

John 12:23-33: Biblical Reading and Reflections

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[0 : 00] John chapter 12 verses 23 to 33 If anyone serves me, the Father will honour him.

Now is my soul troubled, and what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour? But for this purpose 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. The crowd that stood there and heard it said that it had thundered. 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. Throughout John's Gospel there is a repeated note of expectation, sometimes subtle and sometimes more pronounced.

[1 : 24] His hour had not yet come. An hour is coming. His hour had not yet come. An hour is coming. Now, in chapter 12, we finally read, The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.

What the awaited hour will involve is not always clear, especially as it can be accompanied both by a sense of foreboding or of expectancy, depending upon the context. Here it is described as the hour in which the Son of Man will be glorified.

John's uses of the title Son of Man are most commonly encountered in his Gospel and contexts where Jesus is lifting up his glorification or his ascension are mentioned. Behind this, we should probably hear the words of Daniel chapter 7 verses 13 to 14.

The paradoxical truth is that the glorification that Jesus speaks of is clearly the crucifixion.

For John's Gospel, the cross is the beginning of and the definitive moment of Christ's ascent into glory. It is the moment when the dethroning of the rebellious principalities and powers of this age will definitively occur.

[2 : 45] This statement of Christ is prompted by the arrival of Greek God-fearers who sought him out. This is a sign that the truth of Christ is going out to the world. In Daniel, the Son of Man is elevated over all of the beasts of the Gentile empires.

The Greeks coming to hear Jesus is the first speck of the rain cloud on the horizon, the first indication of the fact that the Gentiles will come to Christ and the rallying sign of the cross. Here we might also hear the words of Isaiah relating to the ministry of the servant in Isaiah chapter 52 verses 13 to 15.

Words just before the famous Isaiah passage of the suffering servant in Isaiah 53. The crucifixion of Christ will appeal like a complete and utter defeat.

However, it is essential for the victory and the glory. It is like the seed that must metaphorically be buried and die in order to bear any fruit. The Apostle Paul employs a similar image in 1 Corinthians chapter 15 verses 36 to 38.

You foolish person, what you sow does not come to life unless it dies. What seems like a death or a failure is in actual fact the precondition for glorious new life.

[4 : 18] The fruit that Jesus is referring to here is most likely the fruit of redeemed lives. Jesus' own faithful suffering provides an example for all who would follow him. Those who love their lives, who are so attached to the current conditions of their existence, to their social status, their wealth, their health, their belonging, their friendships, their security and other such things, will end up forfeiting what they hold most dear.

It will be taken away from them. Moth and rust will corrupt and thieves will break in and steal. Only those who hate their lives in this world, by which Jesus means that they are prepared to abandon their commitment for preserving and advancing the current conditions of their life for an end that exceeds this present world, will keep those lives for eternal life.

We must lay up treasures in heaven, deny ourselves and take up the cross to follow Christ. All of the tent pegs by which our temporary dwelling is driven down into the soil of this age must be uprooted.

Ultimately, this is all about following Jesus. We must go where he goes. He laid down his life for us and we must faithfully do the same. While speaking of the hour of his glorification with a sense of expectancy, Jesus is also troubled in himself.

He is understandably torn. Every part of his natural human instinct recoils from what the cross entails. The horror of bearing the burden of sin is also immense.

[5 : 40] Yet this is precisely what he has come to do. To shrink back would be to deny the purpose of it all. He has not come to this hour to be delivered from it, but to pass through it. And he prays here that its purpose would be fulfilled.

God's glory would be realized through it. The statement here should make us think of Gethsemane. We do not have the story of Gethsemane in John's Gospel, but here we have an anticipation of some of its themes.

Others have also seen an allusion here to Psalm 42 verses 5 to 6, The whole context of that psalm should make us think of Christ's sufferings.

And the prayer for the Father to glorify his name is a prayer for God to hasten his purpose in the cross. The voice from heaven is similar to that heard in the transfiguration and the baptism of Christ, neither of which are recorded in John's Gospel.

However, the voice recorded here, like those voices, confirms Jesus' mission. The voice, which is seemingly not understood by most present, as they had failed to understand most things in Jesus' ministry, is a divine testimony to the truth of Christ's mission.

[6 : 54] Perhaps the failure to perceive might be seen as having a willful element to it, with the explanations being attempts to explain away what they had heard, in a self-inflicted blindness.

Satan is the great ruler of the sinful age, and Christ's death will be a decisive exorcism event of the greatest demon, the devil. The devil wasn't just a sort of spiritual scavenger.

Like lesser demons, he was in the heavens themselves with ruling authority. Christ's exorcism of Satan wasn't just the expulsion of Satan from some person into the wilderness, for instance, but the casting down of Satan from heaven.

We can see the fulfilment of this in Revelation chapter 12, verses 1-10, which describes the anguish of the birth pangs of the cross, followed by the joy of the new birth of the resurrection, followed by Christ's ascension to God's right hand.

And a great sign appeared in heaven, a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars. She was pregnant and was crying out in birth pains, and the agony of giving birth.

[7 : 55] And another sign appeared in heaven. Behold, a great red dragon with seven heads and ten horns, and on his head seven diadems. His tail swept down a third of the stars of heaven, and cast them to the earth.

And the dragon stood before the woman who was about to give birth, so that when she bore her child he might devour it. She gave birth to a male child, one who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron.

But her child was caught up to God and to his throne, and the woman fled into the wilderness, where she has a place prepared by God, in which she is to be nourished for one thousand two hundred and sixty days.

Now war arose in heaven, Michael and his angels fighting against the dragon. And the dragon and his angels fought back, but he was defeated, and there was no longer any place for them in heaven.

And the great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world. He was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him.

[8 : 50] And I heard a loud voice in heaven saying, Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come. For the accuser of our brothers has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God.

While Satan will be cast down and cast out, Christ will be lifted up through the cross. Through the cross his spirit would be given, and would draw people from throughout the world to himself. Jesus

