



Temple Baptist Church
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Dr. Mark E. Gaskins, Senior Pastor
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“The Hour Has Come”
John 12:20-33

The Preacher (or Teacher, depending on your Bible translation) put it well in Ecclesiastes 3:1 when he said:

**To everything there is a season,
A time for every purpose under heaven.¹**

Jesus knew this was true for His mission. Time and again, when family, friends, and foes would try to get Him to show His power or prove He was the Messiah, Jesus refused, saying, “My hour has not yet come.”

When His own mother, Mary, approached Him about the wine running out at the wedding at Cana in Galilee, He respectfully responded, **“Woman, what does your concern have to do with Me? My hour has not yet come”** (John 2:1-4).

When His own brothers tried to get Him to go up to Jerusalem for the Feast of Tabernacles and do signs to prove that He was the Messiah, He answered, **“My time has not yet come”** (John 7:3-9).

On several occasions, John tells us that Jesus’ enemies wanted to arrest Him. But they couldn’t, because **His hour had not yet come** (John 7:30; 8:20).

But now, things were different.

Unusual events . . .

It was the week of Passover. Just the day before this day that John is telling us about, Jesus had been the guest of honor at a supper in the town of Bethany. It was less than two miles from Jerusalem, on the eastern slope of the Mount of Olives. It was where Lazarus and his sisters Martha and Mary lived.

While Martha served at the supper, and Lazarus (whom Jesus had raised from the dead a few weeks before) shared in fellowship with Him around the table, their sister Mary demonstrated her love for Jesus in a remarkable way. She took a jar of precious perfumed ointment made of pure nard from India—worth nearly a year’s wages—and anointed Jesus’ feet with it, wiping off the excess with her hair. It was an awesome act of worship, adoration, and devotion!

In the meantime, people who had heard about how Jesus had raised Lazarus from the dead gathered to see them both. As a result, the chief priests now not only wanted to do away with Jesus, but Lazarus too!

Later on this next day (Sunday), Jesus had entered Jerusalem to the shouts of people waving palm branches and crying out,

**“Hosanna!
Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD!
The King of Israel!” (12:13).**

Hearing that the one who had raised Lazarus from the dead was coming really brought out the crowds that day. Among the throng were some Greeks, the kind the Jews referred to as “God-fearers.” While they were attracted to the teachings of Judaism, especially the idea that there is only one true God, they were not yet ready to make a full conversion.

These Greeks had come up to Jerusalem for the Passover feast. They came to Philip, saying, **“Sir, we wish to see Jesus.”** Philip told Andrew, and together they went and told Jesus.

Jesus’ reply must have stunned them. Over and over they had heard Him say, “My hour has not yet come . . . My hour has not yet come . . .” But now, with the Greeks wanting to see Him, Jesus replied,

“The hour has come that the Son of Man should be glorified. Most assuredly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it produces much grain” (12:23-24).

What was Jesus talking about? What did He mean? When He talked about being glorified, was He talking about when He would be crowned king of the Jews? That’s what His disciples would have thought!

But that wasn’t it at all! Jesus was talking about *dying*—and dying *in a particular way*, being lifted up on the cross, and *for a particular reason*, to give life to many. It would be through the cross that Jesus would be glorified, as He was lifted up between heaven and earth to bear the sins of humanity, and to triumph over the powers of evil and death through the cruel instrument of the cross. What would look like His utter defeat would be the means of His ultimate victory!

A sure and certain future . . .

From this point on, Jesus would operate in the certainty that His hour had come. When He would gather His disciples together for the last supper, He would do so knowing that His hour had come (13:1). When He would offer His high priestly prayer, He would begin by saying, **“Father, the hour has come; glorify Your Son that Your Son may glorify You . . .” (17:1).**

Now this turned everything on its head! How in the world could being lifted up on a cross be equated with being glorified? We usually think His glory was in His resurrection and His exaltation to the Father’s right hand.

But throughout John’s account of the gospel, the idea that the cross would be the *beginning* of Jesus’ glorification is pervasive. When Jesus says He will be **“lifted up,”** it always carries a *double* meaning, or *two levels* of meaning, as His statements so often did in John’s account of the gospel. Not only would He be physically lifted up off the ground into the air on the cross; He would be spiritually exalted as His crucifixion displayed the reality of God’s awesome love and His victory over the devil for the salvation of His people. On the cross, the Son of Man who had come down from heaven would start on His way back up to heaven! And in His cross Jesus would triumph over His enemies. They thought it was His end; in reality, it was His means of redemption! They thought He was the victim; He was in reality the Victor!

