



Part 50 – The Agony and Obedience of Jesus

John 12:27-37

The last half of John chapter 12 encompasses Jesus' final public teaching. As such, verses 20-50 function as a kind of epilogue wherein Jesus is summing up the purpose of his coming into the world. In the previous passage Jesus told his disciples that "the hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified" (vs. 23). But this glory will be counter to everything they had once been taught to expect about the Messiah.

The agony and obedience of Jesus

Vs. 27-28a – As he will in Gethsemane, Jesus expresses anguish over his coming death: "Now is my soul troubled..." Here, he laments the suffering he must endure on the cross. As we see repeatedly in the Psalms, lament is often not the absence of faith. Rather, lament is what happens when faith meets anguish. What is witnessed in Jesus' agony is no competition of wills between the Persons of the Trinity. The Son and the Father, being eternally one in essence, share one indivisible will. Speaking according to his human nature, Jesus gives voice to his revulsion concerning the horrible death his mission required of him.

"But for this purpose..." – "The Son of God came into history as a human being that he might be executed by those who had been most eagerly anticipating him. Jesus' execution was not a tragic accident, a case of being in the wrong place at the wrong time. It was the very reason for his existence as a human being!"¹ The horror of his sin-bearing death was met with his fervent desire to do the will of his Father. What won out was his desire for the Father's glory.

A voice from Heaven

- In what may be described as the Father's final sign before the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus, He speaks in a way that is readily heard but not so readily understood.

Vs. 28b – This is one of three instances in the Lord's ministry when the Father speaks audibly in public affirmation of the Son (in addition to his baptism and transfiguration). "I have glorified it" may refer to those previous instances. However, it is likely in reference to Jesus' entire life and ministry beginning with the incarnation. In saying, "I will glorify it," the Father has in view the Lord's coming death and resurrection. Make no mistake, God was glorified in the crucifixion of the Son.

"This investment of the horror and shame of the cross with glory makes sense because glory is the manifestation of God's character. The cross as the supreme enactment of God's love is also the supreme revelation of his glory – of who he is."²

Vs. 29 – There is some confusion among the crowd over whether what they had just heard was thunder or the voice of an angel. "But typically, the world can barely comprehend the magnitude of what is transpiring in Jesus Christ. Thus, naturally, there is misunderstanding. The voice, Jesus says, is for those listening, not for him. God is continuing to supply the world with evidence of himself."³

Vs. 30 – "This voice has come for your sake, not mine." – As stated above, the Father spoke audibly to provide yet another public witness to the identity of Jesus.

The cross as God's judgement and mercy

- Here, Jesus describes his coming crucifixion as both judgment and mercy. Jesus' death will mean a twofold judgment. Both Satan and the world will be judged in the death of Christ. On the other hand, the crucifixion will mean that men and women from among all the peoples will come to him and be saved.

Vs. 31 – The "lifting up" of Jesus will bring about climactic changes for the whole world. "Prince of this world," is a reference to Satan found elsewhere in John (14:30; 16:11). Jesus' sin-bearing death on the cross, inaugurated an age of judgment upon Satan and his reign of evil. The cross is "the locus of a cosmic battle, in which Jesus achieves a decisive victory over Satan."⁴ The full realization of this new age of

¹ Karen Jobes, *John Through Old Testament Eyes* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic, 2021) p. 201

² Richard Bauckham, *Gospel of Glory: Major Themes in Johannine Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2015) p. 73

³ Gary Burge, *John*, NIVAC (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000) p. 345

⁴ Judith Kovacs quoted in Edward Klink, *John*, ECNT (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2016) p. 555

judgment upon Satan, sin, and death will come about in the new creation (Isaiah 65:17; Revelation 21:1). “The cross of Christ inaugurates judgment. It unmask those aligned with Satan and opposed to God, who will crucify the Son.”⁵

Vs. 32 – In addition to bringing about decisive judgment upon Satan and the enemies of Christ, the cross will also bring about a massive flood of God’s merciful kindness in saving men and women in every age and from around the world. Earlier Jesus stated that no one can come to him unless the Father draws them (6:44). Here, it is the Son who draws sinners to himself. No conflict is implied or should be taken. There is one single indivisible will within the Triune Godhead. The emphasis is on the agency of God who alone is the explanation of sinners being drawn to Christ. “While the drawing is not universally applied (not all are drawn), it is universally effective for those who are drawn.”⁶

By saying “all men,” Jesus is not, of course, referring to every person who will ever live. Obviously, not every person is drawn to Jesus. Calvin is correct when he writes, “When he says *all* it must be referred to the children of God, who are of His flock. Yet I agree with Chrysostom, who says that Christ used the universal word because the Church was to be gathered from Gentiles and Jews alike.” And remember that this whole train of thought was introduced by the request of the Greeks to see Jesus thus fulfilling that promise that all nations (“all men”) would come into the company of the redeemed.

Vs. 33 – Before the splendor of the resurrection and ascension, the glory of the Son of Man will be seen in the gore and humiliation of a Roman crucifixion. John inserts this bit of narration to remind us that the manner of Jesus’ death is not in conflict with his mission and his glory.

Persisting unbelief

Vs. 34 – “We have heard from the law...” – The crowd offers something of a rebuttal to Jesus’ words about his mission. They argue that “the law” (the Hebrew Bible / Old Testament) says something different about the Christ (Messiah). It was their understanding that when the Messiah came he would remain with them and reign from a throne in Jerusalem. Jesus being crucified was incompatible with this understanding. But of course they did not understand their own Scriptures concerning the Messiah which foretold that he would be a suffering servant, bearing the iniquity of his people (Isaiah 53; Zechariah 3; Psalm 22). His reign will be over an everlasting kingdom in a new creation which will include a vast number of men and women from every nation. But the people read the Scriptures concerning the Messiah with a “this worldly,” political lens. They wanted nothing to do with a Christ who eschews worldly power plays and takes up a cross instead. Too often Christians have followed suit by setting their sights on an earthly kingdom. He is the domesticated Jesus of worldly power rather than the Christ of cosmic glory and everlasting rule.

A sober warning

Vv. 35-36 – Jesus answers the crowd not by addressing their ignorance directly. Rather he warns them of his soon coming departure: “The light is among you for a little while longer...” His “hour” has come. The time for him to be among them is short. Now is the time to “walk while you have the light, lest the darkness overtake you.” Jesus’ sense of urgency came from his concern for their souls. The time for them to believe is limited as he makes clear in the next clause: “While you have the light, believe in the light.” Jesus may be suggesting that if they harden their hearts while they have him in their presence, once he is no longer with them the possibility of any willingness on their part to believe may pass entirely.

“...he departed and hid himself from them.” – Though his hour has come, Jesus will not be handed over to the authorities one minute before the appointed time. It may also be that due to his agony, his departure was for the purpose of prayer and preparation.

Vs. 37 – “...they still did not believe in him.” – The unbelief of Jesus’ fellow Jews is a recurring theme in John, beginning in the prologue (1:11). Though many signs that had been done publicly and witnessed by many thousands, the majority still did not believe. John’s use of the term “sign” points to the intrinsic quality of Jesus’ miracles. They were not merely displays of power. Jesus’ signs were public attestations of his Divine nature and authority. They confirmed his teaching and claims concerning his identity and mission. And so the unbelief of the crowds is rendered all the more inexcusable.

⁵ Burge, p. 345

⁶ Klink, p. 556