

2022 Passion Week

The Uplifted Christ

John 12:32

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The Uplifted Christ

Scripture

The year was 30 AD. Thousands of Jewish pilgrims had come to Jerusalem from all over the world for the upcoming Passover feast. Many Jews came to Jerusalem a week before the Passover to ceremonially cleanse themselves and also to prepare for the Passover. Word had spread among the pilgrims that a young, traveling rabbi, prophet, and healer from Galilee was in Bethany staying at the home of Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. Bethany was a village just east of Jerusalem and Jesus was staying there the weekend prior to Passover (John 11:55-12:1, 9-11). Many people traveled from Jerusalem to Bethany—a distance of about two miles (John 11:18)—to see the once-dead-but-now-alive Lazarus and the miracle-healer Jesus. They returned to Jerusalem believing in Jesus' power to raise the dead back to life (John 12:9-11, 17-18).

The people of Israel were oppressed by Rome. Patriotic fervor always grew at Passover. And this year it was especially vigorous because Jesus was a national sensation. All Jews wanted a Messiah, a deliverer, one who would deliver them from Roman oppression. The Romans maintained their power by killing any opposition, and they were extremely effective at it. But how could the Romans defeat someone who could raise the dead at will? So, Jesus raised Jewish nationalistic expectations with his powerful teaching and healing powers that were so great that he could even raise the dead back to life again.

After observing the Sabbath (Friday evening through Saturday evening) at Bethany, Jesus entered Jerusalem on Sunday morning, April 1, 30 AD. We call this Palm Sunday, and it was

the first day of the last week of Jesus' earthly life.

The people of Jerusalem and the Passover pilgrims were filled with messianic expectation. Would Jesus be their deliverer? Would he save his people from their oppression?

On that first Palm Sunday morning, Jesus and his disciples approached Jerusalem from the Mount of Olives. He instructed two of his disciples to fetch him a donkey and its colt on which he would ride into Jerusalem. Jesus was communicating to the Passover pilgrims that he was fulfilling the prophecy of Zechariah 9:9, that Israel's future king would come riding on a colt, and also by copying Solomon's entrance into Jerusalem when he was coronated as king (cf. 1 Kings 1:32-40).

As Jesus made his approach into Jerusalem, the crowds rightly interpreted his actions and spread palm branches to create a sort of royal red carpet and acclaimed him as their Davidic king (cf. 2 Kings 9:13; Matthew 21:9; Mark 11:10). The crowds were proclaiming Jesus—and not Caesar—as their king!

The entire city was shaken by these events. The Pharisees instructed Jesus to rebuke the crowds for their dangerous messianic exuberance, but he refused to suppress their enthusiasm (Matthew 21:15-17; Luke 19:39-40).

Now there were some Greeks among the Passover pilgrims. They wanted to meet with Jesus, and they did. We don't know what they asked Jesus. But we do know that Jesus responded by predicting his imminent death and describing it as the very purpose for which he had come (John 12:27). Then, astonishingly, a voice from heaven affirmed God's commitment to glorify God's name through the coming death of Jesus (John 12:28-29). Jesus went on to clarify what it was that awaited him: death by crucifixion (being "lifted up from the earth," John 12:32). Yet, it was by this death that Jesus would deal a crushing blow to Satan (John 12:31).

Let's read about the uplifted Christ in John 12:32:

³² **“And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.”** (John 12:32)

Introduction

What would you say if I told you your car could defy gravity, and roll uphill all by itself? Well, it can at Spook Hill! The hill in Lake Wales, Florida is a magnetic hill or “gravity hill.” Gravity hills can be found all over the world, and continue to spur folklore and curiosity as cars appear to roll uphill when placed in neutral gear. Not only is Spook Hill one of our country's oldest known gravity hills, it is also the only known magnetic hill in the state of Florida.¹ At Spook Hill, your car seems to coast uphill all by itself. But it is only an illusion.

To many, Jesus' death on a cross is merely an illusion. Oh, some agree that he really died on a cross at Calvary. But, they deny that his death has any effect on anyone. They argue that Jesus' death on a cross is just like the death of any other person.

Lesson

John 12:32 teaches us several truths about Jesus' cross.

Let's use the following outline that I am taking from Robert Shannon's book titled, *Sermon Outlines for Special Days*²:

1. We Feel the Pull of the Cross
2. We Contemplate the Puzzle of the Cross
3. We Experience the Power of the Cross

¹ See <https://visitcentralflorida.org/featured/spook-hill/>.

