

THE HOUR HAS COME

Introduction

John's tale of the life of Jesus was intended to lead us to faith in him. John describes the things he performed, and shows how some came to faith while others rejected him. There is a sense of moving towards a climax, and when some non-Jews expressed an interest in meeting Jesus he declared that his hour had come. Why? And what was that hour? And what does it mean for us?

A significant moment

Something new had happened. Non-Jews were taking an interest in the Messiah. Jesus knew the timing of God's plan revealed in the Old Testament. As he told the two walking to Emmaus, 'Ought not the Christ to have suffered these things and to enter into his glory?' (Luke 24:26).

He had referred before to 'my hour', e.g. when speaking to his mother at the wedding in Cana.

The term implies that the course of his life was planned by God including the timing of events. That is consistent with the prophecies made about the Christ.

These imply that God the Father and God the Son covenanted with one another to save their people from sin. Isaiah records promises made to Christ – e.g. 42:1 'Behold my Servant whom I uphold ... I have put my spirit on him' and 53:11 'He shall see of the travail of his soul and be satisfied'. It also records promises made by Christ, e.g. Isaiah 50:5 – 'The Lord God has opened my ear, and I was not rebellious, nor did I turn away'.

For that reason Jesus could speak of the planned time arriving. He could also speak of being 'glorified'.

How did he know? The Bible did not have a calendar of events for Messiah's life. The answer lies in the fact that non-Jews were beginning to show an interest in him.

Until his arrival God's covenant was with one nation only. Until he put sin away it was not appropriate for the resultant blessings to cover the whole earth. But part of the covenant promise was that he would be 'a light to the Gentiles' as well as 'the glory of my people Israel' (Isaiah 49:6). Simeon recognised that when Jesus was presented in the Temple (Luke 2:32).

This has profound implications. Jesus is a Saviour and ruler for people everywhere, not only for one nation.

Why did he use the term 'glorified'? He immediately spoke about his impending death – 'unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground it remains alone ...' (verse 24). The climax of his work would be to die as his people's substitute – how can that be considered honouring?

His use of that illustration shows he was thinking in terms of his death achieving great things – a productive death. By receiving the penalty of his people's sin he would remove that penalty from them – they could go free. As a result he would conquer Satan and death. The obstacle to God's blessing would become a thing of the past and Christ could bring God's salvation to vast numbers of people.

The illustration also suggests he was thinking of people who would be like himself – children of God. And the fact that he linked it with non-Jews shows he had in mind the kingdom of God spreading across the world. His glory is that he willingly gave himself for sinners. His glory is the salvation of many sinners.

This principle also applies to the Christian life, and Jesus mentions this (verse 25). It is when we deny ourselves for his sake that we achieve and gain great things. 'He who humbles himself will be exalted' (Matthew 23:12). The Father will honour those who honour Christ (verse 26) just as he honoured Christ himself. We will share his glory.

A terrible choice

The glory of being Saviour could only come if he first endured the cross. That is the first thing he had in mind when he said, 'The hour is come'. He had begun to live in the shadow of Calvary and its reality was a terrible prospect. 'Now my soul is troubled, and what shall I say?'

The Holy One of God was about to be 'made sin'. All the responsibility God laid on us would be laid on the Son of Man, and he must answer for our sin. 'Though I have stolen nothing I still must restore it' (Psalm 69:4). In a sense it would become **his** sin. If we feel ashamed over our sins how must he have felt when answering for the sin of the world?

He knew, because he shared, God's anger against sin. Now he was about to experience it.

He knew with the deepest compassion what human suffering is like, and was implacably opposed to the originator of suffering, Satan. Now he would become Satan's victim. His body would be tortured by the enemy's cruelty. His mind would be bombarded with the enemy's mockery and twisted lies. Satan would tempt him as never before to give in to evil, even if only to escape suffering. 'This is your hour and the power of darkness' (Luke 22:53).

It was far too great for him to bear. His only recourse was to the Father who sent him and on whom he laid all his confidence. 'What shall I say? "Father save me from this hour".'

But he could not pray for escape. He had come into the world precisely in order to bear the sin of the world – 'but for this purpose I came to this hour'. At that moment, as in Gethsemane, our salvation depended on Jesus' conscious choice.

That choice was to pray, 'Father, glorify your name'.

There are only two ways people can know the glory of God in a personal way. One is if he judges their sin. The other is if he shows them mercy and forgives their sin. The first way makes people feel his holiness and power. The second way shows far more of his glory – the wonders of his grace. What an encouragement to pray for his kingdom!

Jesus knew that the only way God would ever have a human family who love and honour him was if he first laid down his life for their sin. God would never be 'God our Saviour' unless Jesus actually saved us by his blood. And we would not know his amazing grace and love and honour God for it.

Jesus wanted God to be, and be experienced as Saviour.

A teaching we must heed

When we read that the Father answered him audibly we assume that it was to affirm him and comfort him. That may have been one reason but Jesus said, 'This voice did not come because of me but for your sake'.

Jesus had been teaching the people by words and signs, but many still did not have faith in him. The voice of God was intended to endorse Jesus' claims before a sceptical public. The Spirit has led John to record this so that we may believe in him.

The Father was confirming that Jesus' teaching is true. That includes what he taught about being the Good Shepherd, the Bread of Life, etc. And it included his teaching about giving his life as a ransom for many.

Jesus further explains it. 'Now is the judgement of this world; now the ruler of this world will be cast out.' It was a profound claim – that his death for sin would deprive Satan of his leverage over humanity. With our guilt gone Satan cannot argue that God should punish us or hand us over to him. All who are in Christ are safe from Satan's claims; hell will never be theirs – Jesus took it for them.

How many people did God intend to save through the death of his Son? No one can tell except God himself, but they are many. So Jesus could say, 'I, if I am lifted up, will draw all peoples unto myself'.

The gospel tells of how forgiveness and eternal life are available to all and sundry because of what Jesus did. 'As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life' (John 3:14-15). Because Jesus was lifted up on the cross eternal life can be had. When that fact is lifted up to people's notice they will flock to him for that eternal life.

'Walk while you have the light, lest darkness overtakes you.' The voice from heaven authenticated the gospel of the crucified Jesus. The time for receiving him is limited. 'Walk while you have the light' by coming to the Saviour while you have opportunity.