

# John 12:12-50

Van Parunak

“He came unto his own place, and his own people received him not.” Now the Lord enters Jerusalem for the final time, to face the ultimate rejection. After the tender reception by his friends at Bethany, he faces

- The boisterous but superficial acclaim of the multitudes who had come to Jerusalem from other places, as he enters the city on Palm Sunday
- In particular, the Greeks, anticipating the “other sheep” whom the Lord has promised to draw into “one flock”

## 12-21, The Triumphal Entry

This episode describes the attitudes of five different groups of people. Each is described, and their response related. They are listed in decreasing order of support for the Lord, until the last, which appears to be the most interested. Each bases their interest on a different stimulus. There is chiasmic structure, in that the first and last are pilgrims, while the middle three are residents of Jerusalem.

1. v.12, “much people that were come to the feast.” These are *not* the permanent residents of the city; but those who had come from outside in 11:55. They are the first to take action to welcome the Lord into his city.
2. v. 17, “The people ... that was with him when he called Lazarus out of his grave,” 11:45. These were citizens of Jerusalem, but they were sufficiently moved by the raising of Lazarus to acknowledge his authority.
3. v. 18, those who had only heard of the raising of Lazarus still came to see, as in v. 9.
4. v.19, “the Pharisees.” They who should be the most spiritual, in fact are the most intransigent.
5. v. 20, “the Greeks,” not proselytes, but God-fearers, who seek out the Lord.

Ref	Origin	Name	Stimulus	Response
12	Pilgrims (“were come”)	<i>oxlos</i>	Scripture (Ps 118)	Royal greeting with palm branches; imitate tabernacles
17	Residents	<i>oxlos</i>	Experience of his miracles	Ongoing testimony
18		<i>oxlos</i>	The witness of others	Met him
19		Pharisees	Their own interest	Increased antagonism
20	Pilgrims (“came up”)	Greeks	Personal spiritual need	Desire to meet Jesus

Compare 2 Sam 19:11. When David was exiled out of Jerusalem because of Absalom's rebellion, after Absalom was slain, the elders of Judah were the last to bring him back. A prophet is not without honor save in his own country. He came to his own, and they that were his own received him not.

## **12-16, The Reception by the Country People**

John relates their reception, and the Lord's kingly gesture. The order is reversed from what we see in the Synoptics. We do not see Jesus on the donkey until the people have already made their belief clear. John wants us to understand the depth of their faith—and yet also a peculiar defect in it.

## **12-13, The People Greet Jesus**

Of the four groups of people, these strangers to Jerusalem offer the fullest welcome to Jesus, and the one that shows the greatest understanding of who he is.

**13 Took branches of palm trees.**--This was one of the four species that the Jews used to celebrate the feast of booths Lev. 23:40; Neh. 8:15. Palm branches had become a symbol of celebration during the period of the Maccabees (1 Macc 13:51, when Simon recovered the citadel in Jerusalem; 2 Macc 10:7, on the restoration of the temple). But to John, with his priestly background, surely the similarity to Tabernacles presses itself most strongly on his mind. Why would they have conducted a ritual peculiar to Tabernacles, at the time of Passover?

We will see other links to Tabernacles in the next few verses. What would the significance of this be?

- Tabernacles and Passover are the two pilgrimage feasts that mark the two new years—Passover in the month Nisan at the start of the sacred new year, and Tabernacles in the month Tishri at the start of the civil calendar. (Trumpets was actually on the first day of the civil year, but it was not a pilgrimage feast, so the people would not be gathered together.)
- The kings of Judah counted their years from Tishri. See Thiele, pp. 28-30. When the Lord presents himself as the Messianic king, the people's minds naturally jump to Tabernacles.
- Zech 14:16 anticipates that during the coming kingdom, all nations will come up to Jerusalem for the feast of Tabernacles. An alternative name for the feast is “feast of ingathering” (Exod 23:16), and it is thus appropriate to celebrate the harvest of the gentiles (cf. Harvest imagery in Rev 14:15, 16; Matt 9:37, 38). Thus this feast particularly anticipates the kingdom. Edersheim notes that “the Feast of Tabernacles is the one only type in the Old Testament which has not yet been fulfilled” (*The Temple*, last sentence in ch. 14)

Apparently, they recognize him as the king, the fulfillment of Tabernacles, and use the symbols of Tabernacles to greet him.

