



[Pastor Steven Billings](#)

**Sermon for Palm Sunday**  
March 28, 2021

## The Glory of the Cross

### John 12:20–43

<sup>20</sup> Now among those who went up to worship at the feast were some Greeks. <sup>21</sup> So these came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and asked him, “Sir, we wish to see Jesus.” <sup>22</sup> Philip went and told Andrew; Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus. <sup>23</sup> And Jesus answered them, “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. <sup>24</sup> Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. <sup>25</sup> Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. <sup>26</sup> If anyone serves me, he must follow me; and where I am, there will my servant be also. If anyone serves me, the Father will honor him.

<sup>27</sup> “Now is my soul troubled. And what shall I say? ‘Father, save me from this hour’? But for this purpose I have come to this hour. <sup>28</sup> Father, glorify your name.” Then a voice came from heaven: “I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again.” <sup>29</sup> The crowd that stood there and heard it said that it had thundered. Others said, “An angel has spoken to him.” <sup>30</sup> Jesus answered, “This voice has come for your sake, not mine. <sup>31</sup> Now is the judgment of this world; now will the ruler of this world be cast 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 by what kind of death he was going to die. <sup>34</sup> So the crowd answered him, “We have heard from the Law that the Christ remains forever. How can you say that the Son of Man must be lifted up? Who is this Son of Man?” <sup>35</sup> So Jesus said to them, “The light is among you for a little while longer. Walk while you have the light, lest darkness overtake you. The one who walks in the darkness does not know where he is going. <sup>36</sup> While you have the light, believe in the light, that you may become sons of light.” When Jesus had said these things, he departed and hid himself from them.

<sup>37</sup> Though he had done so many signs before them, they still did not believe in him, <sup>38</sup> so that the word spoken by the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled: “Lord, who has believed what he heard from us, and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?” <sup>39</sup> Therefore they could not believe. For again Isaiah said, <sup>40</sup> “He has blinded their eyes and hardened their heart, lest they see with their eyes, and understand with their heart, and turn, and I would heal them.” <sup>41</sup> Isaiah said these things because he saw his glory and spoke of him. <sup>42</sup> Nevertheless, many even of the authorities believed in him, but for fear of the Pharisees they did not confess it, so that they would not be put out of the synagogue; <sup>43</sup> for they loved the glory that comes from man more than the glory that comes from God.



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The events recorded in our text took place during the week leading up to Jesus' crucifixion. He had been loudly acclaimed as He entered Jerusalem on a donkey. Now, He was in the temple. And some God-fearing Greeks wanted to have an audience with Him. As it would have been considered a breach of etiquette to introduce themselves to Him directly, they approached Philip. Philip then went to Andrew and together they went to speak to Jesus.

But when they told Jesus about these Greeks, how did Jesus respond? You'd think He'd say, "Why, yes, of course, bring 'em here." But He didn't say that. And at first it looks like He's not even going to respond to them. You know, He does that a lot. People come to Him with questions, and He talks about something completely different, which, on the surface, seems like He's not answering the question – which He always is, actually, but in His own way. We'd all do well to let Him answer in His way, because we'll always walk away with more than we bargained for.

So how *does* Jesus respond to the request by these Greeks to visit with Him? "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified." Well, that's interesting. John quotes Jesus on numerous occasions saying, "My time has not yet come." "My hour has not yet come." "My time has not fully come." But now He says that His time *has* come; the hour has come for Him to be glorified. *Glorified?* Look, we know what happened later that week: His brutal death on the cross. We could hardly say that that was glorifying to Jesus. Ah, but it was! And this request by the Greeks serves as a reminder to us, a sign that His hour *has* now come.

So, how's that? How is this simple question by these Greeks a sign that Jesus' hour has come?

Jesus says, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit." Jesus is, of course, speaking of Himself. He is the grain of wheat, being killed on the cross. But what's the result? Much fruit! Through His death and resurrection much fruit will be raised up. That fruit, by the way, is *us!* But how does a grain of wheat bear fruit? Through a kind of death and resurrection.

Jesus says that a seed falls into the earth. It's buried. And its life to that point comes to an end. But new life emerges from the old and a new plant grows and bears more fruit. Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 15[:36-38a] concerning our bodies and the resurrection from the dead: "What you sow does not come to life unless it dies. And what you sow is not the body that is to be, but a bare kernel, perhaps of wheat or of some other grain. But God gives it a body as he has chosen." When we die, we're planted into the ground. When God raises us from the dead, we'll be different, our bodies will be new.

