

Dying To Live
John 12:20-33
March 18, 2018

Two men went up in a hot-air balloon one May morning. Suddenly they were enveloped by clouds and lost track of where they were. They drifted for what seemed like hours. Finally the clouds parted and they spotted a man below them on the ground.

"Where are we" one of the passengers hollered down. The man on the ground looked around, looked up at the balloon, looked around some more and then yelled back, "You're in a balloon." Duh! I guess you ask a simple question, sometimes you get a simple answer. It was obvious, that where they were was in a balloon!

If you were reading through John's Gospel in the Bible it would be obvious to you that our reading this morning from chapter 12 marks a change in John's story line. There are twenty-one chapters in John so the eleventh chapter comes right in the middle. In the first ten chapters Jesus is teaching. The eleventh chapter is devoted to the raising of Lazarus from the dead. Then from the twelfth chapter on Jesus is in Jerusalem preparing for the cross.

So in the eleventh chapter we have the story of Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead, the most important miracle that he performed. Before he calls Lazarus out of the tomb, Jesus says to Lazarus' sister, "Did I not tell you that if you would believe, you would see the glory of God."

That could mean only one thing. With the raising of Lazarus, the kingdom was about to break into the world. The power that represents the kingdom. The power of new life, the power of creation, was about to be revealed and it was. Many of the Jews believed in Jesus because of the raising of Lazarus.

Now this presented a problem for the Jewish religious leaders. Why was this a problem, wouldn't someone being raised from the dead be a good thing? You would think so. But immediately following this miracle of Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead, we read in John 11:47- "Then the chief priests and the Pharisees called a meeting of the Sanhedrin." Here is this man performing many miraculous signs. If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him and then the Romans will come and take away both our temple and our nation." (John 11:48) Then verse 53 says, "From that day on they plotted to take his life." So it was Lazarus being raised from the dead that lit the fuse for Jesus eventual crucifixion.

But the crowds continued to grow that followed Jesus. Then as we move to John chapter 12 we read of Jesus entering Jerusalem for the Passover and the crowds waving palm branches and shouting Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! We will celebrate this happening next Sunday. But immediately following Jesus triumphal entry into the city, we come to this morning's reading.

Verse 20, "Now there were some Greeks among those who went up to worship at the Feast. They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, with a request, "We would like to see Jesus." These were not Jews, they were Gentiles, Greeks who had come to the Passover to worship what they believed to be the one true God and they had heard about Jesus, the miracles he had been performing, the things he had been teaching. They come to Phillip and say, "We would like to see Jesus."

The arrival of the Gentiles wishing to “see”, is Jesus’ signal to announce that “the hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.” According to the “rules” of this world, a moment of “glory” is a moment of pure triumph, of success, of honor. For the world, glorification is winning the Super Bowl, an Olympic gold medal, and sailing through March Madness undefeated. The gospel definition of glorification is something quite different. Even the opposite.

It seemed like when Jesus wanted to teach a simple truth, he would speak of opposites. If you’re going to find your life, you’re going to have to lose it. It is only in giving that you receive. If you want to be first, you must become last. If you’re going to be master, you must become a servant. All of these opposites are wrapped up in one: “We must die if we want to live.”

Jesus said, “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds.” Then Jesus would go on to say,

“When I be lifted up from the earth, I will draw men to myself.” “He said this to show the kind of death he was going to die.” (John 12:32-33)

When those Greek seekers came to Philip saying, “We want to see Jesus”, they were saying, “We want to know Jesus” or “How can we know who Jesus is?” It’s a question people have been asking for over 2000 years. How can I know Jesus? How can I experience and receive the power that was demonstrated in the raising of Lazarus?

The answer is, you can know him from the cross. Jesus said, “When I am lifted up, I will draw all people to myself.” This is why Jesus came to earth as Emmanuel, God with us; to go to the cross to draw us to himself.

Was it easy? No. Jesus even said, “My heart is troubled, and what shall I say, “Father save me from this hour? No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour. Father, glorify your name.”

God is sovereign. But as believers that doesn’t mean we will never have problems in this life. As we read through the page of the Bible, we read about ordinary people who had problems, much like we do, but as long as they walked with God, their problems were God’s opportunities. In the life of Jesus, a man’s leprosy became Jesus opportunity to show that he was the master over that illness. A man’s blindness was his opportunity to show that he could give sight. A man’s lameness became his opportunity to show he could make a person’s body whole. God allowed troubles to come to Israel so the entire world around them could see the redemptive power of Christ.