

Armagh Baptist Church – Sunday 21st February 2010

'How Jesus viewed his approaching death'

John ch.12:20-36

Introduction

In John ch.11 we saw how Jesus was able to raise Lazarus back to life again after he had been 4 days in the tomb. Jesus demonstrated clearly on that occasion that he was Lord even over death itself.

But here in ch.12 we have seen Jesus entering Jerusalem for the last time. He's into his last week of life here on earth. Now He is facing his own death. If he was truly Lord over death then why could he not have prevented his own death at the hands of the Jews and the Roman authorities? Why were they able to put him to death on that cross? Was it a matter of personal defeat?

To get the answer to such questions we have to see how Jesus thought of his own death, or how he viewed it. What was the real significance of the death of Jesus Christ on that cross nearly 2000 years ago?

Over the years many people have speculated about that very question, but here in John ch.12 we have what Jesus himself believed, and indeed taught, about the true significance of his soon-coming death.

First of all I want you to notice who all of this was said to. I think it is significant that the clearest teaching about Jesus' death on the cross was not given to the Jews - God's own special people, because by now, they had by and large rejected him as their Messiah and Saviour. Notice instead that this teaching was given to Greeks (v.20-22). These men were outsiders from Israel – Gentiles - people like you and me!

This again brings out John's theme: that Jesus was not just the Messiah or Saviour for Israel alone:

- He had come because He loved the whole **world** (John 3:16).
- He came not to condemn the **world**, but that the **world** through Him might be saved (John 3:17).
- In Samaria, the village the woman at the well belonged to, they came to see that *"this man really was the Saviour of the **World**"* (John 4:42).
- He said on another occasion *"I am the **World**, whoever follows me, will not walk in darkness, but have the Light of Life."* (John 8:12).
- And at the end of John ch.12 he says, *"I did not come to judge the **world**, but to save it."* (v.47)

We need to remember that it was coming up to the Feast of the Passover in Jerusalem. Thousands would be arriving from all over the known world. They were mostly Jews of course, but among the crowds were a few other people, Gentiles or Greeks, people who were searching for reality in religion.

The Pharisees have already made the comment in v.20 to each other:
*'See, this is getting us nowhere.
Look how **the whole world** has gone after Him!'*

And then in the very next verse we are introduced to these Greeks who have come to worship at the Passover Feast. Look what these Greeks asked Philip one of the disciples for:

***"Sir, we would like to see Jesus."* (v.21)**

At first it appears as if Philip doesn't know what to do with them, so he consults with another disciple - Andrew. And together they go to tell Jesus that some Greeks would like to meet him!

These Greeks have obviously been left dissatisfied with all their searching as far as religion is concerned in the past. Now they have come to Jerusalem to investigate the Jewish religion, but still they are dissatisfied. They have now realised that what they needed was all to be found in Jesus. And they were absolutely right. Jesus is the answer to all our questions.

Do you realise that? – That all you need for true satisfaction in faith is Jesus. You don't need anybody or anything else. It's not religion you need; it's Jesus.

The rest of this passage is a very significant part of Scripture. Jesus himself is speaking. He talks about himself, and he talks about his death that was soon going to take place just outside the city of Jerusalem, before that Passover week would be over.

Here in these verses we see how Jesus viewed his own death. He begins by saying in v.23, that *'the hour had come for the Son of Man to be glorified.'* We'll see what He meant by that in a moment, but notice the first thing he says about his own death. It would be like...

1. A grain of wheat falling into the ground and dying (v.24)

Some people want to see Jesus, like these Greeks did, but they don't want to think of the gory details of his death – and the horrors of crucifixion.

- They want to think about his words - some of his famous sayings.
- They want to try to follow his famous Sermon on the Mount.
- They want to try to copy his lifestyle, or follow his example.

But sadly, very often, they want to by-pass the cross.

If we want to truly see Jesus, then we must see him dying for us on the cross. When these Greeks wanted to see Jesus, he didn't turn their attention to his miracles, or his teaching, or his sermons, or his good works, he turned their attention to the cross - and he makes three references to his death.

The first was a grain of wheat falling into the ground to die (v.24)
What was Jesus getting at - what did he want us to understand by this?

Jesus was saying that unless he went to that cross and died for us, he would be no good to us as a Saviour. As He stood there talking to those Greeks, at that point in time he was just like a single solitary seed or grain of wheat.

Precious though He was, and powerful as he was, as the very Son of God, nothing would happen for us until, like that grain of wheat, He would fall into the ground and die, and only by dying would he bring forth a vast, great Harvest - a Harvest of all those who would put their faith and trust in Him as Lord and Saviour of their lives.

I'm sure when the **Great Famine struck in Ireland just over 150 years ago in 1845**, and the potato crop was destroyed by blight, many a poor beleaguered farmer was faced with a very difficult decision to make: Maybe he only had a few wizzened up potatoes left to feed himself and His family. What should he do? Should he put them in the saucepan and cook them, eat them and get nourishment from them? Or should he put them in the ground, and wait until next year's harvest, hoping that next year's crop would be a good one, and he and His family could get back on their feet again? Would he and his family even survive until next year's Harvest?

