

- d. After declaring that anyone who would serve Him must follow Him in such a way as to be “with Him where He is” – i.e., embrace His way of approaching life in this world, Jesus turned His attention back to Himself and His “hour” (12:27, cf. v. 23), implicitly highlighting the truth that following Him as His servant is costly. His ordained hour had come upon Him at last – the climactic time He’d long anticipated and thoroughly prepared for, but now that it had arrived, He was deeply disturbed and agitated in spirit. So much so that His natural inclination was to ask His Father to deliver Him from it. This same pathos would accompany Him into the Garden of Gethsemane where it would erupt in an agonized petition to His Father to remove the cup prepared for Him if at all possible (cf. Matthew 26:39; Mark 14:36; Luke 22:42). Jesus fully understood that He had come into the world for the purpose of fulfilling the great work of this ordained “hour” and He was fully committed to it; at the same time, it was no small undertaking, but would demand from Him everything He had, both in inward psychological and spiritual resolve and outward physical suffering in the most torturous of deaths.

Jesus knew what awaited Him, but He also recognized that His Father’s glory (and His own) was bound up in it. His resolve was undergirded by His steadfast commitment to seeing His Father glorified through the realization of His eternal purpose for His creation in Him, the Son. The greatest act of humiliation and self-giving – the Father’s as much as the Son’s – was to be the greatest triumph and display of divine glory. Hence, even while Jesus travailed in His spirit and would have gladly embraced another path to the ordained end, He worshipped His Father with the plea, “*Father, glorify your name.*” Very soon this earnest devotion would express itself in the similar sentiment, “*not My will, but Yours be done.*”

Jesus made this vocal plea in the hearing of a gathered multitude and immediately there came a heavenly reply, “*I have glorified it and will glorify it again.*” While this voice came in answer to Jesus’ plea, He explained to those standing around Him that the Father had responded for their sake, not His (12:28-30). A couple of things about this exchange are important to note:

- The first is the meaning of the Father’s response, which indicates both a past and a future self-glorification. Clearly the future component points to the cross event and its outcome in the Son’s glorification, but opinions differ respecting the past component. Some connect this past glory with Jesus’ earthly ministry by which the Father’s person, word, will and work were manifested in unique glory (ref. 7:18, 11:4, 40, 14:8-11, 17:4; cf. Hebrews 1:1-3). Others tie it specifically to the incarnation (cf. 1:14 with 2 Corinthians 4:1-6; Colossians 2:9; etc.). But it’s arguably best to view this past glory as encompassing the totality of God’s work in the salvation history culminating with the Christ event (cf. Romans 9-11 with its climax in 11:33-36; also Romans 16:25-27; 2 Corinthians 3:1-11; Colossians 1:24-27). The Father had glorified His “name” – i.e., His *person* as He had disclosed Himself to men – by His preparatory works and words and now He was going to bring that glory to its climax in the fulfillment in His Son.

- A second matter is the difficulty attached to the crowd's perception of the heavenly voice and Jesus' commentary on it. First of all, Jesus made the petition to His Father and the Father answered Him, yet He told the people there with Him that the voice had spoken for *their* sake. This suggests that Jesus already knew the Father's disposition and design; His petition, as well as His Father's answer, was for the benefit of those with Him. This interchange between Son and Father was for the sake of the crowd, yet John recorded that they heard only an unintelligible rumbling which some ascribed to thunder and others to an angelic utterance (likely because it immediately followed Jesus' petition). If God was speaking for their sake, how were they profited by an utterance they didn't understand? It seems the Father intended simply to authenticate His Son and affirm His petition and this didn't require the crowd to hear discernable words; a thunderous sound out of heaven was sufficient to accomplish this end.

Jesus told Philip and Andrew that the hour of His glorification was at hand and He indicated by His petition that His Father would also be glorified in it. Now He began to elaborate on His hour and what it would entail and accomplish (vv. 31-32): It would see the world judged, its ruler cast out and mankind gathered to Him (an indirect answer to the Greeks seeking an audience with Him). The world's ruler was to be deposed, implying the release of his subjects. But the purpose of this liberation was *ingathering* – bringing the world of men under the lordship of the conquering ruler (cf. Mark 3:20-27; Colossians 2:15; Hebrews 2:14-15).

