

The Lord Predicts His Coming Death and Resurrection

John 12:20-26

John 12:20-26 – “Now there were certain Greeks among those who came up to worship at the feast. ²¹ Then they came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida of Galilee, and asked him, saying, “Sir, we wish to see Jesus.”

²² Philip came and told Andrew, and in turn Andrew and Philip told Jesus.

²³ But Jesus answered them, saying, “The hour has come that the Son of Man should be glorified. ²⁴ 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. ²⁵ He who loves his life will lose it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. ²⁶ If anyone serves Me, let him follow Me; and where I am, there My servant will be also. If anyone serves Me, him My Father will honor.”

Background Notes

Verse 20 says that Greeks were among the crowds who came up Jerusalem to worship the Lord at the Passover feast. These Greeks would have been Gentile converts or proselytes to Judaism. Acts 10 gives the account of Cornelius, who was a Gentile, but he was a proselyte. He was a follower of the monotheistic religion of Israel. Both Cornelius and the Greeks in John 12 realized that the pagan gods of the Greek and Roman religions were not the true God. Israel had the one true God!

“They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida of Galilee, and asked him, saying, “Sir, we wish to see Jesus.” These Greeks wanted to have an interview with the Lord. Perhaps they had seen the recent cleansing of the Temple, when the Lord threw out the corrupt moneychangers from the court of the Gentiles in the Temple courtyard. Maybe this event triggered the response of these Gentiles, and they wanted to have an interview with the Lord. Maybe they wanted to ask Him, “Why? What was that all about?”

The Greeks probably came to Philip because he had a Greek name. Philip told Andrew, and together Philip and Andrew told Jesus. It almost seems like the disciples had some kind of screening procedure to protect the Lord from the increasing crowds. Do you remember how the disciples tried to protect the Lord from the parents who brought their children to the Lord, and the Lord rebuked the disciples: “Let them come! *“Allow the little children to come to Me, for of such is the kingdom of heaven.”*

“Jesus answered them... *‘The hour has come that the Son of Man should be glorified’*” (v23). Who was included in “them” in verse 23? Did “them” include the Greeks who had come to interview the Lord, or just Philip and Andrew, or the whole crowd? We can’t be sure. In fact, we really can’t be sure whether the Lord ever did speak to individually to these Greek proselytes. Maybe He did - or maybe He spoke to them just as part of the crowd. In any case, the Lord’s statement in verse 23 was made in response to their request to speak to Jesus.

“Jesus answered them, saying, ‘*The hour has come that the Son of Man should be glorified.*’” At first it seems that this response had no connection with the Greeks’ request - but there was a connection, as you might expect! The “hour” referred to our Lord’s death and resurrection. Up to this point in John’s Gospel, this “hour” had not arrived. John 7:30: “*Therefore they sought to take Him; but no one laid a hand on Him, because His hour had not yet come.*” And John 8:20: “*These words Jesus spoke in the treasury, as He taught in the temple; and no one laid hands on Him, for His hour had not yet come.*”

But now the “hour” had come, and through this “hour” of the Lord’s death and resurrection the door would be opened for the gospel to go out to the whole world - including Gentiles, like these Greek proselytes. This, I believe, is the connection between the request of the Gentile Greeks to interview the Lord and the Lord’s response. Possibly these Greeks had heard that the Lord had previously said to the disciples, “Only go to the lost sheep of Israel,” and the Lord knew that was troubling them. With the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus, “His hour,” the gospel would go out to the entire world!

Doctrinal / Teaching Points

1. For Christ, death was the way to life.

“*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*” (v24). The Lord used the natural illustration of how a seed must “die” when it is planted. The seed must break apart and “die” if life is to go on. The seed must die if there is to be any future fruit or harvest.

The Lord applied this principle to Himself. He had to die in order for us to receive eternal life. We’re the fruit! He had to die because death is the penalty of sin, and we are sinners. If the Lord Jesus had not died, there would be no harvest. He would have “remained alone,” as the illustration portrays: “*...unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it produces much grain.*” Jesus Christ was the only person who never sinned, but He gave His perfect life as a sacrifice. His body was broken, and He died – for us! Now we can have life if we believe and put our trust in Him.

As the seed carries the life when it passes through death to the new growth, so, through His death, the life of Jesus Christ is communicated to believers. As the fruit, we now possess divine life, eternal life - the life of Christ! Do you realize that? If you are a Christian, you not only have forgiveness of sins - **you have divine life!** Do you have that divine life?

What a wonderful illustration of our Lord’s sacrificial death, that Jesus took from the way God designed and created the plant world! For Jesus Christ, death was the way to life.