**and went forth to meet him.**--That is, to accompany him back into the city. The Greek word is related to the one used to describe our meeting the Lord in 1 Thes 4:17.

**and cried, Hosanna.**--A Hebrew expression, meaning, “Save now, we beseech thee.” It is a contracted form of the expression in Psa 118:25. This psalm concluded the Great Hallel, a cycle of six psalms (113-118) sung at Tabernacles and again at Passover.

**Blessed is the King of Israel.**--They are quoting Psa 118:26, “blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord,” but they add, “the King of Israel.” This is a remarkable phrase. Heb 7:7 lays down the principle that “the lesser is blessed of the better” to establish the superiority of Melchizedek over Abraham and thus over Levi. And in fact, if we survey cases in the OT where blessing takes place between king and people (see notes), we find that seven times a king blesses the people, while only on four occasions do the people bless the king. One of these (2 Sam 14:22) is not directly relevant (see the notes), but the other three are:

- 1 Kings 1:47, the people bless David upon the succession of Solomon to the throne. Significance: when the people accept the king, they pray God's blessing on him. (Kingship in the Bible is something that is accepted by the people, not unilaterally imposed by the king. David waited until the people acknowledged him as king.)
- 1 Kings 8:66, the people bless Solomon at the end of the feast of Tabernacles that followed the dedication of the temple. Significance: points to the Tabernacles theme
- Psa 72:15, the messianic king is blessed (apparently by the people). Significance: points directly to the Messiah, and also as a harvest hymn is appropriate to Tabernacles.

**that cometh in the name of the Lord.**--Review what it means to do something in someone's name. The canonical example is the accusation of Naboth by Jezebel in 1 Kings 21:8 "in the king's name." She was not the one who wanted the vineyard. She took action on his authority, to advance his purposes.

These words of the Psalm articulate what he has so often taught, that his authority is not his own, but is derived from the Father who sent him. We often think of John as emphasizing the deity of the Lord Jesus. He does, but even more he emphasizes the distinction between the Lord and his Father, and his submission to the Father who sent him. John, more than the synoptics, describes the Lord as an "apostle," as the writer to the Hebrews later styles him (3:1). Examples:

- 4:34 My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work.
- 5:19 The Son can do nothing of himself, but what he seeth the Father do: for what things soever he doeth, these also doeth the Son likewise.
- 5:30 I can of mine own self do nothing: as I hear, I judge: and my judgment is just; because I seek not mine own will, but the will of the Father which hath sent me.
- 6:38 For I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me.
- 7:16 My doctrine is not mine, but his that sent me.
- 7:28-29 I am not come of myself, but he that sent me is true, whom ye know not. But I know him: for I am from him, and he hath sent me.
- 7:33 Yet a little while am I with you, and *then* I go unto him that sent me.
- 8:28 I do nothing of myself; but as my Father hath taught me, I speak these things.
- 8:42 I proceeded forth and came from God; neither came I of myself, but he sent me.

Return now to the question of Tabernacles vs. Passover. Why in fact did the Lord present himself as king at Passover, when Tabernacles would have been more appropriate for a coronation? Answer: If he had come as king before he came as redeemer, he would have had to destroy the sinful nation. The people wanted a king to judge their enemies, not realizing that he would also judge them. He graciously reveals himself first at Passover, where he makes his great redeeming sacrifice, before taking his rightful place as king. As Heb 3:1 notes, he is not only the apostle of our profession, but also the High Priest of our profession. Heb 9:28, "So Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many; and unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time without sin unto salvation."

