



If It Dies

Jesus offers hope to those who seek Him.

JOHN 12:20-33

Most of us have a favorite fruit. At some point, a seed was planted that led to the producing of that fruit. While the seed may look nothing like the fruit, it sacrificed itself in producing the plant or tree that eventually led to the piece of fruit we enjoy. Unless the seed “died,” it could not have taken root and produced growth. Even so, Jesus predicted He had to die to provide eternal life.

Share about your favorite fruit. What steps are required for you to enjoy that piece of fruit?

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

JOHN 12:20-50

Jesus came not only as Messiah of the Jews but Savior of the world. While He primarily ministered among the Jews, Jesus made it clear that God also loves the Gentiles who seek and serve Him. When some God-fearing Greeks wanted to meet Jesus, the event triggered Jesus's proclamation of His impending death. As His hour approached, He again explained what was about to happen. As He often did, Jesus used metaphors and symbols to teach. He pointed out that a seed had to die to produce life.

Jesus's analogy of dying to live not only applied to Him, but also to anyone who followed Him. Some people might try to preserve their ways of life rather than die to self and come after Him. In doing so, they would lose the opportunity for greater, eternal life. In contrast, Jesus was willing to yield His life to glorify the Father and provide salvation for believers. His death would result in drawing people to Himself for God's glory. Just as some Greeks had been attracted to Jesus, even so His death on the cross would bring countless others to Him.

Using another metaphor, Jesus described Himself as the light of the world. He urged His followers to believe in the light and walk in the light. Addressing His earthly life, Jesus warned that the light would only be with them for a short while. They should take advantage of His presence to grow stronger in their faith and to put that faith into practice as children of the light.

Unfortunately, in keeping with Isaiah's prophecies, many people were blind to the light and refused to believe. Some of the people who heard Jesus believed in Him but were reluctant to do so openly for fear of the religious leaders. They desired the approval of people rather than laying down their lives for Christ.

Read John 12:20-33 in your Bible, highlighting words that point to actions that indicate a person believes in Jesus. How does becoming a believer in Jesus affect a person's life?

EXPLORE THE TEXT

INTRODUCED (JOHN 12:20-22)

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

²² Philip went and told Andrew; then Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus.

VERSES 20-22

John highlighted Jesus’s entrance into the city—a triumphant scene for the Jews (12:12-19)—in close connection to **some Greeks** who came looking for Him. The phrase *some Greeks* could refer to unidentified Gentiles rather than specifically to people from Greece. The previous events highlighted what Jesus meant to the Jews; the events that followed highlight that He came for all peoples and all nations—including Gentiles.

Why would Gentiles want **to worship at the festival** of Passover? These Gentiles may have been “God-fearers,” individuals who walked away from pagan religions and worshiped the God of the Jews. Rather than fully embracing Judaism, God-fearers did not participate in all the requirements of the Law, including circumcision (Acts 10:1-2,22).

The text does not explain if or when **Philip** may have previously met these visitors. They may have approached *Philip* because he had a Greek name or because they knew he was from **•Bethsaida**, a town on the Sea of Galilee. Many of its residents reflected a Greek rather than Jewish influence. As such, Philip was likely comfortable with dealing with non-Jews.

The verb tense indicates these visitors continually **requested** of Philip; they wanted to **see Jesus**. Wanting to *see Jesus* meant they wanted to interview Him. Maybe their curiosity had been piqued by the reception Jesus received when he rode victoriously into Jerusalem. Maybe they had heard about Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead. Regardless, they wanted to know this Jesus better.

Philip told Andrew, who was also from *Bethsaida* (and the only other disciple with a Greek name), about the men’s request. Together, Philip and Andrew told Jesus about the men who wanted to meet Him.

What makes a person approachable? How does our personal identity serve as a door to point others to Jesus?

