

See the Son. Believe for Life.

The Hour Has Come. John 12:20-36

An hour is one of the most basic and important ways in which we measure time. We calculate miles per hour, we expect one hour dry cleaning, and hope dinner will be ready in less than an hour. Did you know the farthest any human being has ever run in an hour is 13.2 miles?

The hour is much better than the second in my opinion. The second is annoying. Short and always on the move. A lot can happen in an hour. You can watch two episodes of your favorite sitcom, listen to an entire album by your favorite artist, and immerse yourself in a good novel by covering a fair amount of ground.

The hour is long enough for several events to take place within it, yet short enough to narrow in on almost exactly when something will happen. I think maybe this is why John chose to use the “hour” as the metaphor to describe Jesus approaching death on the cross throughout his book.

In John 2 at the wedding in Cana, Jesus sort of rebukes his mother by saying that his hour has not yet come. In John 4 he tells the Samaritan woman that the hour is coming for those who worship God to do it in Spirit and truth. It’s not here yet, but it’s coming. In John 7 the crowds try to arrest Jesus, but they can’t do it because his hour has not yet come. John’s entire story has been building toward the arrival of the expected hour for Jesus. In John 12:23 we read for the first time in this book that “the hour has come.” The whole rest of the book will focus on this hour and Jesus’ actions will flow from His knowledge that the definitive hour of his ministry has arrived. Listen to John 13:1. It’s here and this hour will change things. How so? In John 12:20-36 we will see **6 Outcomes of the Arrival of Jesus’ Hour.**

1. Glorification (vv. 20-24)

To be specific here, this hour will bring about the glorification of Jesus Christ. Look at verse 23 again. What causes Jesus to say these words? Look back to verse 20. Keep in mind what the Pharisees had just said in verse 19. They were complaining that the world has gone after him. Of course, they were complaining but John included this with a touch of irony. This is ultimately what will happen. People from every tongue and tribe and nation will go after Jesus and believe in Him. And

that's exactly what happens in verse 20. These are not Jews who speak Greek, they are foreigners who seem to be converts to Judaism or are at least interested in it. This is why they are at the Passover. They have no doubt heard about Jesus. Look at verse 21. And they are "going after him". They are pursuing interaction with him and knowledge of him. Look at verse 22.

Now, we don't ever find it if they met Jesus. John seems unconcerned with that. But Jesus responds to the knowledge that some Greeks are seeking him with these words in verse 23, possibly just spoken to Phillip and Andrew.

Why does he say this? The fact that some Greeks are seeking him indicates to him that God's work in moving forward in ways the OT anticipated regarding the inclusion of Gentiles in the people of God. This will no doubt bring glory to him. How will Jesus be glorified through this hour? Verse 24.

This verse is how the Greeks, and all others, will truly come to see Jesus. He will die and His death will bear much fruit. His death will be the seed that is put in the ground and will bring about his glory as people from all over the world respond with faith to His offer of forgiveness and new life. Rev. 5:8-13 gives us the culmination of this glory which is received because of His death. So, his hour equals his death and his death equals much fruit which results in His glorification.

2. Imitation (vv. 25-26)

Now, verse 24 gives us the principle that is reality in this world. You see this principle in nature with a seed and the abundant fruit that the seed produces by going into the ground and dying. Jesus, of course, applies this to himself and his coming death in verse 24, but then in verses 25-26 he says that this same principle must be at work in His followers. Look at verse 25 with me.

I want you to look back at verse 24 and notice what happens to the seed that does not go into the ground and die. It remains alone. It doesn't benefit anyone else and doesn't enjoy the new life of a plant or a tree. Jesus takes this principle and says it's true of you and I as well. I want you to understand exactly what Jesus is talking about here. He uses the phrase in verse 25 "in this world." He's not saying that we have to despise the good gifts of God given to us in this life. God has filled our lives with goodness to be enjoyed.

But there is a way of living that acts as if this life, these 70 or 80 years on this earth, are all we get and are all that matter. There's a way of living that ignores eternity.

"The one who loses his life because he loves his life is the one who lives as though life in this world is ultimate and therefore is to be protected, retained, and maximized as one's fundamental purpose. By contrast, the one who guards himself for eternal life by hating his life in this world is the one who sees his life in this world as being like a grain of wheat that has to fall into the ground and die so that it can bear fruit in the resurrection." – James Hamilton

Here's the question, do you give your time, money, talent, love, and self away for the good of other people as an investment in eternity? Or, do you desperately try to use your time and talents to maximize your pleasure in this life without a thought to the next life? If you die to self and give your life away here you gain true life in eternity. Verse 25 is the principle and the pattern and verse 26 is Jesus telling us that His followers must imitate this pattern, which they saw in Him. Look there.