2. For the Christian, “death to self” is the way to life.

“*He who loves his life will lose it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life*” (v25). When you become a Christian, you have eternal life and you are on your way to Heaven. But what about your earthly life right now?

Believers still die physically - but we can make this present physical, earthly life count forever! And that's what verse 25 is all about.

"He who loves his life will lose it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life." The Greek word used for "life" in the first part of this verse is different than the word that is used for "life" at the end of the verse. The word used for life in the first part of the verse refers to our physical, earthly life, and the last word used for "life" means eternal life.

What does it mean to "lose your life if you love your life"? *"He who loves his life will lose it."* It means that if your ultimate goal in life is a selfish desire to please yourself, and if you live only for your own comfort and pleasure, then you will "lose" your life. Your earthly life will be a total loss, as far "bearing fruit" for Jesus, and as far as any eventual reward in Heaven goes.

But if you "hate" your life, you will keep it. *"...he who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life."* This doesn't mean we are to hate ourselves, or constantly get down on ourselves, or become suicidal! No, of course not. But when we **deny our selfish desires and goals** because we love the Lord and His Word, then it appears that we "hate" ourselves and our own (earthly) lives. But because there will be reward in Heaven, we have made our temporary earthly lives **count forever!**

"Hating" our lives in this world is the "death to self" principle of Romans 12:1: *"I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service."* The "death to self" principle is also seen in Galatians 6:14: *"the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world."* *"Crucified to the world"* - there it is! The "death to self" principle! Denial of our selfish desires and goals is the key to making our earthly lives count for eternal life! As the verse says, *"He who loves his life will lose it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life."* For the Christian, death to self is the way to life.

Here's an illustration of what I'm trying to say. I know a man who has practiced the principle of "death to self" throughout his life. We went to Sunday school together. Soon after he finished school, he chose to give up what "the good life" in this country had to offer him. He went to Central America as a missionary, and he has been on the foreign mission field ever since. He rarely comes back to the USA, and he has very little of what this life has to offer in the way of material possessions and pleasures. Remaining largely unknown, unacknowledged and "unsung," he has expended his entire life in service to Jesus Christ.

Practical Applications

1. If you had three wishes, what would your first wish be?

If you had the proverbial "three wishes," what would your first wish be? The Greeks had a wish: *"Sir, we wish to see Jesus."* That's a great wish, isn't it? In fact, it should be at the top of everyone's "Wish List"!

I hope that #1 on all our Wish Lists would be to **see Jesus!** To see Jesus - not only to eventually see Him face to face in Heaven, which is the hope of every believer, but to see more of Jesus in our lives right now. To know Him better now, and increase our fellowship with Him now should be our #1 wish!

If you had three wishes, what would your first wish be?

2. Let's not "lead the Lord" in our Christian service!

"If anyone serves Me, let him follow Me; and where I am, there My servant will be also. If anyone serves Me, him will My Father honor."

This verse is about Christian service. Notice that the Lord **didn't** say, "Where my servant is, there I'll be." No, He said, *"If anyone serves Me, let him follow Me; and where I am, there My servant will be also"* (emphasis added).

Do you get the point? We shouldn't "lead the Lord" into where we want to be in our Christian service! **We should follow the Lord!** Now, it's true that we have the promise in Hebrews 13:5: *"He Himself has said, 'I will never leave you nor forsake you.'"* The Lord is with us wherever we are. But here we're talking about Christian service, and the key to Christian service is to **follow** the Lord where He wants us to be. **We shouldn't decide where and how we want to serve, and thus we lead the Lord.**

Thirty-five years ago I decided to work for an electronics company in New England. The company was located not far from Vermont ski country. In fact, I guess that's the real reason why I took the job: I really like to ski! But I decided to start a very unique ministry as a sideline - to reach skiers for Christ! So - we bought a large ski lodge as our home, and planned to open it as a ski retreat center. We even printed up brochures.

But then I began to realize that I was not **following the Lord** in this ministry. **I was leading the Lord** into this ministry! What I planned wasn't wrong, but I wasn't looking for the will of God for my area of service. I wasn't looking for what **He** had in mind for me for ministry. Why was I trying to lead the Lord into this ministry? Was it because I was denying my selfish desires? No. It was because **I** like to ski!

I was looking for God's stamp of approval on what **I** wanted to do for Him – not what **He** wanted me to do. So we sold the ski lodge, and after several years the Lord clearly led us into the ministry we believe He had in mind for us all along!

So - let's not "lead the Lord" in our Christian service!