

## I Would Like to See Jesus (Until I Don't)

John 12:20-33 (NIV)

<sup>20</sup> Now there were some Greeks among those who went up to worship at the festival. <sup>21</sup> They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, with a request. "Sir," they said, "we would like to see Jesus." <sup>22</sup> Philip went to tell Andrew; Andrew and Philip in turn told Jesus. <sup>23</sup> Jesus replied, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. <sup>24</sup> Very truly I tell you, 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. <sup>25</sup> Anyone who loves their life will lose it, while anyone who hates their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. <sup>26</sup> Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honor the one who serves me. <sup>27</sup> "Now my soul is troubled, and what shall I say? 'Father, save me from this hour'? No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour. <sup>28</sup> Father, glorify your name!" Then a voice came from heaven, "I have glorified it, and will glorify it again." <sup>29</sup> The crowd that was there and heard it said it had thundered; others said an angel had spoken to him. <sup>30</sup> Jesus said, "This voice was for your benefit, not mine. <sup>31</sup> Now is the time for judgment on this world; now the prince of this world will be driven out. <sup>32</sup> And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself." <sup>33</sup> He said this to show the kind of death he was going to die.

This portion of John's Gospel account takes place on Tuesday of Holy Week, the days leading up to Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection. Some Greek converts to Judaism had come to celebrate the festival of the Passover. We don't know their motivations, but you gotta love their request. They come to Philip, one of Jesus' 12 disciples, and say, "Sir, we would like to see Jesus." (verse 21)

I mean, this is why we come to church too, right? We want to see Jesus! Yes, we want to see our friends. We want to have cookies after worship. But really, ultimately, we want to see Jesus. This is good!

When the request is relayed to Jesus, he replied, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified." (verses 23) If you were a first century believer, these words from Jesus would get you rubbing your hands in anticipation. The hour has come! He's going to be glorified! Now is the time that our warrior Messiah takes his true mantle and drives out these Romans, kicks out the Herods, and sits on the throne of his father David in Jerusalem to rule over all things. He's going to do miracles nonstop so that we have all the comforts that we have longed for, all the food we want to eat, all the healings for all our ailments. And, I mean, did you hear that booming voice? I don't know if it was thunder or an angel, but we know it's power. We're never going to have to worry about anything ever again. This is what they were thinking they would see in Jesus being glorified.

What do you want to see when you hear Jesus say that the hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified? Maybe our thoughts of glory are not all that different from the Jews and Gentiles around Jesus that day. Maybe we want a warrior king Messiah, a president who will vanquish all evil foes, everything contrary to Christianity, and enact laws to get us to be a Christian nation. Maybe we want the Son of Man to give us all we want: home, nonstop all you can eat buffets of the best food, cures of all our ailments, perpetual happiness and total annihilation of depression, and all the new shiny toys, yeah? Or maybe we aren't looking for political or physical rescue but we want what we know God should provide: spiritual rescue. We want Jesus words here, "I will draw all people to myself" (verse 32) to mean that everyone's going to heaven, no one's going to hell, no one will be shut out of God's presence, that I don't have to worry about the spiritual state of the people around me, let alone the world, because God will save them all.

What was Jesus seeing as he said the hour had come for the Son of Man to be glorified? He talked about a kernel of wheat falling off the stalk, going to the ground, dying. When he said, "And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself." He said this to show the kind of death he was going to die. (verses 32-33) Jesus saw his hour of glory being his death. When he said these words, his crucifixion was only 3 days away. In this moment, he sees people mocking him, telling him to prophesy, to show his so-called God powers. He saw them striking him with their fists, taking a crown of thorns and not gently setting it on his head, but bashing it with a staff into his skull again and again. He sees them tying him to a post, exposing his back, and not just whipping him, but using a scourge with bits of metal and bone at the end of those cords meant to dig in and rip the flesh, lash after lash. In this bleeding, beaten up state while also not having slept for 24 hours, Jesus sees that they will make him carry the large wooden beam of his cross. He sees the people spitting on him, not that kind of spit that you do while you're running, but one that is meant to be as gross as possible with as much phlegm and mucus that you can muster so as to insult and humiliate. He sees the nails going through his hands and being lifted up between two criminals worthy of death. His charge, though, was being the King of the Jews, the Messiah.

