

John 12 (Part 2) :20–26 • To Die that We Might Live

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John Chapter 12. All right, you're ready. We're going to pick it up in verse 20, and we're only going to do seven verses here this morning, but there's some important things in these verses for us to think about. Verse 20 of John chapter 12.

It says,²⁰ “Now among those who went up to worship at the feast were some Greeks.²¹ So these came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and asked him, ‘Sir, we wish to see Jesus.’²² Philip went and told Andrew; Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus.²³ And Jesus answered them, “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.²⁴ Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.²⁵ Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. ²⁶ If anyone serves Me, he must follow Me; and where I am, there will My servant be also. If anyone serves Me, the Father will honor him.”

I’m going to have you stop there. Let's pray together.

Father, as we approach these verses this morning and seek to unwrap them and the message that they contain, we come to You in all humility and pray for Your Holy Spirit to open our hearts, to open our eyes, to open our spiritual understanding; to give us insight LORD that we can take with us from this place.

We don't just come here to have our ears tickled. We come to be fed spiritually so that we can get up from this place and we can go into the world stronger than we were before, with a firmer foundation, more equipped to do what You've called us to do and to be who You've called us to be. And so we ask You to do that equipping today through the ministry of Your Word.

We invite Your Holy Spirit to have freedom among us here today, and we ask it in Jesus' precious Name, amen. Amen.

John begins this— you'll notice, this section by telling us that there were some men who came up to Philip and asked to have an audience with Jesus. I've got

to be honest, I'm not really sure why he included that in there, because he never goes on to even tell us if they got that audience with the LORD.

But it seems— oh, and by the way, he calls them Greeks. And they may or may not have been from Greece just because they're referred to as Greeks; that was a common term just for Gentiles you know, in general. So we don't really know where they were from, and we don't know whether they got to talk with the LORD, but whatever their request to have an audience, seemed to kind of launch Jesus into talking about His hour.

And you'll notice in verse 23, He (Jesus) says, *“The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.”* And what's really interesting about that statement is that we've been hearing up to this point throughout this gospel, *“My hour has not yet come.”* (John 2:4; 7:6; 7:8; 8:20) And He has said that repeatedly when there was people trying to arrest him, (John 7:30) we found out they couldn't do it because His hour had not yet come.

When people tried to force Him to do this or do that, He said, *“My hour has not yet come.”* And you know, when they tried to force the Messiahship, you know, to be public, Jesus would go off to a place of solitude. Why? Because His time had not yet come, His hour.

Well, all that's changed now. This is that turning point in the gospel of John where Jesus now suddenly changes that and says, *“The hour has come.”* And this is it; we're in this final week of our LORD's earthly ministry. And there are two verses in particular that Jesus gives us, or I should say, John gives us as recorded, you know, of Jesus.

And I think these verses really deserve our attention because they're so full of important insights into not only what Jesus came to do on the cross, which we've already looked at through communion, but also how it applies to our lives. And it's a very important message for you and me as well, but it's in, it starts in verse 24, and it simply begins with those words, *“Truly, truly.”*

And that is that double emphatic that Jesus often uses to bring us to attention and to say, what I'm about to convey to you is incredibly important so pay attention now. *‘Truly, truly,’* this is Truth that you are getting now and here's the message. *“I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone. But if it dies, it bears much fruit.”*

Jesus is not giving a lesson here for all the farmers to pay attention to. This is a word picture. And He is referring to Himself as the grain of wheat and He's conveying a principle— it's a kingdom principle— for us here today. And the

kingdom principle is one of sacrifice and He's saying that the grain of wheat or the Seed, if you will, the kernel is sown into the ground, but this Seed must give up its singular existence so that it might germinate and become many and fruitful. And that is the idea; that is the principle that Jesus is conveying here. But He makes it also very clear to us that this giving up of the singular life that the Seed must do involves a death, in a very specific sense.

