

John's Gospel - We Would See Jesus

by John Vissers

The sermon emphasizes the necessity of understanding Jesus through the lens of His death on the cross, which reveals His glory and the heart of the Gospel message.

Duration: 34:51

Scripture: John 12:21-36

Topics: "Jesus"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses the significance of the cross from four different perspectives. Firstly, Jesus states that his death on the cross will pass judgment on the world. This judgment is twofold: it exposes our sin and rebellion, but also showcases the grace and majesty of God as Jesus takes on the judgment as our substitute. The speaker then references a story from Charles Dickens' novel, *A Tale of Two Cities*, to illustrate the concept of substitutionary sacrifice. Finally, the speaker highlights a conversation between Jesus and the crowd, where Jesus explains that his death on the cross will draw all people to himself.

Transcript

...in John chapter 12 and reading at verse 20 through to the end of verse 36. 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 tell 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, and 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. Know 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. The crowd that was there and heard it said it had thundered.

Others said an angel had spoken to him. Jesus said, this voice was for your benefit, not mine. Now is the time for judgment on this world.

Now the prince of this world will be driven out. But I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself. He said this to show the kind of death he was going to die.

The crowd spoke up. We have heard from the law that the Christ will remain forever, so how can you say the Son of Man must be lifted up? Who is this Son of Man? Then Jesus told them, you are going to have the light just a little while longer. Walk while you have the light before darkness overtakes you.

The man who walks in the dark does not know where he is going. Put your trust in the light while you have it, so that you may become sons of light. When he had finished speaking, Jesus left and hid himself from them.

So far the reading of God's word tonight, and may he follow it with his spirit and bless it to our understanding. Let's pray together, shall we? Lord, we ask tonight that you would prepare our hearts and our minds to receive your word, that you would silence within us any voice but your own voice, that hearing your word we may indeed understand it, and not only understand it but also receive it by faith and obey it. Through Christ our Lord we pray.

Amen. Every summer my family spends about a week or sometimes two weeks at a Christian conference ground about an hour, hour and a half north of Toronto called Fair Havens. It's run by the Associated Gospel Churches and we've been going there for about 11 or 12 years now and we rent a trailer out in the back 40 and our children have a wonderful time visiting with friends and with some of their cousins who also come.

We enjoy the Bible teaching, the daily chapel times with guest speakers, there are opportunities for fellowship with friends that we've made over the years and generally it's a wonderful time and every summer we look forward to this occasion, usually near the beginning of July, where we make our way up to Fair Havens for a week or so. When you come into Fair Havens, which is located on Highway 48 just outside of Beaverton and you make the left-hand turn going east on Highway 48 into the conference grounds, you're met by a sign. The sign, the first sign you see is simply a sign that says Fair Havens Conference Ground, welcome.

But then underneath that sign there's another sign and the sign says, we would see Jesus. We would see Jesus. And really the purpose of the Fair Havens Ministry is to help men and women and young people and children in this kind of a setting to see Jesus, to come to terms with what it means to believe in him and to grow as disciples of his in the world today.

And that text which greets you on the Fair Havens Conference Ground comes from John chapter 12 and verse 21. They came to Philip who was from Bethsaida in Galilee with a request. Sir, they said, we would like to see Jesus.

We would like to see Jesus. We would see Jesus. Now we come to the middle of the 12th chapter of John's gospel.

And the middle of the 12th chapter of John's gospel brings us to one of the profoundest and really most demanding sections of the entire gospel. One of the commentators says that there are depths here which defy all sounding. Now let's just be reminded of the context of what's been happening which leads us to

this point.

You remember back in John chapter 11 that Jesus raises Lazarus from the dead. And that that creates quite a stir. People are stirred up.

They want to follow Jesus. They want to see him. They want to find out about him.

Many come to faith in him and word is spreading about him. And then following that at the beginning of John chapter 12, Jesus is anointed at Bethany by Mary. And then following the anointing of Jesus at Bethany, Jesus enters into Jerusalem triumphantly riding on a donkey.

