

John 12:20-36

Father glorify your name

Tim Anderson 4/2/2018

The gospels are our records of the life of Jesus.
They are a bit like biographies.
But with most biographies,
You would focus more on the life of a person than on their death.
With the gospels,
The focus is clearly on the death of Jesus.
Here we are today in chapter 12 of John's gospel.
John's gospel has 21 chapters so we are just over half way through.
And already we are in the last week of Jesus' life.
The passage that was read for us
comes straight after the triumphal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem.
Jesus has ridden into Jerusalem on a donkey.
The crowds have sung praises and laid palm branches on the ground.
And the Pharisees are looking for a way to deal with the Jesus problem.
The news of Jesus' raising Lazarus from the dead was spreading.
The crowds were brimming over with excitement about it.
And so the Pharisees are looking for a way to liquidate the problem.
In the verse just prior to our reading,
they said, "See, this is getting us nowhere.
Look how the whole world has gone after him."
The message is 'Our current strategy is failing.
We need to oppose Jesus in a completely new way.'
It's a dark shadow
that hangs over the joy and energy of the triumphal entry.
The storm clouds are brewing.

And now in total contrast there are some Greeks who approach Philip,
One of the twelve with a request to see Jesus.
These Greeks have heard about Jesus,
And they want to connect with him in the flesh.
They're trying to arrange a meeting.
Now we never find out whether they got to meet Jesus.

Because when Andrew and Philip approach Jesus to tell him, Jesus responds like it's a divine signal.

“The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.”

And that sparks a couple of questions.

Why does a couple of Greeks wanting to see him make Jesus think that the hour has come for him to be glorified?

And what does he mean by being glorified anyway?

Well he's talking about his death.

Jesus is glorified in his death.

“I tell you the truth,” he says,

“unless a kernel of wheat falls in the ground and dies,

It remains only a single seed.

But if it dies, it produces many seeds.”

Jesus is picturing himself

as the seed that needs to die to produce other seeds.

Jesus in his death

produces a whole harvest of people who are given life.

And that brings him glory.

Jesus is now glorified as the one who brought salvation to the world.

There's a real paradox here.

In going to the cross,

Jesus was doing the very opposite of seeking glory in human terms.

There is not much less glorious than being crucified.

Jesus had the power to go in another direction.

But he chose the path of humble submission to the will of his Father.

And in doing that was glorified.

Now why did the arrival of a couple of Greeks wanting to see him act like a signal to Jesus telling him that the hour had come?

Well it was only through his death on the cross

that the doors to God's kingdom were thrown open to non Jews.

These Greeks were approaching Jesus

with evident interest in becoming disciples.

But it was not until Jesus died and rose again,

That the gospel message would be preached to the ends of the earth.

It was not until then

that people from all nations would flood into God's kingdom.
So these Greeks wanting to see Jesus were a sign
that non Jews were responding positively to ministry of Jesus.
Non Jews were knocking on the door of God's kingdom.
And so Jesus needed to take the action required to let them in.
That action was his death for the sins of the world.

Jesus is glorified in refusing to seek glory in his life on earth.
What is true for Jesus is true for his followers too.

In verse 25, Jesus continues,

“The person who loves their own life will lose it,
While the person who hates their life in this world
will keep it for eternal life.”

Now we don't want to get too hung up about the words love and hate.

Amongst Jewish people

that was a normal way to draw a very strong contrast.

There's nothing wrong with loving aspects of your own life.

I love my wife, my children, seeing the beauty of God's creation
and watching Australia destroy England in the cricket.

But the big question is what is of overwhelming importance to me?

Could I leave behind all the things I love about this life willingly,

If that's what it took to be obedient to God's will?

That's what Jesus did as he went to the cross.

No doubt Jesus loved his mother and his disciples.

But he was willing to walk away from those human loves

in order to be obedient to God's call on him to go to the cross.

God's not going to ask you to die for the sins of the world.

That was a job just for Jesus.

But God will ask you to follow Jesus.

Verse 26 says,

“Whoever serves me must follow me;

And where I am my servant will be.

My Father will honour the one who serves me.”

There will be some aspect of following Jesus

that will mean that by comparison you will hate the things of this world.

