Jesus mean by this? Why does he say hate your life in this world? You know, we know that Jesus loved many aspects of life. He loved gatherings with people and having meals with them.

He loved his friends like Lazarus, Mary, Martha. He loved children. He said bring the children to me. Do not prevent them from coming.

He loved the beauty of nature. He loved stories and he loved humor in those stories as well. So how can he say you must hate your life in this world?

Well the answer to the question is what does Jesus mean by life in this world? world. And I think that C.S. Lewis in Mere Christianity is really helpful for us here.

He's such a clear writer and I do recommend that you reread this if you have read it and read it for the first time, Mere Christianity. You will find it very helpful.

[20:11] And there's a little passage of what he talks about this life in the world that we are to hate which is helpful. He says this, he says the natural life in each of us is something self-centered something that wants to be petted and admired and to take advantage of other people's lives.

To exploit the whole universe. So there's his definition which is actually the biblical one. And especially it wants to be left to itself, to keep well away from anything that's better or stronger or higher than it.

Anything that might make it feel small. In other words, it's afraid of the light and air of the spiritual world just as people who have been brought up to be dirty are afraid of the baths.

And in a sense, it is quite right. It knows that if the spiritual life gets hold of it, all its self-centeredness and self-will are going to be killed.

And it is ready to fight tooth and nail to avoid that. And this is the, you know, this is the struggle that is in our life. And that's why you can't water down what Jesus says.

[21:21] He is saying, I must hate the idea of spending my life doing entirely what I want to do. And we need the Holy Spirit's help with that.

You know, we need grace as James started our service by saying. Because over and over again, the life that Jesus gives must kill the natural life.

And that's not easy. I think that's one of the reasons that in baptism, you know, that marks the beginning of the Christian life. We pray that the baptized person will not be ashamed to confess the faith of Christ crucified and bravely to fight under his banner against what?

Sin, the world, and the devil. These are all the things that influence the natural life. And then to continue Christ's faithful soldier and servant until their lives end.

Well, that's a cross-shaped life. It's not, and it's not just about hating the natural life. It is actually taking on and loving a new life that is all about serving Jesus.

[22 : 31] And so, in verse 26, it says, 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.

So the cross-shaped life is a life of serving Jesus. And that's not easy. There is a death here because our own wills and desires take second place to the will and the desires of Jesus.

So many times, serving Jesus will involve giving away our right to my own agenda or my own concerns, my comfort, my convenience.

Even the right to immediate fulfillment or happiness that we really feel we deserve. And that will happen when we commit to serve him in, for instance, our marriage or in the place where we work or in our relationships with our friends and our neighbors.

In the conversations I have with people outside the church, there will be there will be a loss of what our own wills and desires are in that.

[23 : 46] And it even happens when we commit to pray or to read our Bibles regularly or to meet with brothers and sisters in Christ in our church. There is a kind of death to our own agenda and our own wills.

And there is something hard about that. There is a death taking up the cross. So in following Jesus, we die to the priorities of self in the world.

And I know many of you have experienced that in your own life. In your commitment to serve Jesus as you are serving others, as you are living in this world, there have been losses in your life.

You have experienced that. And so the question that we ask is, well, what is the attraction here? Why would you do that? Why would you fall into the ground and die?

Well, that's how we end this passage. Because Jesus not only says that there is a dying involved, he says there is a deep glory.

[24 : 45] A deep glory that comes when you serve Jesus in this way. Look again at Jesus' words. Verse 24. The last phrase.

It bears much fruit. It bears much fruit. Those are people that come into life in Jesus. 25.

They will keep it for eternal life. They will keep their life. You will keep your life for eternal life. That is the life of God.

The life of being in relationship with Father, Son, and Holy Spirit forever. An immeasurable glory and honor. In verse 26. Where I am, there will my servant be also.

It is the glory of being with Jesus now, but also in the world to come. And that's why it ends in verse 26. The Father will honor you.

[25 : 45] This is the promise that Jesus says. In that cross-shaped life, the Father will honor you. In our culture, honoring is important.

There are Nobel Prizes, there's Olympic medals, there's Oscars, and Grammys, and everything else. But all of that put together is almost nothing compared to the Father honoring you.

This is the great joy that we have before us. And what does that honoring look like? If you just quickly turn the page to chapter 14, verse 3, it tells us, it says, if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and I will take you to myself that where I am, you may be also.

This is what God the Father does in Jesus. This is actually what the gospel is all about. It is about Jesus bringing us to our real home. And there is no greater honor than that.

This is what the Greeks and everyone else is looking for when they want to see Jesus. They are looking for their home. That's why Jesus tells the story of the prodigal son.

[27 : 02] It's the gospel of Jesus, of people being brought back into their true home. That's why our hearts are restless until we find our rest in him.

And this is what we give God thanks and praise today that he presents to us a life that is like Jesus' own life that goes to Calvary through Calvary to heaven.

And certainly there is this sacrifice in the cross-shaped life that with it has a deep glory now and in the world to come as well.

And so I think it's good to end by a little verse which is so important from Hebrews and I'll just read it to you. He says this, listen for the joy and the glory that's before Jesus and us.

He says, therefore since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses let us also lay aside every weight and every sin which clings so closely and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us.

[28 : 12] The sometimes very difficult race set before us. Looking to Jesus the founder and the perfecter of our faith who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross despising the shame and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God our true home.

of Christ James the serpent and is in the you who are going to be by so saying he was Gig pa Iowa or the female that is riding him and I can tell you to save the Lord in heaven and us one that isahahaha