I wonder was that a little of what Jesus was thinking? Like he prayed in the garden of Gethsemane, *"Father if it be your will, let this cup pass from me, nevertheless, not my will, but yours be done."* (Or as he puts it here in v.27).

Should he spare His own life and avoid the cross, or should He lay down his life as an atoning sacrifice for the sins of the world, that they in turn might be saved through faith in His death for them.

Praise God Jesus decided with us in mind. He saw His life like that little grain of wheat. He knew that it was only by dying that He could give us eternal life. He knew that it was only by dying that the great Harvest of souls could be reaped. And so he submitted to death on the cross to enable the harvest to take place. And you and I can be part of that Harvest tonight!
He saw his death like a grain of wheat falling into the ground and dying, in order that eventually a harvest of souls would come.

In a lesser sense, the principle that is talked about here in vs.24-26 has been borne out in many a missionary situation around the world. Take the Ecuador Jungle in 1952, when Jim Elliot and his friends were trying to reach the Auca Indian Tribe for the very first time. Jim had written in his diary some years earlier: 'He is no fool, who gives what he cannot keep, to gain what he cannot

lose.' And soon he would have to live up to his words, as he and his friends were butchered to death by the very Indians they were trying so hard to bring the Gospel to. A few days later as their wives flew over the spot on the Curary River deep in Ecuador's rainforest where they last had radio contact from them, they could see the bodies of their husbands lying on a sandy beach on the edge of the river. They landed, and buried the bodies of their husbands where they had fallen, like seeds being planted in the ground of Auca territory. But shortly after that, Elisabeth Elliott and some of the other widows went back into that tribe, and lived among them, with the result that now today, over half of that tribe are believers in the Lord Jesus Christ. (Read vs.24-26 again).

Now, I'm not saying that Jim Elliott's death in any way purchased the salvation of the Auca Indians, not at all. But that principle has been borne out many times. Very often it is the blood of the martyrs that is the seed of the church.

But in the greatest sense of this principle, Jesus' death was like a grain of wheat falling into the ground and dying, and only when he died, could that great world harvest begin to be gathered in. Because it was his very death, that dealt with our sins, once and for all. It was his death, that defeated Satan forever, and it was his cry in death, 'It is Finished' which has purchased the salvation of anyone who will come and bow the knee before Jesus as Lord and Saviour of their lives. In that moment they die to sin, and they live for righteousness. It's by his wounds that we are healed.

But notice secondly how Jesus viewed his death:

2. It would be His glorification, not his humiliation (v.27,28)

There was no worse kind of death than crucifixion, no more humiliating way to die, than to be stripped naked, nailed to a cross, and left to suffocate and die like a common criminal. And yet what do we read in these verses:

v.23: *'The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified...'*
vs.27-28: *'Now 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!' Then a voice came from heaven, 'I have glorified it, and will glorify it again.'*

As far as Jesus was concerned, though humanly speaking he dreaded the cross, yet he knew one thing: it was the very reason why He had come into this world at all. He was born to die for the sins of lost men and women. Therefore in that sense His death was to be his moment of glory. This was to be the very high point of his life on earth - the very reason why he came - as he laid down his life for men and women like you and me.

So this was His moment of glory.

But not only did Jesus see it that way, so did God the Father, because at that moment God spoke from heaven, (as he had done previously at Jesus' Baptism and at his Transfiguration) when he had said:

'This is my beloved Son, in Him I am well pleased.'

and *'This is my beloved Son, Listen to Him.'*

This time, in response to Jesus' request to glorify His name, He said:

"I have glorified it, and will glorify it again." (v.28)

God the Father would glorify His Son, not only through his death for us on that cross, but after his death on the cross, he would glorify his Son's name by raising Him from the dead in great power and triumph. But even more than that, he would glorify his Son's name by seating Him again in glory in Heaven:

(Read Philippians 2 vs.5-11)

Because of the Cross, one day every knee will bow before Jesus, and one day every tongue will confess that: 'Jesus Christ is Lord' - and what comes next? This will be... ***'to the glory of God the father!'***

And so through submitting to death on a cruel Roman Cross, God the Father was going to glorify His Son, as the only Saviour for a world of Sinners. But ultimately God the Son, will bring glory to God the Father, because when every knee bows, and every tongue confesses that 'Jesus is Lord' that in itself will bring great glory to God the Father, for his wonderful plan of salvation.

So how did Jesus view his death in this passage?

1. As a grain of wheat falling into the ground and dying in order to produce a great harvest of souls.
2. As his moment, not of humiliation, but of glorification, because after dying on the cross, he would rise again on the third day, and ultimately one day when everybody bows before him, this will bring glory to His Father.

