

The Unexpected Jesus

John 12:20–36

Studies in John #27

JESUS blows away expectations with his words and actions. You should want this! “What?” Yeah, if you can anticipate what Jesus says and does then why do you need him? How is he the God-man if he’s *not* unpredictable? That’s what I want to explore with you as the story continues at Jesus’ final Passover celebration.

We notice that along with the expected Jewish worshippers is the unexpected mention of **some Greeks** (v. 20). In Acts 6 Greek-speaking Jews are described as Ἑλληνιστῆς, “Hellenists,” or those who speak Greek; here the word is Ἕλληνές, people of the former Greek Empire still influenced by Greek culture. They **came to Philip...ask[ing], “Sir, we wish to see Jesus”** (v. 21)—they wished to speak with him.¹ **Philip...told Andrew; Andrew and Philip...told Jesus** (v. 22) whose response blows away expectations.

A SUFFERING KING (VV. 23–24)

The first way he blows expectations out of the water is to say he’s A SUFFERING KING. The Greeks want to see Jesus but Jesus says, **“The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified”** (v. 23). Up to this point in John, Jesus’ **hour** has been future: “My hour has not yet come” (2:4; 7:30; 8:20); “the

hour is coming” (4:21, 23). From now on it’s immediate: **the hour has come** (v. 23; 17:1); “this hour” (12:27); “his hour had come” (13:1). Jesus says this and everyone’s thinking, “Yeah baby, he just came into the city as king and now he’s gonna do his thing!” Not so fast. That’s what we’d expect. But his **hour** and his being **glorified** have nothing to do with earthly expectations.

Listen to how he explains further what he means by **glorified** with an illustration: “**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**” (v. 24).

In the other Gospels the Son of Man’s glory is either his sufferings or his glory. In John it’s both! John told us at the beginning, “we have seen his glory” (1:14). How? In his signs, yes; but the supreme manifestation of the glory of God is in the cross. All through the Gospel Jesus has been saying he refuses to do his own will but that of the Father who sent him. That will is to die like a **grain of wheat** to the glory of God!

A SUFFERING KINGDOM (VV. 25–26)

Then Jesus blows away expectations with how he goes on to apply this principle by saying as the suffering king he has A SUFFERING KINGDOM. It’s not just that he’s going to die; we must too as the **much fruit** of verse 24.

“**Whoever loves his life loses it**” (v. 25). Isn’t that the opposite of what we

hear today: “Love yourself. You can identify as whatever you’d like. Live guilt free.” If the center of your existence is your own life, you’re going to lose it. To love yourself is a fundamental denial of God’s sovereignty over you! I heard someone say this week that Christianity teaches that God wants you to be happy and have your needs fulfilled. Garbage! Shame on those preachers in our day that have taught an entire generation to be narcissistic, self-centered, users of and abusers of God and his Word! Jesus is not that kind of preacher. Do you know what makes him stand out, head and shoulders above the Bill Hybels, Rick Warrens, and Joel Osteens of our time? He stands up in the midst of a crowd of tens of thousands and tells them not, “God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life;” he tells them, “If you love your life and all your comforts you will lose it all in eternity! But if you die to this world you will gain eternal life!” This is what makes Jesus unexpected.

Look at how Jesus goes on to explain: “**whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life**” (v. 25). Love and hate are being used as opposites: do you love God or self? If you love yourself, you hate God; if you love God, you hate yourself. Jesus is talking reality here for eternity. Look at the contrast between **this life** and **eternal life**. It’s also a contrast between this life as it leads to death and life itself with God. Why does he say this? “**If anyone serves me, he must follow me**” (v. 26). Everyone has just gone out of

the city onto the road to welcome Jesus through Jerusalem's gates. Are they to follow his right up to the throne? No, we must follow him on the path of suffering and then glory; death, then resurrection. Jesus concludes with, **“Where I am, there will my servant be also. If anyone serves me, the Father will honor him”** (v. 26).

A WILLING SUFFERING (VV. 27–30)

If you were a king and you knew there was a plot to put you to death, what would you do? Like our politicians you'd increase security, increase the advance intel, and limit public appearances. In a word, you'd avoid death. Here's the third way Jesus blows away expectations: A WILLING SUFFERING.

