

November 20th, 2016

"SIR, WE WISH TO SEE JESUS"

John 12:12-26

Perhaps the greatest enemy to the gospel in America today is the American dream. In 1931, James Truslow Adams penned his book *Epic of America*. He defined the American Dream as "...that dream of a land in which life should be better and richer and fuller for everyone, with opportunity for each according to ability or achievement." The problem is not with the *ideal* of that statement per se, but how Americans have placed their hope in it to fulfill their happiness. The American Dream has become the American Gospel. Paul Washer once said:

I hate preaching that goes something like this, "You know you got a wonderful life there, yuppie. You got a really nice house, a really nice job and you got a really beautiful wife and you got 1.25 children. And you got three cars, and Subaru's and Suburbans and you just have a great job. You got a great life. Everything fits perfectly in place. You just lack one thing: you lack Jesus." That is the most disgusting thing that you could ever say.

What would be more appropriate to say is "Sir, your life is nothing. It has no value at all apart from Jesus Christ." He is not some little accessory that a yuppie puts on top of his life as though it were cherry on top of ice cream. You have Jesus and Jesus has you or you are barren and wasted and lost. So it's not a question of "Do you want a better life?", "Do you want to go to heaven?", "Do you want to fix your marriage?", "Do you want all these things? No. Do you want God? Do you desire Him?"¹

Gaining Jesus Christ is the prize of the gospel. He is not an accessory that *enhances* our already well-ordered lives. He came to be **our life** or He is nothing to us. That's the tension in our passage this morning. The Jews celebrated

¹ <http://illbehonest.com/do-you-desire-god-paul-washer>

Jesus as the King of Israel. But ironically they did not celebrate Him as their sin bearer, as their sustenance, as the delight of their souls, but as an accessory to enhance their own version of the American Dream.

The Big Idea...

Jesus Christ came to be our life, or He is nothing to us.

☆ Jesus as an Accessory King (v.12-19)

☆ Jesus as a Dying Savior (v.20-26)

I. Jesus as an Accessory King

The King of Israel and the World

Our passage picks up the very next day after Mary anointed Jesus with the perfume. v.12 says “The next day the *large crowd* that had come to the feast heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem.” This crowd was made up of travelers from outside of Jerusalem who were coming to celebrate the Passover. And it was a massive crowd. The Jewish historian Josephus records a Passover much later than this before the Jews were defeated by Rome to include 2,700,000 people.² Even if this later number was bigger, the crowd now at Jerusalem was massive.

Recall that this Passover celebration would be the very last one for Jesus. In just a few days, when the passover lamb was being sacrificed, on the very day, Christ would be the ultimate Passover lamb crucified and slain. As John already foretold in this gospel “Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!” (John 1:29)

² D.A. Carson, *The Pillar New Testament Commentary: The Gospel According to John*, (Grand Rapids, MI.: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1991), pg. 431

When this throng discovered that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem, v.13 says that "...they took branches of palm trees and went out to meet him, crying out, "Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, even the King of Israel!" These words had a very Jewish flavor to them, quoted from Psalm 118:25-26. "Hosanna" means "Save now, I pray." So they are crying out "Save us, we pray...we recognize that you are the King of Israel—the Messiah." For 1,000 years the Jews were waiting for the promised Son of David (2 Samuel 7:10-16) who would forever sit enthroned over Israel and the world. "Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over his kingdom" (Isaiah 9:7).

The Jews had already tried to make Jesus king by force in John 6:15—thinking that Jesus would be their political and military king conquering the Romans and setting them free. But Jesus wouldn't have it. What will He do this time? v.14-15 "And Jesus found a young donkey and sat on it, *just as it is written*, "Fear not, daughter of Zion; *behold, your king is coming*, sitting on a donkey's colt!" This is the Messianic prophecy of **Zechariah 9:9** "Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, *your king is coming to you*; righteous and having salvation is he, humble and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey." So Jesus doesn't walk away from their desire for Him to be King. He embraces it. He says "Yes, I am Your King. I am the Messiah." Finally Jesus and the crowds agree. They celebrate Him as King, and Jesus says "Yes, that is who I am." Jesus is *finally* received by His people. Or is He?

