

Dying with Jesus: The Way to Life

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- [0 : 0 0] It's the Jewish Passover feast. Some 200,000 pilgrims are flocking into the tiny city of Jerusalem, hustle and bustle all throughout the city streets, and there is the potent smell of sacrifices wafting through the air.
- Jesus' popularity is rising. It's grabbing the attention of the Jewish leaders in this city, and it's causing rising hostility and fear on their part.
- And in the midst of all this commotion, in verse 20, we're told that some Greeks are looking for Jesus. Verse 20. 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. Now the fact that it's Greeks who are now coming to Jesus is very important for our passage.
- There's lots of reasons why, but I'm going to point out one, and it's simply that this. Jesus would not have been ignorant of the rich tradition and culture of the Greeks.
- [1 : 0 9] They were known for their tradition of philosophy. They're known as lovers of wisdom, as those who prized reason and logic and order above all things, in a sense.
- And that's important, because when we get to Jesus' answer in verses 23 to 28, we see anything but reason and logic. We see what seems like pure paradox.
- It would have utterly baffled the Greeks, and if you're anything like me, it baffles you when you read those verses. They seem strange and odd and foreign. Yet it's when we press into the paradoxes of what Jesus is talking about that we come most deeply to the truth of the gospel and to the truth of the Christian life.
- Isn't that how it really works, friends? Truth is found in the tensions and the paradoxes. So we're going to look at two paradoxes, the paradox of the cross and the paradox of the Christian.
- First, the cross. Jesus puts two words together that almost never go together. The hour and glory. That's the first paradox.
- [2 : 2 1] It's the hour. This is a major word in the gospel of John. The whole gospel, the whole story of the gospel, has been moving relentlessly toward this hour.
- If you remember back to chapter 2, at the wedding in Cana, they run out of wine at the wedding, and Jesus' mother goes, I know who can fix this situation. So she nudges Jesus.
- Says, Jesus, do something about this. And Jesus says, my hour has not yet come. And over and over again in the following chapters, he says, my hour has not yet come.
- Or he says, my hour is coming. But this is the very first time in verse 23, when he finally says, my hour has come. The moment is here.
- This is the purpose for my coming and my existence. And as we go on in the gospel, we discover that the hour is the moment of Jesus' death on the cross.

- [3 : 21] Susie and I, this weekend, we have been nagged by lots of friends to watch this new movie on the gospel of John. As we were looking, as we were watching it, I was struck again with the horror of crucifixion.
- Jesus stripped naked as he hangs on the cross, exposed for all the world to see. And people are casting lots for his clothes.
- Jesus, drops of blood pouring off his face as he wears a crown of thorns, and his mother and family weeping at his feet.
- It's utterly humiliating. It's utterly shameful. It's utterly excruciating. And this is the hour that has come.
- And that's why in verse 27, Jesus is suddenly overcome with emotion. Now my soul is troubled. And what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour.
- [4 : 37] But for this purpose, I've come for this hour. The Savior of the world is not stoic in the face of death. He experiences the deep distress that comes as he looks it in the eye.
- And the amazing paradox comes when we see that Jesus takes this word, hour, which means his death, and he puts it together with the word glory. It's used twice in Jesus' answer.
- If you look at verse 23, the hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. And then at the end, he prays in verse 28, Father, glorify your name.
- And then for the very first time in the Gospel of John, God speaks from heaven to Jesus, and he says, uses the word glory two more times. He says, a voice came from heaven.
- I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again. In the Bible, the word glory can mean weightiness. It can mean honor.
- [5 : 46] I think the dominant note here is a sense of splendor. Glory is the visible splendor of God's character on display.
- Glory is the resplendent beauty of who God is in his own nature. And Jesus puts the word our shameful death together with glory, resplendent beauty.
- This is the paradox of the cross. God's honor in total humiliation, his splendor in total degradation, and his beauty in total holiness. And we have to ask ourselves, why is this the moment of glory?
- Because it displays most beautifully God's character of love. The purpose of the paradox, friends, is simply to bring us face to face with the astonishing fact that God loves us.
- And he's willing to do this for us, that that is his glory, this is who he is, and he has come for this moment. One theologian, British guy, who wrote a book called The Gospel of Glory, said the paradox of the cross exists to make us reckon with the deep, deep love of God.
- [7 : 12] And friends, before we move on to any practical application, and before we go anywhere else, we have to pause, and we have to sit here. because too often we skip over the love of God as if we understand it.
- We lose sight of its costliness. We lose sight of its extravagance. We start to assume that we deserve it, or we start to assume that it's not for us.
- But you can't get away from the love of God here, because it goes all the way down to the depths of human shame and guilt and ugliness and pain. And that is the place where God shows us his glory most deeply.
- It is astonishing fact to sit and stare into the face of a crucified Savior and see love. The deeper you go into the heart of God, the more amazed you are by the simple truths, I find.