God and his glory will be so important to you
that everything else will be insignificant by comparison.
And when we live like that,
The promise of Jesus is
“My father will honour the one who serves me.”
Just as Jesus was glorified in his death,
So are we honoured in our service.

Jesus has spelled out how things are for him
as he goes the way of the cross.
But that doesn't make him immune to the tension.
Verse 27.

“Now my heart is troubled,
and what shall I say?
‘Father, save me from this hour’?
No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour.
Father glorify your name!”
It's like in the Garden of Gethsemane just a few days later.
Jesus is troubled by the horror of the death he is going towards.
And yet he knows
that his entire mission on this earth was about the cross.
It is through the cross that God the Father will be glorified.
Because it is through the cross
that a people will be gathered around his throne
to praise him for eternity.
And Jesus lives to glorify his Father –
Even when he feels the pain of his approaching death.

And then there's a most surprising thing happens.
Then a voice came from heaven,
“I have glorified it and will glorify it again.”
There are only three times in the gospels that God speaks audibly.
Once at Jesus' baptism.
“This is my Son whom I love;
With him I am well pleased.”
Once at the transfiguration.

“This is my Son whom I love;

Listen to him.”

And the third time here.

“I have glorified it and will glorify it again.”

It would be fair to say

that God only speaks audibly like this on very special occasions.

Why is this such a special occasion?

Because this is the moment

at which Jesus decisively turns his face towards the cross.

And God at this moment

declares his approval of what Jesus has done and what he is about to do.

The Father has glorified his name.

That is to say that his name has been glorified

in everything Jesus has said and done up until now.

And he will glorify it again.

That is to say in Jesus’ death on the cross

And the flourishing of the Christian church that grew from that,

his name will be glorified again.

The crowd that were there heard it.

But it wasn’t necessarily clear to them what was said.

Jesus must have told his disciples afterwards.

But then Jesus says something quite unexpected.

“This voice was for your benefit not mine.”

Again we shouldn’t take Jesus’ words of strong contrast to be absolute.

It’s not that there was no benefit to Jesus in hearing the Father speak.

Jesus heart was troubled

and hearing the Father’s words would have been a comfort to him.

His point is that the benefit to the crowd

is far greater than the benefit to Jesus.

Now how can it be when they couldn’t make out the words

that the voice was a great benefit to them?

This voice helps them to make sense of the cross.

When Jesus has died,

They are going to be looking back wondering,
“Is this defeat or victory?”
We know Jesus spoke about his death before he died.
He said that stuff
about a kernel of wheat falling to the ground and dying.
But was this really what God wanted?
When they saw Jesus’ lifeless body nailed to cross,
It was going to be pretty hard for them to understand
that they were looking at the results of God’s plan to save the world.
And the voice from heaven is a reassurance for them
That Yes, this was God’s plan.
Yes, this was how God was glorifying his name.
The cross is how God achieves his plans for the world.

What does God achieve in the cross?

Jesus tells us three things in verses 31-32.

1. Now is the time for judgement on this world;
2. Now the prince of this world will be driven out.
3. Jesus will draw all people to himself.

In the cross, the world is judged.
Judgement day won’t come until Jesus returns.
None of us know when that will be.
But whenever it is,
Your judgement will focus around
how you have responded to the cross of Jesus.
You won’t be judged on whether you’ve lived a good life.
If we were judged on that basis,
Then none of us could enter the kingdom of God.
No one’s life is good enough.
You will be judged
on whether your sins have been paid for by the cross of Jesus.
And no matter how many of your sins there are.
No matter how black they may be.
The blood of Jesus can make you pure.

Three weeks ago we baptised Kaitlyn.
She went under the water and came up again.
It symbolised dying with Jesus and being raised with him.
Her faith is in Jesus.
And in her baptism she is united with his death.
The judgement that is due for her sin
was taken by Jesus on the cross.
Jesus said now is the time for judgement on this world.
Because Jesus went to the cross,
Kaitlyn is judged not guilty.
"Now is the time for judgement on this world."
Only by the cross can we be judged not guilty.

