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John 12:32-33 “The Universal Magnet”

Intro. There are many aspects of our Lord’s teaching which are unique; but perhaps none is more unique than His bold assertions of His importance to the world. Imagine anyone else saying, “I am the Light of the world”; or “I am the Bread of Life”; or “A greater than Solomon is here.” And in John 14:6 Jesus even claims, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.” Who in their right mind could make such claims and not be met with widespread unbelief or scorn? But it has been different with Jesus Christ. His great claims have been believed by multitudes from many nations for almost 2,000 years. For some reason, He can make these claims, and we do not seem surprised by them.

Now in our text today we have another one of those great claims of Jesus Christ, “And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all peoples to Myself.” How could such a claim become true unless He is the Son of God, the Savior of the world? This is especially true for a man lifted up on a cross, the epitome of shame and reproach. Who would have ever imagined that a man, rejected by His own people, and crucified on a cross, could have the ability to attract and draw people from all over the world to believe in Him as their Savior? And how can you explain the way this claim has been fulfilled as true, unless Jesus is who He claimed to be?

So let’s look now in depth into this text of Scripture and discover the spiritual riches that we find here. Perhaps you will see some new truths about the death of Christ from this text. Let’s see first of all:

I. HIS PREDICTION OF HIS DEATH

Even though the crowds had just acclaimed Him as King, Jesus knew He was not about to mount a throne, but to be lifted up on a cross. Jesus said in v.32, “And I, if I am lifted up from the earth...” This is not the first time that Jesus refers to being lifted up. He said in John 3:14, “And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up.” He said in John 8:28, “When you lift up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am He...” What does He mean by being “lifted up.” John himself gives the answer in v.33 of our text, “This He said, signifying by what death He would die.” So once again, Jesus predicts His death by crucifixion.

He predicted His death:

A. Because His Death Was Necessary - We would do well to understand the context of this wonderful verse. A handful of Greeks had come to one of Jesus’ disciples and asked to see Jesus. Based upon the response of Jesus, I believe that they were seeking the salvation that He could provide. Jesus said in v.24, “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it produces much grain.” He could see in them a forecast of many others, from many nations, who would be saved as a result of His death. He recognizes that His salvation is about to pass from Israel into the world. But with these thoughts, Jesus was well aware of what it would cost Him personally for these multitudes to be saved from their sin. He realized that it would cost Him His death upon a cross. The only way our sins could be forgiven would be for Him to suffer the penalty of sin, which is death. That is why He said back

in John 3:14 that the Son of Man “must” be lifted up.

Yet we also see that He yielded to the death of the cross:

B. Because His Death Would Lead to His Exaltation - Notice that Jesus says that His death would involve Him being “lifted up from the earth.” As we have already seen in v.33, Jesus predicted that He would die by crucifixion. When He was crucified, He was literally lifted up from the earth upon a cross. On at least two occasions the enemies of Jesus wanted to stone Him to death (8:59; 10:31). Once they wanted to push Him off a cliff (Luke 4:29). But that is not how He would die. He must be lifted up on a cross, for that was more fitting for One who was to be exalted. It was more fitting for One who would reconcile God and man. *Humanly* speaking, the Romans controlled who would be crucified, but God is sovereign. He saw to it that this prophecy would be fulfilled.

But I believe that we can see more in those words. That cross, to the eyes of Christ, bore a double aspect. So far as everyone else was concerned, being lifted up upon a cross was utter shame, agony, and the lowest point of humiliation. But notice what Christ says about it in v.23, “The hour has come that the Son of Man should be glorified.”¹ Whether or not the cross was utter shame or glory depends upon why He died on that cross. If He had been justly convicted of a terrible crime, then the cross would be a shame to Himself and to His family. But if He voluntarily allowed men to crucify Him, in order that He might die in our place and save us from our sins, then the cross was a glory to Him. It sets forth the glory of His love against the backdrop of the worst hatred by those who crucified Him. In that cross we see the glorious offer of the grace and mercy of God. Indeed, even in the cross, Jesus was glorified!

