

BIBLE BACKGROUND

John 12:20-33

Verses 20-22

There were certain Greeks amongst those who came up to worship at the Feast. These men came to Phillip who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, asking him saying, "Sir, we wish to see Jesus." Phillip came and spoke to Andrew and Andrew and Phillip went and spoke to Jesus.

The Greeks who came to pray would have been in the outer court of the temple, the Court of the Gentiles, that is if they were in the temple precincts, which is reasonable to assume, though the text only says they came to pray on the occasion of the **Feast** εορτή. The **Feast** referred to was the Passover, the occasion when many pilgrims traveled to Jerusalem. There they approached Phillip and then Phillip together with Andrew approached Jesus. Perhaps Phillip's Galilean background was helpful for Galilee had a mixed population and people there would have been fluent in Greek. His Greek name would also have given these people confidence to approach the famous rabbi. The visitors were no doubt proselytes, fully under the law of Moses or at least God-fearers, who accepted the one Lord of Israel but not all the ceremonial laws. They wanted to **see** Jesus or meet him and were perhaps open to his message and the signs he performed. Their wish was for a private meeting rather than observe him amongst a crowd. It was not for social reasons they did this nor were they merely curious. Rather, their action showed a commitment to Jesus and an acceptance of his message.

Verses 23-26

Jesus replied to them saying, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. I solemnly assure you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies it remains alone. If it dies it bears much fruit. He who loves his life will destroy it but he who hates his life in this world will preserve it for eternal life. If anyone serves me let him follow me and where I am there also will my servant be. If anyone serves me, the Father will honour him.

In these visitors Jesus sees that a moment (**hour** ώρα) has arrived, that his Father's plan for his life was reaching its goal. This goal is the **glorification** δοξασθη of the Son of Man. According to John, Jesus' glorification begins with his crucifixion and continues though to his resurrection and ascension, though his signs of healing also glorify him (11:4) and so it could also be said that his life was a glorified one from beginning to end (1:14). However, only his death and resurrection could achieve life for the world and therefore this was the crucial moment and reason for his glorification. As in Hebrews 2:9 et al, the Father glorifies Jesus because he accomplishes all that he is given to do through suffering and humility. In John's gospel, glorification takes place through the gruesome end of his life, which accomplishes God's powerful work of salvation (13:31 [as Judas goes out to arrange for his arrest]; 17:1,4,5,10 [Jesus' high priestly prayer]).

But what does it mean to be glorified? We naturally think of attaining a place of honour, of being exalted and praised, and the extolling of a person's qualities. Certainly, there is this aspect to Jesus' glorification. But the immediate situation of the **the bearing of much fruit** is the essence of Jesus glorification. He completes his Father's will and his Father's will is that many come to him through his Son. It is the effectiveness of Jesus' life that is his glory. Jesus' is glorified, indeed the Father is too, by the result of his great ministry in producing people who believe in him (16:14; 17:10).

Jesus introduces a revelation of God's word by saying **truly, truly I say to you. Unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains alone.** Jesus is that grain of wheat κόκκος του σίτου. He is indicating that he will **die** αποθάνη like a seed that is abandoned to the ground and buried. But like a seed that grows and produces a plant bearing fruit, he will rise to glory and by his death create a people of God who are born of God, who proceed from him, are like him in being one with him, eternal, possessing the Spirit and being in a restored relationship with God. It could be suggested that this parable refers to his followers but Jesus makes himself the subject because he speaks of **the Son of Man**.

He then switches to **those who love their lives**. Reminiscent of Matthew 16:25 and Luke 9:24, Jesus warns about the desire for self-preservation or loving the things of this world more than him, which will lead to **destruction** απολλύει. An ironical event takes place when martyrdom is

avoided: one escapes with one's life but it is destroyed in hell, which is an everlasting destruction for all eternity. That is the result of living for the things of this world rather than for God and his eternal kingdom. On the other hand, if a believer is prepared to be the seed thrown to the ground and buried **in this world**, that is, **hates his life**, meaning to not love it more than Christ, then he **preserves it for eternal life**.

Jesus indicates that his way of being the seed that is buried is the way for all who want **to serve** $\delta\iota\alpha\kappa\omicron\nu\eta$ him. Jesus then speaks with a double meaning. **And where I am, there also my servant will be**. If Christ goes to the cross, followers must accept that that is a possible outcome for them as well, as it would be for Peter (21:18). On the other hand, there is a promise here: if Jesus is glorified and exalted by his Father, followers will share in his glory and be radiated by the presence of God himself (14:3; 17:24). Jesus adds that the **Father will honour** the one who follows him, which is a special recognition given to the faithful disciple who follows Christ with his life. The Son is glorified, and later we hear of the Father's glorification, but our Lord mentions that his own followers who are prepared to lose all for him will be glorified too and that by the Father.

