

Introduction:

I learned a new word last week; Joe Kelley came to our weekly elders' meeting with a list of paraprosookians:

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"Figure of speech in which the latter part of a sentence or phrase is surprising or unexpected; frequently used in a humorous situation."

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Statements such as "Evening news is where they begin with 'Good Evening,' and then proceed to tell you why it isn't" or "You do not need a parachute to skydive. You only need a parachute to skydive twice."

Our Lord spoke many things in a similar way, although His words were not humorous but deadly serious. Sayings such as Matt 5:3-4 "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted." And in the John's gospel chapter 20 we have a wonderful collection of similar seemingly contradictory statements by Jesus that taken together give us a wonderful summary of His purpose in coming to earth, His purpose in His death, and His purpose for His children. Let us begin by reading John 12:20-50 together.

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John 12:20-50

Now there were some Greeks among those who went up to worship at the Feast. They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, with a request. "Sir," they said, "we would like to see Jesus." Philip went to tell Andrew; Andrew and Philip in turn told Jesus.

Jesus replied, "*The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.* I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds. 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.

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"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." The crowd that was there and heard it said it had thundered; others said an angel had spoken to him.

Jesus said, "This voice was for your benefit, not mine. Now is the time for judgment on this world; now the prince of this world will be driven out. But I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself." He said this to show the kind of death he was going to die.

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The crowd spoke up, "We have heard from the Law that the Christ will remain forever, so how can you say, 'The Son of Man must be lifted up'? Who is this 'Son of Man'?"

Then Jesus told them, "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.

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Even after Jesus had done all these miraculous signs in their presence, they still would not believe in him. This was to fulfill the word of Isaiah the prophet:

"Lord, who has believed our message and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?"

For this reason they could not believe, because, as Isaiah says elsewhere:

"He has blinded their eyes and deadened their hearts, so they can neither see with their eyes, nor understand with their hearts, nor turn-and I would heal them."

Isaiah said this because he saw Jesus' glory and spoke about him.

Yet at the same time many even among the leaders believed in him. But because of the Pharisees they would not confess their faith for fear they would be put out of the synagogue; for they loved praise from men more than praise from God.

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Then Jesus cried out, "When a man believes in me, he does not believe in me only, but in the one who sent me. When he looks at me, he sees the one who sent me. I have come into the world as a light, so that no one who believes in me should stay in darkness.

"As for the person who hears my words but does not keep them, I do not judge him. For I did not come to judge the world, but to save it. There is a judge for the one who rejects me and does not accept my words; that very word which I spoke will condemn him at the last day. For I did not speak of my own accord, but the Father who sent me commanded me what to say and how to say it. I know that his command leads to eternal life. So whatever I say is just what the Father has told me to say."

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Prayer

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Some of the key sayings of Jesus in this passage can be seen as paraproverbs

"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."

"When he looks at me, he sees the one who sent me."

"There is a judge for the one who rejects me and does not accept my words; that very word which I spoke will condemn him at the last day."

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But the most important of all the sayings is in verse 32

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

Before we discuss these sayings let us review the context. In the first part of John 12 we read of Jesus' anointing at Bethany by Mary, and then of Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem. This is now the final week before his arrest and crucifixion, and Jesus, as we learn from the other gospels, was teaching in the temple courtyard. We do not know if the request of the Greeks to see Jesus was on the day of Jesus' triumphal entry or one of the later days, but John 12 records the final public teachings of Jesus before his arrest. The remaining chapters of the gospel focus on his teachings to his disciples in the upper room, and then to the events of his arrest, death, and resurrection. And it is in this chapter then that Jesus makes a final summary of the reasons for his coming to earth and his death and its effects.

The chapter begins with a request by some Greeks to see Jesus. We do not know if they were simply God-fearing Greeks who had not yet become Jewish proselytes by baptism or actual proselytes, but the fact of their presence in Jerusalem at Passover time suggests the latter. In any event, they came to Philip with a request to see Jesus, and Philip gets Andrew, and together they go to Jesus. We are not told explicitly that the Greeks came as well, but we can assume that they did because verse 34 tells us that a crowd was listening to Jesus' teaching, and presumably the Greeks were part of that crowd.

This request from the Greeks to see Jesus caused our Lord to open a new teaching on the meaning and purpose of His time on earth, and this is what we are going to look at today.

As we have noted already, the key verse is 34

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

So let us unpack this statement and try to put it into context. We will do so by asking a series of questions, and answering them from this passage.

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1. Who will be lifted up?

The simple answer is of course Jesus, but this does not do justice to the full teaching in this passage. In verses 44-46, recording the final public teaching of Jesus in John's gospel, we read:

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John 12:44-46

Then Jesus cried out, "When a man believes in me, he does not believe in me only, but in the one who sent me. *When he looks at me, he sees the one who sent me.* I have come into the world as a light, so that no one who believes in me should stay in darkness."

