



The Magnet of the Mission: The Cross of Jesus

Behold Our God – Read the Bible for Life Series #46

John 12:20-36

Pastor David Sunday

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We behold the power of the cross as our Savior anticipates His sufferings and believes there will be great fruit from them in this passage, beginning at John 12:20. Hear the Word of the Living Christ.

Now among those who went up to worship at the feast were some Greeks. So these came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and asked him, "Sir, we wish to see Jesus." Philip went and told Andrew; Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus. And Jesus answered them, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. If anyone serves me, he must follow me; and where I am, there will my servant be also. If anyone serves me, the Father will honor him.

"Now is my soul troubled. And what shall I say? 'Father, save me from this hour'? But for this purpose I have come to this hour. Father, glorify your name." Then a voice came from heaven: "I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again." The crowd that stood there and heard it said that it had thundered. Others said, "An angel has spoken to him." Jesus answered, "This voice has come for your sake, not mine. Now is the judgment of this world; now will the ruler of this world be cast out. And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself." He said this to show by what kind of death he was going to die. So the crowd answered him, "We have heard from the Law that the Christ remains forever. How can you say that the Son of Man must be lifted up? Who is this Son of Man?" So Jesus said to them, "The light is among you for a little while longer. Walk while you have the light, lest darkness overtake you. The one who walks in the darkness does not know where he is going. While you have the light, believe in the light, that you may become sons of light."

Lord, I pray that the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts would be riveted on Your Son, Jesus, on His Word and would be pleasing in Your sight. Free us, Lord, from distractions and self-focus. Let us see Jesus high and lifted up, we pray. In His name, amen.

Most of us have great expectations concerning our lives—what we will accomplish, who we will influence. Jesus had great expectations concerning His death. Most of us hope that our lives will have some impact beyond our deaths. We desire to leave some kind of lasting legacy for our children and grandchildren, but few of us imagine that the memory of our lives will last more than a couple generations. Then we'll just be a box on the family tree.

Jesus is different. Jesus expects that His life will have the greatest impact only after He has died on the cross. In fact, Jesus expects His death to be the most significant accomplishment of His life. I want to speak to you about the expectations Christ had concerning His cross because He saw His death on the cross not as a tragedy but as a triumph. He viewed Himself not as a victim but as a Victor. He had great expectations about what His death on the cross would accomplish. As we examine His expectations, we see that Jesus did not miscalculate.

Don't think of Jesus as a political candidate who is 46 points behind in the polls on the night before an election saying, "We're going to win this thing big." He's not delusional or miscalculating. He is speaking and as He speaks, He anticipates victory. Today, Jesus stands in victory and says to us, "Look at the power of My cross and what I've accomplished through My death. Look at what's being fulfilled in the world today as a result of what I accomplished on Calvary's cross so many years ago."

As we see in this passage, Jesus expected His death to be productive, instructive, effective, destructive and attractive. He expected all of these things from His death.

1. Jesus Expected His Death to be Productive

Look at what Jesus says in verse 24. *"Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit."* He expected His death to be productive—to bear much fruit. The context of this passage is that Lazarus has been raised from the dead in John 11. Because of Lazarus' miraculous resurrection, many people began following Jesus. Look at verse 17. *"The crowd that had been with him when he called Lazarus out of the tomb and raised him from the dead continued to bear witness."* The crowd went to meet Him because they heard He had done this miracle.

The Pharisees were getting nervous because Jesus was gaining a following. There seemed to be a breakthrough. They say to one another in verse 19, *“You see that you are gaining nothing. Look, the world has gone after him.”* The whole world is going after Jesus now.

Then in verse 20, Jesus has entered into Jerusalem for His crucifixion. This is the week of Passover and among those who are worshipping at the feast are some Greeks who come to Philip in verse 21 and say, *“Sir, we wish to see Jesus.”* When Philip and Andrew go and tell Jesus that people from other nations are now coming to see Him, Jesus sees that the decisive moment has arrived. Jesus is the Savior of the world.

In his Gospel, John continually emphasizes the universal scope of Jesus’ salvation. He came not just to be the Savior or Lord of one tribe of people, but of all the nations of the world. Jesus realizes this decisive point has arrived. *“It’s time now for Me to die for the world.”* Before He can become the Savior of the world, Jesus understands that He must die. Before you can experience Jesus as your Savior, you must see what He has done in His death on the cross for you.