## 14-16, Jesus Responds

**as it is written.**--The quotation is an abbreviation of Zech 9:9,

Rejoice greatly, O **daughter of Zion**; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem: **behold, thy King cometh** unto thee: he is just, and having salvation; lowly, and **riding upon** an ass, and upon a **colt the foal of an ass**.

The first phrase has been replaced with “fear not.” We should consider both the base quotation and its modifications.

### ***The quotation***

**Daughter of Zion.**--The phrase is a genitive of apposition, like “land of Egypt” or “sin of covetousness.” See articles by Fitzgerald and Lewy. Cities in the OT are often described as “daughters.” The point is that he is addressing the city as a whole, not one particular or representative citizen.

**Thy King cometh.**--The Lord's action is a deliberate, explicit claim to be the messianic king.

**Riding upon a colt the foal of an ass.**--Cf. Zech 9:10 for the contrast, and recall that at his second coming he rides, not on an ass, but on a white horse (Rev 19). The point goes back to Deut 17:16,17, which tells the king that he is not to multiply to himself horses, wives, or riches. The horse is a war animal, and pagan kings relied on them as a key element of their military force, but this was not to be the case with the godly king:

Psalm 20:7 Some *trust* in chariots, and some in horses: but we will remember the name of the LORD our God.

Psalm 33:16-19 <sup>16</sup> There is no king saved by the multitude of an host: a mighty man is not delivered by much strength. <sup>17</sup> An horse *is* a vain thing for safety: neither shall he deliver *any* by his great strength. <sup>18</sup> Behold, the eye of the LORD *is* upon them that fear him, upon them that hope in his mercy; <sup>19</sup> To deliver their soul from death, and to keep them alive in famine.

When Adonijah tried to usurp the throne, he gathered horses and chariots (1 Kings 1:5), but David responded by having Solomon ride to Gihon on the king's mule (v. 33), showing that David's customary steed was not a horse.

Solomon himself failed on this count, as also on wives and riches, 1 Kings 10:26.

So the Lord enters Jerusalem as the true Son of David, riding on a donkey, not a horse. But in Rev 19, when he comes in power to reign, he will ride a white horse.

### ***Modifications***

**Replacement of “rejoice greatly” with “fear not”.**--Zech 9:9 is only one of many OT messianic prophecies that exhort people to rejoice. But OT saints could rejoice in God's goodness in their own age as well, as the exhortations in the Psalms show.

The expression “fear not” is common in the OT when God appears to men and they are terrified by his appearance. It is the natural and appropriate response of fallen, sinful creatures before the sovereign Lord. This fear does not go away with the new covenant. John himself experienced it in Rev 1:17, when the risen Lord appeared to him.

It is in this sense that we should understand the phrase here. The coming of Messiah is a time of rejoicing, but John wants us to recognize the Lord's entry into Jerusalem as a theophany, when “the Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple” (Mal 3:1). And at such a time, the most

appropriate initial response is fear. Only because the Lord has provided forgiveness for his people can he utter the reassuring words, "Fear not."

**Omitted phrases.**--The first part of Zech 9:9 described the Messiah as "just, and having salvation," that is, having experienced it. This is clearly inappropriate at this point in the Lord's life; it would become true after his resurrection.

### ***The Disciples' Response***

**16 These things understood not his disciples at the first.**--Cf. 2:22. They were indeed "fools and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken," Luke 24:25, because the Spirit had not yet opened their understanding. Perhaps we should not be so hard on the Jewish leaders. John wants us to realize that without the Spirit's ministry, even those who followed him were dull of hearing. This comment prepares us for the instruction on the Holy Spirit's ministry that is coming up in ch. 13-16.

**but when Jesus was glorified.**--That is, raised from the dead, Acts 3:13-15. The condition for the sending of the HS was his death, resurrection, and ascension, 16:7

Nevertheless I tell you the truth; It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you.

**then remembered they.**--The Spirit put two things together for them: the things that were "written," and the things that were "done." It was the Spirit who enabled them to see that the Lord had in fact fulfilled the OT prophecies.