The crowds are growing. The word is spreading. People were coming out to meet Jesus.

And the Pharisees were getting worried. And you'll notice in verse 19 just before the passage we read this evening, the Pharisees say, see this is getting us nowhere. Look how the whole world has gone after him.

The religious leaders are starting to get nervous because they realize that the whole world is starting to pursue Jesus, starting to go after him. And then in verse 20, what do we discover but that the whole world is represented by some Greeks who went up to worship at the feast. And it's these Greeks who come and it's these Greeks who ask we would see Jesus.

Now this may seem rather peculiar to us that Greeks would be going up to the feast at Jerusalem, but we need to understand that in the first century there were many Greeks who were interested in Judaism. They were attracted to Judaism because of its theology, because of its belief in God. They were attracted to Judaism because of its moral teaching, its moral code.

And many Greeks in fact were pulled away from belief in many pagan deities of Greek mythology to seek after God in Jerusalem. And so it's not all that unusual that some Greeks would have been there at the feast. But the point is now, having come to the feast, having come to Jerusalem, having come to the temple, they want now to see Jesus.

They want to meet him. They've wanted to talk with him. And no doubt one can imagine that they've heard the buzz in Jerusalem.

They've heard the whispering, they've heard the talk out on the street about this man named Jesus. And they've now come to investigate what all this talk is about. They want to find out who he is.

They want to find out whether all this talk is true. And so they come and they say, we would see Jesus. And that request is relayed to Jesus through some of his disciples.

But I want you to notice the response that Jesus makes here, because their request is like an exploding fuse in the mind of Jesus. Because notice what Jesus says, the hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.

Now we need to understand that this is a powerful statement for Jesus to make, because up until this point in the Gospel of John, the hour had not yet come. The hour had not yet arrived. And Jesus keeps pointing to it.

He keeps hinting at it. It is coming, but it's not yet arrived. And now here in the middle of the 12th chapter of John's Gospel, the crisis has arrived.

The not yet is being turned into the now. And the mission of Jesus is about to explode on the scene. It is about to be fulfilled.

The road to the cross is about to be made clear and evident for all to see. And Jesus goes on, indeed, to speak about his death and about his resurrection. He says, like a kernel of wheat, he must die in order to produce many seeds and much fruit.

And the disciples of Jesus must come to terms with the fact that they must lose their lives if, indeed, they're going to find them. And we read that Jesus is troubled, that his heart is heavy, because he knows what is coming. He knows that the shadow is about to descend on his life and on his ministry.

And he knows the cost that is involved. And he knows the cup that he's going to drink from. And he knows the cross that he's going to endure.

And Jesus, you see, is making something abundantly clear to his disciples. And he's making something abundantly clear to these Greeks who came to see him. What Jesus is saying is, if you really want to see me, if you really want to know me, if you really want to understand what I'm about, then you have to come to terms with my death.

You have to see me on the cross. And this brings us to the central message of the Gospel of John, and indeed the central message of the Gospel of the New Testament, the central message of the Christian faith, the cross and the resurrection of Jesus. If we are going to see Jesus, if we are going to meet Jesus, if we are going to know Jesus, the Jesus that we're going to meet, the Jesus that we're going to see, the Jesus that we're going to know according to the pages of the New Testament is the Jesus of the cross.

But you see, of course, the cross is a problem for many people. It's an offense for many people. That's why Paul, in writing to the Corinthians later in the first chapter of 1 Corinthians, says that the Gospel of the cross is a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Greeks.

And already here in the Gospel of John, we begin to see that reality. You see, people want to look for Jesus in all sorts of places. We are comfortable with a Jesus that we can see on our own terms, a Jesus who fits into our vision, into our perspective.

We're comfortable with Jesus as a wise teacher or a great moral example or a spiritual guru or a revolutionary leader. But when people come to see Jesus, when people want to talk to Jesus, what does Jesus do? He starts talking about his death. When these seekers come, presumably these God-fearers who want to meet him, what does he start talking about? He starts talking about the cross.