The king of the human heart

There are several *clues*, that show us that what this crowd was not celebrating Jesus as the true King of Israel, but a king fashioned after their own heart. This crowd wasn't looking for a King who proclaimed Himself to be the bread of life. "I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst" (John 6:35) This crowd wasn't looking for a King that would die for their sins. Kings don't die. They were

merely looking for a king that would accessorize their lives by bringing them deliverance from Roman occupation. Here five clues that show us that they were thinking about the wrong King.

Clue 1: Jesus entered Jerusalem on a donkey's colt

Jesus does not enter Jerusalem on a war horse. As MacArthur says here "If Jesus had been the conquering warrior the people were hoping for, a war horse would have been a more appropriate mount."³ Revelation 19:11 say that when Jesus comes again, He will ride a white horse, and "...in righteousness he judges and makes war." But here he rides a donkey's colt in humility. The crowd missed that.

Clue 2: The disciples did not understand the triumphal entry

v.16 "His disciples *did not understand these things at first*, but when Jesus was glorified, *then* they remembered that these things had been written about him and had been done to him." The disciples, minus Judas, were followers and lovers of Jesus Christ. But they failed to see the significance of this moment. It was only after His death and resurrection that they saw the King that Jesus came to be. If the disciples missed it, certainly this crowd did as well.

Clue 3: The crowd came out because of the sign

v.18 "*The reason* why the crowd went to meet him was that they heard he had done this sign." The crowd had heard about Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead. They met him on the road *because* of the miracle, *not* because of belief. Their reasoning was probably that since Jesus had the power to raise men from the dead, that He certainly had the power to defeat the Romans. John tells us in v.37 "Though he had done so many signs before them, they still did not believe in him."

³ John MacArthur, *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: John 12-21*, (Chicago, IL.,: Moody Publishers, 2008), pg. 17

Clue 4: Jesus grieved over the city's unbelief after He entered it

In Luke's account of this same event, grieved over Jerusalem. **Luke 19:41-44** "And when he drew near and saw the city, he wept over it, saying, 'Would that you, even you, *had known on this day the things that make for peace!* But now *they are hidden from your eyes.* For the days will come upon you, when your enemies will set up a barricade around you and surround you and hem you in on every side and tear you down to the ground, you and your children within you. And they will not leave one stone upon another in you, *because you did not know the time of your visitation.*'" Three times Jesus says that the city was unaware of who Jesus truly was.

Clue 5: In less than a week, this crowd will be shouting "Crucify Him"⁴

These thousands upon thousands that are shouting 'Hosanna' will soon be shouting 'crucify Him.' John 19:14-16 "Now it was the day of Preparation of the Passover. It was about the sixth hour. He said to the Jews, "Behold your King!" They cried out, "Away with him, away with him, crucify him!" Pilate said to them, "Shall I crucify your King?" The chief priests answered, "We have no king but Caesar." So he delivered him over to them to be crucified."⁵

How could a crowd that recognized Jesus as King and shout "Hosanna", only a few days later scream "crucify Him?" Because this crowd was not worshipping Christ as the King who would die for their sins. They were worshipping this King who would accessorize their lives by freeing them from the Romans.

What an amazing thought that a person could seemingly worship "Christ" and be completely lost and still under the weight of sin! Now I don't want to overstate the case. Jesus was entitled to the 'Hosannas' that the crowd offered.

⁴ cf. Luke 23:18 "they *all*" signifies "the chief priests and the rulers and *the people*"—v.13; Mark 15:13-14; John 19:1-16; Acts 2:22-23, 36)

⁵ There are many other examples of spurious belief throughout this gospel: 2:23-25; 6:2, 14-16, 26, 6:60, 66, 8:30ff.; 12:42-43

But He received it on His terms, not on theirs. He is the King, but not the one they were looking for.

II. Jesus as a Dying Savior

Greeks want to see Jesus

v.20-21 “Now among those who went up to worship at the feast were some *Greeks* [God-fearing non-Jews]. So these came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and asked him, ‘Sir, we wish to see Jesus.’” This is in stark contrast to the Pharisees rejecting Christ in v.19. They wanted Him dead. The Greeks here on the other hand wanted to see Jesus, to speak with Him face to face. And this is an important signal in our passage that Jesus was not simply the King of Israel, but the King of the whole world. John’s gospel has repeatedly used the language of “world” in several texts (e.g. John 1:29; John 3:16) not to mean every single person, but to include all people groups.⁶ Jesus Christ did not come to be King of Israel only, but to be King of every tribe and tongue and nation.