Isn’t that what He was talking about when He used this picture, this metaphor of the grain of wheat? Unless that grain, that kernel, that seed is allowed to fall into the ground and die, it remains alone. But if it does die, it bears much fruit, it produces many seeds.

It would be by the giving of His own life that Jesus would produce life for others. That would be the fulfillment of His purpose, the reason He came. When He would be lifted up, judgment would come on this world, and the prince of this world (the devil) would be driven out. When Jesus would be lifted up, He would draw all people to Himself (12:32). And that would indeed be His glory!

And just to make sure that we understand that He was talking about the cross, John adds that He said this, **signifying by what death He would die** (12:33).

Now Jesus wasn't content to leave His disciples behind in this. No, He would call them to *follow Him* in the way of the cross to glory. He reminded them that the one who loves his or her life, who is unwilling to give up that life for Christ, **will lose it**, while the one **who hates his life in this world** (in comparison to his or her love for Christ) **will keep it for eternal life** (12:25). Then Jesus put it to them squarely:

"If anyone serves Me, let him [or her] follow Me; and where I am, there My servant will be also. If anyone serves Me, him My Father will honor" (12:26).

Jesus knew that His hour had come, and now He called His disciples to follow Him through suffering to glory. If they gave up their lives to Him and for Him, they too would experience new life. In the upper room, He would promise them that He was going to prepare a place for them, and that He would come again and take them to be with Him forever, so that where He was, they would also be (14:1-4). He would promise them that because He lives, they would also live, sharing someday in His resurrection (14:19). And as He would pray for them the night before His death, He would tell the Father, **"Father, I desire that they also whom You gave Me may be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory . . ."** (17:24).²

A higher cause . . .

Now Jesus' call and His promise and His prayer weren't just for the eleven disciples. They were meant for us as well!

Through the years, we've seen in many ways the *type* of commitment Jesus was calling for here demonstrated by those who serve to protect and defend our country. We've seen it in natural and man-made disasters as police and firefighters and first responders have gone into incredibly dangerous situations, sometimes to their own deaths, to rescue or defend others. In the many wars our country has fought, many brave soldiers have displayed incredible courage as they've put their lives on the line for their country, their comrades, and their cause. Their oath of allegiance to their country and their commitment to their comrades led them to risk life and limb to protect and rescue their fellow-warriors and to defend freedom and liberate the oppressed.

But as noble as those commitments are, Jesus' call is to a much higher cause—the kingdom of God, indeed, a saving relationship with God Himself through His Son Jesus Christ, a relationship that not only secures for us eternity with Him, but transforms our lives in the here and now in preparation for life in the age to come.

You see, even today, nearly 2,000 years later, *Jesus calls us to follow Him in the way of the cross to glory with Him*. He also calls *us* to share in this life that comes through dying to ourselves and being willing to give ourselves up completely to and for Him. He promises *us*, too, that He is preparing a place for us where we'll be with Him for eternity, and prays for us to be

with Him to see His glory and be honored by His Father—to share in His resurrection at the last day, and to be in His glorious presence in the new creation, *forever*.

When King David was fleeing from Jerusalem when his treacherous son Absalom tried to overthrow him, David told Ittai the Gittite, who had only recently come to Jerusalem and cast his lot with him as his king, to go back and stay with Absalom. But Ittai declared his loyalty to David, saying, “. . . **surely in whatever place my lord the king shall be, whether in death or life, even there also your servant will be**” (2 Samuel 15:19-21).

Isn't that what Jesus wants from us?

But what will that mean for us? How will we live it out in our lives and our life together as a church?

By dying to ourselves that we might live in Christ!

John Elliott captured it so well in words we know through the voice of Christian singer Steve Green:²

Embrace the cross where Jesus suffered,
Though it will cost all you claim as yours.
Your sacrifice will seem small beside the treasure,
Eternity can't measure what Jesus holds in store.

Embrace the love the cross requires.
Cling to the one whose heart knew every pain.
Receive from Jesus fountains of compassion;
Only He can fashion your heart to move as His.

O wondrous cross, our desires rest in you.
O Lord Jesus, make us bolder
To face with courage the shame and disgrace
You bore upon Your shoulder.

Embrace the life that comes from dying,
Come trace the steps the Savior walked for you.
An empty tomb concludes Golgotha's sorrow;
Endure then 'til tomorrow your cross of suffering.

Embrace the cross. Embrace the cross,
The cross of Jesus.

My brothers and sisters, the hour has come!

†MEG

¹ Scripture taken from the New King James Version.

² <http://www.stevegreenministries.org/product/embrace-the-cross-6/>; accessed 3/20/2015. Words and music by John G. Elliott. Copyright 1989 LCS Songs (a division of Lorenz Creative Services)/Charlie Monk Music/Pamela Kay Music.