In many ways, this is not very seeker-friendly, but it is the Gospel, and Jesus points them to the cross. Now, there's a great deal in this text, and tonight I want to focus really on verses 31 and 32 in particular, because in verses 31 and 32, Jesus here reveals the very heart of the cross. And what we discover in verses 31 and 32 is really four things about the cross, that the death of Jesus on the cross achieves four things which form the very center of the Gospel message.

And I want to suggest to you that these verses help us understand what the cross is all about, seeing the cross from four different perspectives, and what the cross is all about, and thereby to meet the real Jesus. First of all, notice that Jesus says the cross, his death, will pass judgment on the world. Verse 31, now is the time for judgment on this world.

The death of Jesus, the cross of Christ, will pass judgment on the world. Now, it passes judgment on the world in at least two different senses. First of all, the cross exposes our sin.

Jesus was sent into the world by the Father, but the world rejected him. He came to his own, the Gospel of John says, but his own did not receive him. And on the cross, Jesus is rejected by humanity.

And on the cross, then, as Jesus is rejected by us, the ultimate form of our rebellion against God is exposed and is revealed. The depths of our alienation from God are uncovered. It exposes our sin, that we are children of Adam, and how far we have fled from God and rejected God and refused God in our lives.

And in love, in the cross, God sends his Son into the world, but what happens? The world, in its rebellion, hangs Jesus up to die. And so, you see, the cross, in a very real sense, judges the world. It judges us in our sin.

It exposes our real situation. It uncovers our real situation before God and shows us just how far we really are from God, that when God himself steps into human history in human form, taking up human flesh, all that we can do is say no and turn our back on God and ultimately put Jesus to death. It exposes our situation.

But the cross also judges the world in another sense, because in the wonder of the divine love of God, in the majesty of the divine sovereignty of God, what's going on in the cross is that Jesus represents humanity before God the Father. And as the mediator, he represents, yes, the Father to us, but he also represents us to the Father. And on the cross, then, this judgment is heaped on Jesus.

He is judged for us. The cross is a place of God's judgment on sin, but that judgment is heaped on Christ. Jesus alone has the right to judge, has the right to judge us, but what's going on in the cross here is he is judged in our place and judgment is executed on him.

And so the reality of the cross, Jesus says, is it is time for judgment on this world. But the judgment ultimately is taken up by Christ himself. He takes our place.

He is our substitute. And yes, our alienation is exposed, and yes, our rebellion is exposed, but in the marvels of the grace of God, the sovereign majesty of God, that judgment is taken up by Christ himself as our substitute and representative. In Charles Dickens' novel, *A Tale of Two Cities*, there's a wonderful story, a story about a man named Darnay who's been sentenced to death by the guillotine.

The night before the execution is to take place, Sidney Carton, who's an English lawyer, who looks somewhat like Darnay and who's largely wasted his talent and his life, he steals into the dungeon in which the condemned man is confined, and he changes clothes with him, and Darnay, the man marked for death, escapes from the dungeon and is free. And the next morning, with his hands tied behind his back, he climbs the scaffold to stand where Darnay should have been standing and sacrifices himself for his friend. One can only imagine what Darnay must have thought as he saw his friend Sidney Carton there taking the punishment, the judgment, which he deserved upon himself.

What did he think when he saw his friend die in his place? What did he think when he saw his friend receive the judgment that he rightly deserved? If we want to see Jesus, the first thing we need to understand is that he is the judge judged in our place. We must see the cross as a place of judgment, the cross as a place which exposes our sin, the cross as a place where we see Jesus dealing with our alienation and rebellion from God. But secondly, I want you to notice that Jesus says that the cross will

overthrow Satan.

The cross will overthrow the evil one. Notice what verse 31 says as Jesus goes on here. He says, Now the prince of this world will be driven out.