Jesus says in verse 23, *“The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.”* He is the most glorious being in the universe. They are right to want to see Him but His glory is now going to be put on display in a most unexpected manner. His pathway to glory is through death on a cross. Without a cross, no Greeks, Americans, Asians or anyone from all the nations of the world will be able to see Jesus in His glory. Jesus understands that in order for His life to be fruitful, He must first die.

He uses this agricultural metaphor. Think of a little seed—it has life in it. It contains both life and fruitfulness. But if that seed remains alone, it cannot bear fruit. It must fall into the ground and die. The outer shell of the seed must be broken. There must be a death in order for the life that’s within it to be let loose, germinate and multiply. Until the outer life has perished, the inner life within that seed cannot flow forth and bring a harvest.

The Apostle Paul said in 1 Corinthians 15:36, *“What you sow does not come to life unless it dies.”* Jesus is the seed. In Him there is life. In Him the fullness of God dwells bodily. But in order for riches of Jesus’ life to become ours, in order for the life that is in Christ to flow forth to a lost and dying world, He had to die. It wasn’t enough for Him to just take on our humanity and be born. It wasn’t enough for Him to demonstrate God’s power through His mighty works and miracles. It wasn’t enough for Him to live a holy life and be a marvelous example to us. All of those things are true of Jesus but in order for

Him to save us, He had to die in order that we might live. If He had not become that grain of wheat that falls into the ground and dies, He would have remained alone—a solitary, perfect individual—and He would have gone to Heaven alone. There would have been no one besides Jesus in heaven. We could not have joined Him there. There would have been no harvest. But Jesus has great expectations here about the productivity of His death. He says, “There’s going to be much fruit from My death. I’m going to bear much fruit.” He’s not disappointed.

Today, Jesus has been raised from the dead and He is giving resurrection life to millions and millions of people from every tribe and tongue. The nations of the world are His inheritance. The ends of the earth are His possession. It all hinges on that great crisis point of history—what He did on the cross. He expected His death to be productive.

2. Jesus Expected His Death to be Instructive

Secondly, in verses 25 and 26, we see Jesus expected His death to be instructive. Jesus is not the only grain of wheat that has to fall into the ground and die. He’s not just speaking about Himself in this passage but is giving everyone who wants to follow Him an example of what discipleship is and entails.

There was a design in the death of Jesus that He intends for us who follow Him to imitate. Jesus was glorified by dying on the cross. Through His death, He gained resurrection life. Through that death, He is bearing much fruit. Likewise He says to us that the pathway to glory for us is through death. Look at what He says in verse 25. *“Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life.”* In order to embrace Jesus and know the life that is in Him, we have to die to a love of this life and this world. You cannot look at Jesus as an optional upgrade to an already self-satisfied life. It doesn’t work that way.

Jesus says, “In order to gain Me, you need to consider everything else as worthless compared to this.” You recently heard a sermon from Pastor DeHaan about this. A Christian is someone who has died with Christ—died to sin, died to this world. It no longer has the alluring power over us that it once did. Everyone who is a Christian has died. We have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. We were buried with Him by baptism into death. *“[We] have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer [we] who live, but Christ who lives in [us]”* (Galatians 2:20). We have died. His death has become our death; His life

has become our lives. He says we are called to recognize that truth about ourselves and to live it out, to experience practically what is true of us positionally. We are dead now. If we want to follow Him, we need to hate our lives in this present world and consider that...

**All I once held dear built my life upon
All this world reveres, and wars to own
All I once thought gain I have counted loss
Spent and worthless now, compared to this**

**Knowing you, Jesus knowing You
There is no greater thing
You're my all You're the best
You're my joy, my righteousness
And I love You, Lord**

(Knowing You by Graham Kendrick)

Look at what Jesus says in verse 26. *"If anyone serves me, he must follow me; and where I am, there will my servant be also."* Where is Jesus going in the next few days? He's going to a brutal cross. He says, "If you want to serve Me, you have to follow Me there, walk the Calvary road, lay your life down and die in order that you might bear much fruit." Have you ever prayed that the Lord would make your life fruitful for Him? I hope you have. We need to remember that fruitfulness is costly.