He says that, *“Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone. It remains simply a single seed. But if it dies, it bears much fruit.”* Now, obviously Jesus is speaking of His coming sacrifice on the cross by using this word picture; by helping us to understand what He's about to do, that He is expressing His own willingness to not protect His own single existence, but rather to give up that singleness so that there might be many who are blessed and there might be a fruitfulness that comes out of His willingness to lay down His life. And that is certainly the idea that we are getting from this.

But this principle is also applicable to our lives; each of us, each and every one of us as Believers, and that is why Jesus takes this principle of life from death and He makes it personal to you and me by going on in verse 25 and saying, *“Whoever loves his life.”* In other words, whoever holds on to his life and says, I'm going to retain this life for my purpose, for my single purpose; in other words, whoever takes his life and says, I'm going to protect this life, I'm going to keep this life as mine and mine alone, He (Jesus) says that person will end up losing it.

But He says, *“Whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life.”* Now this is where we need to kind of get a little bit of insight and understanding. We Americans, you know, we have a very strong sort of a response to the word *hate* and probably even more so in the last several years with so many politically correct things flying around and whoever you don't agree with you *hate*, which is ridiculous.

And I think most of us know that, but we still respond rather abruptly to this whole idea of the word *hate*. In fact, people get messed up with it because the Bible uses the word *hate* in a way that we Americans just don't get.

In the Old Testament you might remember reading a verse where the LORD literally speaks of the sons of Isaac and He says, *“Esau, I hated. Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated.”* (Malachi 1:2-3)

And I've had so many people ask me questions: Why did God hate Esau? Did God? Does God? Does God just kind of randomly pick people that He's going to hate and people that He's going to like? And then we come to a verse like this

where Jesus says, “*Unless you hate your life...*”

And so we're like, I don't really get it. Is Jesus telling me He wants me to hate my life? Well, no, that's not what He's saying. In fact, our lives are very precious; they're gifts from Him. The whole idea in ancient sort of language usage of that word *hate*, it literally speaks of making another choice; being willing to give something up.

And when Jesus talks about hating our life, He's talking about being willing to freely lay those lives down for Him and for His purpose and for His will and for His pleasure, you see? Because the world is constantly telling you and me to hold onto our lives for our purpose— and that's really all they have to live for. I mean, what does the world have to live for except to make themselves happy, to live for their own pleasure?

Every time you and I sit down to, you know, if we have the guts to watch a TV show or watch a movie today that is conveying the message of the world, it's all the same, do whatever makes you happy. You need to do, and you need to be... whatever makes you happy. I want to make so-and-so happy. But are you making yourself happy? They, and that's a big deal in the world because that's all they've got. That's all they've got.

And of course our flesh is connected to that message. You don't have to— you don't have to tell my flesh to make itself happy. My flesh already wants to make itself happy. My flesh wants to feel pleasure, my flesh wants to enjoy pleasure at the expense of others. I really don't care. And that's my flesh. And we're all kind of in on that whole thing just because, you know, we're sons and daughters of Adam.

But then we get saved. And we find out that there's a higher purpose to our lives, and that He (Jesus) calls us out of that idea of *my* life, *my* purpose, *my* pleasure, *my* joy, *my* happiness. And He begins to speak to us about laying those things down and finding the life that we might otherwise be looking for, and that the world is looking for, but in fact are going to lose... because they were looking in the wrong place. They were looking to meet their needs and they ended up losing those things.

Well, that's the kind of laying down of our lives that Jesus is talking about here. That's the Biblical principle that He's conveying to us here. Unless a seed falls into the ground and dies, it's just going to remain a single seed. But *if it dies*, it germinates, it grows. It multiplies. It bears fruit. And man, I tell you, that brings a joy and a happiness that the world can't even begin to touch. You know?

And this is a– this whole idea of giving ourselves to the LORD and living for His pleasure, you know, rather than my own, is replete through the Bible and particularly the New Testament. And I want to share some of those passages with you this morning on the screen. The first is for Matthew six, verse 33.

Matthew 6:33 (ESV)

...seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness...