A very powerful statement. Now the prince of this world will be driven out. You know, when you look at the cross from a human perspective, the death of Jesus appears to be a monumental victory for the evil one, because here the forces of evil have come and have put the Son of God himself on the cross.

But what Jesus is saying here is that the cross, rightly understood, is actually the defeat of the evil one and victory for the Son of God. Through the eyes of faith, we see Jesus as the victor. When we see Jesus on the cross, we don't simply see a victim, but we see a victorious victim, one who is also a reigning Lord.

Now the question, of course, is how can this be? On the cross, Jesus carries to conclusion his perfect obedience as man to the will of God. His life, you see, was a life of active obedience. Jesus perfectly fulfilled the will of God.

He perfectly obeyed the law of God. He did all that we could not do and thereby undoes our disobedience. But then he goes to the cross.

He did not need to die for his own sin. He gives himself up willingly in an act of passive obedience. He willingly gives himself over to death.

The evil one does not take Jesus' life away, although it may look that way. Jesus lays down his life. And throughout the Gospels, Jesus makes that abundantly clear, that he alone has the authority to lay down his life and to take it up again.

It is not up ultimately to the evil one to have authority over the Son of God. And it's in this laying down of his life voluntarily that he smashes the chains of guilt and condemnation with which the evil one had bound us since the fall. The great preacher and theologian P.T. Forsythe put it this way.

He says, The holiness of Christ is the one thing damnable to the devil's power, and that holiness is consummated in the cross. Hence the cross is the destruction of the evil one. You know, sometimes we lose sight of this dimension of the cross.

But do you know, for the first thousand years of the Church's history, this aspect of the cross, the triumph of the cross, was preached as an essential part of the gospel of Christ. Augustine taught it. Origen taught it.

Gregory of Nyssa taught it. Martin Luther said that the cross has broken Satan. His doom is writ.

The wound in the heart of evil, Luther said, is mortal. And that's why we can read words like we read in the book of Revelation that the kingdoms of this world are destined to become the kingdoms of our God and of his Christ. Do you remember what the Apostle Paul says in Colossians chapter 2 and verse 15, a marvelous text, having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them? How? Triumphant over them by the cross.

By the cross. You see, the Church lives with this assurance that on the cross Jesus has defeated the evil one. Jesus is victor.

And we live, as someone has described it, between D-Day, between the time of decisive battle on the cross and resurrection when the evil one was defeated, and V-Day, V-E-Day, the time of ultimate victory when it will be revealed. And we live now between those times, which is why we still see evil rampant. But the reality is, the hope is, the assurance is, that the decisive victory has been won at the cross.

The evil one has been disarmed and is being driven out of the world. When we look at Jesus, if we would see Jesus, we must see him on the cross as the victorious one. And then thirdly, notice that Jesus says the cross will exalt him.

Verse 32, but when I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw all men to myself. Now I want to just take the first half of that verse initially, because John says here that Jesus was referring to his death on the cross. He's referring to the fact that he's going to be lifted up physically on a cross.

But there's more going on here than a simple reference to the physical act of being lifted high on the cross, because the verb which is translated here as lifted up can also refer to exaltation. Someone is lifted up in the sense that they are honored, in the sense that they are exalted, in the sense that people pay attention to them, in the sense that they receive glory. In ancient times, a king or a queen, an emperor or a ruler would be lifted on a royal seat, on a royal chair, and receive the adulation and the praise and the applause of the people.

And that's the image that's being used here, that Jesus on the cross is going to be lifted up. That's the way the cross is understood here. Jesus has already prayed that the Father would glorify his name in verse 28.

And now when the Son of Man is lifted up from the earth, he will be glorified. You see, the cross is a throne. The crucifixion is a coronation.

And Jesus reigns from the tree. And again, you see, if we want to see Jesus, we must see him in this way. In a very real sense, the cross turns all of our understandings and all of our categories upside down.

