

Jesus Glorifies the Father

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This is the day that the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it! Good morning, Church. I want to read a passage of Scripture that comes from the Gospel according to John, chapter 12, beginning with verse 20.

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

Jesus replied, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. I tell you the truth, 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. The man who loves his life will lose it, while the man who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. Whoever serves me must follow me; where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honor the one who serves me.

"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!"

Then a voice came from heaven, "I have glorified it, and will glorify it again."
May God bless the reading of the Word.

A long, long time ago in a land far, far away, my roommate in seminary became my best friend. When we got to seminary, I was a pastor in the Southern Baptist Church. He was a part of the Nazarene Church at that time. God was calling him into the chaplaincy in the United States Navy. (I almost went that route, and I decided that I didn't like being that obedient!) Anyway, shortly after we got to seminary, he revealed that he had never been baptized, and he wanted to be baptized and wanted to become a member of my church. So I baptized him, and he became a Southern Baptist. Shortly thereafter, he found out that there's a glut of Southern Baptist chaplains in the United States Navy, and it would be better for him if he was part of another denomination. And so, he started looking around. He became a part of the Disciples for a while, and then he became a part of the Congregational Church for a while, and then he became a part of something else for a little bit. And finally, one of our one of our classmates said, "Ron, what are you?" And his response was, "I am a seeker of the truth." I like that. That should describe all of us. My personal belief is: If God is worried about what flavor we are, we're all in trouble! Seeker of the truth: "You shall know the truth, and the truth shall set you free." Following the truth makes God happy.

In our passage today, there are Greeks at the temple during the Passover. This should not surprise us. If you know anything about Greek history, they loved knowledge. They loved novelty. They would travel great distances to learn novel truths and see novel things. The temple, the Jewish temple that Herod the Great built, was one of the wonders of the ancient world. During the Jewish Passover, the little, sleepy town of Jerusalem went from 200,000 up to as many as 2 million people. During that period of time, between 100,000 and 200,000 lambs were sacrificed and eaten. It was a spectacle. Now, it could be that these Greeks were proselytes--Gentile people who had converted to Judaism, but probably not. They probably were there just to witness the spectacle that was the Passover. Now, this occurs right after Jesus cleared the temple.

This occurred right after Jesus had run the moneychangers and those selling sacrifices out of the Court of the Gentiles by saying, "My Father's house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations, but you have made it a den of thieves." I wonder if these Greeks had witnessed that.

They approached Philip, which is just logical, because Philip is a Greek name. There are some who hypothesize that Philip was a Gentile who had converted to Judaism. They came to Philip, and this is their question: They said, "We want to see Jesus." And that's an accurate translation, but a better word would be: "We want to discover Jesus," or, "We want to interview Jesus." It was more than just gaze upon Jesus. They wanted intimate knowledge of who this guy was. Philip went to Andrew, and Andrew and Philip went to Jesus, because they knew Jesus had come to answer the ultimate questions about God and about humanity. About God: "Who are You?" Jesus came to show us everything God was, everything God is, everything God has always been, in a way that was unmistakable, a way that we could understand. And he came to show us what humanity was created to be, what we at our best are capable of.

And so, they brought these Greeks to Jesus. He began with a statement: "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified." I want to confess that for years, and I don't mean a few years, I mean for years, I just kind of scanned that and went on to the good stuff that comes afterwards. But I have since discovered that it is understanding that statement that adds meaning and depth to the rest of what Jesus said. He said, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified." "Son of Man" is the title Jesus uses most often for himself. That was his favorite title for himself, "Son of Man." We encounter that title only once in the Old Testament. It's found in the book of Daniel, chapter 7, verses 13 and 14. The prophet Daniel had had a vision, and in his vision he said, "I saw one like the Son of Man, coming with the clouds, with great glory." The Son of Man was the undefeatable world-conqueror sent by God. And this is the title Jesus uses for himself. Now, in our Bible, that's the only time we encounter it. But in Jewish Scriptures, books that we call the Apocrypha, books that were written during the inter-testamental period between the Old Covenant and the New Covenant, there are a number of those books that talk extensively about the Son of Man. And during Jesus' time, the Jewish people had a very definitive idea of who the Son of Man was and what he was going to do. He was none other than the promised Messiah, the Messiah that would come and restore Israel to what they believed was their rightful place among the nations. They would be restored to a place where they would be the chief nation and all the nations of the world would come and bow down to them. And that is what the Jewish people would hear when Jesus used that name for himself.

But if you know the Gospels, Jesus did not concern himself with the Romans. If you know the Gospels, Jesus did not concern himself with worldly power, or conquering anything except sin and death. Jesus indeed was a conqueror, but not of the Romans, but of our greatest enemies: sin and death. He would be glorified, not in battle, but on a Roman cross. That was the glory he spoke of. When he said, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified, he meant his own death. That is how he was glorified, and that is how he glorified God. When Jesus would first use that title for himself, his hearers would be exhilarated and excited. But then he began to describe what that meant: dying. Then they were bewildered and lost. They would not understand that until after the resurrection.