And it simply says, “*...seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness....*” And the reason I put this up there is because Jesus is telling us to “*Seek first,*” in other words, as a point of first priority, “*seek first the kingdom of God.*” You see, my flesh doesn't want to do that. My flesh wants to seek first *my* kingdom, and it wants to establish *my own* authority, *my own* rule and reign, you know– *as if I have one*. And to make that the priority of my life.

And Jesus says, “I want you to have a different priority when you wake up in the morning each and every day. And I want the priority of your life to be My kingdom, not yours.” You know? Well, that goes against the grain of our flesh. We know that, but it's still what it– it is involved in this whole idea of laying down my life. Right?

Romans 12:1 (ESV)

I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.

And then Romans chapter 12 Paul writes, “*I appeal to you, therefore brothers, by the mercies of God to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.*” There is a spiritual kind of worship that you and I perform before the LORD.

And it is the process by which we give our lives to Him on a daily basis. We offer ourselves as living sacrifices. Now once again, this flies in the face of the world. The world tells you to get up in the morning and think about how you can make it for yourself, and Jesus calls us to lay down our lives each and every day, to offer them as a sacrifice.

Notice it's a living sacrifice, alive to Him– rather than alive to your own needs or even your own desires. And just to wait upon Him and to come to Him and say, “LORD, I give myself completely to You.” That's what He's talking about

when He talks about this principle of this Seed that goes into the earth and dies.

It is literal, and the reason death is used is because it involves a dying to self and make no mistake about it, that's hard stuff. This whole dying to self business, it's like, "Just forget it. You know, I can't, I can't do it," and neither can you— by ourselves. We'll talk about that in a minute.

The next passage, James was never afraid to use the S word, and here he does, James four, seven,

James 4:7 (ESV)

Submit yourselves therefore to God.

"*Submit yourselves, therefore to God.*" That's the— there are two 'S' words that the world hates; it's *submit* and *surrender*. Don't say that in front of the world, man. They'll leave you under a pile of rocks. You know? And those are dirty, filthy words because we live in this world that glorifies in our independence.

And yet God calls you and me to give up that independence, to lay it down and to submit to the LORD; to submit to His will, His desire, His purpose for our lives, "*Submit yourselves therefore to God.*"

1 Corinthians 6:19-20 (ESV)

You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.

And then I love First Corinthians six. It says, "*You are not your own. For you were bought with a price.*" You know, I remember hearing people in the world, and you'll hear this refrain from time to time, where people will talk about the fact that, "It's my body. I can do what I want with it." Right? And maybe you even said that before you came to Christ, but now that you're a Believer, you can't say that anymore.

It's not your body, it's His body. He bought it. He paid for it and He paid with His blood. And so now that body that you have, whether it works good or not, that's irrelevant; it belongs to Him and He's given it to you for stewardship. As long as you're on this earth and one day you're going to set it aside.

Don't worry about it, He'll give you another one. But for right now, and for always, it's His; "*You've been bought with a price.*" And that means as you live your life in that body— serve the LORD.

Allow yourself to recognize that, “I've been given this life. I've been given this body, that I might glorify God, that I might please Him and live for His pleasure, not for my own.” So many, so much of our lives are caught up with receiving pleasure for ourselves. We're all about pleasure, whether it's you know, having money and or eating or sex or whatever you know. We live for pleasure. Pleasure, pleasure, pleasure. You know? We're all about that.

God says, “That's My body that you're using there. I purchased it on the cross. And are you willing to surrender it to Me for My purpose? For My will; for My agenda? For My kingdom, and for My kingdom purposes?”

But you know, this is all very hard and if we're going to be honest, we're going to admit that when it comes to our own lives, we're pretty possessive. I'm very possessive about my life... and this idea of laying down my life.