John Stott said, "The greatest single secret of evangelistic or missionary effectiveness is the willingness to suffer and die." That's the greatest single secret. Translate that into your own family. If you want to see the Gospel passed on to the next generation, your kids need to see something of the death of Jesus in you—death to self. If you want to reach your neighborhood, there's going to be some dying involved. If you want to reach the nations of the world, it comes through death. "The greatest single secret of evangelistic or missionary effectiveness is the willingness to suffer and die." Maybe it is a death to popularity, pride, prejudice or to material comfort. Stott says, "A servant must suffer if he is to bring light to the nations. And the seed must die if it is to multiply." If people are going to see the life of Jesus through us, we must be ready to experience the death of Jesus in us.

The Apostle Paul said this was the pattern of his ministry in 2 Corinthians 4:10. He said, "[We are] *always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies. For we who live are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh. So death is at work in us, but life in you.*" The death of Jesus is instructive for us. Let's examine ourselves:

- What in me needs to die in order that I may bear gospel fruit for God?
- Is God calling me to die to something so I might see and show Christ more convincingly to others?
- Is there something I'm fighting to keep alive that God has sentenced to death when I became a Christian, and God is saying, "It's got to die in your life if you really want to be fruitful for Me"?

Look at the reward in verse 26. If we follow Christ all the way to His cross, we get to be where He is. It says, *"If anyone serves me, the Father will honor him."*

3. Jesus Expected His Death to be Effective

Jesus expects His death to be productive, instructive and thirdly, effective. Starting in John 12:27, we get a glimpse of what this is going to cost Jesus. He says, *"Now is my soul troubled."* There is no trouble like soul trouble. Jesus' soul is in agony. Though He is fully God, remember that He is also man, just like us. He's experiencing a flood of emotions that we would experience—only worse—because He's anticipating facing the Father, not in the warm embrace of His everlasting love but in the terror of His fierce wrath for our sins.

Jesus anticipates His death with extreme agitation and revulsion. We were made to live forever so death is unnatural. Death is the wages for sin. As someone has said, death is "guilt made visible." If you ever wonder how serious sin is, just look at death—it is guilt made visible. As Jesus faces this, His soul is troubled. He's in agony and in the Garden of Gethsemane He sweats drops of blood. But know this for certain: Jesus was not caught off guard by His death. He was fully aware of what was about to happen. In fact, He was on the planning committee for this.

There's an old poem called, "The Wicked Fairy at the Manger" by U.A. Fanthorpe. Picture that manger scene after Jesus is born and then bring in this wicked fairy. She appears at the manger and says,

My gift for the child:

No wife, kids, home;
No money sense. Unemployable.
Friends, yes. But the wrong sort –
The work-shy, women, wimps,
Petty infringers of the law, persons
With notifiable diseases,
Poll tax collectors, tarts;
The bottom rung.

His end?
I think we'll make it
Public, prolonged, painful.

*Right, said the baby. That was roughly
What we had in mind.*

He plans this. He's not caught off guard. There's agony but there's purposefulness in coming to this hour. Listen to the great yearning cry from the depths of His innermost being as he says in verse 27, *"But for this purpose I have come to this hour. Father, glorify your name."*

He fully submits Himself to the eternal purposes of God that we read about in Ephesians 1. There are only three times in Jesus' life when the Father's voice thunders from Heaven. It happens at His baptism, transfiguration and here, just before His crucifixion. Listen to what God says in verse 28. *"Then a voice came from heaven: 'I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again.'" When? "As You hang there upon that wicked tree, You are going to be glorified, My Son."*

Don't think that Jesus was defeated at the cross but victorious in His resurrection. No. The death and resurrection of Jesus belong together. Jesus was effective in bringing glory to God through His death. The resurrection is God's loud affirmation that He was truly glorified by His Son's obedience unto death. The Son glorifies the Father through His death, and the Father glorifies the Son in His death. We say, "How can it be that in this act of deepest degradation—the cross of Jesus—we find the source of Christ's highest exultation? How does that work? How can the death of Christ so effectively put on display the glorious splendor of both the Father and the Son?"

4. Jesus Expected His death to be Destructive

Let's read John 12:31. *"Now is the judgment of this world; now will the ruler of this world be cast out."* Jesus expects His death to be destructive. Destructive of what? The world thought it was passing judgment on Jesus when it nailed Him to the tree but in reality, the cross of Jesus passes judgment on the world. First of all, it exposes our sin for the ugly evil that it really is. We murdered the Son of God! That's what sin drove us to. But in that very act of our worse sin possible, God was saving those who would believe from sin. As we were pushing God farther away from us, God was making peace with sinners and drawing us to Himself through the blood of Christ's cross.

