

John 12:20-36 AM

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[0 : 00] Well, if you would turn back to John 12, page 899, the children's spot has stolen a third of the sermon. You'll be pleased to know. I don't have any puppets, but I'll quiz you on it.

Well, now, as we approach Easter this year, we want to have the cross of Jesus Christ before our eyes, and it is the heart and centre of our faith. It's what's going to hold us together for the next 100 years. It's what gives joy and clarity to our Christian lives, and it's what gives energy for outreach and serving and witness to others, because our faith is created, shaped, and reshaped by the crucifixion of the Son of God. The crucifixion is the centre of God's work in history and his world. It's the highest revelation of the glory of God. It's the basis of our hope and our love, and each week we're going to look at the cross of Jesus Christ from a different passage to know something more of the love of Christ which surpasses knowing. And in our passage in John chapter 12, Jesus gives us the clearest and I think most astonishing view of the cross in all the New Testament. A small claim. Verse 32, if you look down at that verse again, familiar words, and I, says Jesus, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself. And just in case we miss it, John adds an editorial note in verse 33, he said this to show by what kind of death he was going to die. Now, we get a bit sentimental about this, but crucifixion was the most hated and repulsive site in the ancient world. It was deliberately created as a way of torturing people to death and making sure nobody followed in their footsteps. But Jesus says, my crucifixion is going to be a worldwide attraction.

Through it, I'm going to draw all people to myself. He says it's a lifting up. The word is exaltation. He views his cross as an enthronement, as a victory, as the moment of glory. This is different.

It's not that the cross is humiliation and the resurrection is exaltation and glory. In John's gospel, it is his death which is the glorious victory, the magnet, the enthronement that will draw people to himself. And already, I'm sure you feel, if you take this verse out of context, it just feels like Jesus is deluded. And so, we have to put it back in context. And when we do, what we find is this, that the very verse before our passage, verse 19, is a word of despair and futility from Jesus' greatest enemies, the Pharisees. He's just ridden into Jerusalem in triumph on a donkey.

[3 : 23] Before that, he just raised Lazarus from the dead. And look at verse 19. What are they saying to each other? You see that you're gaining nothing, they say to each other. Look, the world has gone after him.

What shall we do? And immediately, they say that, verse 20, some pagan groups come to a disciple with the Greekist name and ask for an interview with Jesus. Now, since the start of his ministry, Jesus has been waiting for this moment. Until now, when he's talking about the hour, he says the hour hasn't come, it's future. But when the Greeks come and ask to meet him, it triggers in Jesus and shows Jesus that the hour has come, the time has come for him to die for the world. And so, verse 23, he makes this astonishing statement. The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. In the original, it has arrived, the hour, for the Son of Man to be glorified. All the clocks of the universe wait for this moment and are set by this moment. It's the turning point in the history of the world.

And what does it mean? I found it so helpful that Ben explained the organ piece after the anthem we just had. I've heard it a number of times, but I've never understood what the organ is doing, collecting all those notes together. And what Jesus does is he explains what the cross means for us, for himself, and for the whole world in this passage. Number one, what does the cross mean for us?

Verses 24 to 26. And this is what the children's focus was on, so I'm going to cover this very quickly. What I find most lovely about this is that Jesus is facing his own death and the pressure is overwhelming and the urgency is overwhelming, but he takes a moment first to explain what his

death means in the practical circumstances of the lives of everyone who wants to follow him. And he looks across the road and he sees someone planting seed and he says, that's it. He said, my death is going to be like that. You take a little seed of wheat, what do you do? You have to give it a funeral. Plant it in the ground. You bury it. And is that the end? What looks like the end of the seed is actually precisely the thing that will make the seed bear fruit. What were the numbers? 16,000? 2 million? I can't remember.

Jesus says, that's how it's going to be for me and that's how it's going to be for you and you're going to have to die as well. And he gives three quick pictures of dying. He says, we're going to have to hate our lives in this world, which is a Hebrew way of saying we have to say no to all our self-centered desires. Our desire to be the center and petted and admired and exploiting others.

[6 : 22] We're to be Christ-focused, not self-focused. Christ-obsessed, not self-obsessed. Where this is part of dying, displacing ourselves at the center with Jesus. And what is the fruit that comes from that dying? It's the eternal life that comes by faith in Jesus. It's the very life of Jesus and the life of eternity comes into the ordinary lives and continues in our life day by day and after we die.

To die also means following through the cross, verse 26, living a cross-shaped life, tracing the cross of Jesus onto our decisions and actions and hopes. And our fruit is that we'll be where Jesus is, at the Father's side in heaven. And to die also means serving Jesus as my Lord and my Master. My aim is to please Him and when I do, the Father will honor us. But I'm not going to spend long on this because you've got the lamb and the avocado seed idea, but that's basically what the cross means for us.