BIBLE SKILL: *Dig deeper into the usage of key words or phrases.*

Examine Jesus’s reference to His hour in His response to His mother. (John 2:4) Notice the difference between Jesus’s reference to “My hour” and “the hour” in John 4:21-23. Consider how the early failures of Jesus’s enemies related to the fact that His hour had not yet arrived (John 7:30). Read John 13:1 to see another description of Jesus’s hour. How do these references help us better understand John 12:23?

DIES (JOHN 12:23-26)

²³ Jesus replied to them, “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. ²⁴ Truly I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains by itself. But if it dies, it produces much fruit. ²⁵ The one who loves his life will lose it, and the one who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. ²⁶ If anyone serves me, he must follow me. Where I am, there my servant also will be. If anyone serves me, the Father will honor him.”

VERSES 23-24

John gave no indication why they wanted to meet Jesus, nor did he state that Jesus actually met with them. News of the Gentiles’ request, however, triggered something in Jesus. It elicited an announcement that *the hour* had *come* for Him to die for the whole world—Jews and Gentiles alike.

Four principles are affirmed in Jesus's reply. First, for Jesus to say *the hour* had *come* meant He was not passively subjected to the circumstances. Second, Jesus's speaking of the hour at this point marked a turn in His usage of the word. Previously, He had spoken of the hour—meaning His death, burial, and resurrection—as a future event (John 2:4; 4:21,23; 7:30; 8:20). Beginning here and moving forward, the hour was imminent (12:27; 13:1; 17:1). Third, the prophet Daniel had spoken of the ***Son of Man*** as the one who would come and unite heaven and earth (Dan. 7:13-14). Jesus used the term because He, the Messiah, had come to fulfill that prophecy. Fourth, Jesus would be ***glorified*** through His death, which He explained in the statement that followed.

The image of planting a seed would have been familiar to those listening to Jesus. Rabbis used the terminology to describe the death of the physical body and the resurrection that followed. Greeks, who were involved in fertility cults, used similar language to describe reaping sparingly and afterwards sowing abundantly. Both groups understood sowing a grain of wheat and afterward harvesting much fruit.

**How was Jesus glorified through His death, burial, and resurrection?
How was this contrary to what people expected in the Messiah?**

VERSES 25-26

Having presented the metaphor of planting a seed, Jesus moved to the application. When He spoke of someone loving or hating ***his life***, He was referring to a life dictated and governed by one's ego, whims, self-interests, and desires. ***This world*** did not refer to this planet that spins in space. Jesus used *world* to mean the realm in which all fallen creation lives. Rather than be confined to this fallen world, believers experience eternal life that is glorious beyond what anyone has seen, heard, or imagined (1 Cor. 2:9).

Verse 26 contains the promise of both risk and reward, of peril and prize. Jesus was nearing the cross; to ***follow*** Him at this point meant being willing to die a martyr's death. That death, though,

would be followed by the eternal rewards of being with Jesus and being honored by the Father.

Why is it difficult to hate one's life in this world? How does losing one's life lead to gaining life?

GLORIFIED (JOHN 12:27-28)

²⁷ “Now my soul is troubled. What should I say—Father, save me from this hour? But that is why I came to this hour. ²⁸ Father, glorify your name.” Then a voice came from heaven: “I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again.”

VERSES 27-28

Jesus came as God in human flesh—as much human as if He were not divine and as much divine as if He were not human. Verse 27 is a reminder of that truth.

He had just announced the hour had arrived; His death was pending. In His lifetime Jesus had surely seen crucified bodies hanging on Roman crosses. He had witnessed the barbaric torture and resultant agony. Thus, for Jesus to say ***my soul is troubled*** had to be an understatement.

The word *soul* referred to the core of a person's feelings and emotions. What Jesus felt was coming from deep within. The imagery behind the Greek word translated *troubled* was of something being disturbed. The same word described Herod's reaction to the wise men's announcement about the birth of the king of the Jews: “he was deeply *disturbed*” (Matt. 2:3, emphasis added). Jesus felt intense emotional distress because of what He was facing. Despite the anguish, however, this was why He came.

