

The lifting up of the Son of Man

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[0 : 00] Well, friends, let's turn to John's Gospel, chapter 12. John's Gospel, chapter 12. And if you have our big hardback Bible, you'll find that on page 899. I just want to say a little bit about the passage first before I read it, just so that when I do come to read it, you'll have certain thoughts already in mind.

I'm going to read in a couple of moments verses 20 to 36. But as I say, I'll just say a little bit more. I'm due to be here for three Wednesday lunchtimes for these Bible talks today and the next two weeks.

And what I would like to do is to work through this 12th chapter of John's Gospel, really from verse 27 through to the end at verse 50. And you'll see from our church Bibles that this section of verses 27 to 50 falls into three chunks.

First of all, we have verses 27 to 36. That's today's section where Jesus has a lot to say about the cross that he is facing in just a few days time. John 12 really dates from Palm Sunday.

So that's when he's speaking. Then secondly, we have verses 36 to 43, which is a study from John the Evangelist himself in unbelief.

[1 : 17] It's as though he stands back from his subject and from the action of what's going on in Jesus's life. And he reflects in the light of various things that the prophet Isaiah says about this mystery of why some people, many people who heard Jesus, refused to put their trust in him.

So that's unbelief for next week. And then thirdly, we'll look at verses 44 to 50 in a fortnight, where the Lord Jesus makes his final appeal to people to come to him and put their trust in him.

I say his final appeal because those words at the end of chapter 12 are the last words of public teaching recorded in John's gospel. The gospel of John really falls into two parts.

First of all, we have chapters 1 to 12, and those first 12 chapters cover all the three years of Jesus's public ministry, up to and including Palm Sunday.

So we have three years of public ministry, which includes several big blocks of teaching and the record of the seven great signs or miracles that Jesus performed.

[2 : 20] Then we have the second part of the gospel from chapter 13 to chapter 20, and that records the events of the final week of Jesus's life here before the resurrection. So we have 12 chapters that cover three years, followed by eight chapters that cover one week.

It just shows how important that one final week was. And then we have chapter 21 at the very end, which is a kind of epilogue to the whole book. So in the section I want us to cover over these three Wednesdays, John is concluding part one of his book.

He's drawing together various threads as he prepares to launch into the events immediately leading up to the death and resurrection of Jesus. So let's turn to our passage for today.

I'm going to be speaking on verses 27 to 36, but I'll read from verse 20 to give us just a little bit more context. So from verse 20. Now, among those who went up to worship at the feast, that's the Passover, were some Greeks.

So these came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and asked him, Sir, we wish to see Jesus. Philip went and told Andrew. Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus.

[3 : 32] And Jesus answered them, The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. 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. Whoever loves his life loses it. And whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life.

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.

Now is my soul troubled. And what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour. But for this purpose, I've come to this hour.

Father, glorify your name. Then a voice came from heaven. I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again. The crowd that stood there and heard it said that it had thundered.

[4 : 35] Others said, An angel has spoken to him. Jesus answered, This voice has come for your sake, not mine. Now is the judgment of this world.

Now will the ruler of this world be cast out. And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself. He said this to show by what kind of death he was going to die.

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?

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. While you have the light, believe in the light, that you may become sons of light. Well, friends, let's work our way through this passage.

[5 : 39] And I hope the result will be that we better understand why Jesus had to endure this terrible experience of the cross. Now in these few verses, Jesus doesn't tell us everything that the Bible has to say about the meaning of the cross.

But he tells us a number of things that are really important. So I want us to look at them under three headings. First of all, he speaks in verse 27 about the necessity of the cross.

Now is my soul troubled. He says. And that word is a very strong word. It really means tormented, stricken, in great anguish. People have sometimes made light of the torment and the awfulness of what Jesus had to go through on Good Friday.

People have said, well, he was God, wasn't he? He wasn't a frail mortal like the rest of us. He had divine resources with which to cope with this torture. But people who speak like that are only seeing one half of the picture.

The point is that in going to the cross, he was, at that point in time, a frail mortal just like you and me. Immortal eternally, but mortal in this world.

[6 : 54] There's a strange paradox there, isn't there? You remember Charles Wesley's words in his great hymn, "'Tis mystery all, the immortal dies." There's the paradox.

Logically, it's a contradiction to say that the immortal could die. But that apparent contradiction expresses the truth. He is immortal, but he really did die.

And the physical pain of crucifixion was as unbearable and awful to him as it would be for you or for me. No wonder he said, now is my soul troubled.

And in the next few words, we feel something of the conflict and pain inside him. He goes on, and what shall I say? How can I express myself? How can I put into words what I'm feeling?