The cross of Christ destroys any excuse that we might offer for our rebellion against God. We cannot say, “My sin really wasn’t that bad, God. I don’t deserve Your judgment.” All God has to say is, “Look at the nail-scarred hands and feet of My Son. You who think of sin but lightly nor suppose its evil great, here may view its nature rightly. Here its guilt may estimate.”

Look at the cross and you see God’s judgment on sin. You see what sin is to God. To any who would say, “Well, I’m not really that bad,” God would say, “What did you do with Jesus? Did you embrace, believe in and submit to Him? Or did you ignore, despise, reject and have no room for Him?”

God brings judgment on the world through the death of His Son. He also brings judgment on the ruler of this world. He destroys the dominion of Satan. I love the thought of Jesus saying this several days before He dies. “Now is the ruler of this world cast out because I’m going to the cross to die for the sins of the world.” In doing so, He’s going to destroy the dominion of Satan. As Jesus is enthroned on the cross, Satan will be dethroned from his reign of terror and tyranny.

Listen to 1 John 3:8. *“The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil.”* He did that in His death on the cross. Colossians 2:15 says, *“He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame [a public spectacle], by triumphing over them in him [by His cross].”* Jesus expects His death to be destructive of the reign of sin and Satan. Truly it was both of those things.

5. Jesus Expected His Death to be Attractive

Finally in verses 32 and 33, Jesus expected His death to be attractive—magnetic in its attractiveness—to the lost and dying world whom He came to save. I love these verses and this is really the main reason I wanted to pick this text to preach right before our Mission Conference. Look at verses 32 and 33. *“And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself. He said this to show by what kind of death he was going to die.”* No one comes to Jesus unless drawn by the Father and by the Son.

We just don’t come to Him on our own. We want to run our own lives and do it our way. Jesus says, “When I am lifted up from the earth—when I am hung upon that cross—I am going to begin drawing all kinds of people to Myself. Not every single individual is going to be saved but every single class of individuals—male and female, young and old,

from every tribe, people group and nation on this vast planet. A vast multitude, Revelation says, that no one could number—are going to be gathered together to worship God before His throne and to worship the Worthy Lamb *“who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!”* (Revelation 5:12).”

He says, “When I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw all people to Myself.” We are drawn to Jesus. He’s not interested in building up our own little churches and denominations just for our benefit. He’s drawing people to Himself and we exist to point other people to Him; to enable people to know, love and follow Him. Our job is to say to a world that is lost and needs to see Jesus, “Here He is. Behold your King.”

Jesus had great expectations beyond the cross. His vision swept out from the cross to the whole world. What did He see? He saw Himself getting into the hearts of men and women everywhere! He saw Himself attracting them—His cross drawing them in like a divine magnet. He saw all kinds of people from all kinds of places, times and seasons yielding themselves to Him; people all over the world rushing in where the gospel is preached; rushing toward the people of God who lift up Jesus and say, “We want to see Jesus.” Just like this Greek who came to Philip saying, “We want to see Jesus.”

Jesus didn’t believe that people were going to be able to listen to what He did on that cross and remain untouched by it. Jesus didn’t believe that people would be able to remain neutral or stay at a distance when they heard of the nails that pierced His hands, side and feet, and the thorns that crowned His head. When they heard it was all for love’s sake that He died for us, He didn’t believe people would remain untouched.

He believed that people would be drawn to Him when they heard what He had done for them on the cross. He thought people like you and I would be so moved by the depth and strength of His interest in fallen sinners that we could not resist such wondrous love as this.

I love how Charles Spurgeon put it. “The only crime that ever could be laid to Jesus’ charge was that He was found guilty of excessive love—love beyond all reason, love beyond all boundaries, loving as none ever loved before.” Jesus was confident that after He died and rose again, this message of His love for a simple world would be powerfully attractive to you and me. It was Athanasius, an early church father, who said, “No one has ever died like Jesus did. It is only on a cross that a man dies with His hands spread out wide as if to say to a lost world, ‘Come to Me. Come to Me and live.’”

Jesus is saying to you and me as He ends this passage, “Come to the light. Believe in the light!” Look at verse 35 which says, *“The light is among you for a little while longer. Walk while you have the light, lest darkness overtake you. The one who walks in the darkness does not know where he is going. While you have the light, believe in the light, that you may become sons of light.”* “Believe in Me,” Jesus is saying. “Come to Me! I was lifted up to bring you salvation. Now come to Me and live! Believe on Me and live! Become a son of light.”

