

## *Valley Bible Church – Sermon Transcript*

### **“But If It Dies...” John 12:20-26**

This morning in our communion service we will be remembering the death of Christ. Hopefully this remembrance will not be a meaningless exercise for you. Rather I would hope that it will serve to remind you, in light of His death, what is most important in life.

And what is that? The most important thing in our life, in light of His death, should be living for Him, the one who loved us and gave Himself for us. In other words, the most important thing in our lives should be serving Christ and following Christ. There should be nothing else more important than this in our lives. This should be more important than our comfort, our treasure, our accomplishments, our family, even our very lives.

This truth, I believe, will be highlighted for us in the passage that we are studying this weekend.

This brings us back to our study of the Gospel of John. Jesus had just been ushered into Jerusalem during the Passover feast by tens of thousands of Jewish pilgrims waving palm branches and crying out, “Hosanna! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord, even the King of Israel.”

This very public entrance by Christ recorded for us in **John 12:12-19** was no accident. Jesus wanted to enter into Jerusalem with this kind of fanfare. He wanted it because He wanted to push the Jewish religious leaders to the point of desperation. He wanted to force them to seize Him during the Passover feast. Was Jesus successful in creating this sense of desperation? And the answer would have to be yes!

Hopefully, you remember what the Pharisees said to one another in **John 12:19**. “The Pharisees therefore said to one another [Reflecting on this very public entrance of Christ into Jerusalem], “You see that you are not doing any good; look, the world has gone after Him.” The Pharisees were clearly desperate. All of their efforts to subdue Christ’s growing popularity were failing. Any timetable they may have had for seizing Christ was out the window. The only alternative that was left for them was to seize Christ ASAP.

Now, this brings us back to the passage that we will begin to examine this weekend. Let me read for you **John 12:20-26**. Now there were certain Greeks among those who were going up to worship at the feast; (21) these therefore came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida of Galilee, and began to ask him, saying, “Sir, we wish to see Jesus.” (22) Philip came and told Andrew; Andrew and Philip came, and they told Jesus. (23) And Jesus answered them, saying, “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. (24) Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains by itself alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. (25) He who loves his life loses it; and he who hates his life in this world shall keep it to life eternal. (26) If anyone serves Me, let him follow Me; and where I am, there shall My servant also be; if anyone serves Me, the Father will honor him.” Notice the transition from **John 12:19** to **John 12:20**. It goes from the apostle talking about the desperate state of mind that existed among the Jewish religious leaders to the apostle introducing to us a group of curious Greeks in **John 12:20**. Though on the surface this transition might seem rather disconnected, the truth is that it was not disconnected at all.

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In fact, the introduction of certain Greeks in **John 12:20** appears to trigger in Christ a new and different level of communication between Him and His disciples about His death. Why would the appearance of these Greeks do this?

Let us once again look at **John 12:20**. What does it say? “Now there were certain Greeks among those who were going up to worship at the feast.” So, who exactly were these Greeks who were going up to worship?

I believe that the Greeks in **John 12:20** who were going up to worship at the feast were God-fearers. Why would I say this? I would say this because I believe it best explains why Christ’s disciples responded as they did in **John 12:21**. But before we consider the disciples response we, first of all, need to understand what I mean by God-fearers.

God-fearers were non-Jews who had rejected polytheism in deference to the monotheism but were unwilling to become Jewish proselytes. They typically were unwilling to become Jewish proselytes because they were repelled by the Jewish ritual requirements such as circumcision and food regulations. Though they would often times help support the work of the synagogues and even, as we see here in **John 12:20**, participate in Jewish feasts, they would not necessarily be readily received by the Jewish community. And this was a hurdle that was not always easily overcome, which we will see beginning in **John 12:21**.

Let me read this verse for you. “These [**Greeks, these God-fearers**] therefore came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida of Galilee, and began to ask him, saying, “Sir, we wish to see Jesus.”

