

John 12:20-50

- II. Jesus Reveals Himself to the World (1:19-12:50)
 - S. The Seventh Sign – The Raising of Lazarus (11:1-57)
 - T. The Anointing and Triumphal Entry (12:1-19)
 - U. The Future Glory of Jesus (12:20-50)

As chapter twelve comes to a close, Jesus' three-year ministry also comes to a close. The next five chapters will all take place in the Upper Room, from the Last Supper right up until His arrest. This is it! Jesus is in Jerusalem for the Passover, and the curtain is about to close.

In v. 20, we're told that *there were certain Greeks* who wanted to see Jesus. When His disciples relayed that request to Him, He responded by saying that *the hour has come that the Son of Man should be glorified* (v. 23).¹ Yet, note what that glory entails. It doesn't mean that all will recognize Him for who He is, or that He'll take the throne of David and rule as king. Instead, His glorification means He'll be like *a grain of wheat that falls into the ground and dies* (v. 24). He talks about the one *who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life* (v. 25) and the importance of service (v. 26).

This turns the wisdom of the world on its head. According to the world, receiving glory and fame and prominence means self-centeredness and self-preservation and cut-throat competition until everyone else is defeated. According to Jesus and the Word of God, true honor and glory come when we set ourselves aside and live for something greater than ourselves. As we read in John 3:30 – *He must increase, but I must decrease*.

As we continue on in vv. 27-28, we learn something else about the selfless suffering that we are called to endure. *Jesus' soul is troubled*, He knows what's about to happen, and He admits that it was *for this purpose* that these events all unfold the way that they do. But note that first sentence of v. 28, Jesus' prayer *Father, glorify Your name*. In our trials and tribulations, we have never come close to the level of suffering that Jesus was about to endure. Even those martyrs through the years, though they may have been put to death, yet never bore the wrath of God upon them as they were executed. So, when Jesus our Lord submits to the Father, that His name would be glorified, how much more can we – in our trials that pale in comparison – seek to glorify the Father's name through all that we face?

It is for a good and biblical reason that I say that our trials and tribulations are for our ultimate good and God's glory. I don't make that up! In fact, Jesus says that this whole exchange happened out loud so that His disciples could hear and learn from it (v. 30). The sooner we view the difficult times as coming from the Lord for the purpose of glorifying Him and sanctifying us, the sooner we can successfully navigate those difficult times from a heavenly perspective. And, if we're having difficulty approaching them from a heavenly perspective, James tells us to ask God to give that heavenly perspective to us (James 1:5).

After alluding to the manner of death that would come upon Him (vv. 32-33), Jesus once again urges them to *believe in the light* (v. 36). Yet, even though *He had done so many signs before them, they did not believe in Him* (v. 37). There's a part of us, as believers, that finds it difficult to understand why people don't believe in Jesus as their Savior. But as we read the Word of God, we recognize that this isn't surprising. We ought to follow the example of John, turning to the pages of the Word itself, to recognize that in our natural state, there's nothing about us that will turn to God on our own. Note John's words: *they did not believe in Him, that the word of Isaiah the prophet might be fulfilled* (vv. 37-38).

¹Remember all the times that Jesus had previously said that His hour had not yet come? Well, that's changed!

John 12:38 quotes from Isaiah 53:1; and John 12:40 quotes from Isaiah 6:9-10. The latter passage is quite striking, not only because it's the passage in which Isaiah is transported to the heavenly throne room in the vision, but all the more because God tells Isaiah that his message is going to fall on deaf ears until judgment comes and only *a tenth* remains (Isa 6:13). John's words are quite plain: *they could not believe* (v. 39) because Isaiah's prophecy must come to pass.

Not everyone is going to believe – they are incapable of doing so on their own. But, it turns out the promise of 1 Timothy 2:4, that God *desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth*, nevertheless prevails. Even *the rulers*. . . *believed in Him*, even if they didn't openly confess Him out of fear (v. 42). God's call to faith extends to men and women from all walks of life, even political leaders!²

The passage – and the major section – ends in vv. 44-50. Just as Jesus had prayed that the Father would be glorified, He now draws their attention back to the Father. It was the Son's job to point people to the Father. It was the Father who guided and directed Jesus as to what He *should say* and what He *should speak* (v. 49). Jesus came as *a light* (v. 46), and those that believe in that light should walk in that light (see 1 John).

After this, John's account of Jesus' ministry, as well as the ministry itself, shifts to those who have already believed in Jesus. For three years, Jesus has taught and performed miracles as He remained faithful to the calling that the Father had placed in His life. Some believed, yet many did not. Before His death, Jesus' attention was now going to turn to His disciples, those who believed in Him. John 13-17 will serve as an incredible encouragement to us who have already believed.

²This is also at the heart of John 12:32. It's not that everyone will believe; indeed, this passage teaches the opposite. Rather, it's that people from all walks of life are going to be included in the spiritual deliverance Jesus is about to secure. This also fits the context; after all, this passage started with the Greeks wanting to see Him!