

The Hour Has Come

Text: John 12:12-26

- “We wish to see Jesus.” In all the mob of worshippers, here’s a few who really want to see the real thing. They want to go further. And they are not even part of the ‘in crowd.’ They are Gentiles. Greeks. Notice how Jesus responded to them. **The hour has come...** How many times can you remember Jesus saying, “The hour has NOT come?” To His mother at the wedding at Cana, when she wanted Him to reveal His power by providing wine when the wine had run out. He said to her, **Woman, what does this have to do with Me? My hour has not yet come.** And again in John 7 when His brothers wanted Him to go up to the Feast of Tabernacles in Jerusalem and show off a little bit. They told Him, “If you want to make a name for yourself, then stop doing it in secret. Go to the big city and make a splash!” Jesus answered them, **MY time has not yet come.**

But here He says, in response to these Greeks who want to see Him, **My time has come!** To do what? Then He says those words that should ALWAYS make you sit up and pay attention. Like when you hear the captain of the plane come over the intercom and say, “I’m sorry to inform you, Ladies and Gentlemen...” YOU LISTEN! Jesus says it, here: **Truly, truly, I SAY TO YOU.**

Then He says, “Unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.”

Who is the wheat Jesus is talking about here? HIMSELF! He is the grain of wheat and the time has come for Him to die. Major Ian Thomas wrote in his book, “The Saving Life of Christ,” that “Jesus could never have said, at any point in the three years of ministry He had on the earth, ‘My ministry is perfect,’ until He had gone to the cross.” Was Jesus perfect before that? YES! But His ministry, the purpose for which he came to the earth, the very reason He left heaven, THAT was not perfect (or another word for perfect in Scripture is mature or complete) until He went to Calvary. That’s why Jesus says here, **The hour has come.** Until Jesus went to the cross, he remained by Himself, alone. Helped a lot of people feel better, even raised some from the dead. Even forgave some of their sins. But until the grain of wheat DIED, it remained by itself. One solitary grain.

- I had every intention of preaching from Nehemiah 10 this morning. But on Thursday as I sat down to write the message, what was most strongly on my mind was the unexpected death of my older brother. He went to bed last Monday night, and woke up in a different place. He went to sleep in a body, and he woke up absent from the body, and present with the Lord! Keith worked hard at RJ Reynolds for many years as a computer guy, and they sent him all over the country and to Puerto Rico to different RJR facilities to help set up or troubleshoot their networks. Even though my brother did not have a college degree, he was like my Dad: they both worked hard to make themselves a valuable asset to the company. Keith was loyal to his employer for more than 40 years. But his heart was at the beach. He sent me a text last May after he had retired at the age of 59 and moved to his double-wide trailer in Newport: “My only decision today, and every day is whether I am going to fish from the surf, from the pier, or from my boat.” Who would have guessed that his retirement would be less than a year before the Lord called him home?
- Larry Warren called me this week when he heard about Keith’s death, and I said, “Larry, you know about losing a brother, but your brother was much younger and his death much more tragic.” The next day, Larry sent me this testimony to God’s grace and redemption: On March 1, 1984, my brother Ed, senior pastor of First Pres. Church in Roanoke, Va. was killed in an automobile accident in Beckely, West Va. He

was on his way to a mission trip to serve the poorest of the poor in the mountains of West Va. Ed was my best friend. At the age of 35 he's already completed his Dr. of Ministry with an MA in counseling and family therapy. With my younger brother Paul & I, we'd just agreed to move to Charlotte to start a ministry ourselves the next year- Warren Counselors- family, law and finance. After Ed's death, I experienced a long-term battle with depression, but the Lord graciously moved me into a ministry to train pastors in Africa, His way of continuing the several generations of pastor training started by my great-grandfather and continued by my Dad, brother and now me. 10 years later, our family was serving pastors and community development leaders in the largest slum of Cape Town South Africa. This was during the apartheid years, just a few months before Nelson Mandela was elected. On a Sunday night, as our family prepared to attend our usual church service, my wife Mary said she was not feeling well because of the pregnancy of our third son-who we had not yet named. She said she'd rather stay home and our older boys, 3 & 5 quickly agreed they should stay home and take care of their mother. Only God knew that delay of getting everyone back in the house so I could go to church alone, was His plan to not only save our family for future service, but to redeem the day my brother had died. That night, at the St. James church, during the service, 5 men broke into the sanctuary and opened fire with AK47's. Because I was late for church I was not sitting in the same pew we always sat in with the family. I stood up to see what was happening, just in time for a bullet to hit my pew, wounding the man behind me. I stood in shock as the terrorist threw hand grenades into the audience, before they left. Only later did I find out that one of those hand grenades landed on the pew where we usually sat, killing 4. During the next few months, Mary and I considered whether we should stay in South Africa as the violence continued and the ANC vowed that attacks would escalate until there was a free election. Mary & I counseled with our pastor and his wife, Mark & Cindy Fox, who surprised us by saying, it looks to us like you should stay and do the work God had called you too. I was the one who didn't want to stay, Mary had already said she thought our ministry was as pregnant as she was and to leave would abort the ministry. Grudgingly and somewhat fearful, we returned to Cape Town after Christmas to resume the ministry. During the month of Feb. 1994, our pastor training grew from 50 pastors to 150 and then to 500 by the end of the year and 50,000 grads 20 years later. On March the 1, 1994, 10 years to the day after the death of my brother, the Lord redeemed that day of grief by giving us our third son, who we named Joshua, meaning, "the one who saves."

