

# John 12.20-36 Sermon / COB / 10.26.14

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## Introduction

- † **[Slide 1: Title]** I love when Jesus uses farm illustrations, because it makes choosing a picture for the slides easy. How many of you have been involved in farming or grew up around farms?
- I have never advanced beyond a vegetable garden, but we presently live out among farms and I delight in seeing the changes through the seasons. This year, we had a winter barley harvest, then the corn and soybeans grew all summer, now we have watched those harvests and I think we are back to planting winter barley and maybe some winter wheat. I know it is a lot of work for the farmers, but it brings LeeAnn and me a sense of peace and stillness before God as we look out on what they are doing.
  - Jesus lived in a society that had a lot of agriculture. They grew wheat, barley, millet, and spelt; they cultivated grapes, olives, figs, apricots, citrus fruit, fava beans, and lentils; they had sheep, cattle, and horses. Thus Jesus used farming illustrations and metaphors a lot when he was teaching. Today he is going to use one to talk about his own death, and I think you will find it easy to understand and yet profound in meaning.
  - Then Jesus is going to use that same illustration and his own example to try to inspire us. We'll see how well he fares in that. Let's pray and then we will get started...
  - We begin today with John 12.20. If you did not bring your Bible, you can grab one off of the window sills. If you are not sure how to find John 12, use the table of contents or ask someone sitting next to you.

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**[Slide 2: 12.20-22]** John 12.20-22 NET: Now some Greeks were among those who had gone up to worship at the feast. So these approached Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and requested, "Sir, we would like to see Jesus." Philip went and told Andrew, and they both went and told Jesus.

- † If you remember from last week, it is time for the Passover festival. When John says some Greeks were coming to worship, he is referring to non-Jews from the wider culture, Greco-Romans who had come to believe in the one true God of the Jews.
- It is not clear why they wanted to see Jesus. Perhaps simply because he had become famous for his miracles. But if a couple of days have passed since v.19, then we know from Mark 11 and Matthew 21 that Jesus has cleared the Temple's Court of Gentiles for a second time.
  - You might remember Jesus did this early in his ministry, in John 2, and I preached with a whip and a supersoaker. This time, Jesus stressed that God wanted the Temple to be a house of prayer for *all* nations. Maybe these Gentiles were impressed by this and what it represented about God's concern even for non-Jewish people.
  - It also is not clear why they approached Philip in particular. Maybe he was the first disciple they came upon or maybe they thought his Greek name indicated he would be friendly to Gentiles. In any case, Philip consulted Andrew and together they told Jesus about the request.

**[Slide 3: 12.23-24/hour/SOM]** John 12.23-24: Jesus replied, "The time has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. I tell you the solemn truth [ἀμὴν ἀμὴν, truly truly], unless a kernel of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains by itself alone. But if it dies, it produces much grain."

- † We never learn if these Gentile fellows ever got to see Jesus. John doesn't show us Jesus ever responding directly to their request, but Jesus does address what their request signifies to him.
  - Remember the Jewish religious leaders have already rejected Jesus as the Messiah [or Christ] from God, and soon the nation of Israel – except for a believing remnant – will reject Jesus to the point of putting him to death at the hands of the pagan, Gentile, Romans.
  - Yet in that moment, Gentiles were seeking him out, reflecting that with his death and resurrection Jesus would usher in a New Covenant between God and mankind, which would include *all* people groups.
  
- † The approach by these Gentiles signaled to Jesus that the climactic “hour” had come. The NET says “the *time* has come,” trying to make it easier to understand, but the Greek text says “the hour has come.” Up until now, Jesus has always been saying “the hour is coming,” but now he says “the hour *has* come.” It now is time for his sacrificial death.
  - Remember, Jesus often referred to himself as the Son of Man, which had meaning derived from the prophesy of the Jewish scriptures, which we call the Old Testament.
  
- † **[Slide 4: 12.23-24/Isaiah]** Jesus says the hour has come for him to be glorified or exalted, but he is referring to his death! Let me read to you a prophecy from Isaiah 52.13. God the Father says [NASB]: “Behold, My servant [the Messiah] will prosper [or succeed], He will be high and lifted up [we sing that!] and greatly exalted [or glorified]. In the Greek translation of the Old Testament, called the Septuagint, Isaiah’s verb is the same as Jesus used here in John: he will be glorified, he will be exalted!
  - Jesus would be lifted up both in being crucified on the cross and in being exalted, and these are related. His death is his supreme act of obedience to God the Father, the path he must take to victory over sin and evil, and the path for him to return to full glory as the Son of God sitting at the right hand of God the Father in Heaven. Being lifted on the cross would result in being exalted by God the Father and by believers everywhere.
  