One of the great theologians of the 20th century, Karl Barth, when asked towards the end of his life, many of you probably know the story. What's the one thing you've learned in all your years of study?

[8 : 26] And in your six million words of writing about who God is, he said, Jesus loves me, this I know. For the Bible tells me so.

That's the paradox of the cross. And it's no mistake that in talking about the paradox of the cross, right in the center of it, Jesus inserts two verses about the paradox of the Christian life.

Verses 25 and 26, read them with me. Whoever loves his life loses it. And whoever hates his life in this world 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.

Now here's the paradox, it's twofold. Jesus takes the word hate and life and puts them together. That's verse 25. And Jesus takes the word service and honor and puts them together.

[9 : 36] That's verse 26. And our world just doesn't do that. But Jesus does. This is the paradox of the Christian life. Hating your life is somehow the way to saving it.

And serving is somehow the way to honor. Now if you're anything like me, when you first read these words, you have red flags and alarm bells going off all over the place. You go, whoa Jesus, this sounds very negative and world denying here.

Isn't life a gift from you? What are you talking about? I think Jesus is doing two things. He's holding before us both the real cost of discipleship and the rich reward of discipleship at the same time.

The real cost and the rich reward. And the real cost as we see in verse 24 is that there's a sense in which to be Jesus' disciple you have to hate your life in this world. Now, what's he saying?

There's lots of things he's saying, but I think the key comes in understanding the phrase in this world. In the Gospel of John, this word world is full of meaning.

[10 : 46] It means quite literally in John, humanity and rebellion against God. The world is human society organized without reference to God.

So what Jesus is asking us to hate, I think, are the ways in the areas in which our, that our life are not lived in reference to him.

Jesus says, you gotta hate your life in this world. In Matthew, Jesus says something somewhat similar, but he states it positively. He says, whoever loves father and mother more than me is not worthy of me.

And whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. I think a modern translation would be something like, whoever loves house or car more than me is not worthy of me.

Whoever loves work or school more than me is not worthy of me. It's Jesus' way of saying, what do you really love? You must hate your life in this world, Jesus says.

[11 : 54] And then when you look at verse 26, he says, you must serve. You must serve. A servant lives life for the master.

Every aspect of their life. Choices are made in devotion to the master, priorities determined by the master, identity formed in relation to the master.

A servant is one who rejects and hates life that is lived without reference to God and then decides they're going to live life completely with reference to Jesus. They're going to serve him.

And the amazing thing is that in verse 26, Jesus says, if anyone serves me, he must follow me. And where I am, there will my servant be also.

Those are costly words in light of the fact that Jesus is going to the cross. They're very costly words. John's disciple had a disciple named Polycarp who was a famous bishop.

[13 : 04] If you're Anglican, you know what that means. If you're not, that just means head leader of a church. And he was bishop of Smyrna. And he was 86 years old when he was dragged by the Roman courts before the magistrate.

And he was asked this. He said, reproach Christ and I will set you free. Don't and you will die. And Polycarp replied, 86 years I have served him.