Jesus' statement in verses 31-32, then, further develops the central theme in His parable about the seed. In the parable, the death of the seed is necessary to it accomplishing its fundamental work of fruit-bearing; unless and until it dies, it remains alone with its germinal life confined within it. Here, Jesus' death – His "lifting up" – results in the fruit-bearing that is *ingathering*.

- Life flows out from Jesus by means of His death, but so as to draw the world of men to Himself. In the parable, the seed's life is propagated by *metamorphosis*; it carries on in a new form in the plant and its fruit. In the case of Jesus, His life is propagated by means of *incorporation*; the life within Him bears its fruit through men participating in Him.
- Moreover, this fruit-bearing – which in the parable derives solely from the death of the seed – is here associated with *conquest* and *liberation*. The fruitfulness of the life inhering in Jesus depends, not just on His death, but the *death of death itself*. Jesus' life cannot be communicated until the antithetical principle of death is vanquished. Thus the fruitfulness that is incorporation into Jesus presupposes the condemnation of death and its basis, the overthrow of death's rule and the liberation of its captives. Exile, captivity, subjugation, liberation and *ingathering* were core themes in Israel's eschatological and messianic hope, but they needed to be reframed and rethought in terms of Jesus and His climactic "lifting up."

- e. The group gathered around Jesus was part of the multitude who'd embraced Him as Israel's Messiah (ref. again vv. 12-13). For when He spoke about being lifted up, they questioned how such a thing was possible for the Messiah (12:34). They knew He was referring to His death, and this confused them because they understood the Law to teach that Messiah would "remain forever" (consider such messianic contexts as 2 Samuel 7:1-16; Psalm 72, 89, 110; Isaiah 9:6-7; Ezekiel 37:24-25; Daniel 7:13-14). Though second-temple Jewish eschatology embodied differing views concerning the duration of Messiah's reign, it had no category for a dead Messiah. Even more, it was inconceivable that the Messiah would be "lifted up" – that He would die a degrading death at the hands of the power He was supposed to vanquish. (Note the double entendre in drawing men by being lifted up from the earth.) He'd moments earlier identified Himself by the title, *Son of Man* (v. 23), which they evidently interpreted messianically, and now He was speaking of being lifted up in death; thus their question, "how can you say that the Son of Man must be lifted up?" Their theology of Messiah told them that Jesus either was mistaken about His death, He meant something other than crucifixion by the expression, "lifted up," or He was speaking of some other person as the "son of man" who was going to endure this death at Rome's hand.

For all the "light" that Jesus had brought to bear by the things He'd said and done (even in the last few days) – and in the face of their confidence that He was indeed Israel's Messiah, these who believed in Him yet remained in the darkness of unbelief. But now the opportunity afforded by the light was passing quickly: Very soon the light would yield to the encroaching darkness which was about to fall upon them and all Israel. Thus it was imperative that they walk in the light (i.e., be illumined and directed by it) while it yet remained, lest they be engulfed and overcome by the darkness. They were to "believe in the light" while it continued to illumine them and, in that way, become "sons of light" (12:35-36).

John recorded these statements as Jesus' final words to Israel (verses 44-50 are likely John's capstone summary of Jesus' teaching during His public ministry; note 12:36b) and they are notable in that they punctuate his central theme of believing unbelief. Like so many in Israel, this crowd embraced Jesus as the Messiah, but the messiah of rabbinical teaching and the popular ideal. Confronted with the true light (1:4-9, 8:12, 9:5), most in Israel remained in the darkness of unbelief, even in the context of their "faith" (cf. 2:23-25, 4:43-48, 8:31-47). And what was true of the people of Israel is here implied of these inquiring Greek proselytes. Despite the blazing light of Jesus' words and works – a light which no person could miss or ignore, He remained an enigma because He came into a world shrouded in darkness. And this dynamic was very soon coming to a head with Jesus' arrest and crucifixion. That episode would so shatter Jewish messianic expectations that even Jesus' closest disciples – His chosen Twelve who'd lived with Him and fully experienced His words and works – would stumble and fall away. Not even the intensive, culminative instruction of the Upper Room would succeed in informing and establishing their faith so as to steel it in the hour of testing (cf. Matthew 16:21-23, 26:30-75; Luke 22:14-34, 24:1-12; John 20:1-10).