- † **[Slide 5: 12.23-24/wheat]** We live in an agricultural area here, so Jesus’ farm illustrations should appeal to many of us. He points out that if you keep a seed of wheat in a jar, that’s all you will ever have, that one seed. But if you plant the seed, and it dies in the process of germination, then that death brings life for a fruitful crop, a multiplication of seeds.
  - Jesus’ death would work the same way. He had to die as a sacrifice for us, so in that moment he could pay the penalty for our sins, but that allowed him to offer us true spiritual life in intimacy with God, which will yield a great harvest of saved and righteous people for God. Pretty nice, huh? A wonderful gift from Christ, clearly illustrated with the seed metaphor.
  - Take a deep breath... Now, hold on to your hats, because now Jesus is going to talk about us...
  
- [Slide 6: 12.25-26]** **John 12.25-26:** [Jesus continued] **“The one who loves his life destroys it, and the one who hates his life in this world guards it for eternal life. If anyone wants to serve me, he must follow me, and where I am, my servant will be too. If anyone serves me, the Father will honor him.”**
  
- † When we were studying 1 Peter last year, we saw near the end of chapter two that Christ made a unique sacrifice for us, but that this unique sacrifice leads to the requirement that we as his

followers be willing to suffer and sacrifice for him and the sake of his gospel mission. Similarly, here we see Jesus moving from talk of his own selflessness to explaining that we as his followers need to be selfless also; as he died so that we could live, we need to die to self so that we can live for him.

- **[Slide 7: 12.25-26/contrast]** As we have seen before, the Jews liked to use the terms “love” and “hate” to show contrast between preferences.
- The person who is hating his/her life, in this sense, is not miserable about being alive; rather s/he is willing to die to selfish desires, so as to learn to live for Christ and his gospel mission.
- The person loving life, in this sense, makes decisions based on pleasure and benefit right now, instead of investing in eternity; this person lives for worldly ambitions instead of biblical or godly ones; and this person elevates the self to a level of idolatry, because his/her focus is on the self and its desires instead of on God and his ways. This is a bottom line person. The person living for Christ and “hating” this worldly life is the top line person.

† We can unpack multiple layers of meaning here.

- First, the person who absolutely “loves” life in this way has no interest in knowing God or his Christ, and thus lives by what is worldly and for what is worldly, and thereby “loses” or “destroys” any chance at true, spiritual, eternal life; whereas the one who “hates” this life and thus comes to faith in Christ and follows him, will “guard” the true spiritual life given to him/her and “keeps” it eternally. So that is one layer of meaning: the person who loves this worldly life misses out on true spiritual life, while the one willing to give up what is worldly comes to know Christ and gains true spiritual life.
- Second, let’s consider the person who does truly come to faith in Christ. True faith should lead to spiritual growth, and thus this new believer will start to follow Christ, and as that person follows more closely, s/he will come to live for Christ and eternity, and thus move from “loving” this life for self to “hating” it for Christ. This should be true for every one of us who believes: we should see progress every year in moving away from what is worldly and toward what is godly, we should be ever more like Christ in character, and thus ever more willing to sacrifice the pleasures of this life and even suffer if need be, to carry out Christ’s gospel mission.
- Third, if you really believe in Jesus and are born again to true spiritual life, but still find yourself living like a pagan – I mean, you are caught up in materialism; you desire to be entertained, to have fun, to the point that you don’t get involved in ministry work; you think in terms of your ego and pride, your “rights” in life; you only do what you want, not being willing to sacrifice to help others – if this is you, then you are “destroying” and thus “losing” the true life of walking with God; whereas if you learned to hate all that and live for Christ instead, if you learned to live top line instead of bottom line, you would “guard” and thus “keep” your spirituality, that true spiritual life, now, and that would carry into eternity.

† **[Slide 8: 12.25-26/where I am]** When we hear Jesus say, “Where I am there also my servant will be,” we want to celebrate, because we know Jesus now is in Heaven, and we look forward to going there. We have another song about that... and it is a joyful idea!

- But think of the context of this statement. Jesus said this as he was about to suffer torture, abandonment, and crucifixion. That doesn’t sound so good, right? We don’t want to be there.
- As crucifixion was his path to glory, so our death to self – our willingness to sacrificially live and die for Christ and his gospel mission – is our path to receiving honor from God. Do you

understand? When you get to Heaven, God is not going to compliment you on becoming wealthy, on watching the most movies out of all your friends, or on having a great social life. He will honor you for dying to self and living sacrificially for Christ.