² Robert Shannon, *Sermon Outlines for Special Days*, ed. Sam E. Stone, Standard Sermon Starters (Cincinnati, OH: Standard, 1995), 13-14.

I. We Feel the Pull of the Cross

First, we feel the pull of the cross.

We know about *physical magnetism*. It makes our electricity. We see it in the atom, the smallest thing we know, and in the universe, the largest thing we know. But Jesus is not talking about physical magnetism.

We are familiar with *personal magnetism*. There are those to whom people are naturally drawn. There is a force in their personalities, but that is not what Jesus is talking about.

And then there is the *magnetism of influence*. People are drawn to power figures: political leaders, business leaders, actors, and so on.

But that is not what Jesus is talking about.

Jesus is talking about *spiritual magnetism*. This is something that we experience every time we encounter the cross, whether in Scripture, a sermon, a song, a picture, or even a thought.

When Jesus said, **“And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself”** in John 12:32, John went on to clarify what Jesus meant in the next verse, “He said this to show by what kind of death he was going to die” (12:33). What Jesus had in mind is revealed in John 3:14, “And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up.” Numbers 21 tells about the wandering Israelites in the wilderness being bitten by poisonous snakes, causing a fiery fever. Moses interceded with God for the people and was told to make a brass imitation of a serpent and lift it up on a pole outside the camp. Those who had enough faith to look at it would be saved (21:8). Therefore, Jesus was saying, “If I am lifted up on the cross like that writhing serpent, as a sin-bearer, *the* sin-bearer, I will draw all who believe in me to

myself in salvation.”

Salvation occurs when people are drawn to Christ. It is not accomplished by driving people to Christ. It is not accomplished by luring people to Christ. It is only accomplished as people are drawn to Christ by his person and work.

II. We Contemplate the Puzzle of the Cross

Second, we contemplate the puzzle of the cross.

What draws people to Jesus is his being lifted up as our atonement. The word “atonement” occurs 90 times in Bible, all in the Old Testament, and it means “reconciliation between God and people.”³ Years ago, I heard my pastor say that one can remember it as “at-one-ment” as God makes himself at one with his people. How does God accomplish atonement?

He sent Jesus to this world. Jesus lived a life of perfect obedience. He never broke God’s law. Then he went to the cross and was **“lifted up from the earth”** by dying to pay the penalty for our sin. The innocent made himself a sacrifice on behalf of the guilty. The offended made himself a sacrifice for the offenders.

So many people do not understand the puzzle of the cross. They do not understand what God was doing in sending his Son Jesus to the cross. But we understand that Jesus died to make us at one with the Father by Jesus’ death on the cross.

III. We Experience the Power of the Cross.

And third, we experience the power of the cross.

³ D. Brockway, “Atonement,” ed. John D. Barry et al., *The Lexham Bible Dictionary* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016).

We see this in a number of ways.

The cross is a *powerful symbol*. That is why the cross replaced the fish as the symbol of Christian faith. Today the cross is the most widely recognized symbol in the world.

The cross is a *powerful truth*. In the cross we see how far sin went. Men killed the world's only perfect person. Men killed the Savior of the world. Men killed the Son of God!

The cross is also a *powerful lesson*. It shows us how far love will go. The apostle Paul speaks of this in Romans 5:7-8, where he wrote, "For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die—but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us." Paul goes even further in Romans 8:32, where he wrote, "He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?"

The cross is a *powerful cleanser*. "What can wash away my sin? Nothing but the blood of Jesus!"

Finally, the cross is a *powerful motivator*. The cross moves us as nothing else can to worship, love, and service.

Conclusion

Therefore, having analyzed Jesus' death on a cross in John 12:32, let us give thanks for Jesus' crucifixion for sinners.

On that first Good Friday on April 6, 30 AD, Jesus was lifted up on a cross and died to pay the penalty for all our sin. That is the only remedy that God has provided for our sin. So, look to Jesus and let him draw you to himself in faith and repentance. And you will be saved. Amen.

Mission Statement

The Mission Statement of the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church
is:

*To bring people to Jesus Christ
and membership in his church family,
develop them to Christlike maturity,
equip them for their ministry in the church
and life mission in the world,
in order to magnify God's name.*

Sermons by Rev. Freddy Fritz

This sermon, and other sermons, by the Rev. Freddy Fritz can
be found at:

1. www.tampabaypresbyterian.org/sermons.
2. www.sermoncentral.com/contributors/freddy-fritz-sermons-11181.asp.
3. www.sermonaudio.com/source_detail.asp?sourceid=Fred-dyFritz.

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