Jesus goes on to say his followers, his servants, would follow him. In verse 26, he says, "Whoever serves me must follow me." That means you and I. So, it's pretty important for us to understand what Jesus is saying here. What is he saying to us? Is he saying to us that we, too, must be martyred? Kind of. I hope not literally. But for some, absolutely. But what does he mean for all of us? It means death to self. It means death to "I want," and I'll come back to that. And here's a place where I sometimes get in trouble, so bear with me. I believe that it is actually relatively easy to be a martyr. You only do it once! I mean, there's a moment of terror. There's a moment of terror, but then you win the lottery: You go home to be with Jesus. I believe it is much more difficult to get up every day, day in and day out, week in and week out, month in and month out, year in and year out, and die to self: to serve God faithfully day after day after day after day for an entire lifetime. What Jesus meant when he said his followers, his servants, would follow him, meant that we would be obedient, not once, but consistently throughout a lifetime, dying to "I want." It is only when we bury our own personal aims and desires that we become truly useful to God.

A number of years ago now, God showed me that the latter part of my ministry, a lot of it, was going to be mentoring other ministers. And that has been the case. And one particular young man that I mentored, and am continuing to mentor, knew that God was calling him into ministry. We all knew that. And I remember having many a conversation with him where he said, "This is what I want to do. This is what I want to do, and this is what I don't want to do." Now, when you're working with God, that don't work. Here's the Southern phrase for you: "That dog just don't hunt." It doesn't work. You don't tell God what you're going to do and what you're not going to do. You just show up for duty, and you say, "God, what are You doing today that I can help with?" I finally got through to him. I said, "What you need to do is just say, 'God, I know You have called me. And what You want me to do, open the door for me.'" Three months later, he had a full-time job as a minister in the church. Today he is the senior pastor of a rather large United Methodist church, because he put to death "I want" and said, "God, what do You want?"

Now, don't get me wrong. "I want" is okay. I tell people that all the time. "I want" is okay. But this is how you pray: "Lord, this is what I want. But what I want more than what I want is, I want what You want. I want what You want. I know this is what I want, but what I want more than what I want is, I want what You want." There's a phrase that Paul uses that used to give me trouble. He said, "I die daily." And I used to wonder, what in the world is he saying there? But I believe this is exactly what he was saying: putting to death "I want" every single day, and saying, "Lord, I'm reporting for duty. What is it You want me to do today?" It's only then that we glorify God. We glorify God and we follow Jesus by spending our life in a life of service.

In that same church that I was in when I met my friend, we were building a parsonage. If you don't know what a parsonage is, that's the house for the preacher. We were building a new parsonage. And we were doing it mostly by volunteer labor, and we were doing it mostly on Saturdays. And one Saturday during the middle of the summer, we had worked all morning on the parsonage. It was right at noon. And it was one of those days where it made you sweat just to breathe. And one of my guys, who was 80 or 85 years old, was out in the asphalt parking lot. And he had a container of poison, and he was following the cracks in the asphalt to poison the weeds. He was just going back and forth with his head down. And I said, "Mr. Howell, you're going to burn out!" He said, "I'd rather burn out than rust out any day." That man gave his life in a life of service. Joan of

Arc, when she knew her time was about up, and her enemies were closing in on her, said, "Lord, I may only last a year. Use me as You can.

I'm reminded of a dear old saint, that when I knew him, was a robust longshoreman, chair of our trustees, did all the work around the church. And then he was stricken by a lung disease that robbed him of his health. And every year, for the next four years, his health went down, down, down. And every year he would come to me and say, "Pastor, I can no longer do that, but I can do this." And then the next year he was saying, "I can't do this, but I can do that." And two weeks before he died, he was still picking up the phone and calling church members and reminding them of meetings and responsibilities, two weeks before he died.

The way we follow Jesus and glorify God is by sacrificing our wants and our desires for the Kingdom, by spending our lives in service, by being obedient. Jesus glorified God by giving his life. Jesus gave complete, perfect obedience to the very end. And he said, "My servants must follow me." The question becomes: Will we? Would you die daily to "I want"? Would you be obedient?

Let us pray. This is the season of Lent: a time of self-examination, a time of brutal self-honesty. Are you being obedient? Can you truly say, "I am dying to 'I want,' and I want what Jesus wants, what God wants, for my life. I want to glorify God with my life." Let us pray.

Lord, hear not the words of our mouth, but the meditations of our heart. Hear our true, true desires, and then reveal them to us. Show us, Lord, where we are selfish, where we are sacrificing Your will to our wants. Lord, help us to be true followers of Christ. In His name we pray. Amen.