Jesus’ answer

So these Greeks ask the disciples “Sir, we wish to see Jesus.” How does Jesus answer? His answer corrects the wrong notions that the crowd has of Him. ‘You want to see me? You want to know who I really am? Here it is, v.23 “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be *glorified*.” “The hour has come for Me to be made much of! And oh what a sight I will be!’

Glorified through death

But what is shocking is *how* Jesus says He will be glorified. So follow the logic of Jesus’ statements. In v.23 He says *it’s time for Him to be glorified*, and in v. 24 He tells us *how this will happen*. v.24 “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain

⁶ That is what Caiaphas unwittingly prophesied in John 11:51-52 that “Jesus would die for the nation, and not for the nation only, but also to gather into one the children of God who were scattered abroad.”

of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.” Now this analogy is very easy to follow. Seeds cannot bear fruit unless they die and go into the earth. If Jesus were to be the King that the Jews *wanted*, He would remain alone, and there would be no hope for them. But if He dies, then there would be a fruit of everlasting life for His people.

This answer that Jesus gives was not just for the Greeks. In fact, we don't even know if they were physically there. It is answer to the crowds and it is answer for us.

‘You think my glory comes by *merely* saving you from the Romans? No my glory comes through death on a cross. Israel, your biggest problem is not Roman occupation. America, World, your biggest problem is not your finances, or who is in political office, or your failing health, or your crumbling marriage, or your addictions. Your biggest problem is sin.’ “The soul who sins shall die” (Ezekiel 18:20) ‘If I don't deal with your sin, you will forever be separated from me, under the righteous wrath of God. I didn't come to be an accessory to your life— to be the cherry on top of your American dream. I came to die so that you might truly live! **I must be your very life, or you have nothing!**’

That who Jesus claims to be—life itself. Not a an accessory. Not a useful religious person that we can pull out when we are going through some drama. That's not the Jesus of the Bible. Jesus came to bear our sins on His body, and die, and be buried, and three days later rise again defeating sin and death, and the devil forever. The fruit of Jesus' death brings life. Anyone who believes that message will be saved. “Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life.” (John 5:24)

Application

Our Duty: We must die to our life in this world

Jesus' death becomes the design for our lives. Up to this point so many comfortable Christians in America can say: 'Amen. Jesus died for my sins, so I can go on living in whatever way I choose.' But Jesus will not let us adopt that mindset. Remember He's still answering the question from v.21 "Sir, we wish to see Jesus." So He answers, '**seeing me also means becoming like Me.**' Let's look at v.25-26 "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."

Do you hear what Jesus is saying? He's saying that being saved into His death also **requires** a death of our own. This is not how salvation is *earned*, but it is how salvation *acts*. His death is the design for our lives.

There are three deaths that that Jesus calls us to in these last three verses.

Death 1: Belonging to Jesus means that we would hate *our lives in this world*.

v.25 "Whoever loves his life *loses it*, and whoever hates his life in this world..."

This doesn't mean that we would have a negative view on creation, or that we ought to be self-loathing. Hating one's life means to give preference to Christ over our comfort, over our possessions, and over our family. Hating our lives in this world *means* that when the pleasures of *this world* war against Jesus, we would willingly part with those things.

Luke 14:33 "So therefore, any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple." Jesus repeatedly tells us in the gospels how much it cost to follow Him. **Matthew 10:37** "Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than

me is not worthy of me.” This is what separates a true disciple from a false convert. Are you willing to part with all for Christ?

Voice of the Martyrs⁷ recently published a story of a 13 year old Uganda girl named Susan Ithungu. In 2009, Christ invaded her life and she was radically born again. Susan began to follow Jesus in spite of her Muslim upbringing. When her father discovered this, he began brutally beating her, even threatening to kill her with his knife. After months of this, unable to get her to deny Christ, he locked her in small closet in their mud shanty. There she stayed for six agonizing months. Her father did not feed her. The only food she got was when her brother slipped a roasted banana under the door. When the police had finally rescued her, her hair had turned yellow, her eyes were sunken in her face and she weighed less than 45 pounds. Now why would Susan endure such treatment? Why would she not simply deny Christ? Because she loved Christ more than her health. She loved Christ more than her father. She hated her life in this world.