These Greeks, these God-fearers, wanted to see Jesus, they wanted to meet Him, they wanted to talk with Him, they wanted to benefit from His teaching (**John 12:21**)

Because they wanted to meet with Jesus, to talk with Jesus, to benefit from His teaching, these Greeks approached Philip, one of Christ’s disciples, and formally asked him to help them make this meeting possible. This may not seem to be a very significant request, but it was. These Greeks, these God fearers, were on the fringes of Jewish society. For Jesus to take the time to meet with them would have been very unusual since Jesus ministry in Palestine was almost entirely, with very few exceptions, to full-fledged Jews. So, how did Philip respond?

Philip, apparently believing that these Greeks were outsiders, hesitated to respond to their request without first consulting with another disciple (**John 12:22**). This hesitation by Philip and his need to take counsel with another disciple clearly demonstrates the deep divide between Jews and non-Jews even when the non-Jews were sympathetic, even supportive of the Jewish faith.

So, what was the result of this consultation? Let me read for you **John 12:22**. “Philip came and told Andrew; Andrew and Philip came, and they told Jesus.” Philip, after consulting with Andrew, felt even though they apparently viewed these Greeks as outsiders, they should at least tell Jesus about their request.

How did Jesus respond? He responded to this request as if He had been waiting for it. This request from these God-fearing Greeks was the trigger for Christ to communicate more specifically to His disciples about His death

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Why would this have served as a trigger? I believe that this request by these non-Jews served as a trigger because Jesus knew that very shortly the wall that kept these Greeks from being fully and totally accepted into the community of the redeemed was shortly going to be torn down at the cross. And He wanted His disciples to be more fully informed about this work that was about to take place. So, what specifically did Christ share with His disciples about His death?

First of all, Jesus told His disciples that His death was imminent (**John 12:23**). Let us read **John 12:23**. “And Jesus answered them, saying, ‘The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.’” The ‘hour’ that earlier in the Gospel had not yet come had now arrived according to Jesus in **John 12:23 (John 2:4; 7:6, 8; 8:20)**.

This is evident when we compare earlier remarks in **John 2:4, John 7:6, 8** and finally **John 8:20** to His remark here in **John 12:23**.

So, what hour had come? What did Jesus say? “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.” So, what hour had now arrived? The hour that had now arrived was the hour for the Son of Man to be glorified. So, how should we understand these words, ‘**the hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified**’?

If you were to ask the disciples of Christ at that moment in time what Jesus meant when He told them that He was about to be glorified, they probably would have thought He was telling them that He was about to set up His earthly kingdom.

If I were to ask you this morning what do you think He meant when He told His disciples that He was about to be glorified, some of you might think that He was talking about His return back to His Father and the glory of heaven.

But Christ was not referring to either of these options. He was referring to something else quite different. Based on **John 12:24-26**, when Christ told His disciples that His hour to be glorified had come, He was speaking specifically about His death.

But how could this be? How could something so shameful as dying on a cross be in Christ’s mind so glorious? This leads us to a second thing that Christ shared with his disciples about His death. Not only was Christ’s death imminent, Christ’s death was glorious because His death was necessary so that others might live (**John 12:24**). Let me read for you **John 12:24**. “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains by itself alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.”

Jesus in this verse is explaining to His disciples, using figurative language, why His death would be so glorious. He does this by giving us a picture of what happens when a grain of wheat is sown into the ground.

In other words, Jesus is pointing out to His disciples what is obvious in farming: that unless a seed is planted in the ground, there will be no crop.

Because Christ was willing to give Himself up to death on the cross of Calvary, a vast multitude of people, both Jew and Gentile, will become spiritually alive (**Romans 5:19**). Listen to **Romans 5:19**. “For as through the one man’s disobedience [referring to the sin of Adam] **the many were made sinners, even so through the obedience of the One** [referring to the death of Christ] the many will be made righteous.”

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If you are spiritually alive this weekend, it is because Christ was willing like a grain of wheat to be sown into the ground and die when He allowed His body to be nailed to the cross of Calvary. Now hopefully you can now understand why Christ would view His death on the cross as glorious, and hopefully that is how you view His death on the cross as well.

How could you not if you now consider yourself spiritually alive, because Christ was willing to physically and spiritually die on His cross.

Is Christ's death glorious? Absolutely! The realization that Christ's death on the cross was glorious should compel us along with the heavenly hosts to worship Him (Romans 5:9-14).