Furthermore, we see the glory of the cross in terms of its outcome. The cross led to the exaltation of Jesus over the universe. Phil. 2:8-11 says of Jesus, “He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross. Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, ...and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

So we see in this text our Lord’s prediction of His death. Next, we also see:

II. HIS POWER TO ATTRACT

Jesus said in v.32, “And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all peoples to Myself.” The Greek word here translated “draw” is the same word used in John 6:44, “No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him....” The word translated “draw” is a rather strong word, meaning to draw or even drag with force. The same word is used in John 21:11, “Simon Peter went up and dragged the net to land, full of large fish....” It is used in the book of Acts of people dragging Paul out of the city. So Jesus says that as a result of Him being crucified, He would have a strong drawing power upon people. In fact, without the drawing power of God, no one would ever come to Jesus (John 6:44). Our natural tendency is to go away from God, not move toward Him. Sin, Satan, and society all draw us away from God. Yet if people are going to be saved, an ever greater power to draw and attract must be given. All who are Christians in my

¹ Was Jesus also referring to the cross? In John 13:31, Jesus said, “Now the Son of Man is glorified, and God is glorified in Him.” This was spoken immediately after Judas went out to betray Him, leading to His arrest that night, and the crucifixion the next day. In John 17:1-2 Jesus tied the hour of his glorification to giving eternal life to those the Father had given Him. He said in v.10, “I am glorified in them.” Yet in 17:5 He said, “glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was.”

audience are saved because God drew you to believe in Christ. You did not initiate repentance and saving faith. You simply responded to God's work in your heart.

So let's notice several truths about the drawing power of God. Consider:

A. The Condition of His Power to Attract – Jesus says in v.32, “if I am lifted up... [I] will draw all peoples to Myself.” Jesus indicates that His sacrificial death on the Cross will draw people to Himself. Only by dying on a cross would Jesus be able to draw men to Himself, and thus to His Father.

The fact is, the cross began to draw men from the very beginning. Even while Jesus hung on the cross He began to draw the souls of men. Two thieves were crucified with Him and heard His words. One listened attentively. Even on the cross Jesus drew him to believe in Him, for that thief cried out, “Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom” (Luke 23:42). The centurion soldier witnessed what happened when Jesus died on the cross and said, “Truly this Man was the Son of God!”

So I believe that the cross is one of the primary means God uses to draw people to Christ even today. Indeed, the cross is the magnet of Christianity. You know how a magnet has the power to attract metal. The message of the cross is the heart & soul of the gospel. So let us see to it that the cross of Christ is the central focus of our Gospel proclamation. It was for Billy Graham, and it was for the apostle Paul. Paul said in 1 Cor. 2:2, “For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified.” The cross is the heart of the gospel. And even as I am preaching about the cross of Christ, there are probably some in my audience who are being drawn to Christ. Do you sense it? He suffered and died for you. How can you not be drawn to Him? We also see the importance of the cross in the fact that Jesus asked us to remember only one aspect about Him, and that is seen in the Lord's Supper. We are to remember His broken body and His shed blood, which points to His saving work upon the cross.

B. The Causes of His Power to Attract – What is it that Christ is going to do to draw you to Himself? First of all, He draws you by:

1. His Spirit - He does not merely say, “If I be lifted up from the earth, the message of the cross will draw men,” but He says, “I will do it.” “I” here is emphatic. He states that He personally, by His Spirit, will draw people to Himself. We must not think merely of Jesus as One who died, but One who lives today. A person who is dead can draw no one. But since Jesus is alive from the dead, He can draw people to Himself. And He works through the Holy Spirit to convict sinners of sin, enlighten them to the truth, and He draws them to Himself.

This is one reason why it is so important to pray for unbelievers to be saved. God works in response to the believing prayers of His people.

Yet there is something else that is seen in the cross that draws people to Christ, and that is:

2. His Love - As we examine this more closely, we also see that the love demonstrated at the cross draws people to Christ. The death of Christ was not simply that of a martyr for the truth. Jesus did not die simply in defense of truth. He died because of love. It was not nails that held Jesus to the cross, but it was His love. Love gives selflessly to meet needs, and our greatest need is to be forgiven of our sins. Christ knew that the only way our sins could be forgiven was for Him to take upon Himself the penalty of sin, which is death.