But let's turn secondly to what the cross means for Jesus. And I was in two minds about this, because in a way this is like a new sermon.

Because there's one main issue at the heart of John's Gospel. The one issue at the heart of John's Gospel is the relationship between God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit.

[7 : 55] Most particularly God the Father and the Son. And it is in His death, we learn the most about the relationship between the Father and the Son.

And I'm conscious as we go into the middle section of this passage that we tread on holy ground. He's just said, in His death, He's going to be glorified.

And now He says, if you look down at verse 27 in the text, verse 27, the beginning of the next paragraph. Now is my soul troubled. What shall I say?

Father, save me from this hour. But for this purpose, I've come to this hour. Father, glorify Your name. Then a voice came from heaven.

I have glorified it. And I will glorify it again. Just, let's go through this a little carefully. Jesus is not an unfeeling, stoic, super being.

[8 : 50] He's fully human. And everything in Him humanly recoils from the idea of crucifixion and death. His death, you see, it's not just a brutal physical torture.

It's way more. But Jesus knows on the cross He's going to take our place. He's going to take to Himself our guilt and our shame, our evil and our sin.

So what does He do? He says, I want to pray to the Father, save me from it. But then He doesn't. He prays to the Father the most remarkable prayer.

He says, Father, glorify Your name. In other words, He's not praying, Father, help me go through this and not break down.

He's not praying, Father, don't let me go or give me supernatural strength. He doesn't pray anything for Himself here. It is a prayer that the Father would do something for the Father.

[9 : 53] Isn't that interesting? Father, glorify Your name. It's exactly the same thing He taught us to pray in the Lord's Prayer.

Our Father in heaven, hallowed, make holy Your name. And here He is praying, reveal who you really are through the cross, show your character and defend your reputation.

And this exchange goes to the heart of the relationship between the Father and the Son. Their joy is the glory of the other.

They're most thrilled when the other is most exalted. And now as Jesus' life comes, it's on the line, uppermost in His desire and His heart is the glory and revelation of His Father, not Himself.

Isn't that amazing? It's no wonder that we thrive on love as human beings. And we were made in the image of God. We need each other. Without friends, without love, we shrivel and die.

[10:58] We're made by this God. We're made for this God. And eternal life in John's Gospel is God the Father taking us to where the Son of God is at His Father's side to enjoy all the fullness of the life of God together, embracing one another forever.

And so for the third time in the ministry of Jesus, God the Father speaks audibly from heaven, I have glorified it and I will glorify it again.

Yes, says the Father, throughout your ministry and your life, I have been revealing my character. Every word you've spoken, every miracle, every interaction has revealed the glory.

And now the moment is coming, the supreme revelation of my glory, that's where I'll show who I really am. And the world will finally have the answers that they ask, their deepest questions, they'll know.

I care deeply about the suffering of the world, so deeply that I have an extravagant and gracious plan that life is not meaningless. That even evil in the end will not triumph, but I will triumph over it.

[12:08] And nowhere in the history of the world does the love of God shine more brightly than in the cross of Jesus Christ and the relationship between the Father and the Son.

But even more remarkably in this passage, after God speaks, is that the crowd misses the point. We're brought back to earth with a uh.

They have no spiritual hearing for God's voice and so they're divided the crowd. Some have a rational and scientific explanation to try and explain it away. That's perfectly understandable, they say.

It was just thunder, a natural phenomenon. Others go the supernatural route, they say, no, no, no, it wasn't thunder, it was, we heard the voice of an angel. We don't know what the angel said, but it was like a spiritual and spooky experience and that's the important thing.

And neither group humble themselves before God and penetrate to the meaning of what God has said. And it just highlights that Jesus is again completely alone facing his death.

[13:11] And it's lovely, he just sweeps away all the superficial surface explanations of life. In verse 30 he says, that the voice, it came for your sake, not for mine.

Yeah, it's very encouraging to me, but if you had ears to hear, if you had a seed of spiritual insight, you would understand what my death really means.

But rather than spreading blame around, what he does now is he patiently explains the words of God the Father, I will glorify my name, and what his death now means for the world.

So I move to the third point, what the cross means for the world. And this is verses 31 to 33. As Jesus has prayed, glorify your name, the Father has said, I have glorified, I will glorify, triple glory. And what is the triple glory of the cross, and what does it mean for the world? Here it comes, verse 31 and 32. One, now is the judgment of this world.