What goes for the end of our life goes for the beginning of our life, and here I mean our spiritual life. Are you like those Greeks? Do you want to see Jesus? Then look to the planting of seeds. We see the beginning of a spiritual life every time a baby is baptized. That child is, in the waters of baptism, planted, put to death, so that he might be raised



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again as a new, young plant – a plant that needs to grow, to be nurtured with the living water of God’s Word, fertilized, and cultivated.

But what goes for the *beginning* of our spiritual life – our quest to see Jesus – also goes for the *rest* of our life. Jesus goes on to say, “Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life.” Do you love your life in this world? Is your whole being wrapped around yourself, what you’ll achieve, how you’ll improve your earthly life? Then you’ll lose it. On the other hand, do you *hate* your life in this world? In other words, are you willing to lose your life for Jesus’ sake? Are you willing to put a higher priority on Christ than anything else in your life?

Or listen to what Jesus says next: “If anyone serves me, he must follow me; and where I am, there will my servant be also. If anyone serves me, the Father will honor him.” To serve Christ is to follow Him. And where’s He going? To the cross. To His death. And that’s where His followers are headed.

Beloved, do you want to see Jesus? Then you have to follow Him. Take His road. As He said, “Where I am, My servant will be also.” And the honor that God gives to His Son, He will give to those who follow Him.

Every religion in the world has a central symbol around which it revolves and from which its identity takes shape. For Christianity, that symbol is the cross – a heavy, wooden, stark, splintery cross. You can’t avoid the cross if you want to deal with Christianity. And if you want to be a Christian, you can’t avoid the cross for yourself. Was the cross unavoidable for Christ? Some have suggested that it was His fate to go to the cross. But we don’t believe in fate; fate is not a Scriptural concept. None of the players in this drama – Pilate, Judas, the Sanhedrin – none of them were controlled by fate; they all made their own choices.

Even Jesus made a choice. He didn’t have to go to the cross. Listen to His words: “Now is my soul troubled. And what shall I say? ‘Father, save me from this hour?’” My soul is troubled, He says. That’s a quote from Psalm 6! It’s the cry of a sinner in repentance over his sin. But Jesus was not a sinner. Did He have to die? No. He was the very Son of God. He didn’t have to die. He didn’t even have to come here. But He came. And dying was the purpose for His coming. “Shall I say? ‘Father, save me from this hour’? But for this purpose I have come to this hour” If we were ever to receive salvation then, yes, Jesus’ death on the cross was necessary. But it was still His choice, which makes His death so dear and precious to us.

It’s in that context then that Jesus cried out, “Father, glorify Your name.” Heavenly Father, don’t save Me from this hour, but use the hour of My death so that salvation might be given to Your people. And then God the Father spoke from heaven, “I have glorified it.” I’ve glorified it through Your life and ministry – “and I will glorify it again” – through Your death and resurrection.

The crowd gathered there didn’t quite understand what had happened, but Jesus told them the voice was for their benefit. In fact, all this was for their benefit. Because,



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“Now is the judgment of this world; now will the ruler of this world be cast out.” Christ’s death meant the destruction of the fallen world and the casting out of Satan, the ruler of this fallen world.

“When I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw all people to myself.” By this He’s referring, of course, to the cross. Jesus was not glorified *after* His crucifixion, as a reward for what He did. No, the cross *is* His glory! His being crucified *is* His glorification. By the cross He drew all people to Himself!

And this, finally, is the answer to the Greeks. “Sir, we would like to see Jesus.” And Jesus’ answer is, “Yes, you will see Me. Everyone will see Me – in all My glory – for in a few days, My glory will be displayed on a cross for all the world to see.”

Glory in a *cross*? Ugh. Who wants to look for glory there? But the cross is where Christ’s glory *is*, and it’s where His glory will be forevermore. If we want to see Christ’s glory, *that’s* where we have to look.

Do you want glory for yourself? Do you want eternal life? These are not found where you might expect. For your glory, too, is in the cross. Eternal life is found in hating your life in this world. It’s bearing your cross for Christ. Nobody wants to suffer, nobody wants the cross. We’re afraid of it! But the cross is the reason Jesus came. And the cross is our reason for being.

Jesus’ life didn’t end at the cross, of course. He rose again on the third day, victorious over sin, death, and the devil. He ascended into heaven and lives and reigns to all eternity. Neither will your life end in death, dear Christian. For Jesus will raise you up on the last day. His victory over sin, death, and hell will be your victory. And you will ascend through the clouds to meet Him in the air. And you will reign with Him in heaven forever and ever.

That’s where the glory of the cross led Him. And it’s where it will lead you, too: life forever in the glory of heaven. Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord! Amen.