So Jesus here is making one of his clearest claims to divinity; to being "very God of very God" as the Nicene creed tells us. Jesus is saying that when a man or a woman believes in Him, they are also believing in God himself, and that when a man or a woman looks at Jesus in faith they are also looking at God himself. This can only be true if Jesus is in fact God Himself, God in the flesh, the Son of God who is co-equal with God the Father and God the Holy Spirit. This teaching is an echo of Jesus teaching in John 5, after he had healed the man at the pool of Bethesda:

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John 5:21-23

For just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so the Son gives life to whom he is pleased to give it. Moreover, the Father judges no one, but has entrusted all judgment to the Son, that all may honor the Son just as they honor the Father.

So we conclude from this (and many other passages of Scripture) that Jesus is the Son of God, eternal, all powerful, yet temporarily hiding his power and majesty in the humble clothing of a Galilean peasant.

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2. What does it mean to be lifted up?

Jesus Jewish and Greek hearers knew perfectly well what being "lifted up" meant. In that time it was probably a euphemism, a polite way of saying, "being put to death by crucifixion". In Roman society crucifixion was not discussed: the Roman writer Cicero suggested that "the very mention of the cross should be far removed not only from a Roman citizen's body, but from his mind, his eyes, his ears." But sadly crucifixion was widely practiced in Roman provinces, as a method both of humiliation and as a particularly painful method of execution; we get our word "excruciating" from the pain of crucifixion. Probably all of Jesus' hearers had seen for themselves the bodies of condemned criminals hanging on crosses, left there so the subjugated people would live in fear of their conquerors and would not cause any trouble.

So when Jesus spoke of being "lifted up" he was speaking of his coming death by crucifixion. His listeners clearly understood this, because they asked

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"We have heard from the Law that the Christ will remain forever, so how can you say, 'The Son of Man must be lifted up'? Who is this 'Son of Man'?" John 12:34 They had correctly identified Jesus as the Son of Man, another term for the coming Messiah, and they could not understand why he spoke of death; they were looking for a king to save them from the Romans, not a king who was going to get himself killed by the Romans.

But there is another meaning to being lifted up, because the Greek word translated "lifted up" can also be translated "exalted". Peter uses the word in this way on the Day of Pentecost when he says

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"Exalted to the right hand of God, he has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit and has poured out what you now see and hear." Acts 2:33 And in Jesus' mind his exaltation back to his Father's side was closely coupled with his being lifted up on the cross. This is why he can say in verse 23 "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified." So for Jesus the statement, "The hour has come for the Son of man to be glorified," and

the statement, "The hour has come for the Son of man to die," are equivalent, for it is precisely through his death that Jesus is glorified and no other way.

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3. What did it cost Jesus to be lifted up?

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John 12:27-28

"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!"

In these verses our Lord gives us an insight into the awful cost of the cross. He had just been speaking of the cross to the Greeks and the crowd in these words:

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John 12:23-25

Jesus replied, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds,"

These words focused his thoughts on the time only a few days hence when he would be arrested, tried in a kangaroo court, hauled before the Roman governor and sentenced to death. This would be followed by a terrible scourging with leather whips with pieces of bone or metal tied into the thongs, and then the long walk to the hill of crucifixion, the agony of being nailed to the wooden cross, and the hours of hanging on the cross in excruciating pain. But was this what made his heart troubled? If it was the only cause of his troubled heart, then Christian martyrs have gone to the stake with more peace than Jesus. So the real cause of Jesus' troubled heart must have been His realization of the cost He would pay in taking the punishment for our sins. On the cross Jesus became sin for us, as Paul reminds us in 2 Cor 5:21

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God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

And so in a way that we can only dimly understand, the holy and pure Son of God, the one who before whom all knees will bow, the one who had known close intimacy with his Father, this lovely and good man, would become on the cross in God's sight the blackest of sinners; he became all mass murderers, all rapists, all liars, all cheats, all adulterers, and so on. And he knew that God his father would turn his back on him and leave him alone to pay the full price for all these sins by dying in agony and in desolation. And it was this; this thought of all the sin and all the evil that were so soon to be laid on him, that caused his heart to quail and to ask "Shall I ask my Father to save me from this fate?" But He goes on to say "No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour. I came to pay this price so that murderers and rapists and Pharisees and tax collectors and all sinners can be forgiven. I came to name bring healing to this world, and joy and love and grace. And above all I came to bring glory to my Father. So Father, glorify your name!"

And God honored and affirmed our Lord: John 12:28b Then a voice came from heaven, "I have glorified it, and will glorify it again."

My friends, we need to pause here to meditate on the price that was paid for our salvation. Our Lord Jesus, knowing what it would cost him, nevertheless took my place and your place on that cruel cross, and endured the horrific consequence of being cut off from his Father and paying the price so that we might know the joy and peace of God's grace and love. As the hymn writer Philip Bliss wrote:

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Bearing shame and scoffing rude,
In my place condemned He stood;
Sealed my pardon with His blood.
Hallelujah! What a Savior!

Guilty, vile, and helpless we;
Spotless Lamb of God was He;

“Full atonement!” can it be?