- As I think about my brother's passing this week and Dale Sklenar's death a few weeks ago, I am so thankful that they each had a triumphal entry into heaven. As will all who know the Lord Jesus.
- Turn to **Psalm 116**. I read Psalm 116 to my mom this week, that starts out, "I love the Lord, because He has heard my voice and my pleas for mercy. Because He inclined His ear to me, therefore I will call on Him as long as I live." Tim Keller wrote that "to call on the Lord as long as I live," meant two things in the Bible: first, it is to trust in Him and nothing else for your salvation ("Romans 10:13, "For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved,") and to orient your whole life to Him. The Psalmist goes on extolling the goodness of the Lord and thanking Him for His deliverance. Then he says, "What shall I render to the Lord for all His benefits to me? I will lift up the cup of salvation and call on the name of the Lord..." We can lift up the cup of salvation because Jesus drank the cup of bitterness and death. I will lift up the cup of salvation. (vs. 13) This is tremendous. The only way we can repay what God has done for us is to take it up!
- It was CT Studd, the famous cricketer and millionaire from England who laid down his sport and gave away all of his money to go to the mission field who also said, "If Jesus Christ be God and died for me, then no sacrifice can be too great for me to make for Him." What did CT Studd give to God? His money? No, God didn't need it. His game of cricket? God didn't need it. CT Studd gave God his life. He took up the cup of salvation and drank it down. What would you think about someone who was handed the cup at communion and just took a sip? "That's all I want. Just a taste." There's something wrong there. No, you drink it down. Take up the cup of salvation as a way of remembering His life and offering YOURS. That's what you give to God. This psalm is always read at Jewish Passovers after the meal, immediately following the third cup of wine, which is called the cup of salvation. It is likely that Jesus read this aloud to His disciples, then, on the very night He was to be betrayed, the night before he would drink the cup of

bitterness that had been prepared for Him. Did Jesus just sip the cup? No, He drank it down, so that we might freely drink of the cup of salvation.

- **I will pay my vows to the Lord.** (vs. 14) He says this twice, in verses 14 and 18. He says he will pay them NOW. He says he will pay them publicly, “in the presence of all the people.” I don’t want to explain away this verse as just a refrain that they sung that had no real application to us. I think it is vital that the promises we make to God we keep. We can pay our vows to the Lord because Jesus paid for our redemption with His own blood. Pay your vows. Matthew Henry says, “Vows are debts to be paid.” The Lord paid everything for you to be able to pay your vows, pay your debts.
- **“Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints.”** This verse seems at first glance to be out of place. The psalmist had said the Lord saved him from the snares of death (verse 3) and had delivered his soul from death in verse 8. So, why is this verse here? Well, for one thing, because it is true. It is a wonderful thing to think about, that when a loved one dies who knows the Lord, that death is a precious thing to God. The word for “precious” almost always refers to precious stones and jewels that adorned the temple. But it is also used in 1 Samuel 3:1 to refer to God speaking to His people through prophets: “And the word of the Lord was rare in those days.” It is also used in Proverbs 3:15 to refer to wisdom: “She is more precious than jewels.” If something is precious, it is valuable and rare and something to be treasured. That’s what God thinks of the death of one of His own. It’s precious to the Lord when one of His sons and daughters die, because it was priceless to the Lord when His only begotten Son died. How many believe that when Jesus entered Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, He knew He would be on the cross five days later? Yes. David wrote in Psalm 139, “In your book were written, every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there were none of them.” Jesus knew how many days He would have on the earth, and not one of them was changed or shortened or lost. If the Lord tends to the days and the years and the beginning and the end of His Son’s life, does He do so for us as well? Yes! That’s why it is true: Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints.
- Charles Spurgeon wrote this about that verse: “They shall not die prematurely; they shall be immortal till their work is done; and when their time shall come to die, then their deaths shall be precious. The Lord watches over their dying beds, smooths their pillows, sustains their hearts, and receives their souls. Those who are redeemed with the precious Blood are so dear to God that even their deaths are precious to Him.”
- Spurgeon went on to write that we believers love to treasure up the last words of the departed. It’s true! I hope you won’t think me irreverent, but because death is no longer our fear, we can laugh at some of the things people do surrounding it. Sometimes people put things on their loved one’s tombstones that tell us maybe what the person’s last words were. Like this one: **Picture** (I told you I was sick.) Or maybe what the person is thinking now: **Picture** “I see dumb people.” Or just what the person was really like on the earth, his most distinguishing characteristic. I have heard Alistair Begg talk about his favorite tombstone: “Silent, beneath this churchyard stone, Lies stingy Thomas Wyatt; He died one morning just at ten, **And saved a dinner by it.**”
- This is not to make light of death, but we know what the writer of Hebrews said, “Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death He might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery.” (Hebrews 2:14-15)
- Let me ask you, then: “When are you most sure of God’s presence?” I believe for the saint, we will be most sure of God’s presence when we stand at the door of death. If we walk before the Lord in the land of the living, then we can command our souls to rest in the truth that we will walk right into His everlasting arms when His days for us are at an end. Our deaths are precious to the One who will welcome us home with open arms. Then the Psalmist writes this in verse 16, as a response to the promise that our deaths will be precious to the Lord:
- “I am Your servant.” Again, if this psalm was read by Jesus with His disciples in the upper room, then how fitting that the Lord would demonstrate servanthood by girding Himself with a towel and washing His disciples’ feet. If we are followers of Jesus, we are servants.