[14:21] Two, now will the ruler of the world be cast out. Three, and I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself. And to human reason, apart from God, we'd have to say that's just, again, it's just delusion.

I mean, if you were there at the cross, you would have to say, now is the judgment of Jesus. Now has Jesus been cast out. And as he's raised up on this wretched instrument of torture, he's going to, everyone's going to run away from him.

But what Jesus says completely overturns that, and it's breathtaking. It's not local, it's not national, it's global, it concerns the whole world and all people, he says. What does he mean by these three things, this triple glory?

When he says, now is the judgment of the world, he means two things at the very least. You find this in John's gospel. Jesus often speaks at two levels. Firstly, I think the judgment of the world means this.

That when he's lifted up on the cross, the light of God will shine more brightly than any other time in history. And the shining of the light brings a verdict and the judgment of God, because we cannot face the truth of our sin and the terrible reality that Jesus has to die for it.

[15:46] See, the judgment is not just at the end of time. In the cross of Jesus, God brings forward into history and judgment is executed at the cross.

And the cross shows this, that we love darkness rather than the light because our deeds are evil. That's the verdict. In other words, we would rather extinguish his light than allow the light to expose us.

We would rather slaughter our creator than be separated from our sins and let him take them away. We would rather coddle our anxieties than allow Christ to bear them for us.

And here is the verdict of God and our superficial view. Our superficial view, there are pretty good people and don't really need, all we need is a little improvement. And the cross is a great judgment on that.

The judgment of the world. But the judgment, now is the judgment of the world, means a second thing as well. Because it's also the place where Jesus takes the judgment of the world into himself.

[16 : 58] He takes all the sin and darkness, our greed and our pride and our arrogance and our anxiety, and he becomes sin for us. And in him, our sin is condemned and judged and dealt with, so that we might be clean, righteous, ready to be with him where he is.

Now is the judgment of the world, Jesus says. And he means at least those two things. Secondly, he says, now is the ruler of the world cast out.

Verse 31. It looks like Satan and the powers of darkness of triumph. You know, there's Jesus dying. It looks like Satan's beaten the son of God. But Jesus is saying, in my death, the devil is dethroned, the ruler of this world.

And all the weapons of Satan, his lies and his accusations and his temptations to sin, Jesus draws into himself and drains them to the very last, so they can have no power over anyone who belongs to Jesus.

It's like he takes the neck of the serpent, Satan, and takes the poisonous fangs and plunges them into his own heart, utterly draining the venom of evil into himself.

[18 : 18] It's a pretty alarming picture. I made it up myself. The cross is the Archimedean point of our world.

So, do you remember who Archimedes is class? He was a clever guy. He lived 200 years before Jesus. And he wrote about levers, rigid bars like a crowbar to move things.

And the key to the power of the lever is the fulcrum, where the hinge point is. And he said, if I had the right point outside this world as a place to stand, I could move this world.

But you see, no one who's captive, no one who's in Satan's house, has access to that Archimedean point outside our world. But the cross of Christ is the only place that gives us access to move the cosmos, because he came from heaven, and Christ alone has the power to cast out Satan.

It's our Archimedean point. So now we have a new ruler. Satan has no claim on me. Yes, of course, he roams the world seeking to devour believers.

[19 : 32] He still accuses, he still tells us lots of lies, which we're very prone to believe. He still tempts us away from Christ. But his power is broken.

And when he tempts, and when he comes at you, you say to him, my life is hidden with Christ in God. You say to him, all my sin on him was laid.

You can accuse me of nothing. You say, he has grace to cover all my sin, and he's promised to hold me forever. He is my only hope in life and death.

Go away. Or, if you're Martin Luther, you might swear in German at Satan. You see, the cross is the foundation for our assurance, because Satan has been dethroned.

It's the beginning of the global mission, of drawing people out of Satan's dominion, to the loving rule of Christ. But thirdly and finally, for just a moment, the third thing it means for the world is verse 32, and I, when I'm lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.

[20 : 40] As Jesus is hoisted up on the wood of the cross, Jesus tells us, it is my exaltation, enthronement. And how does he exercise his rule?

Answer, by drawing people out of Satan's darkness, to himself, all people without distinction.

Because there's no way an unbeliever can come to Jesus, unless Jesus draws him.

It's not in my power to draw you to Jesus, not in your power to draw people. The power rests with Jesus alone. And that means that Jesus is the supreme worker in the church.

There's not a single one of us here who are not being drawn by Jesus. He came from glory full of grace and truth, to share his glory with us, nowhere is that more clear than in the cross of Jesus.

And if we come to him and follow him and answer his drawing, he'll bring us to himself and finally bring us to glory. Amen.

[21 : 43] Amen. Amen.