If you desire to serve Christ, you must follow Him down the road of death to self. But this path of death to self is not a dark and foreboding path. It's a glorious walk with Christ that culminates in the honor bestowed on you by God the Father. There are all sorts of applications we can try and draw from this, but let these words shape the course of your life. There's a possibility and a promise here that when you die to yourself to follow Christ and serve others that you will receive honor from the Creator God of the universe. C.S. Lewis put it like this:

"It is written that we shall 'stand before' Him, shall appear, shall be inspected. The promise of glory is the promise, almost incredible and only possible by the work of Christ, that some of us, that any of us who really chooses, shall actually survive that examination, shall find approval, shall please God. To please God...to be a real ingredient in the divine happiness...to be loved by God, not merely pitied, but delighted in as an artist delights in his work or a father in a son – it seems impossible, a weight or burden of glory which our thoughts can hardly sustain. But so it is." – C.S. Lewis

And you and I will end up at this point when we cherish Christ and follow Him in the pattern He set down for us.

3. Revelation (vv. 27-28)

Jesus now turns to the difficulty facing Him during this hour because He knows of the horror that awaits Him. Verse 27. His point is that even though great difficulty awaits Him, His entire life has been driven by one great purpose which will be realized in this hour. What is that purpose? Look at the first phrase of verse 28.

This is his driving passion and it will take Him all the way to His own death in order to glorify the Father. Look at the rest of verse 28. The Father affirms that Jesus' death will again bring Him honor and glory. How will the death of Christ be a revelation of God's glory?

John's Gospel has tied the person of Jesus closely to the Father. John 1:18. The death of Jesus on the cross will be the ultimate revelation of God's love for humanity and His willingness to save. God's glory (character) will be put on display once again, yet to a greater degree, through the death of Christ. Christ's greatest passion is the glory of the Father. (John 17:1, 22-26. Christ has come so that we can know the love of God and experience oneness with the Father and the Son. His death reveals that as it provides the means of reconciliation for us with God. 1 John 4:9.

4. Resolution (vv. 29-31)

God the Father speaks and the crowd can't make out his words at this point, but they know something supernatural has happened. Look at verses 29-31.

Keep in mind that we are looking at outcomes of the arrival of Jesus' hour. Do not forget this outcome. Christ came to save as the light of the world but his light reveals the darkness of men's souls and will ultimately bring judgment to those who don't believe. Part of that judgment is fixing what has gone wrong. Jesus is speaking of Satan here in verse 31 and he's been a liar and deceiver since the beginning. The world has remained under his sway and power. He influences, tricks, destroys and mocks.

But this won't be readily apparent in the midst of Jesus' hour. Jesus will die on the cross and it will seem like Satan has won. But it's through his suffering and death that he reigns victorious and we are brought along with Him. And it's through his victory that he is exalted.

5. Exaltation (vv. 32-33)

Look at verses 32-33. The word that is translated “lifted up” is taken from Isaiah 52:13, which begins the Suffering Servant passage found in Isaiah 53. You can see in Isaiah 52:13 that the servant is lifted up and by this lifting He is exalted. Back in John 12:33 we find out that Jesus was speaking of what sort of a death He would die. Jesus would be lifted up on the cross and at the same time would be exalted in glory and honor.

“For the death of the cross, which Christ suffered, is so far from obscuring his high rank, that in that death his high rank is chiefly displayed, since there his amazing love to mankind, his infinite righteousness in atoning for sin and appeasing the wrath of God, his wonderful power in conquering death, subduing Satan, and, at length, opening heaven, blazed with full brightness.” – John Calvin

6. Declaration (vv.34-36a)

There’s clearly been a crowd listening to Jesus say these things about His hour. But notice that they hardly respond in faith. Look at verse 34. They are essentially saying, what sort of Son of Man are describing? They believed that the Messiah would never die and so death doesn’t fit into their picture. Jesus answers in verses 35-36.

The image of light and darkness has been a frequent one throughout John’s Gospel. Jesus is the light and to believe in Him is to see the light and reject the darkness. To be in darkness is to be unable to see His glory and to continue in the gloom of your sin. Jesus’ message to them here cuts to the chase. He is the light who reveals the Father’s glory and they ought to believe in Him. They ought to take Him at His word. And what happens if they do? Look at verse 36 again.

John 1:12-13.