Hallelujah! What a Savior!

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And Isaac Watts wrote;

When I survey the wondrous cross
on which the Prince of glory died,
my richest gain I count but loss,
and pour contempt on all my pride.

See from his head, his hands, his feet,
sorrow and love flow mingled down;
did e'er such love and sorrow meet,
or thorns compose so rich a crown?

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4. What are the results of Jesus being lifted up?

Two important results are mentioned in our text. Of course there are many others, but we will just look at these two:

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a. When Jesus is lifted up in death He will draw many people to himself

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John 12:23-24

“I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds.” Jesus is saying here that his death is like a single seed; it is planted in the ground and to all appearances it has died. But in fact it has not died, it has germinated and will produce a plant with many seeds on it. And so Jesus death will lead to many (in fact millions and millions) of new seeds, namely the men and women who come to faith in him and through him. So the emphasis of this teaching is in the **number** of people Jesus will bless.

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b. When Jesus is lifted up He will draw all kinds of people to him.

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John 12:31-33

“But I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself.” By this Jesus does not mean that all people would become believers; John makes this plain when he says John 12:37-38

“Even after Jesus had done all these miraculous signs in their presence, they still would not believe in him.”

So Jesus is not teaching some sort of universalism, in which all people eventually come into His kingdom; rather he is saying that all kinds of people will come to him; Jews and Greeks, white and black, rich and poor, Asian and Caucasian; men and women from every tribe and tongue will come to him and be added to His church. This is what John saw in his revelation:

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Rev 7:9-10

After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. And they cried out in a loud voice:

"Salvation belongs to our God,
who sits on the throne,
and to the Lamb."

What a wonderful body Christ's church is! In this great group of redeemed people around the world, of which BCF is a tiny microcosm, we are all equal in God's sight. So the emphasis of this teaching is in the **diversity** of people Jesus will bless. As someone has said "The ground is level at the foot of the cross," and all believers are equal in God's sight; ransomed and healed and restored and forgiven.

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You can judge your brother by his fortune's size, but we're all the same in the good Lord's eyes
You can judge your sister by the deeds she's done, but we're judged in Heaven by the carpenter's son

If you measure the gain, better count the cost, 'cause the ground is level at the foot of the cross
Why gain the world if your soul's been lost? Cause the ground is level at the foot of the cross

You must enter heaven as a humble man, cast away your burdens, take him by the hand
By the grace of Jesus and his holy blood, all sins are washed in the mighty flood

The Ground Is Level at the Foot of the Cross
(Tim Stafford/Daniel House Music, BMI)

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5. What should our response be to Jesus being lifted up?

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John 12:24-26

"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."

Jesus is saying that the proper response to his death, to his being the grain of wheat that falls into the ground and dies, is to serve him. He puts this in the stark language of life and death; anyone who selfishly lives for himself or herself loses his or her life in the sense that he or she wastes it. Nothing really good comes from it. But those who would follow Jesus must serve him and those who serve him must follow him.

We must note that serving Jesus does not make us right with God, and we do not gain our salvation by them.

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Eph 2:8-9

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith-and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God- not by works, so that no one can boast.

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But our good works are the fruit of our faith:

Eph 2:10

For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

So the challenge to us as Christians is to ask "am I serving the Lord?" Such service does not have to be in the church, although I thank the Lord that so many of you are serving him through the church. We in BCF are blessed to have dedicated believers teaching Sunday School, caring for children in the nursery, tending the grounds, maintaining the building, designing the web site, running the sound system, enhancing our worship with music, and so on and so on. Many are leading Bible studies on campus or House Groups. But we all can and must serve the Lord outside the church, so that the world may know that there is a God who loves them. Such service could be anything from helping at the food pantry to visiting the local detention home or nursing homes, to simply being good neighbors. As Jesus tells us in the parable of the sheep and the goats

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Matt 25:34-40

"Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.'

"Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?'

"The King will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.'

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And Jesus says in John 12:26

“My Father will honor the one who serves me.” What a wonderful promise!

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6. What of those who do not respond to Jesus being lifted up?

Jesus makes it plain that those who reject him, who fail to respond to his grace and forgiveness offered through the cross, will be judged.

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John 12:35-36

Then Jesus told them, "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."

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John 12:47-49

"As for the person who hears my words but does not keep them, I do not judge him. For I did not come to judge the world, but to save it. There is a judge for the one who rejects me and does not accept my words; that very word which I spoke will condemn him at the last day.

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“The cross shows very clearly God's wrath against sin and his mercy to repentant sinners. The cross of Christ represents judgment for the world. The Greek word for judgment is *krisis*, crisis. The cross of Jesus Christ is the supreme crisis of the world, the supreme moment of decision, for it is at the cross that the true state of every man's heart is laid bare. The cross demands a response from you and me, from every person in this world. Will we be drawn to the cross and cherish its mercy or will we bristle at the humility and repentance demanded by the cross and add our voices to the throng shouting, "Crucify him"?" (Steve Roy)

The choice is yours.