One main reason this statement of Jesus is true is because His death on that cross demonstrates the kind of love that people find difficult to resist. Have you noticed that people are drawn and attracted to those who love them? The love of a mother draws a wayward child home. A

woman is drawn to the love of a man and vice versa. Children are drawn to the love of a grandparent, or other adult who loves them. Even so, souls are drawn to the greatest love of all, the sacrificial love of Jesus Christ.

Oh, just consider Jesus dying for you on the cross. Are you not drawn to Him, especially as you consider how much He loves you? Paul said of Christ in Gal. 2:20, “who loved me and gave Himself for me.”

By the way, people are drawn to a church where they are loved.

Yet notice something else about the power of Jesus to attract. Consider:

C. The Continuation of His Power to Attract – Normally when a person dies, their influence diminishes. Paul recognized this truth when he said to the Philippians, “To abide in the flesh is more needful for you.” To die and go to heaven would have been great for Paul, but it would have ended his ministry to the Philippians. But Jesus indicates that His death would only enhance His drawing power. Jesus had the power to attract followers during His ministry. Thousands would follow Him and listen to His teachings and be amazed by His miracles. Indeed, many were drawn to Jesus during His life, but what about after His death? Here is a man who claimed that His death will not be the end of His influence, but only the beginning. After almost 2,000 years He is still drawing people to Himself.

If Jesus had been just another prophet, just another reformer, the same thing would have happened to His influence upon His death. In fact, people would have expected that after such a death as crucifixion, Jesus would have lost *all* influence upon men. But unlike all other men, Jesus is unique in that His influence has increased many times over since His death! Jesus has over a billion followers today. Amazing!

Finally, there is one more truth from this text that I want to bring out. We see here:

III. THE UNIVERSALITY OF HIS APPEAL

Notice in v.32 that He would draw “all” unto Him. This emphasizes His universal appeal. He is not the Savior of the Jews only, but all people. He spoke these words right after some Greeks came seeking Him. He knew that as a result of His sacrificial love and death He would draw men of all nations and kindreds and tongues to Himself, to believe in Him and be His disciples. He will draw vast multitudes of all peoples and countries to Himself. Back in John 1:29 John the Baptist said as he pointed to Jesus, “Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!” In John 3:16 it says, “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son....” In 4:42 Jesus is called “the Savior of the world.” In a sense Jesus looked forward to His death, not as an end to His work, but as the transition from one form of limited influence to another form of influence which would one day flood the world. Jesus was the Light of the World when He came, and now, He is even more the light of the world.

Hasn't His prediction been proven true? Christianity spread all over the Roman Empire by the end of the first Century. Today, Christ is believed in by at least some in most people groups in the world today. We need to complete the task of reaching every nation and people group. In Revelation 7 we will see the final fulfillment of Jesus' prediction. There we read of people from every tribe, tongue, and nation standing before the Throne, praising God for salvation through Jesus Christ.

Of course, this means that we should seek to win *all* people to Christ, regardless of race or national origin. It is strange that some will support the missionary to take the Gospel to the man in

Africa but not reach out to the black man in his own community!

So we see the magnificent claim of Jesus that he would draw all people to Himself. Now let's consider:

A. The Reason for His Universal Appeal - How could a crucified Jew have universal appeal? Jews were a very exclusive people who were despised by many. In addition to the other reasons already given, I can tell you another reason why Jesus has universal appeal. It is because He has met a universal need by His death on that cross. The thing that we all need most is that our relationship with God shall be set right, and that we shall be delivered from the guilt of past sin, and from its power in our present lives. Jesus meets a universal need, which is caused by a common problem, which is sin. The white man is a sinner; the black man is a sinner. The Asian is a sinner. Whatever the diversities of culture, all people of all nations have sinned and come short of the glory of God (Rom. 6:23). No matter what people group you visit, you will find the same thing. You will find liars, thieves, adulterers, and other sinners. Sin is a universal problem. We are all sinners in need of forgiveness of sin. Jesus is the only One who can meet the universal need of humanity. When He died on that cross, He bore the penalty of sin. Although all men are tragically lost in sin, Christ has made it possible for all men to be triumphantly lifted out of their sin.

