

Title: Honored by the Father  
Date: July 7, 2024  
Subject: Jesus teaches he would die to himself and we need to die to ourselves to live.  
Scripture: John 12:20 – 28

In our study of Christ's life, we've arrived inside his last week. The triumphal entry has taken place. Jesus has cleared the temple of those who were buying and selling, making it "a den of robbers." Things settled down a little bit when some people who were serious about following God wanted to meet with Jesus.

Read John 12:20-28

The Greeks were Gentiles, non-Jews, who'd come to Jerusalem to worship. They contacted Phillip who told Andrew they wanted to see Jesus. It's a good guess the Greeks accompanied the disciples making Jesus' reply broad in scope.

Jesus is fully aware he's reached the point where there's no turning back. Everything is set in motion for the final events of his life. He knew what he had to do and was prepared to do it. He will suffer for the sins of humanity.

The result would be that the Son of Man would be glorified. The Cross becomes the place where Christ is elevated, not just physically. He followed the Father's will and is therefore honored by the Father as his chosen instrument to bring salvation. The Father didn't entrust the mission to any of the angels, Moses, Abraham or any other human.

The Father said he would glorify Jesus in the future. He would accept Christ's perfect sacrifice, raise him from the dead, have him ascend back to heaven to be with him where he'd be worshipped by angels. He'd resume the glory of the Son of God he had before he came to earth. Another part of being glorified is the worship he'll receive from those who place their trust in him.

Jesus uses a basic fact from agriculture - a seed that isn't planted in the ground remains only a seed. It's been years since we planted sweet corn in our garden. Never had a very good crop. If we'd taken one kernel of corn and put it on our patio, let it soak up the sun, protect it from birds, mice and elements, it would have remained a single seed.

Suppose I came home one day for lunch and Jean said we're having corn. My mouth starts watering, thinking about delicious sweetcorn with butter, salt and pepper on it. Ready for my hands to get messy. She serves up the corn...one kernel of corn. She cut it in two so we could share. "Ohh, how tasty! Rather filling. Don't think I could eat another bite!"

It's not a meal. To have maximum impact and benefit, the seed can't remain a single seed. It needs to be planted in the cold ground and die. It will absorb the moisture, swell, burst open, send a shoot up through the soil and eventually produce many seeds.

I spent most of the summer after graduating from college in Colombia, South America. One week was at a camp for missionary kids in the Andes mountains outside of Medellin. The camp was bordered by a cornfield. I tried to reach the lowest ear of corn by jumping. It might shock you that I'm not the greatest leaper. The ear of corn had to be at least 10 feet above ground and there were two or three cobs on the stalk. They looked like they could feed a family for a week. There were lots of kernels of corn because somebody had planted a seed in very fertile ground. Lower down in the Cauca River Valley the topsoil was 20 feet deep.

Jesus spoke of himself. His death was necessary for others to have life. He could have chosen to be like the seed that isn't planted, not die, and enjoyed life...by himself. If he didn't die and rise again, he would've remained alone as a single kernel. He wouldn't have been able to give life to anyone else. But, through dying, he would produce many seeds. Jesus "hated" his life. He denied himself when he left heaven to come to earth. He hated his life when he could have saved it but instead let himself be crucified.

Did the Lord have concerns about what was going to happen to him? He says in v. 27: "Now my heart is troubled, and what shall I say? "Father, save me from this hour?" He knew that wasn't the answer. He knew he'd come to this time in his personal history, in all of human history, when he was called upon to die for the sins of humanity and provide a way for them to be with God forever in heaven. His desire was for the Father's name to be glorified.

Jesus also compares people to seeds. Immediately after he gave the illustration, he spoke about saving and losing life. Jesus repeated this throughout his teaching. He included it in the instructions to the disciples prior to their preaching and teaching tour (Matthew 10:39), when he described the cost of discipleship after rebuking Peter (Matthew 16:25, Mark 8:35; Luke 9:24), when he spoke about the conditions of the world when the Son of Man is revealed (Luke 17:33). It must be important.

The person who loves his life, wants to keep control of his life, will lose his life. The person who hates his life in this world, who gives control of their life to God, will save it for eternal life. We are to die to ourselves, giving up living for self. We give up our name. We're no longer called by our name, but by the name of someone else, a Christian. We don't build our kingdom, but the kingdom of Christ. We surrender our will because we recognize we're not our own, but that we've been bought with the price of Christ's blood.

