

Bible Study Guide: Week of 3-15-2021

1. Read through the passage below
2. Read my notes and commentary
3. Read the questions at the end and ponder or discuss with others

Pastor Andrew

John 12:20-33

²⁰Now among those who went up to worship at the festival were some Greeks. ²¹They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and said to him, “Sir, we wish to see Jesus.” ²²Philip went and told Andrew; then Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus. ²³Jesus answered them, “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. ²⁴Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. ²⁵Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. ²⁶Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also. Whoever serves me, the Father will honor.

²⁷“Now my soul is troubled. And what should I say—‘Father, save me from this hour’? No, it is for this reason that I have come to this hour. ²⁸Father, glorify your name.” Then a voice came from heaven, “I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again.” ²⁹The crowd standing there heard it and said that it was thunder. Others said, “An angel has spoken to him.” ³⁰Jesus answered, “This voice has come for your sake, not for mine. ³¹Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be driven out. ³²And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.” ³³He said this to indicate the kind of death he was to die.

²⁰Now among those who went up to worship at the festival were some Greeks. ²¹They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and said to him, “Sir, we wish to see Jesus.”

The festival John is referring to here is the third and final Passover of Jesus’ public ministry. The first Passover we looked at a few weeks ago when Jesus disrupted the temple complex during the festival (John 2:13ff). The second was in John 6:4ff. It is no coincidence that some of the key moments of Jesus’ ministry take place during major Jewish festivals. One of the main purposes of John’s gospel narrative is to show that Jesus is the locus of God’s presence and power—either in addition to or instead of other traditional loci of God’s presence and power (i.e. the temple, the covenants, festivals, etc.) The Greeks mentioned here were not Greek-speaking Jews, but rather non-Jews. It is unclear why they are in Jerusalem “to worship at the festival.” It is possible that they were the so-called “God-fearing Greeks” mentioned in Luke 7 and Acts 13, among other places. These were non-Jewish Greeks who participated in Jewish worship practices without becoming full converts. In any case, their arrival on the scene sets in motion Jesus’ “hour” as we will see in later verses. These Greeks’ request to “see Jesus” also fulfills what the Pharisees said right before this passage in v. 19: “You see, you can do nothing. Look, the whole world has gone after [Jesus]!”

²²Philip went and told Andrew; then Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus. ²³Jesus answered them, “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.

Indeed, now it seems the whole world has been drawn toward Jesus—even the Gentiles are being drawn to him. The strange pattern described in v. 22 (Philip went and told Andrew; then Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus) brings Philip and Andrew back into play for the first time since Chapter 6. There, they participated in Jesus’ sign of the feeding of the 5,000. The first time they came up was back in chapter 1 when they were among Jesus’ first disciples. There, the pattern of Jesus’ invitation spreading outward first started. Here, it comes back to Jesus, full circle. The messengers have taken the message about Jesus all the way out to the gentiles and now the gentiles have come to see Jesus in the flesh themselves. It is fitting that the first messengers of the gospel bring this word to Jesus. For this reason, Jesus knows his hour has come. This mention of “hour” and being “glorified” are shorthand for Jesus’ passion, death, crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension.

²⁴Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.

Jesus uses this miniature parable to explain how his death will paradoxically result in new life. To “bear much fruit” is a metaphor in this gospel for the life of the community of faith—that is, the church (see John 15). Jesus knows that his own death will result in the formation and activity of the church. Paradoxically, it is his demise that will cause God’s glory to flourish.

²⁵Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. ²⁶Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also. Whoever serves me, the Father will honor.

Verses 25 and 26 have some parallels in the synoptic gospels. Here, the idea of loving one’s life contrasts with Jesus’ voluntary giving of his life for the sake of the world. The call to follow Jesus, then, is a call to similarly lay down one’s life for the sake of others.

“Those who love their lives” are those who do not follow Jesus’ example and value their own comforts and preferences more than following God’s will. By contrast, “those who hate their life in this world” are those who make the opposite choice—to follow Jesus’ example of self-giving and to receive the life he offers rather than the life the world offers. The term “hate” here is a term of comparison. This is not a generic self-loathing; rather it is a prioritizing of God’s life and purposes as more important than one’s own earthly life and ways. Jesus promises that those who follow him (i.e. follow his example of self-giving and love) will be joined with him forever. He highlights the love and mutuality that the Father, Son, and those who believe in Jesus will share.

²⁷“Now my soul is troubled. And what should I say—‘Father, save me from this hour’? No, it is for this reason that I have come to this hour.

Here Jesus’ words and attitude contrast with the synoptic gospels. In the synoptic accounts in Gethsemane Jesus prays that “this cup might pass from” him and describes himself as “deeply grieved, even to the point of death.” In Luke’s account, Jesus’ praying is so fervent and anguished that his sweat became like great drops of blood falling to the ground. Here, however, Jesus is firmly resolved to carry out his mission. He still says his “soul is troubled,” but we get the sense that he is easily able to overcome this agitation and press on toward his goal.

²⁸Father, glorify your name.” Then a voice came from heaven, “I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again.” ²⁹The crowd standing there heard it and said that it was thunder. Others said, “An angel has spoken to him.” ³⁰Jesus answered, “This voice has come for your sake, not for mine.

Jesus asks the Father to glorify his name. The answer he receives from heaven serves as confirmation that Jesus’ being “lifted up” will indeed be a glorification of God. The Greeks who came to Jerusalem sought God’s glory at the festival and in the temple, but it is only in seeing Jesus that one truly and fully glimpses God’s glory. The Greeks came to see Jesus. Jesus’ response is to move toward the cross, signifying that God’s glory is seen most clearly in Jesus’ suffering, death, burial, resurrection, and ascension.

Oddly, the crowds interpret the voice as “thunder.” When is the last time you heard thunder speak? Others do slightly better, claiming the voice is not God, but rather an angel. This passage echoes back to John chapter 10—the Good Shepherd discourse—where Jesus claims that his sheep hear his voice and follow him and know him. Here, the crowds do not recognize the voice that speaks because they do not yet recognize Jesus as their shepherd.

³¹Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be driven out. ³²And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.” ³³He said this to indicate the kind of death he was to die.

There is an already/not yet aspect to Jesus’ words here. Rather than some distant judgment to come in a future age, Jesus states that it is through his glorification (passion, death, resurrection, ascension) that judgment will come on the world. The word “judgment” here is the Greek word *krisis*—a clear cognate of our English word “crisis.” It means a decision point. In the death and resurrection of Christ, God renders a judgment—a clear decision—regarding the fate of evil and of creation. This is a positive judgment for creation, which will be redeemed through Christ’s work. It is a negative judgment for evil, because it will be eliminated. Likewise, he says “now the ruler of this world will be driven out.” Through his glorification, Jesus will condemn the powers that stand opposed to God. The verdict has already been rendered, now we are waiting for the sentence to be carried out—i.e. for evil to be done away with once and for all. Again, there is an already/not yet aspect going on here. Already in Christ, God has done these things—destroyed evil, judged the world, and drawn all people to God. At the same time, we are waiting for the fruit of this work Christ has done to be fully realized.

Discussion/Reflection Questions:

- 1. Why do you think the Greeks wanted to see Jesus? Do you think they found what they were seeking?**
- 2. Why do you think the crowds misunderstood or misidentified the voice from heaven?**
- 3. How might Jesus’ words about “unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains a single grain” apply to the life and ministry of the church today?**