Jesus goes into prayer mode. What's the first thing we do when we're stressed out, when we know something big is happening, or when we have a worry? In contrast, Jesus prayed! **“Now is my soul troubled”** (v. 27). What a glimpse into the true humanity of Jesus. What a Savior who stooped so low from the glory of eternal union and communion with Father and Holy Spirit! So true was his incarnation that his **soul**, the deepest part of his human nature, was **troubled** with what was about to happen to him! So he cries out, **“And what shall I say? ‘Father, save me from this hour’”?** (v. 27) The ESV takes this as a hypothetical with a question mark but I'm convinced it's best to take

his words as a prayer: **“Father, save me from this hour!”** Why? Most of all this is a declaration of his trouble and agony!² Like the other Gospels describe the Garden of Gethsamane where Jesus prayed, “Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done” (Luke 22:42), so too here: **“But for this purpose I have come to this hour”** (v. 27). Jesus is “on point;” Jesus is “on mission,” as we say. And that mission had one focus: **“Father, glorify your name”** (v. 28). As he prayed John tells us **a voice came from heaven: “I have glorified it”** (in the incarnation) **“and I will glorify it again”** (in the cross and resurrection). **The crowd that stood there and heard it said that it had thundered. Others said, “An angel has spoken to him”** (v. 29). They were saying this because they heard something that was inaudible to them. **Jesus** then **answered** the speculations of the crowd with this: **“This voice has come for your sake, not mine”** (v. 30). Jesus didn’t need it; they did as confirmation he was the Messiah.

A TRIUMPHANT SUFFERING (VV. 31–33)

All this talk of a suffering king, a suffering kingdom, and a willing suffering doesn’t sound fitting for a king. Jesus blows away our expectations of who he is and what he does a fourth way: A TRIUMPHANT SUFFERING.

Look at the irony here. Jesus enters the city to the acclaim, “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Even the king of Israel.” Yet he’s riding on a donkey, an Old Testament image of sacrifice. And he’s now preparing his disciples, especially, for his being like a seed that dies as he’s going to be crucified. Yet, with all that in mind he ironically says, “**Now is the judgment of this world**” (v. 31). Listen to what he’s saying. Jesus says ultimate, final, eternal **judgment** begun *already*. And that judgment is of **this world**. Paul says it like this in Romans 1: “For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men” (v. 18). That’s not a wrath and judgment in the end; it’s *now* as Jesus says!

Then Jesus ironically says, “**now will the ruler of this world be cast out**” (v. 31). As he is “enthroned” on the cross Satan will be dethroned. Satan’s greatest work was inspiring Judas, Caiaphas, and the rest of the Judean leadership to put Jesus to death. Yet his greatest work was his final work. Jesus is Lord! Jesus is King! Jesus is Conqueror over him! Jesus bruises his heel, so to speak, on the cross but Satan the serpent’s head is crushed!

The next irony is Jesus’ saying, “**And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself**” (v. 32). He’ll be **lifted up** on a cross for all to see his shame, but it’s actually his glory! Jesus actually alludes here to

Isaiah 52:13, where in the context of the suffering Servant the Lord said, “My servant...shall be high and lifted up, and shall be exalted.” And while it seems for the moment everyone abandons him, he actually begins to draw the nations. He’s already begun that, hasn’t he? Many Jews believed in his at the Passover and we saw in verse 20 that **Greeks** from all over the east were attracted to the God of Israel and now were coming to Jesus. In fact, by the cross Jesus says he’ll **draw** people to himself. That’s the same verb used before in 6:44, which so powerfully said, “No one came come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him.” Now it’s Jesus who’s doing the drawing by means of his cross. As John says, **he said this to show by what kind of death he was going to die** (v. 33).

Brothers and sisters, I told you a few sermons ago that with chapter 12 we begin a lot of talk about the cross of Jesus. And here Jesus himself, our chief prophet, the Son of God in flesh himself, tells us of the attraction of the cross. What is it that I as your pastor, your elders as your overseers, and you as a people should be committed to bring God glory and sinners to faith? The worldly churches the fill our cities here in North County, and throughout our land, tell us to attract people through any means necessary. What does Jesus tell us? The attraction for sinner is the cross! Charles Haddon Spurgeon once said it best: “If men will not come to hear us because we preach the gospel,

draw them by no other attractions. We need no attraction but the cross! An uplifted Savior draws all men to him still!”³ Amen? Brothers and sisters, I recommit to this. Are you with me?

The crowd, though, had an objection. And it was even one that sounded so biblical: **“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?”** (v. 34) They don’t give the source but we know there are passages in the prophets and psalms (Isa. 9:7; Ezek. 37:25; Pss. 72:17; 89:35–37) that speak of the Messiah as living and reigning forever on David’s throne. At the time of Jesus, the Jewish rabbis had taken these texts to mean the faithful should expect triumph when the Messiah appeared. In other words: this world glory. The world that is under judgment. The world we are to hate so that we might love and follow Jesus. How did Jesus respond? He didn’t! He told them he was **“the light** of the world who was only with them **a little while longer”** (v. 35) therefore **“while you have the light, believe in the light, that you may become sons of light”** (v. 36). Believe today! Believe that the cross is the path to glory. Believe that following Jesus and dying to this world is the way to gain eternity. Believe that preaching the cross is the way to build a lasting church family. Let’s pray...

Notes

¹ Carson, 437.

² Carson, 440.

³ “A Blow for Puseyism.” Sermon 653. As found at http://www.gracegems.org/3/attraction_of_the_cross.htm (Accessed September 1, 2018).