I respect it when I see other people do it, I'll tell you that. I mean, we really do. I mean, as even as a nation, we just got done last weekend celebrating Memorial Day. I don't think we really celebrate it; we observe it. Because what we're observing is all of the men and women who've gone before us, who've laid down their lives for our country in times of war to keep us, you know, safe and to keep us free. And we have a very deep abiding appreciation for the selflessness and the bravery of those who have done that. And we think very highly of those people.

But when it comes to ourselves, we avoid that stuff like the plague. It's like, “I'm really happy that you laid down your life, but don't expect me to do it.” You know? Because we have an instinct that's been built into us and it's an instinct of self preservation. I don't know if you've noticed... You know? I mean it's just there. And that instinct for self preservation assures us that any notion or any idea that Jesus gives us of laying our lives down, sacrificing our lives for Him, it's going to come hard because every fiber of my being wants to hang on to what I have, and it wants to save; I want to save my life. I am geared towards saving my life.

And yet what? What do we find out? This is repeated in Matthew chapter 16. What happens if I save my life?

Matthew 16:25 (ESV)

For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.

“Whoever would save his life will lose it.” There it is again, [Jesus is speaking] as recorded in Matthew's gospel. But He says, *“Whoever loses his life for My sake, will find it.”*

You want to find your life? Do you want to find the meaning of life? You want to find joy and purpose, like the world has never understood? Lay down your life for Jesus. And give your life to Him daily. And let Him use you as an instrument of His purpose.

Live for His pleasure and not your own. And you will begin to find a joy, a happiness, a contentment, a satisfaction with life that you never could otherwise. And you don't get it by running after it, you get it by running after *Him* and laying down your life. This principle, you know, it has to begin at the point of salvation. Doesn't it?

I mean, if I don't lay down my life at the point of salvation and say, “Jesus, I can't; I can't do this. I can't. I'm not good enough. I can't possibly live a good enough life to be saved. And so I come to You. I lay down my life and I ask You to forgive my sins.” That's where it begins, right? We lay down our lives at the point of salvation, but it doesn't end there.

It continues on for the duration of our Christian lives. We continue to lay down our lives. We continue to come to the LORD and say, “I can't do this. I can't do this.” So here's all this talk about dying to self, laying down my life. And I think that as Christians, we just have to come to the LORD and just say, “LORD, I can't do that. I'm not capable of doing that by myself.”

In other words, the flesh is not going to put the flesh to death. The flesh won't crucify the flesh. In order that we might, in order that we might die, we must use the tool that Jesus has given us. And it is given to us in one of the most, I believe, powerful expressions of the culmination of this sacrificial living that is given to us in the Word, and it's in Galatians chapter two, verse 20 on the screen,

Galatians 2:20 (ESV)

I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

where Paul wrote, *“I have been crucified with Christ and it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me and the life I now live,”* in the body, *“in the flesh,”* in this container; *“I live by faith in the Son of God Who loved me and*

gave Himself for me.” Do you see what Paul is telling us here? Do you see the insight he's giving us about this life of sacrifice? It doesn't come by me wishing and hoping and promising God I'm going to do better, live better or whatever. It comes through the cross.

It comes by dying with Jesus on the cross. And that's why Paul begins that passage by saying, *“I have been crucified with Christ, and now I no longer live.”* You see, I couldn't; I can't die to self on my own. I can't do that. I have to come to the cross to end that tyranny of the flesh.

You know, the world thinks that they're free, and actually they're not. They are under the most tyrannical dictator known to man, and that is the flesh of man. The flesh dictates. Every day. It dictates. It's probably telling you things right now, *“I'm hungry.”* Right? *“I'm tired. I'm cold; I'm hot. I'm jealous. I'm angry. I'm sad. I'm lonely....”* The flesh is constantly dominating, you know?