- If we want God to honor us, we need to serve Christ; and if we want to serve Christ, he says we have to follow him. That means we need to reflect his character, even when provoked! That means we need to be obedient, even when it hurts! That means we need to be willing to sacrifice and suffer – to give up our comfort zone, our pride, our leisure and luxury, our popularity and wealth – and get serious and intentional about pursuing Christ's gospel mission.
- So, when someone hurts me, I am going to love them, forgive them, pray for them, and even help them, rather than standing on my pride and worldly rights to get angry or get even. I will sacrifice my pride, I will sacrifice my rights, I will sacrifice my comfort to help even my enemy.
- I am going to obey God's word no matter what it costs me. Sometimes it will cost me my friends or my job. Sometimes it will drive me crazy, like honoring civil authority when the speed limit on US30 is ridiculously low in the rural areas. Sometimes it will require discipline to resist temptation, when I want to overeat, over medicate, isolate rather than serve, stay comfortable rather than sacrifice or serve. Sometimes I will have to do something I don't even agree with or not do something I think is ok, because God's wisdom is different than mine, and I trust him to be right even when I cannot understand it.
- And I am going to pray that God will change me, transform me, to be a reflection of him, so that I can make a difference here for him. I am going to pray that God will help me to give away more and more of my money, my time, my effort and creativity, and anything else with which he blesses me, so that I can play my part in his church, his ministry, and his gospel mission.

† Like a grain of wheat, Jesus had to die in order to multiply, in order to bring about fruitfulness. Like Jesus, we too need to die, we need to die to the self, to selfishness, self-centeredness, self-reliance, the fleshly desires and ambitions of the self, so that we come to hate all that and instead choose to live selflessly and sacrificially for Christ and his gospel mission. Like Jesus, we need to die to self in order to multiply to be fruitful for God.

**[Slide 9: 12.27-28] John 12.27-28:** [Jesus continued] **"Now my soul is greatly distressed. And what should I say? 'Father, deliver me from this hour'? No, but for this very reason I have come to this hour. Father, glorify your name." Then a voice came from heaven, "I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again."**

† Just like us, Jesus did not find the path God the Father chose for him an easy one. His soul was greatly distressed. Keep in mind he was not only facing torture and death, he was going to take on all the penalty from God the Father, all the Father's condemnation, for our sin! We cannot imagine what that must have been like for him.

- Maybe, on this day, he felt anxiety, certainly he felt sadness, he was upset enough to call himself distressed in the soul, but look at his response! He could pray and ask God the Father to deliver him from this task, this hour, but instead he says, "Father, glorify your name," in other words, "Father, do whatever you need to do to me to bring yourself maximum glory."
- How many of us pray something like that when we are suffering or afraid? I have to admit, this is not often my first inclination! Maybe we should pray this. Sometimes the short-term suffering might be something that can lead to long-term gain for ourselves and others.

- † Jesus knew as the Son of God he had come to Earth for this very hour, to make this sacrifice. When he acquiesced to God the Father, the Father spoke audibly from Heaven, the third time this happened during Jesus' ministry years, so far as we know.

**[Slide 10: 12.29-32/judgment]** John 12.29-32: The crowd that stood there and heard the voice said that it had thundered. Others said that an angel had spoken to him. Jesus said, "This voice has not come for my benefit but for yours. Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be driven out. And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself."

- † The crowd heard God the Father's voice, but did not understand it. Some thought it was mere thunder; others were perceptive enough to sense communication and thought it was an angel. Jesus knew God the Father spoke for the benefit of the people, so he interpreted for them.
- † Since God the Father said he would indeed glorify his name, meaning Jesus would have to die, Jesus told the crowd that now was the time for judgment of the world. The world – in the form of the Romans and Jewish religious leaders – thought it was passing judgment on Jesus, that they would try him, find him guilty, and kill him, but in reality this sacrifice would signify God's judgment on the world for its rebellion against God and against his anointed Messiah-king.
  - The death signaled the nation's rejection of the Son of God, the Messiah, which was rejection of God the Father himself and his revelation, so God would bring judgment on Israel first, on the Romans later, and eventually on the whole world.
  - Those who choose sin and evil and thus reject the Son of God will face eternal condemnation, while those who choose the light, who choose to believe in the Son and his sacrifice for them, will receive judgment of eternal life.
- † **[Slide 11: 12.29-32/driven out]** Jesus also said "now the ruler of this world will be driven out." Jesus referred to Satan as the ruler of this world, because Satan had usurped mankind's authority, had corrupted all mankind to the point that evil was having its way in the world.
  - Sending Jesus to the cross seemed like evil's greatest victory, but actually it was the provision for evil's defeat. In his resurrection, Jesus conquered the power of sin and death, thereby proving his supreme power over evil.
  - By his sacrificial death, Jesus made it possible for people's eyes to be opened to see clearly instead of being deceived by sin and evil, and he freed people from the power of sin, so as a result many people are saved in faith and learning to live righteously. Though Satan remains a powerful foe to the righteous on Earth, ultimately his power is broken and his fate is sealed, and his counterfeit reign will end when Jesus returns.
- † **[Slide 12: 12.29-32/lifted]** Jesus then said that he would be lifted up from the earth and thus draw everyone to himself. As we mentioned earlier, to be lifted up refers to both his crucifixion on the cross and to his exaltation as the Son of God, king, and Messiah-savior which results from that crucifixion.
  - Part of that exaltation would be how he would be honored throughout the Earth. Jesus said as a result of being lifted up on the cross, he would attract all people to himself. Remember those Gentiles approaching Jesus at the start of our passage? They had to ask for an audience; they