When we look at the cross, we think we're seeing ultimate humiliation, but Jesus says, no, it is my exaltation. When we look at the cross, we see a suffering servant, and yet we also see a reigning Lord. The power of God, the majesty of God, the sovereign grace and power of God are revealed in one who dies on a cross.

Weakness is strength, and strength is weakness, as Paul says in 1 Corinthians. Wisdom is foolishness, and foolishness is wisdom. The cross of Jesus makes the weak strong and brings down the mighty to their knees.

The rich are made poor, and the poor are made rich. Jesus on the cross is exalted. And if we would see Jesus, and if we would understand Jesus, and if we would come to know Jesus, we must see him as the exalted Lord.

And that's not the way most of us would like to see him. We want a Jesus, of course, who fits into our categories, that we can define according to our understanding the terms that we want to use. A Jesus we can control.

But the cross reveals a suffering servant who is exalted. A Jesus who turns our lives upside down. And then fourthly, and finally, notice that Jesus says that he will draw all men to himself.

Verse 34, But I, when I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw all men to myself. Jesus says, As I am lifted up on the cross, I will draw men and women, young people and children, to myself. Now at one level, of course, the meaning is simple.

As Jesus is elevated on the cross, people were able to see Jesus from a distance. Some might have approached out of curiosity. But there's more going on here.

Because what Jesus is saying is that as he's on that cross with outstretched arms, those outstretched arms embrace a sinful world which is crucifying him. And those outstretched arms are an invitation to the peoples and to the nations of the world that he will draw all men to himself. Through the cross, men and women from every nation will come to the Savior.

Now this theme has emerged again and again throughout John's Gospel. In John chapter 4, we see the first hint of it where the Samaritans are brought in and included in the harvest. In John chapter 10, Jesus speaks of bringing other sheep into the fold.

And now in John chapter 12, it is the Greeks who want to see Jesus. You see, it's quite clear as the message is unfolding in John's Gospel that this cross, this salvation is not just for the Jews, but also for the Gentiles, for all the nations of the world. When we see Jesus on the cross, we don't see a Savior simply for one kind of person, for one kind of people, for one nation, for one ethnic group, for one language, for one tribe.

We see a Jesus with outstretched arms who died for men and women of every nation, of every group in the world. He will draw all men to himself, a Savior who breaks down every barrier to create a new humanity, Jew and Gentile, male and female, slave and free, as the Apostle Paul says in Galatians 3.28. If we would see Jesus, Jesus himself says as he said to his disciples in response to the request of these Greeks, if we would see Jesus, we must see the Jesus of the cross, the judgment of the cross, the victory of the cross, the exaltation of the cross, and the invitation for all to come to the Savior. I'm told that the geographical center of the city of London, England, is Charring Cross.

I'm not absolutely sure whether that's true, whether it's the exact geographical center, but I'm told that it is. And Charring Cross, for those of you who have been there, is in the form of a cross, and I'm told that you can find your way anywhere in London if you go there. If you're at Charring Cross, you can find your way anywhere in London.

It's the center, and from there you go. A story is told of a little boy who was lost in the city of London, and a police officer came along and wiped away his tears, and when he had gotten himself settled, he said, can I take you home now, son? I'd like to take you home. And the boy replied, oh no, sir, simply take me to the cross, and I'll find my way home.

Take me to the cross, and I'll find my way home. That's what this text ultimately is saying to us. If we want to find Jesus, if we want to orient ourselves, if we want to find our way home, we must come to the cross.

Because you see, the Jesus who meets us in the pages of the New Testament is not simply some wise teacher, some spiritual guru, someone who makes us feel good. The Jesus who meets us in the pages of the New Testament is the Jesus of the cross. We would see Jesus.

Let us stand beneath the cross. Let us pray. Lord, our prayer tonight is simply the prayer, the words of these Greeks who came to see Jesus so many years ago, that we too would see Jesus.

Give us fresh eyes of faith that Jesus might be our vision. Through Christ our Lord we pray. Amen.

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