And then out it comes, this fierce, agonized prayer launched from earth to heaven. Father, he says, save me from this hour. Now, you'll see that there's a question mark after those words in our version here, in the English Standard Version.

[7 : 59] But as you probably know, the Greek text, John's own words, the Greek text has no punctuation marks at all. So the translators of the Bible have to choose and decide what punctuation marks to put in.

And Professor Don Carson, in his fine commentary on John's Gospel, suggests that it makes better sense to put an exclamation mark after Father, save me from this hour, rather than a question mark.

And I think he's right. If you put an exclamation mark there, that means that this is a real prayer, blurted out by an anguished soul. But if you keep the question mark there, it just becomes a gentle piece of introspection.

What shall I say? Shall I say, Father, save me from this hour? No, I won't say that because I know I've got to go through with it. The agony is all taken away if you keep the question mark.

But the whole point is that his soul really is troubled. There's a great conflict within him for a moment. It comes out in his Gethsemane prayers recorded in Matthew, Mark, and Luke, where he says, Father, please, if it be possible, remove this cup from me.

[9 : 10] Take it from me. Nevertheless, he goes on, not what I want, but what you want. So part of his soul intensely wanted not to have to endure this unspeakable suffering.

But another part of his soul intensely wanted to obey his father's will and accomplish his father's purpose. That's the conflict within him. On the one side, there is a horror of torture and death.

But on the other side, even stronger, there is his passionate commitment to pleasing and obeying God the Father. And that's the side that wins. And that's why he immediately goes on to say here in verse 27, but for this purpose I have come to this hour.

and therefore I'm pressing forward. I must walk this road. But the horror of his approaching death just breaks through for this brief moment.

Father, save me from this hour. We may not know, we cannot tell what pains he had to bear. As another hymn puts it, we'll never know the depth of the pain that he had to bear, but we can be sure that it was real and horrific.

[10 : 21] So let's not fall for that suggestion that it was easy for him because he was divine. Now look at that final phrase in verse 27. For this purpose, he says, I have come to this hour.

To go to the cross was always his focused and clear goal. Why? Because only through the shedding of his blood could our sins be dealt with, atoned for, and forgiven entirely.

The cross was necessary and it was inevitable. As the author of the epistle to the Hebrews puts it, without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness.

If Jesus had not died on the cross in our place, there could be no forgiveness for us, there could be no place in heaven for us, no hope, only the prospect of condemnation and ruin in hell.

For this purpose, I have come to this hour. Let me ask, friends, have you thanked the Lord Jesus for dying in your place on the cross?

[11 : 28] If not, why not thank him today and begin the Christian life today? We all have to begin at the cross, recognizing and confessing our sin and trusting that his death really did wipe all our sin off our account.

So there's the first thing, the necessity of the cross. Now, secondly, Jesus speaks here of the judgment of the cross in verses 28 to 31.

He says in verse 31, now, meaning now through my death on the cross, now is the judgment of this world. Now will the ruler of this world be cast out.

Now, let's trace this through from a little bit further back in the chapter. If you look back to verse 20, you'll see that some Greeks, some Gentiles, have come to Jerusalem to worship at the Passover feast and they find Philip, they realize he's one of the disciples, and they make a specific request to him that they should see Jesus, not just to see him with their eyes, but to meet him and talk with him.

And it's this request from these Gentiles that makes Jesus say in verse 23, the hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Now this hour of verse 23 is of course the same hour as the hour of verse 27.

[12 : 55] That's the hour of the cross. The Jews with whom Jesus has been talking and arguing for most of chapters 1 to 12, they've reached a point now where they've made it clear that they are rejecting him.

In fact, if you look back to chapter 11, verse 53, you'll see that their leaders are now explicitly planning to kill Jesus. And as soon as the Jews close the door in the face of Jesus and make it clear that they are rejecting him, suddenly these Gentiles start appearing.

Now Jesus has always known that his death and resurrection and ascension will open the doorway for Gentile believers to start coming into his kingdom. So the arrival of these Greek Gentiles brings it home to Jesus that the events that are going to lead to their inclusion in his people are now pressing hard upon him and beginning.

So he realizes with fresh force that he must press forward to the cross despite its horror. And that's why he says what he says in verse 27. Everything is now coming to its awful and awesome climax.

And this is why he then says in verse 28, Father glorify your name. Now that of course has always been his great concern that the truth and honor and reputation of God the Father should be honored and hallowed and seen in all its true glory.

[14 : 24] And he knows that the events of his death and resurrection will indeed bring glory to his Father's name. And you'll see in verse 28, as soon as he cries, Father glorify your name, his Father replies from heaven, I have glorified it.