And he has done me no wrong. How can I blaspheme my king and my savior? That day, Polycarp was burned at the stake. First confession of Christ.

Polycarp quite literally lived these words out in following Jesus by serving him. And he went to the place of death. Now for us it may not be physical death.

That's one extreme in a sense. But you better believe that for 86 years Polycarp lived a whole bunch of small sort of deaths that led to the point for him to be able to stand up and say, I am a servant of Christ when people are asking him to deny it for his life.

[14 : 19] There is a real cost to following Jesus and this is very countercultural. I mean, I think one of the most deeply seated gut instincts that we have as human beings and as Christians is how can I be a Christian with as little cost or change as possible?

How can I live a human life with as little cost and change as possible? And here Jesus is saying there's real cost to discipleship.

And friends, you don't need me to tell you that we don't live in a society where it's not going to get easier or more comfortable to be a Christian. And so we need to once again hear the real cost of discipleship.

But that's not it. Thank the Lord for that. Jesus doesn't just say pull up your boot straps, buck up, and get going. He holds before us a rich reward that motivates us and spurs us on and energizes us the whole entire way.

Because as Christians, the reward always outweighs the cost. Notice verse 25, the reward at the end. Whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life.

[15 : 48] And then verse 26, the Father will honor him. It's that future that motivates us. It's that future that keeps us going.

I could talk about eternal life for a long time, but it's going to come up in the next couple chapters, so I'm going to skip over it and go straight to verse 26. The Father will honor him.

we all want to be honored. We all seek affirmation and approval from someone and to a large extent this determines how we live our lives.

Perfect example, my daughter Annabelle, she's seven months old. She's very plump and fairly happy.

She has discovered something called the Jolly Jumper. I don't know if you guys know that, but it's basically something that hangs by our doorway and our kitchen by the frame, and it has a big spring and like a full body harness, and she can jump up and down in the Jolly Jumper, and it makes her feel really good about herself because she can't even crawl yet, and all of a sudden she's jumping.

[16 : 58] It's a beautiful thing, but one of the amazing things is if I'm sitting at the table working on my computer not looking directly at her, I hear the jumping stop, and I look over and she's just like staring at me, and the second I go, good job girl, you're doing a really good job, she goes, and she just goes crazy again, and then I'll go back to my computer, and two minutes later I'll hear it, stop, and I look at her and I affirm her and go, good job girl, you did a really good job, and she starts just jumping again, and it's a really simple thing, but it's this beautiful moment where she feeds off the honor and the affirmation I give her, and she just basks in it, she'll jump higher, she'll jump further, she'll jump as long as possible, if she can just receive that affirmation, it's a deeply relational thing, as she's jumping in her jolly jumper, friends, we all want to be honored, and it can look a whole lot of different ways, it can look like the teenager working really hard in sports to get his dad's attention, it can look like the student spending lots of hours in the library to get the affirmation of a grade, or a professor, or peers, it can look like a pastor wanting to speak really well in front of his congregation so that he gets affirmation, it can be a person staying in a relationship they should not be in, because they can't bear to think of not having the other's affirmation.

See, what so often motivates the sin in our lives is seeking affirmation in all the wrong places. And this is where I'm going to end, brothers and sisters, the Father says, you serve Jesus, and I, the Father, will honor you.

And what a day it will be when we stand before the throne of God Almighty above. God from whom no secret is hid, washed in the blood of the Lamb.

And we hear the Father say, well done, good and faithful servant, enter into the joy of my kingdom. And the Father wipes every tear from our eye, every tear of guilt and shame, and every tear of sorrow and pain.

and the Father exalts us in his glorious presence and lavishes us in his affirmation and his love, his love and his glory, which was shown in the painful death of Jesus Christ.

[19 : 42] Brothers and sisters, that's where we're heading. That's our rich reward. And so now we count the real cost. In the name of the Father and the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Amen.