Verses 27-29

'Now my spirit is disturbed. What shall I say, "Father, save me from this hour"? Yet, for this reason I came to this hour. Father, glorify your name.' Therefore, a voice came from heaven: **"I have glorified it and will glorify it again."** The crowd standing there, which heard it, was saying that it was thunder. Others were saying, **"An angel has spoken to him."**

John does not have a Garden of Gethsemane scene but Jesus prays at an evening meal before the Passover (chapters 13-17). These words of Jesus, **Father, save me from this hour** remind us of what happened in the garden as recorded by the other gospel authors. Jesus affirms that this moment is why he came and in the end his desire is to **glorify** his Father's **name**. Name and the person were closely associated in the East, especially when the word of God, and a name is a word, bears the revelation of God. While Jesus is faithful to the work his Father sent him to do, it is the goal of that work that Christ keeps at the forefront: the glorification of God. Thus, in the Trinity, there is a reciprocity: the Father glorifies the Son for his willingness to suffer for the world and gives success to his mission and the Son glorifies the Father by creating a following through a people who know the Father through the Son and call on his name, that is, see in God their true Saviour.

As the Father spoke at Jesus' baptism and at the Transfiguration affirming his Son's identity and mission, the Father speaks and says, **I have glorified it and will glorify it again**. When did God glorify his name prior to this episode? The assumption has to be during Jesus' ministry of healing and preaching (5:37; 14:11). The Father's name is on everything that Jesus has done. Jesus is the signature of God and his works are a testimony to his status as the Son of the Father.

The crowd is confused. It cannot understand what Jesus' is saying and therefore it cannot hear the voice of God properly. It reminds us of the Risen Jesus' words to Saul on the road to Damascus: Saul's companions saw the light and heard a sound but didn't see anyone (Acts 9:7). Paul spoke of a veil coming over the face of listeners who hear the word but cannot receive it because of unbelief (2Corinthians 3:14).

Verses 30-33

Jesus responded and said, 'This voice was not for me but for you. Now is the judgement of this world. Now the ruler of this world has been cast outside. And I, when I have been lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.' He was saying this to signify by what death he was about to die.

Jesus turns on the crowd and issues a word of God's judgement: **This voice has not come for me but for you**. They heard only a sound because of their unwillingness to hear but Jesus speaks of the **voice** of God $\phi\omega\nu\eta$. Thus follows a portentous word: **Now is the judgement of this world**. Jesus can speak of the present time as a crisis, which is the English translation of Greek word for judgement $\kappa\rho\iota\sigma\iota\varsigma$. How a person responds to Christ **now** $\nu\upsilon\nu$ determines what destiny that person has (5:24). The future for all the world is now. In Jesus' person, particularly his death and resurrection, a turning point comes for the world. But with this statement, Jesus goes further. Judgement also means both a saving act and a destructive end. For Satan, called

the ruler ἀρχῶν **of this world**, the cross is the end of his power (16:11). Jesus or rather the Father **will cast him out**, for ἐκβληθήσεται is a divine passive. When humankind rebelled against God not only sin entered the world but Satan. The word **world** κόσμου is a negative place in Jesus' eyes because it is under Satan's tyranny. Christ must come under this terrible dominion in order to deliver those who will receive his salvation. Thus, salvation has the meaning of coming under a new ruler, the Liberator, Jesus Christ, who bestows on his children life with God and glory as well.

I have referred to the cross and the particular point of the **now** or the **hour** that Jesus speaks of because in verse 32 he speaks of the time **when he will be lifted up from the earth**. This too has a double meaning. To be **lifted up** ὑψωθῶ refers to the lifting up of Jesus on the cross as well as to his exaltation, being lifted up to glory. The world might see only a ruined and tragic figure on a cross, but to those being saved, they see a glorious Lord whose majesty is in his humility and who gains power by losing it, by being a seed thrown to the ground. Isaiah prophesied of this in 52:13. In John 3:14 Jesus sees a parallel with the bronze serpent on the staff that Moses lifted up so that those who looked on it and believed in God's grace, could be healed.

The cross is the way that Jesus unites us to himself and to the Father (17:24). As he said in verse 26, **I will draw all people to myself**. Satan depersonalizes. That is why there is breakdown between nations, families, marriages but also the way commerce and the desire for money uses sex, provides a poor service, indeed, automated services! When Christ draws people to him through the cross, by finding God in him and his almighty love, they find themselves and each other.

Finally, Christ constantly indicated that he would die but here he even describes the manner of his death, that is, crucifixion.