The words of verse 27 reflect the prayer of Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane (Matt. 26:39). The prayer reflects both the dread Jesus felt and His steadfastness in His obedience to the Father, understanding He was to be sacrificed for our sins (John 10:17-18; 1 John 4:10).

In the statement, ***Father, glorify your name***, the Greek emphasizes the “your.” It is reminiscent of the opening statement in the Lord’s Prayer, “your name be honored as holy” (Matt 6:9). The act of bringing glory to God had deep roots in the Old Testament. (See Ex. 15:11; Deut. 5:24; Ps. 19:1; Isa. 60:1-2.) Giving God glory had been a guiding principle throughout Christ’s ministry (John 1:14; 7:18; 8:29,50; 11:1-4). His humbling Himself by “becoming obedient to the point of death—even to death on a cross” would ultimately result in every knee bowing and every tongue confessing “that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Phil. 2:8,11).

God spoke audibly in response to Jesus’s request. He promised He would ***glorify*** His name ***again***. Looking back on these events, believers see the Father brought glory to His name through the death, burial, and resurrection of the Son. Jesus was not crucified because God was angry, dissatisfied, or disappointed with Jesus. The crucifixion was the means through which Jesus would seek and save the lost (Luke 19:10).

How does the struggle Jesus faced help believers faithfully follow God?

DRAWS (JOHN 12:29-33)

²⁹ **The crowd standing there heard it and said it was thunder. Others said, “An angel has spoken to him.”** ³⁰ **Jesus responded, “This voice came, not for me, but for you.** ³¹ **Now is the judgment of this world. Now the ruler of this world will be cast out.** ³² **As for me, if I am lifted up from the earth I will draw all people to myself.”** ³³ **He said this to indicate what kind of death he was about to die.**

VERSES 29-31

John did not describe ***the crowd***. It may have included some who had gone to Bethany to see Jesus and Lazarus (12:9) or some who had waved palm branches when Jesus entered Jerusalem (vv. 12-13). Some hearing God’s voice thought it sounded like ***thunder***. Not knowing the source, some thought ***an angel*** had spoken.

Jesus knew He did not need to hear the audible voice of God to know the Father heard His prayer. The voice was for the benefit

of others who heard it. They recognized that the brief prayer Jesus uttered had resulted in a divine response from the sky.

That thunderous response itself was a declaration that this was to be a pivotal and powerful moment. For Jesus, the crucial moment had arrived, and it was **now**.

Unlike the other Gospels, John does not include stories of Jesus delivering individuals from demons or evil spirits. Instead, John told of Jesus declaring that **the ruler of this world** was to be **cast out**. Using exorcism language, Jesus was not referring to a demon or an evil spirit; He was speaking of Satan himself. The enemy was to be defeated—**now**.

VERSES 32-33

How was the enemy going to be defeated? Jesus would be **lifted up from the earth**. He had used similar terminology when alluding to the lifting of the bronze snake (3:14-15). Jesus was speaking about His crucifixion, the **kind of death he was about to die**.

In saying He would **draw all people** to Himself, Jesus was not teaching that all people would automatically or eventually be saved—even without coming to faith in Christ. Instead, Jesus was saying that God was calling **all** peoples to Him—Jews and Greeks, Romans and Gentiles, male and female, young and old, rich and poor. He came to be the Savior for all. (See John 1:12.)

**How does the death of Jesus on the cross produce judgment and victory?
How does the cross draw people today?**

KEY DOCTRINE: *Salvation*

Salvation is offered freely to all who accept Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, who by His own blood obtained eternal redemption for the believer. [See Matthew 1:21; Ephesians 2:8-9.]

APPLY THE TEXT

- Believers can introduce others to Jesus.
- Following Jesus has costs and rewards.
- Hope is found in faithfully following the Father.
- Jesus draws to the cross those who seek Him.

As a group create a list of people who are far from God. Pray for the people listed and for opportunities to share with them. What other actions can the group take to introduce others to Jesus?

What actions can you take to lift up Jesus? In what areas do you need to strengthen your witness for Him? How can you strengthen those areas?

PRAYER NEEDS