So the only way to be free, the only way to begin to walk in freedom from the tyranny of the flesh is through the cross. And that's why Jesus said what He said in Matthew sixteen, twenty-four up on the screen,

Matthew 16:24 (ESV)

“If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.”

when He said, *“If anyone would come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me.”* What I want you to notice, Jesus didn't just stop with saying, *“If you want to come and follow Me, you need to deny yourself.”*

He didn't just stop there. If it would've ended there, we would've all been tremendously burdened and we would've said, *“You just gave me an impossibility. You told me to deny myself if I wanted to come after You. Well, yes, I want to come after You, but I can't. I can't do it.”*

He says, *“I know you can't. That's why I've given you a tool. And that tool is the cross, and you must take it up and you must take it up daily.”*

But you have to remember something about the cross. It's not that pretty little pendant that you're wearing around your neck. Not that there's anything wrong with wearing a cross. I'm not dissing (ie speaking against) that. That's fine.

The cross has one job and one job only in your life, and that is to put to death. That's it. It's the only, it's its only job. And by the way, the cross never compromises. It never bargains with you. It simply does what it is been given

to do. It kills. And we have to remember that.

I want to end with some incredibly powerful words from my favorite author, AW Tozier, who says things in ways that I just can't.

We must do something about the cross and one of two things only we can do – flee it or die upon it. If we are wise, we will do what Jesus did... endure the cross and despise its shame for the joy that is set before us. The cross will cut into our lives where it hurts worst, sparing neither us nor our carefully cultivated reputations. It will defeat us and bring our selfish lives to an end. Only then can we rise in fullness of life to establish a pattern of living wholly new and free and full of good works. – **A.W. Tozer**

And he says, “We must do something about the cross and one of two things only we can do– flee it or die upon it. If we're wise, we'll do what Jesus did... endure the cross and despise its shame for the joy that is set before us.”

But know this, “the cross will cut into our lives where it hurts worst, sparing neither us nor our carefully cultivated reputations. It will defeat us and bring our selfish lives to an end. And only then can we rise in fullness of life to establish a pattern of living wholly new and free and full of good works.”

You can see why I like to quote Tozier. It's like, I just can't talk like that. He has a way of conveying truths that just blows me away. But do you notice he talks about freedom there?

When Paul said earlier in that passage we looked out from Galatians, “*I've been crucified with Christ;*” what he was saying in essence was, “I am free from the tyranny of the sinful flesh, the dominating, screaming tyranny of the flesh to dictate my life. And now the life I live in this flesh, I live by faith. Faith. Trusting that He's going to lead me. He's going to guide me in the way that's right. I can't trust my flesh to do that. It's going to take me down a path of destruction. If I follow it. But I'm going to trust my LORD to take me down the path of life as I daily take up the cross.”

And guys, you might be sitting there wondering, “How do I do this?” It's just a simple prayer, a daily simple prayer: “LORD, I give my life to You. Help me today to learn how to say no to me and yes to You.” It's that simple, “Help me today.” And you're not going to do it perfectly. You're going to mess up and you're going to– you're going to default to self on a fairly regular basis.

And when you do, you just come to the LORD, say, “Yeah, me again, coming

back here, you know, coming back around the same milepost I've been here before. Forgive me LORD, I fleshed out today. I'm sorry, but I know what I need to do and I know I need to take up the cross and die upon it so that I might live—and not only so that I might live, so that others may live, so that my life might become fruitful... and multiply as a blessing to others.” Amen? Amen.

Let's stand together. We'll close in prayer. As always, if you need prayer for some personal thing going on in your life, we'll have some folks up here to pray with you, so come on up front if you need that.

Jesus, the things we've been talking about here today are really above us. And this whole idea of being like that seed that is willing to give up its singular existence in order that it might die and allow the life of Jesus to live instead, LORD, that too is beyond us.

Only through the power of the Holy Spirit, Who masterfully uses the instrument of the cross, can we find freedom from the tyranny of the flesh; the freedom to live our lives for the glory of God, for the pleasure of our Savior; to accomplish Your purpose and Your will.

Teach us daily because LORD, we're not going to do it perfectly. But teach us every day how to live that way and how to take up our cross. We ask it all in the Name of Jesus Christ, our Savior and King. And all God's people said together, amen.

God bless you. Have a good rest of your Sunday.