Jesus was confident. “I will draw all people to Myself.” Not, “I might win a few people.” No! “I’m going to draw a vast multitude to Myself. This is going to be effective, productive and attractive to a lost world.”

Do you share Christ’s confidence in the power of the cross? Do you really believe that we have the most attractive magnetic message in the universe to bring to people? Do you think this message will draw people in your family, your neighborhood and your nation to God? Do you believe the power of the cross that we sing about?

When you were a kid, you probably played with a big magnet and put all this metal stuff on the floor and started moving the magnet around. The magnet picked up everything in its sight. When a magnet draws another object like a nail to itself, it makes whatever is attached to it magnetic also. We’ve been magnetized by the cross of Jesus if we’re Christians. We’ve been drawn in to Jesus by His cross and that makes our lives a magnetic field as well for the Savior—magnets for Jesus! How do we draw them? We lift up to the eyes of a lost and dying world the same thing that drew us in—a Living Savior Who triumphed over sin and death through His death on the cross.

There is no other message in the world that is as powerful as this to draw in lost people. If you’ve been attracted to Jesus by the cross, your life is a magnet for Him. Don’t stay in the gadget drawer where you can’t reach anyone. Get the magnet out and go where people need to hear about the Savior and draw them! Lift Him up, not yourself! Draw people to the Savior! Lift high His cross and say to the world, “Here is your King, your Savior!”

Here is love, vast as the ocean,
Lovingkindness as the flood,
When the Prince of Life, our Ransom,
Shed for us His precious blood.

(Here is Love by William Rees & Robert Lowry)

Make that message known. That’s the message people need to hear most.

I was reminded of the Moravian missionaries who in 1733 went and preached to the Eskimo people of Greenland. They resolved in their first years to be very systematic in their method of displaying the truth of God's Word. It was their purpose at first to lay forth the whole scheme of dogmatic systematic theology from the fall of man to the glorification of the saints. As they taught this way, the result was dismal failure. A whole generation of missionaries saw very little fruit. One in fact became so discouraged and depressed by the indifference of the people that he left the country after he preached his farewell sermon from Isaiah 49:4. *"I have labored in vain; I have spent my strength for nothing and vanity."* But in the next generation, a turning point occurred. There was a missionary named John Beck whose story is a classic in the history of missions.

One balmy evening in June (if there are balmy evenings in Greenland), he was sitting in his tent translating the Gospels into the native tongue. A group of Eskimos gathered around him and asked him about his work. As he had often tried before, he began to open the questions of dogmatic theology with them but they turned away. It suddenly flashed on his mind that instead of preaching dogmatic theology, he would read them an extract from the translation of the Gospels he was preparing. He seized his manuscript and read these words. *"And being in an agony he prayed more earnestly; and his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground"* (Luke 22:44). When they heard this, the brightest man in the group named Kajarnak, sprang forward to the table and exclaimed, "How was that? Tell me that again for I too would be saved!" And the first Eskimo was finally touched.

The power was the story of the cross. Legend has it that finally the missionaries just quoted John 3:16 to them and the Eskimos said, "Why haven't you ever told us this before? This is what we need to hear!" *"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son..."* And from that moment on, the Greenland missionaries altered their methods and made sure the focus of all their teaching was the story of the Via Dolorosa, the Crown of Thorns, the Scourging of the Son of God, His Wounded side, His death upon a cross. They lifted high the cross and from that point God began drawing all people to Himself in Greenland. May we do the same.

Let's pray.

Lord, we thank You that the focal point of our message is something no human mind would have ever devised or invented. God, You *"so loved the world, that [You] gave [Your] only Son,"* and He came into this world to die on a cross—to be lifted up as a sacrifice for

our sins. We thank You that when He was lifted up on that cross, He began drawing all people to Himself. We thank You that He's doing so still today. We pray, Lord, that You would use us to lift high Your cross and that You would be drawing people to Yourself through the ministry of our lives and through this church, for the glory of Your Son, Jesus. Amen.

New Covenant Bible Church

4N780 Randall Road, St. Charles, IL 60175

(630) 584-2611 ♦ www.newcbc.org

All Scriptures quoted directly from the English Standard Version unless otherwise noted.

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