The second thing that God achieved on the cross
was driving out the prince of this world.
It's talking about the devil.
Now when we look around,
It seems like the devil is still alive and active.
Whether you look at the situation in Syria,
Or the revelations in the Royal Commission into child sexual abuse,
Or the way people treat one another on facebook or anywhere else,
The devil seems hard at work.
But Jesus says that in the cross he was driven out.
If you imagine the devil as a weed
The cross is like spraying the devil with roundup.
The fate of the weed is sealed.
You just have to wait a day or two for it to die.
In the case of the devil we have to wait until the return of Jesus
before he will be finally taken out of the picture.
But in the cross his defeat was sealed.
He's operating on borrowed time.

The third thing that God achieved in the cross
is drawing all people to Jesus.
Now we need to be very careful with the word all.
'All' does not always mean every one without exception.

If I say that I love all the people of Hastings,
I might be saying that the people of Hastings
are a lovely bunch of people to live amongst
and I appreciate being part of this community.
But I don't know every single member of this community
without exception.
So it is, with drawing all people to Jesus through the cross.
It means all categories of people.
Those Greeks who approached Jesus and began this dialogue
were not previously able to be part of the Kingdom of God.
But because of the cross
people of every language and tribe and nation
can be part of the people of God.
Young and old, men and women, rich and poor,
educated and uneducated, black and white,
the cultured and the Collingwood supporters
all will be gathered around the throne.
Notice that it says that all people will be drawn to Jesus.
People are drawn to Jesus.
Getting crucified wouldn't be viewed as a clever marketing trick.
In the wisdom of the world it drives people away.
It doesn't draw them in.
But when Jesus was lifted up on the cross,
God used that event
to draw unimaginably many people to become his followers.
You may know people who've been drawn to Jesus.
They might have looked like the most unlikely converts.
You might have been one of them.
You might be one of them right now.
Someone who without knowing quite why feels attracted to Jesus.
That's the power of the cross.

Well the crowd are a bit bemused by Jesus' words.
"We have heard from the law
that the Messiah will remain forever.
So how can you say that the Son of Man must be lifted up?"

Who is this Son of Man?"

Notice that the crowd doesn't misunderstand what it means to be lifted up.

They know that if Jesus says that he will be lifted up, that means that he won't be around forever.

They know he is talking about his death.

Their confusion comes from their belief that the Messiah must live forever.

Where did they get such a belief?

Hear these words from the prophet Isaiah.

"Of the greatness of his government and peace there will be no end.

He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom,

establishing it and upholding it

with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever."

You see.

The Messiah is forever.

Or hear these words from the prophet Ezekiel.

"They and their children and their children's children will live there forever,

and David my servant will be their prince forever."

Well that's 400 years after David's death.

It's talking about the Messiah.

And he will rule Israel forever.

So the question on the crowd's mind is,

"The Messiah will rule over us forever -

so who is this Son of Man figure you are talking about Jesus?

This figure who is going to die.

Who is this Son of Man if he's not the Messiah?"

Well we know the answer to the question.

The Son of Man is the Messiah.

He is going to die (as the Son of Man),

but then he will rise and reign forever (as the Messiah).

But Jesus doesn't spell all that out to the crowd.

Instead he tells them that he will only be with them a little while longer, so they had better take the opportunity to become his followers while they can.

And then Jesus finished speaking.

And what does it say next?

"When he had finished speaking, he hid himself from them."

On a number of occasions,

Jesus seems to disappear at will from a hostile crowd.

But on this occasion,

he's acting out for them what he just said.

I'm only going to be around for a little while.

Take your opportunity to listen.

Then poof!

He's not there anymore.

Well that's true for people today as much as it was true for that crowd.

They might have a Christian friend or neighbour,

and it feels like they have forever to gradually think about who Jesus is, and what that means for them.

Then suddenly circumstances change.

Someone moves jobs or moves house.

Someone gets sick or dies.

And suddenly, poof, the opportunity is not there anymore.

Friends there is an urgency to the gospel message.

It is possible for Australians to be too laid back.

Just saying.

Let's grasp hold of the power of the cross.

The cross is how Jesus is glorified.

The cross is how the life of one man became a harvest of lives.

The cross is how those who follow Jesus gain eternal life.

The cross is how God the Father glorifies his name.

The cross is how the world is judged.

The cross is how the devil is driven out.

The cross is how all people are drawn to Jesus.
If you are like the Greeks who wanted to see Jesus,
You can only see Jesus from the foot of the cross.
Let's stand at the foot of the cross and marvel.