

Study notes for Jesus' hour – John 12:20-36

This reading follows on from Jesus' arrival in Jerusalem on a donkey taking up where Jim left off last week with the raising of Lazarus from the tomb, and just after Mary's anointing of Jesus in Lazarus' house in Bethany.

Before we begin our study of the text, let us take a moment to still our hearts and pray together.

Opening Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, You came to bring life to the world, the life that is the light of all people. In your time You knew that Your hour had come. The hour to bring glory to God, the hour of Your death. Prepare our hearts to receive Your Word, that we would grasp even more how wide and long and high and deep is Your love.

Amen

Read John 12: 20-26

The structure of John's gospel is often described as

The Prologue – 1:1-18.

The prologue of the gospel is a mostly poetic passage that presents Jesus as the pre-existent Word made flesh

The Book of Signs – 1:19-12:50

Called such because it relates stories of remarkable things Jesus did, which are repeatedly called signs

The Book of Glory (or The Passion) – 13:1-21.23

Because it deals with the last week of Jesus life when, the time for Jesus to be glorified had come and focusses on the last days, the arrest, trial death and resurrection

Epilogue – 21:24-25

A postscript that provides a brief editorial comment noting that the Gospel contains only a few of the many stories that could be told about Jesus. This reminds us that Jesus cannot be confined to the pages of any one book, even a Gospel. This reinforces the prologue of the Gospel that Jesus is the incarnation of one who existed before the world was ever created.

Justification for the division of the Gospel into these two main sections (Book of Signs/ Book of Glory) comes in part from references to 'Jesus' Hour' in the unfolding narrative. Illustrating the importance of perfect timing

We are told three times that Jesus' hour had not yet come, prior to this moment in John's Gospel

(2:4; 'Women, what concern is that to you and to me? My hour has not yet come')

7:30; 'Then they tried to arrest him, but no one laid hands on him, because his hour had not yet come'

8:20) 'He spoke these words while he was teaching in the treasury of the temple, but no one arrested him, because his hour had not yet come'.

And then suddenly in Chapter 12:23, Jesus declares that 'the hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified' and 'It is for this reason that I have come to this hour' in 12:27 (hence my award for ????? who was 4th to join our call this evening.

The coming of the 'hour' brings the first half of the story to a close; the second half opens with the words 'Now before the Passover, Jesus knew that his hour had come' 13:1

John repeatedly refers to 'hour' or in Greek 'hora' to signal a specific period in Jesus' life. The phrase provides a rhythm for the entire gospel and indicates that Jesus' life was oriented towards one event: his glorification and return to the Father through the cross.

The passage itself

‘Sir, we would like to see Jesus’ the words of the Greeks to Philip signals to Jesus that His hour has come. He moves from His ministry to the Jewish people to His ministry to all people and knows just how great the task before him is – the agony of the cross.

This leads him to pray to His Father. But first he hints at His sacrifice to come, speaking of the grain of wheat dying in order to produce more life. He says that ‘Whoever serves me must follow me’. Of course, we cannot follow Jesus to the cross, but we can sacrifice our own agendas and self-serving desires, lifting them up to God in prayer.

As Jesus considers what lies ahead, His soul is troubled, and he prays. Some commentators would see this as ‘The Gethsemane’ moment in John. The other Gospels focus on Jesus’ anguish in the garden, but John instead focusses on Jesus’ prayer and the Father’s response.

Jesus invites those around him into his inner world. He prays aloud, sharing who he faces the weight of taking on the sins of the people. In this he echoes the grief of when Lazarus died (as we saw in the last session).

Jesus is troubled, but he doesn’t ask God to save him from the time of trial (which he does in the Garden of Gethsemane’.

Perhaps voicing His prayer reflects His human nature as he gains strength from speaking out his feelings and his commitment not to shirk the very reason he came to earth.

The Father responds, promising that He has already glorified His name. However, his response is not what Jesus needed to hear but what those around him needed to hear.

God’s glory was important in OT, in the Gospels we see how Jesus manifests the Father’s glory through His life on earth. His death and resurrection.

After praying Jesus speaks of light and darkness and then removes himself.

We know that Jesus communicated with His Father regularly and at pivotal times such as this one. He prayed aloud so that those around him would hear their conversation.

By welcoming us as witnesses, we understand more about the love of Father and Son and how they share that transforming love with us through the work of the Holy Spirit.

Ignatian contemplation

Now, I have a challenge for you.

We are going to try something a little bit different in terms of how we pray.

Sometimes when we engage with scripture, we do it intellectually and corporately. This can make it difficult to engage with what we are reading.

We are going to pray in the style of Ignatian contemplation. A form of prayer designed by Ignatius of Loyola in 1500's - a priest, a theologian and subsequently a saint. This form of prayer was developed by Ignatius.

It is prayer with scripture:

to engage head and heart;

to help people come to know Jesus through imaginative interaction with Scripture;

To meet God through the story;

To allow God to interact with us personally and differently.

The difficult part of the process is relaxing into it and letting God be in control, rather than trying to force a response or reaction.

We engage with God using all our senses.

We are going to engage our imaginations in this prayer exercise.

We are going to place ourselves into the Gospel scene.

Ask God to give you an open heart and mind.

Setting the scene

The setting is Jerusalem during a major Jewish festival, and Jesus has just ridden into the city on a donkey – a triumphant procession.

Crowds flock to Him, having heard of how He raised Lazarus from the dead.

Imagine that you are in this scene as I re read the passage. Let your mind wander as you decide who you are – one of the disciples, a member of the crowd, one of the Greeks wanting Jesus?

As you listen, picture what you experience as the action unfolds. What do you see? Hear? What smells and sounds fill your senses? What do you feel as Jesus speaks of the grain of wheat falling to the ground, and what do you think of as He prays? How do you react when he departs?

Read the passage John 12:20-26

Leave a moment after to sit with

How did you find that experience?

Maybe you need some time to consider how you felt?

Final thoughts

How is this season of lent going for you?

Have you committed to not eating chocolate, running 5 miles a day? No sweets? Reading your bible more?

Maybe in addition to what we have all decided to do more of or less of we could in addition to all these things consider devoting 10 minutes each day to pray, focussing on the prayers we are exploring in this bible study or combining reading our scriptures with praying Ignatius style as we have just done

Conclusion

As we consider the prayer that Jesus offered as he faced the Cross – what have we learned from this session?

Could it be how God widened the definition of who could be his people?

If so, who then could we welcome?

How does having a God who experienced what we experience increase your faith in and love for him?

How could you think about the light that came into the world to dispel the darkness in our lives right now?

Closing Prayer

Lord Jesus, You voiced Your anguish to the Father as You faced the cross and You welcomed those around You to enter into Your prayer. Help me to turn to You with my full range of emotions, that I may find communion with You through Your Spirit.

Amen