What he means there I think is I've glorified it in the great miracles and signs of Jesus, especially in his raising of Lazarus from the dead in chapter 11. I have glorified it and I will glorify it again in the events of the next few days at the death and resurrection.

Now verse 29 records the crowd standing there heard the noise from heaven but they couldn't understand it. Some of them thought that it was a clap of thunder and others thought that an angel had spoken to Jesus.

But he says in verse 30, this voice has come not for my sake but for yours. In other words, you may not have heard it clearly but you did hear an unmistakable powerful response from heaven to my prayer that the Father's name should be glorified.

You are aware therefore that what is happening to me is a turning point in the history of the world, a turning point in the history of God's purpose. So let me tell you what it means.

[15 : 44] It means that through my death on the cross this world is about to be judged and this world's ruler, the devil, is about to be cast out and to receive his death blow.

So let's look at each of these two things in turn. First of all, the judgment of this world. I guess it's not easy for us to think of something as big as the world being judged.

We're used to judgments in much smaller doses. So we're used to an individual or perhaps a small group of people being taken to court and tried and then being either condemned or acquitted, being judged.

But Jesus is saying that the world is about to be judged through the event of the cross. The cross somehow is going to put the world in the dock and the cross is going to find the world guilty.

So what does that mean? Well, the word world in John's gospel doesn't just mean planet earth. It means humankind, human society as organized without reference to God and usually in hostility towards God.

[16 : 53] So it's the whole of human life in its godless or non-Christian aspect. Human society that neither knows God nor wants to know him. Now in John's gospel, Jesus encounters the world, the antagonism of human society in two particularly fierce forms.

First of all, the Jewish leaders. He has to battle with them year after year. They resist him tooth and nail and eventually reject him. But secondly, he has to battle with Pontius Pilate whom he's going to meet in a few days time, the Roman governor and he has to deal with him in chapters 18 and 19.

You might say church and state have ganged up against him. That's really what was happening. And it's this combination of the fierce Jewish leaders and the Roman governor which puts Jesus onto the cross.

The Jews clamor for him to be crucified but they have no judicial power to carry out an execution. So they have to manipulate and persuade Pontius Pilate to give permission for Jesus to be crucified.

And they succeed through very great pressure on the governor even though Pilate knows full well that Jesus is innocent. So the world in the form of the Jewish leaders and the Roman governor the world thinks that it is judging and condemning Jesus.

[18 : 14] But in our verse 31 Jesus shows that it's his cross that is judging the world. It's the other way around. So how is that? Because the world's true mindset and heart is plainly demonstrated, revealed by its decision to crucify the Son of God.

The event of the cross shows the world up. It reveals it as God hating. If, before the crucifixion, if anyone had wondered whether the world really was guilty in God's sight, the crucifixion of Jesus now takes away any doubt.

Yes, the world is pronounced guilty. The unjust execution of God's Son is the damning evidence that shows that the world is guilty. So the world is judged by the cross.

But secondly, from verse 31, the ruler of this world, that's Jesus' description of the devil, he is cast out. Now, by that, Jesus does not mean that the devil's evil activity in human society came to an end in 30 or 31 AD.

We know that well from our experience, and the New Testament teaches as well, that the devil is still active and malevolent in human society. What Jesus means is that at the cross, the devil was fatally wounded.

[19 : 39] The cross was the decisive moment at which the devil's power received its death wound. How so? Well, I think for this reason, that it was at the cross that all of Christ's people were liberated from their slavery to the devil.

Before the cross, the devil had all of us in his bondage. He had power over us to take us ultimately to the pit of hell. But at the cross, Jesus disarmed him, forced him to release his captives, because at the cross, Jesus broke the power of sin.

That was always the devil's chief weapon. The unforgiven sinner is still in the devil's grip. But the forgiven sinner, the sinner whose sin has been carried and absorbed by Jesus on the cross and dealt with on the cross, that person is now entirely free of Satan's power.

So if you're a Christian, the devil will tempt you, of course, but he has no ultimate power over you. He's been stripped of that power. His reign over your life has been cast out.

Now, says Jesus, through the cross, the ruler of this world will be cast out, dethroned, sent packing, as far as his ultimate power over the people of Christ is concerned.

[21 : 01] So that verse 31, it's a very condensed verse, but it's full of good news. Why not look at that verse again later in the day and meditate on it.

It is full of good news. So we've seen first the necessity of the cross in verse 27, the judgment of the cross in verse 31, and now we see thirdly the power of the cross in verse 32.

Let me read that verse again. And I, says Jesus, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself. Now, that doesn't mean, it can't mean, that all people throughout the world are going to become Christians.

Just look back to verse 25, where Jesus distinguishes the two basic types of people in the world. There are those who love and preserve their own lives, who live for themselves, and there are those who are willing to hate their lives or sit loose to the demands of self.