Let me read for you **Revelation 5:9-14**. “And they [the four beasts and the twenty and four elders] sang a new song, saying, ‘Worthy art Thou to take the book, and to break its seals; for Thou wast slain, and didst purchase for God with Thy blood men from every tribe and tongue and people and nation. (10) And Thou hast made them to be a kingdom and priests to our God; and they will reign upon the earth.’ (11) And I looked, and I heard the voice of many angels around the throne and the living creatures and the elders; and the number of them was myriads of myriads, and thousands of thousands, (12) saying with a loud voice, ‘Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing.’ (13) And every created thing which is in heaven and on the earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all things in them, I heard saying, ‘To Him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb, be blessing and honor and glory and dominion forever and ever.’ (14) And the four living creatures kept saying ‘Amen.’ And the elders fell down and worshipped.”

Why is Christ the object of worship? Christ is the object of worship because though He was God's Son. He was willing as God's Son, or in other words as God's lamb, to willingly give Himself up to death on Calvary so that we might live and many others like ourselves might also live.

Let me ask you a question. Do you believe that people who appreciate the significance of Christ's death and have personally appropriated the benefit of that death by faith will live their lives differently than those who have not come to that realization? I don't know what you will say but I know what Christ would say and this brings us to a third thing that Jesus shared with His disciples about His death.

Not only was His death imminent, not only was it necessary, but Christ's death will be reflected in the way that His disciples live their lives (John 12:25-26). Let me read these verses for you. “He who loves His life loses it; and he who hates his life in this world shall keep it to life eternal. (26) If anyone serves Me, let him follow Me; and where I am, there shall My servant also be; if anyone serves Me, the Father will honor Him.”

These verses describe how a true disciple of Christ will live in light of the death that He had just described in **John 12:23-24**. In other words, Jesus expected that His death that was imminent and necessary would have an impact on those who would call themselves His disciples.

What kind of impact did He think His death would have on them?

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They certainly will not love their lives. In fact, they would find themselves hating their lives. Isn't that what **John 12:25** tells us? But what in the world does this mean?

The answer is given to us in **verse 26**. The person who Jesus describes as losing their life, the person who Jesus describes as hating their life, is the one who is willing to serve Christ. He is the one who is willing to follow Christ no matter what.

Will Christ's death have an impact on Christ's disciples? Absolutely! Those who have personally benefited from the death of Christ and who see it as glorious will invariably value the life they are enjoying in Christ more than their life in this world (John 12:25). Will they value it more important than their comfort? Yes! Will they value it more than their treasure? Yes! Will they value it more than their accomplishments? Yes! Will they value it more than their family? Yes! Will they value it more than life itself? Yes!

So, what can a true disciple of Christ expect to be his reward for serving Christ and following Christ? Listen to the promise of Christ at the end of **John 12:26**. "If anyone serves Me, let him follow Me; and where I am, there shall My servant also be." This promise applies to us both in this life and the life to come.

If you have given up your life in order to serve Christ, if you have given up your life in order to follow Christ, then you can be assured that you will always be with Christ. Not only can you be assured of that fact now that He will not leave you nor forsake you, you can be assured of that fact throughout eternity. This certainly was the inference when Jesus told us earlier that those who love their lives will lose it and those who hate their lives in this world will keep it unto life eternal in **John 12:25**.

Those who value the life they are living in Christ more than they value the life they are living in this world will one day be with Christ in glory (John 12:26).

How do we know beyond even the promise of Christ that this will happen? Let me read for you the last words of **John 12:26**. "If anyone serves Me, the Father will honor him."

What a wonderful promise! Those who serve Christ and who are seeking to follow Christ can know that they will one day be with Christ in glory because Christ's Father will want to honor them in that way (John 12:26). God the Father will honor those who, in light of Christ's death, have chosen to honor His Son.

This weekend we are celebrating the death of Christ. Are you prepared to do this? Are you, in fact, in light of the glorious death of Christ, leaving behind the things of this world so that you might serve Christ, so that you might follow Christ, or is your life all about you and what you can get for yourself?