But the third way that Jesus viewed his death in this passage was this...

3. It would be His lifting up to draw all men to Himself (v.30-33)

The crowd looking on wasn't sure whether it had thundered, or whether an angel had spoken to Jesus. But they had definitely heard something. Jesus says in v.30 that the voice coming from heaven had been for their benefit, not his. But they were still bewildered.

You see, at this point nobody knew that Jesus was going to die, or how he was going to die. He had told them, but they hadn't been listening, or taken it in. But when he goes on to talk about being lifted up, he was talking about being lifted up on a cross to die. And look what he says about it in v.31ff:

Jesus believed that...

(i) This world would be judged for their sins at that time (v.31)

Jesus says, *'Now is the time for judgement on this world.'*

Now – not later. Not in 2000 or 3000 years time. He said 'Now!'

In some sense Jesus was about to take the judgement, the punishment, for the sins of this world - at that time, as he died on that cross, 2000 years ago.

Jesus would willingly suffer punishment for sinners on that cross (v.31).

This is at the very heart of what Jesus was doing on the cross.

He wasn't just showing the world how to die an exemplary death.

He wasn't just showing this world how much God loved them.

He was actually taking the sins of the world onto his own shoulders.

He was actually taking the punishment for those sins upon himself.

He was actually suffering and dying in the place of sinners.

He was taking your punishment and mine that we deserved.

He took it instead. This is the meaning of substitutionary atonement.

Jesus became our substitute. He took our place, He took the punishment that we deserved from God for our sins, and He died in our place.

He became the atoning sacrifice for our sins as he died on that cross.

But something else was happening then, while he hung on that cross:

(ii) The Prince of this world was being driven out – Satan (v.31)

Notice again, this was happening then, not later in history. This was happening at the cross. Satan was being defeated, Jesus was gaining the victory over the devil. Satan thought he was doing his best work, when he was having Jesus put to death on that cross at the hands of sinful Romans, and jealous Jews, but as Jesus took our sins upon himself and drained the last drop of God's wrath, and then cried out "It is Finished" in his dying breath, sin was dealt with, and Satan was defeated, and that's why the power of death was broken, so that Jesus could rise again from the dead on the third day!

Some people teach that Jesus is coming back at the end of time to have another battle with Satan – the Battle of Armageddon. But if you read the Book of Revelation carefully, you will discover that although the kings of this world will line up for battle at some point in the future against the Lord and his Anointed One, that battle doesn't actually ever take place. Because Jesus brings it to a sudden and abrupt halt, by the power of his coming. How come? Because he has already won the battle 2000 years ago, when he defeated the Devil on the cross. When He cried out, 'It is Finished!' He really meant it. There is nothing more that He has to do. He has already done it all. As far as our Salvation and as far as the defeat of Satan are concerned, the battle is over and the war is won! The Prince of this world has been driven out

(iii) Salvation has been made available for all men (v.32)

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*“But I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw **all men** to myself.”*

And the next verse says:

‘He said this to show the kind of death he was going to die.’ (v.33)

What kind of death would that be? - It would be a ‘lifting up from the earth’.

That is clearly death by crucifixion. He would be nailed to a cross of wood, and then he would be lifted up between heaven and earth, as the cross dropped down into its socket in the ground. And there he would be left to suffer and die an atoning death for the sins of mankind.

But he promised, *‘When I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw **all men** to myself.’* Who was he saying this to? He was saying it to a crowd of people. Many of them were Jews, but among them were these Greeks – the Gentiles. That’s what he means by *‘all men’*. It’s not that every single person who has ever walked this planet will be drawn savingly to Jesus Christ. But it does mean that people from all backgrounds – Jew and Greek, Jew and Gentile, indeed people *from every tribe and tongue and people and nation* – that’s who will be drawn to Christ, as a result of his death on the cross for each one of us.

He will draw each one to Himself.

He doesn’t force us to be saved. He doesn’t coerce us.

He lovingly draws us to himself for salvation, to trust in Him by faith.

Conclusion: What about You?

Jesus has died for people of all backgrounds. **Q. Has he died for you?**

Jesus has dealt with the sins of mankind. **Q. Has he dealt with your sin?**

Jesus took the punishment for sin. **Q. Has he taken your punishment?**

Jesus says he will draw all men to himself. **Q. Has he drawn you to Himself?**

Q. Are you saved?

Are you trusting in the finished work of Christ on the cross for your salvation?

In v.34 the people in the crowd, even after all of this, still aren’t sure who the Son of Man is! But Jesus goes on to say this in vs.35-36:

‘You are going to have the light just a little while longer.

Walk while you have the light, before darkness overtakes you.

The man who walks in the dark does not know where he is going.

PUT YOUR TRUST IN THE LIGHT WHILE YOU HAVE IT,

so that you may become sons of light.’

‘When he had finished speaking, Jesus left and hid himself from them.’

If Jesus was to hide himself from you tonight, would this be your last chance?