Judas Iscariot is a prime example of a person who worshipped self. When Jesus was anointed prior to his death, Judas was horribly upset by what he viewed as a waste of expensive perfume. He pretended he was thinking of the poor. The poor he was thinking of was poor Judas. His hunger for money drove him to routinely steal money from what was to provide for the needs of Jesus and the disciples.

Judas typifies the person with self-love, who will do whatever it takes to advance himself. They seek to maintain control over their lives. They're unwilling to become a disciple of Christ. "He who is unwilling to assume the hazards involved in being a disciple of Christ will ultimately lose his life" (Wycliffe Commentary, Matthew 16:25). The attitude continues in the life of Christians when they want to serve themselves and not God.

Jesus returns to another of his themes - service. Reread v. 26. Serving is linked to following. Serving and following are linked to being like Jesus. We're to walk in his footsteps, do as he did, live as he lived.

Ellicott v. 26: "All self-seeking, whether in the coarser forms of pleasure and power or in the more refined forms of emotion and thought, is self-loving; all self-sacrifice, whether in the daily round of duty to man or in the devotion of the whole self to God, is self-saving. Self-seeking is always akin to, and oftentimes one with, hatred of others; and hatred is death. Self-sacrifice is akin to, and one with, love to others; and love is life."

Those who serve Jesus have the promised reward of being honored by the Father. It's not the same as being glorified because we haven't done what only Jesus could do and we won't be in the same position as Jesus. We'll be honored by being welcomed to our eternal home in heaven to be with him forever.

This past Super Bowl was watched by 123 million people in the United States. Some were actually interested in the game. The rest wanted to see the commercials. The game focused on 96 people who ran, blocked and tackled, expending tremendous amounts of energy.

The spectators, especially those not at the stadium, not so much, unless you count the trips to get refills on food, yelling at the TV or occasional cheer. Heart specialists note that when people are onlookers, the wrong things go up - body weight, blood pressure, heart rate, cholesterol, triglycerides. And the wrong things go down - oxygen consumption, flexibility, stamina, strength, and vital capacity.

The same is true in the Christian life. Spectators have the wrong things go up - criticism, discouragement, disillusionment, and boredom. The wrong things go down - sensitivity to sin, concern for others, receptivity to God's word.

We're called to be active followers and not spectators.

Matt Nowery has served with Samaritan's Purse, the organization led by Franklin Graham, since his college graduation 19 years ago. For the past ten he's been Director of Samaritan's Purse in Northern Iraq. Prior to that he managed a community center in northern Iraq for four years. His initial area of service was Sudan which was the most dangerous place in Africa and perhaps the entire world. After serving in Sudan for a year and a half, he returned home to address leaders and supporters of Samaritan's Purse.

"I have seen the most horrible things, but I have met people who are still full of faith in spite of what they have endured." How's that for an opening statement?

Matt continued, "Eighteen months ago I was at home, a recent graduate of the University of Georgia waiting on an opportunity, looking for a place to commit my life."

Matt then turned to face Franklin Graham. "Mr. Graham, this is the first time since the day you gave me the opportunity in Sudan that I have been able to thank you publicly. So, tonight, in front of all these people, I want to say thank you for challenging a young man like me to wholehearted commitment to Christ."

Eighteen months earlier Franklin had called Matt's father Kirk. The two were friends and the call took place not long after Matt and older sister Ashley graduated from college. "Kirk, this is Franklin. Hope I'm not

calling too late. I have had your kids on my heart. I heard that they are at transitional points in their lives, out of college, and looking for something beyond the mundane. I have a little project I want to present to them. Could all of you come up here to talk about it?"

The next day the family talked about it. Kirk, wife Denise, Matt, and Ashley went to visit Franklin at Samaritan's Purse. After a few pleasantries, Franklin turned to Ashley, a nursing school graduate, and said, "Sudan is the most desperately needy country in the world. There's been a civil war there for decades, and the U.N. calls it the most dangerous place on earth. We have a field hospital near the Darfur region where we treat people there who have been shot, beaten, slashed with machetes, and tortured by Muslim forces from the north. There's also every kind of disease you can imagine, and if that wasn't bad enough, our hospital has been bombed seven times. These people are going through so much, and I think that when this kind of thing is happening, the first hand to reach out to people in need should be the hand of Jesus. We are that hand. Ashley, you're a talented nurse and I want to invite you to join our team at the hospital in Lui."