What kind of glory is that? That's pain and suffering. It's revolting. It's unjust. It shouldn't happen. I don't want to be a part of it. I wanted to see Jesus. I wanted to see glory. I don't want to see that.

Even more I want to turn away my eyes as I hear Jesus say, “Anyone who loves their life will lose it, while anyone who hates their 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.” (verses 25-26) In wanting to see you, Jesus, you’re telling me that if I love my life, I will lose it? That I need to hate my life to keep it? What about self-care? What about loving myself? Sacrifice my life? That’s not glory. That’s not something I want to see. I want my life. I want to be comfortable. I want all those things I listed before. I want to do what I want to do. I don’t want to see things that cause me pain.

You say to hate my life. What does that even look like? It’s accepting that not everything that I want for my life is good for me. It’s saying that I will deny my natural inclinations and desires that are contrary to God’s will and his Word. It’s looking at God when I see that I want to do something that I know is wrong and say no to it, say no to that kind of life. It’s living that my life is not always getting what I want, but giving up anything in life that would cause me to look at those things instead of seeing Jesus. It’s making things awkward to strained among family members as I share my God with them. It’s potentially getting shunned or written up at work for wearing a cross and talking about going to church. It’s losing friends when they want to minimize your faith and say that we all basically believe the same things but you explain that Christ has done everything for you and made you perfect already, that he is the only, the exclusive Way, Truth, and Life, which they don’t believe. If this is seeing Jesus, then maybe I don’t want to anymore.

Jesus looked at this hour that was before him. He knew all the gruesome details. He knew that he was about to lose his life, be the kernel that fell from the wheat and died. “Now my soul is troubled, and what shall I say? ‘Father, save me from this hour’? No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour. Father, glorify your name!” (verses 27-28) Jesus was staying the path. He was not choosing a comfortable life. He chose to “hate his life” so that you and I would see him, see what he does for us, see that he is making the payment for all the times, paying for all the time I did turn away from seeing Jesus and all the times that I wanted to, for all the times I have loved my life more than I loved seeing Jesus. He hated his life so that we are forgiven, that we are cleansed, that we are judged and declared not guilty instead of being judged and driven from his presence, losing our lives.

Some people hear Jesus’ words in verse 32, “And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself,” and think that everyone’s going to heaven. Everyone gets eternal life. In the context here, that’s not what Jesus is saying. He is saying that him going to the cross, seeing lifted up in that way, will be something that everyone has to deal with. Some will look at Jesus being lifted up on the cross and turn away. They don’t want to see that Jesus. They will look at his words about hating their life, and they will say, “Nope. That’s not for me. I love my life. I won’t go through pain and suffering if that’s what I have to do to follow Jesus. That’s not glory. That’s sadistic. That’s unloving. That’s weak. That’s foolish.” Those who look away from Jesus lifted up on a cross will be judged for it, and they will lose their life for loving it.

But for all who see Jesus on the cross and realize that this life is not one of always getting what I want, that following Jesus means that I will say no to things, that I will see that old, sinful life and hate it. And so we keep our eyes on Jesus and follow him on that path of suffering to the cross, a cross that we bear too. We serve Jesus doing the good works that God prepared for us in advance to do because we have been saved by grace through faith, seeing what our God sacrificed for us of his own free will.

To see Jesus and to see his glory is to see him suffer, suffer for us, suffer to save us, forgive us, make us clean, to give us a new life. To see Jesus means that we will also suffer in this life, carry crosses as well. It may mean that we will lose family, friends to see Jesus. It means that I will restrict myself from doing some things to do other things, to be here, to be in his Word, to give time to talk to God in prayer, to give him of my time, my talents, and my treasures not only here but always in my life wherever I am with whatever I am doing. To see Jesus may very well be hating the life you wanted to instead follow God and serve him.

When we see that Jesus being glorified means that he is choosing to suffer for us and that we will suffer by losing our life for following him, we may very well not want to see Jesus anymore. But it is seeing Jesus suffer and die on the cross that he draws people to him, seeing that losing his life saves us from losing our life forever. This is how we see God’s glory for us in Jesus’ suffering and death. This is why we still want to see Jesus, even in his suffering, and especially in our suffering. He brings us through all the suffering to his glory. Amen.