Death 2: Belonging to Jesus means that we will *follow* Him. v.26 “If anyone serves me, he must follow me;” Jesus says in **Matthew 7:14** “For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few.” Many people have simply stopped following Christ, because the cost is too much to bear. “The gate is narrow...the way is hard.” I’ve known several people in my life who at one time confessed their love to Jesus Christ, but now have completely abandoned Him. Demas abandoned Paul. Following Christ, means that we are picking up our cross daily and following Him to Calvary. This is hard. *It is simply a much easier life to do something else.* To follow Christ means that we must die to the easy life.

Death 3: Belonging to Jesus means that we will *serve* Him. v.26 “If anyone serves me.” To serve Christ means to give up our rights as Lord over our own lives and do His bidding. It is to become His slave. It is to stop ruling over

⁷ Voice of the Martyrs, November 2016

your own will and ask Christ to rule over every aspect of it. This means that we die to our autonomy. **1 Corinthians 6:19** “Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? *You are not your own,*” Earlier this week, Monica and I were talking about the anxieties that both of us face on a regular basis— anxieties over money, anxieties over schooling, over relationships, over church life. We often feel helpless. And I asked her “What is it about helplessness that we hate?” She answered “We hate it because we aren’t in control.” Belonging to Jesus means that we give control of our lives over to Him.

Three deaths

Jesus is calling us to three deaths in these v.25-26. 1) That we would hate our lives in this world, 2) That we would follow Him, 3) That we would serve Him. **And these are necessary *conditions* for believers.**⁸ Look at v.25 “Whoever loves his life *loses it* [*meaning* if you love your life in this world more Jesus Christ you will be eternally lost] v.26. “If anyone serves me, he *must* follow me;” [This is not a suggestion by Jesus but a necessity that He pushes upon us—you *must* follow me other wise you don’t belong to me.]

My heart shrinks from truths like this. They make me afraid. Because they show us God’s righteous requirement for gaining eternal life. And I know that I fall short short. What do I do? We look back to the gospel.

Our Delight: Christ’s death *guarantees* our death and our eternal life

The gospel is not—Jesus does His part and then we do our part. The gospel is—Jesus does His part and this **guarantees** that our part will be accomplished. v.24 guarantees that v.25-26 will happen in God’s people. v.24 “but if it [the seed—meaning Christ] dies, [He] bears *much fruit*. Meaning, Jesus will bring about this ‘dying’ in the heart of His people through His death. This is how Paul says it in Galatians 2:20 “I have been *crucified* with Christ. It is

⁸ There is a difference between a sufficient cause and a necessary condition.

no longer I who live, *but Christ* who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.” That’s why the good news is so good. When we cling to Christ by faith, we are crucified, that is—we will ‘hate our lives in this world...and follow Him...and serve Him.’ That is the miracle of the new birth. Susan Ithungu was able to endure 6 months of torture, not because she was so strong in her will, but because Christ lived in her. And if Christ lives in you—you will never fail *ultimately*. Yes you will sin. Yes you will be sinned against. Yes you will fall into anxiety or depression or doubt. Yes you will go through many trials and tribulations. But if you have placed your faith in His work alone, then Christ already lives in you. And He will not forsake His work.

Three Glories

I showed you 3 deaths from v.25-26, now look at three glories from those same verses.

Glory 1: We gain eternal life. v.25—It’s true that we must hate our life *in this world* (that’s the death we must die), but the glory is that we “keep it for eternal life.” The glory far outweighs the death.

Glory 2: We get to be with Christ v.26 —It’s true that we must follow Christ where He leads, and that may mean that He will lead us to our own cross, but the glory is that “where I am, there shall my servant be.” We get to be with Christ! “For to me to live is Christ and to die is gain.” So whether we live or die, as we follow Christ, we gain Christ.

Glory 3: The Father will honor us. v.26b—It’s true that we must serve Christ, and that means dying to our desire to control everything (that’s the death we must die), but the glory is that “the Father will honor us.” I feel so strange even quoting this verse, because we are supposed to bring honor and glory to God. And we will. But here Jesus says that the Father will honor us.