were restricted to the Court of the Gentiles in the Temple. Jesus' death would usher in the New Covenant between God and mankind, which would include *every* people group.

- So all people could approach Jesus or God freely, without needing permission, without being limited in access as the Gentiles were under the old covenant. And some from every people group will come to praise the name of Jesus, before the end will come.

**[Slide 13: 12.33-34] John 12.33-34: (Now he said this to indicate clearly what kind of death he was going to die.) Then the crowd responded, "We have heard from the law that the Christ will remain forever. How can you say, 'The Son of Man must be lifted up'? Who is this Son of Man?"**

- † Jesus said this to indicate both that his death would be a crucifixion [a lifting up] and that it would be the deliverance which God the Father had promised throughout history, deliverance from the effects of sin, deliverance from the power of sin, deliverance from personal guilt and condemnation from God, deliverance from the power of evil and Satan, and deliverance from eternal death.
- † To us, this all sounds good! But to the people with Jesus at the time, it was confusing and alarming. Let's remember our context.
  - Jesus used the "Son of Man" title when he said now was time for him to be glorified [12.23], and here he said this glorification would come through his death on the cross. This is just days after the crowd proclaimed him to be the Christ and Ultimate Davidic King as he entered Jerusalem on the donkey colt, and they knew that the Ultimate Davidic King was the same as the Son of Man, the Messiah, in prophecy, the one who would rule in God's name over the entire Earth.
  - Old Testament passages suggest God's kingdom will never end. Earlier in the week, on what we now refer to as Palm Sunday, these people were expecting Jesus to triumph over the pagan Romans and lead them, not to die for them. So now, they wanted to know what kind of Messiah/Son of Man Jesus had in mind that he would have to die.

**[Slide 14: 12.35-36] John 12.35-36: Jesus replied, "The light is with you for a little while longer. Walk while you have the light, so that the darkness may not overtake you. The one who walks in the darkness does not know where he is going. While you have the light, believe in the light, so that you may become sons of light." When Jesus had said these things, he went away and hid himself from them.**

- † Jesus didn't really answer their question, at least as far as we know. Instead, he offered them encouragement to take advantage of this time period while he was with them, just like he had taught to his closest disciples before.
  - Jesus said he – the light of the world – would be with them a little while longer, only a few days at this point. They should believe in him while he was there and be guided and taught by him while he was there, because it would be much more difficult to believe and understand once he was gone.
  - If they would respond to him in faith, they would become sons of light, people of Christ who live by God's revelation and reflect his ethical qualities.
  - The same is true for us. We need to believe in Jesus and let him guide us, so we can be God's people – the top line people, sons of light! – who learn and trust in God's revelation and trust in God's promises to deliver us.

- If we can believe and trust and obey in this big matter of salvation by grace then we can also believe and trust and obey in every situation in life, such that we end up the people who hate this worldly way of living and choose instead to live for Christ and his gospel mission.

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## Conclusion

- † **[Slide 15: crucifixion]** I would like to finish with an application exercise today. LeeAnn is going to help me by passing something out to you.
  - Jesus has given you the deliverance which God the Father promised throughout history, deliverance from the effects of sin, deliverance from the power of sin, deliverance from personal guilt and condemnation from God, deliverance from the power of evil and Satan, and deliverance from eternal death. The question is, are you really grateful, grateful enough to respond as Christ directs.
  - Rachel is going to come and play softly for us, and we are going to pray, and I ask you to pray through the issues included in your handout, which relate to this passage of John. If you would like to pray up at the altar, I encourage you to come on up. If you want me to pray with you, come join me on the right side of the stage. *[turn off mic / long pause]*
- † You may continue praying, but let me call up our praise team now. I want you to join me in making a symbolic gesture.
  - We used these bandanas before to symbolize blindness. Today we will use them to symbolize the blindness that comes from walking in spiritual darkness. If you want to be a son of the light, a person of Christ who lives by God's revelation and reflects his ethical qualities, a person who chooses to give up what is worldly to better serve Christ, then come up during this next song and submit this bandana to the altar, as a symbol of submitting yourself to Christ.