Ashley's parents were shocked. But before they could say anything, Ashley said, "Mr. Graham, my daddy trusts you and we've always been taught to live by faith and make strong commitments. I believe God has prepared me for this, so sign me up."

Kirk was thinking, "Sign me up? Doesn't this require a family meeting? No one asked me for a vote."

He looked at his wife and she was speechless too. Before either parent could say a word, Franklin turned to Matt: "Matt, I want to talk to you about a tougher assignment."

Kirk thought, "A tougher assignment? Are you kidding me?"

Franklin continued, "In southern Sudan we have identified more than 200 churches that radical Muslims have either bombed, burned or looted. In many of the churches they locked the people inside, tied the pastors to the doors and burned them to the ground." He paused, letting the picture form in everyone's minds.

"Matt, I want you to go in and get the names and stories of every pastor that has been killed. I want you to get the names of all the Christians who have been killed and all the churches that have been destroyed. And I want you to commit to leading the effort to build five churches for every one that has been destroyed and to raise up five pastors for every one who has been martyred. Jesus Christ will stand in the end."

Matt's exact answer: "Mr. Graham, I can't let my sister make me look bad. Sign me up, too."

On the way home, Matt and Ashley reminded their parents they'd raised them for big challenges and to respond with wholehearted commitment. And that's exactly what they'd done.

Ashley worked in an indescribably intense setting at the hospital, often experiencing more heart-wrenching moments in a single day than many people experience in a lifetime. She was even attacked by radical Muslim soldiers who killed one of her patients in front of her. But she continued to serve.

Back to Matt's report. "My team and I have recorded the stories of 429 Christian pastors who have been tortured and martyred in Sudan. In most cases, their church buildings were destroyed, sometimes burned

down with the church members locked inside. The Christians are victims in a reign of violence driven by the fierce Muslim government in the north. They have been severely persecuted, and many have died, but others are waiting to take their place.”

When Matt finished, he walked over to Franklin Graham and looked straight at him. “Mr. Graham. Thank you again for challenging me, for asking me to make a difference, for calling on me to make my life count for the kingdom of God. Please don’t ever stop challenging young people to wholehearted commitment to Christ.”

The call to commitment to and from Christ isn't for the few people called to serve in places like Sudan. It's for everyone who names Jesus Christ as their Savior.

With what might God be challenging you? There's a danger in giving specifics because sometimes people think if the specific thing they're facing isn't mentioned, then they don't have to do anything. There's also the danger in not mentioning specifics because people can take the generality as not applying to them.

Having said that, here are some specifics, knowing I might miss the challenge the Lord has for you. It might be continuing to put one foot after another, step by step, following the Lord in a difficult situation. It may be keeping on doing the right thing, the same thing, like praying for a profound need, a person’s salvation and expect different results as you persevere and are faithful. It might be going to some place across the world where few people know Jesus as Savior and governments and other religions are hostile. It might be starting a Bible study with your neighbors, at work, at school. Rework schedules to make God and the things of God the priority. Maybe the challenge is to turn down temporary pleasures of sin. Maybe it's to not laugh at things that displease God like sexual humor, innuendo or coarse jokes that are improper. Maybe it's to serve others, even in an anonymous way, say a kind word, give a financial gift, share an encouraging smile. Maybe it's to be baptized as a follower of Jesus. Or become a member of the church.

Jesus said, “The man who loves his life will lose it, while the man who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. Whoever serves me must follow me; And where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honor the one who serves me.”

Who or what means the most? God or money or pleasure or job or spouse or relationships or popularity or entertainment or me-time or fear or safety or . . .

John Bechtel was a missionary in Hong Kong and was able to go into mainland China. He was given a tour of the capital city by a guide who was a Christian and a member of the Communist Party. Everyone had to be a party member, but it didn't mean much. The guide was a student at the premier university. He said all the students in the Arab language department were Christians learning Arabic in preparation to go to the Arab world to talk about Jesus. Bechtel wondered about the dangers. The student responded, “What can be done to us that hasn't already been done? We Chinese Christians have been killed. We have been put in prison. We have been starved. We eat anything, can make cat or dog taste like a feast. We have made many sacrifices and are prepared to give more.”