B. Yet His Universal Appeal Is Resisted - This verse is used to support the Calvinist doctrine of irresistible grace. As I stated previously, the word translated "draw" is used of drawing in a net (21:6, 11). The word is used of "dragging" people somewhere with force (James 2:6; Acts 16:19; 21:30). In fact, 6 out of 8 uses of this word in the New Testament clearly refer to drawing or dragging with force. So when Christ draws people to Himself, people find themselves under the influence of a powerful attraction. In fact, Jesus states in John 6:44, "No one comes to Me, unless the Father... draws him." God powerfully influences the mind, will, heart, and the entire personality of those who become true believers. But to conclude that this drawing influence is irresistible may be reading more into the text than is there. For Christ says that "all" (*pantav*)² will be drawn to Him. But are all saved? No! So the Calvinist is forced to say that "all" means "all kinds of people" who will be drawn and saved. I believe that all who are exposed to the gospel, and confronted by the claims of Christ, will typically find themselves convicted of their sins and drawn to Christ.³ But too many resist the call of God to repent & believe in Christ. Also, people often remove themselves from the preaching of the cross in an effort to escape its drawing power. They avoid churches and Christians that proclaim the gospel.

We have some fishermen here. You have caught some fish that fought so hard when you hooked them, and began to draw them in, that they escaped your drawing power. That's the way some sinners are. They hear the gospel, they hear about Christ dying for their sins, and when Christ draws them to Himself, some fight that conviction so hard that they turn away, and some are never saved. Will you yield to the drawing power of Christ or will you resist. Christ told Saul of Tarsus, "It is hard for you to kick against the goads" (Acts 9:5).

Conclusion: And so I come to you now, dear friends, with the plain question, What are you doing in response to Christ drawing you, even now? He has died for you on the cross; does that not draw you? He loves you with unconditional, sacrificial love; does that not draw you? He is speaking to

² A.T. Robertson says, "Jesus does not mean every individual man, for some, as Simeon said (Luke 2:34) are repelled by Christ."

³ Unless they have previously hardened themselves against the gospel.

you even now by His Spirit; does that not draw you? Even now He extends those nail scarred hands, and He seeks to draw you to Himself. Do you feel the pull of His Spirit? Please don't resist Him. Come to Christ today! He will forgive you, and give you a new heart and life now, and an eternal home in heaven with Him. Why should you try to resist? If He is calling and drawing now, what more evidence do you need? The Bible says, "Today, if you hear His voice, harden not your heart" (Heb. 3:15; 4:7). In Acts 7:51 Stephen spoke of his Jewish brethren always resisting the Holy Spirit. Don't make that mistake.

Many in my audience are already believers, but perhaps some of you have strayed away from the Lord. Was there ever a time when you were closer to the Lord than you are right now? If He is drawing you back, why not make things right today?

Sources: Gary M. Burge, *The NIV Application Commentary: John* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000); Stephen Felker, *Devotional & Explanatory Notes on the Entire Bible* (Col. Hghts, VA: Published by Author), 2016; Oliver B. Greene, *The Gospel According to John, Vol. 2* (Greenville, SC: The Gospel Hour, 1966); William Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary: John* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1955); Alexander Maclaren, *Expositions of Holy Scripture*, Vol. 11 (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1977 reprint); J. Vernon McGee, *Thru The Bible*, Vol. 4 (Pasadena: Thru The Bible Radio, 1982); Arthur W. Pink, *Exposition of the Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975); Larry Pierce, *Online Bible* [Ver. 4:23] (Ontario: onlinebible.net, 2012); A.T. Robertson, *New Testament Word Pictures*, Vol. IV (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1931, accessed through *Online Bible*). Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from *The New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982). Barnes, Hobbs & Tenney consulted, but not used.

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