The first group will lose their lives eternally. The second group will be eternally saved. The Bible always makes that great distinction between two groups. So in verse 32, Jesus is not saying that all people will be saved.

[22 : 16] His phrase, all people, is surely prompted by the fact that he's just been approached by these Greek Gentiles. All people means people from every tribe, race, nation, and language.

First and foremost, what he means is Gentiles as well as Jews. So the lifting up of Jesus on the cross has the power to draw people from every nook and cranny of human life.

And you and I, just look around at the congregation here today, we have been drawn from a lot of different nooks and crannies of human life, haven't we? Think of your own fellowship, your own church, whether you belong to the Tron Church or to a different fellowship.

Don't you have a fine selection of crooks and grannies in your church? Sorry, did I get that wrong? We certainly have a fine selection like that at the Tron Church, I know that. It's part of the joy of Christian fellowship that people from all sorts and conditions and ways of life can be drawn to Christ.

Now, look again carefully at verse 32. What is it that people are drawn to? It's not to the cross as such, but to Jesus himself.

[23 : 26] I, when I'm lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself. It's him that we're drawn to. So we see in our mind's eye, and it's good to imagine it, we see in our mind's eye that figure hanging on the cross, and we approach him, we're drawn to him.

We approach him, as it were, with bated breath, with sorrow for our defiance of God and with sorrow for all our sin, but also with a great sense of gratitude and love, a sense of amazement that somebody so pure and glorious should be willing to stoop so low for someone as sinful and ungodly as you or me.

But we're drawn to him. We dare not turn away. We dare not pretend that the crucified one has nothing to say to us. And eventually, we kneel in our mind's eye before that figure.

We confess to him that we're born rebels, that by nature we don't care for God at all. But that loving and wonderful figure on the cross in the end breaks our resistance.

And we say to him in the end, thank you, Lord, for dying for me. Thank you for enduring what I could never endure. Thank you for liberating me from Satan's power. I repent, and I gladly submit my life to your leadership and your lordship.

[24 : 54] That's the power of the cross, to draw people, all people, to Jesus himself. Well, let me just take a final couple of minutes over the closing verses, verses 34, 35, and 36.

You see, the crowd in verse 34 are confused. They seem to be saying, the Hebrew Bible teaches that Christ, the Christ will stay forever when he comes.

And we're beginning to think that you are the Christ. So what do you mean when you say that the Son of Man is going to be lifted up? Does that mean taken away? How can the Christ remain forever and yet be taken away?

What kind of a Christ are we talking about? Now, Jesus declines to answer their question, but instead, he presses them to make a response of faith in him.

He shows them that there's an urgency about their situation. Look at what he says in verse 35. The light is among you for a little while longer.

[26 : 00] Now, the light, of course, is himself. He describes himself back in chapter 8 of this gospel as the light of the world. And he's picking up that same theme here. But he is showing how dangerous it is for them to delay and not to come to him right then and there and put their faith in him.

He's saying time is limited. You have a small window of opportunity. If you don't come to the light now, the darkness will overtake you.

And by darkness, he means the power of untruth, leading ultimately to despair and death. Just look at that sobering statement in verse 35.

The one who walks in the darkness does not know where he is going. That's the person who's not a Christian. There's no light, no guidance, no moral compass, no pathway to follow.

Could that be somebody here? If it is, look at the Lord's words to you in verse 36. While you have the light, believe in the light.

[27 : 07] You become sons of light. While this little window of opportunity remains, put your trust in Christ and you'll become a son of light, which means a person who shares Christ's life and truth and his joy and his true moral compass and his ultimate destiny in heaven.

Do you see then from these verses how faith in Christ is not a leap into the dark? It's a leap out of the dark. It's coming to a place of light and joy and peace and security.

Now it's challenging to be a Christian, but it's the only place to be. So let's thank him today with all our hearts that he was willing to go through this dreadful ordeal of torture and death.

It was for our sakes that we should leave the darkness and become children of light. I, he says, when I'm lifted up from the earth will draw all people to myself.

Let's bow our heads and we'll pray. When I survey the wondrous cross on which the Prince of Glory died, my richest gain I count but loss and pour contempt on all my pride.

[28 : 40] Lord Jesus, we echo those words of the hymn writer and we want to thank you again that this dreadful ordeal, this place of shame and unbearable suffering is also the place at which the glory of God is revealed as we see how deep is your love for each of us and how you've been willing through your suffering and death to take the consequences of our sin upon yourself.

Give us grateful hearts, dear Lord Jesus, and help us to live the rest of our lives in the conviction and joy of all that you have done for us. and we ask it for your dear name's sake.

Amen.