### ***17, Reception by Jerusalem Believers who saw Lazarus raised***

The first group to welcome the Lord were "people that were come to the feast" (v. 12). Their quotation of Scripture shows that they are motivated by the OT revelation concerning the Messiah. Now we turn to the second group of people:

**17 The people ... that was with him when he called Lazarus out of his grave.**--These are the Jews of 11:19, 45. Unlike the first group, they are probably residents of Jerusalem, since they knew the family of Bethany and were able to come to them when Lazarus died. Their motivation is their observation of the miracle that he did.

**bare record.**--This is one of John's words. 47 out of 90 occurrences of the verb in the Greek Bible are in his writings, as are 30/48 of *marturia* (but none of the 276 instances of *marturion* or the 93 of *martus*). A central theme to John is how we know what we know. There are two channels. We can see it ourselves, or we can be told. The link between the two is that those who have seen are expected to tell others.

- First of all, Jesus has first-hand experience of things that are above, on the basis of which he bears witness (3:32, 33)
- Then there are individual witnesses to him: John the Baptist (ch 1), the woman of Samaria (ch 4), and these people. In each case, they have first-hand experience of something that he has done, and they tell others.
- So the disciples are to bear witness of him (15:27). This is the basis of John's burden in 1 John 1:1-3.

By extension, we also are to be witnesses to him. But note what this requires: an intimate personal

experience of his saving power in our lives. Head knowledge alone is not sufficient grounds for a witness, nor is a “decision” that we have made, or mere mental assent. Jesus is in the business of changing our lives. If he hasn't changed anything in yours, perhaps you have never really met him.

The verb is in the imperfect tense in Greek, indicating a continuous, ongoing activity. They kept on bearing record. Some would receive their testimony, others would reject it, but they kept up the message.

### ***18, Reception by those who heard***

**18 the people also met him, for that they heard that he had done this miracle.**--The first to greet the Lord are those who have been expecting him on the basis of the Scriptures. The next are those who saw his mighty works. Now comes a third group, those who have heard of him from the testimony of others. Their tie to him is not as strong as that of the first two groups—but it is still favorable, unlike the attitude of the next group.

### ***19, Reception by the Pharisees***

**19 The Pharisees therefore said among themselves.**--The three groups so far are greeting the Lord. The Pharisees instead are talking among themselves. They should be the most eager to receive him, and instead are devoted to his destruction. They are motivated by a desire to maintain their own prestige.

**ye prevail nothing.**--Their efforts have been described in

- 7:32, attempt to arrest Jesus
- 7:47-52, mockery
- 9:22, excommunication, cf. 12:42
- 11:47ff, plans to destroy him

All have proven in vain. As the Lord promised, “I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it,” Matt 16:18.

**the world is gone after him.**--Their concern is the same as that of the Jews of Thessalonica, who complained of Paul and Silas, “These that have turned the world upside down are come hither also” (Acts 17:6). They are afraid that he will disrupt the social order that gives them their special privileges.

### ***20-21, The Question of the Greeks***

As if to emphasize how pervasive was the interest in the Lord, John draws our attention to one final group.

**20 And there were certain Greeks among them that came up to worship at the feast.**--We have seen four groups responding to the Lord's entry into Jerusalem. Now John zooms in on a subset of the first group, those who “came up” to Jerusalem for the feast. “Came up” indicates that they were not residents, but made a special trip for this occasion.

We have already observed how “a prophet is without honor in his own country” (4:44); the Lord's most emphatic welcome comes from those who did not live in Jerusalem, while the opposition is centered in the religious leaders. With this verse, John shows us that this tendency continues.

Among those who came up to the feast would be several groups. Distinguish three:

1. Jews born to Jewish parents, who might live in many parts of the world and so speak various languages.
2. Converts to Judaism from among the Gentiles, who had received circumcision.
3. “God-fearers,” Gentiles who admired the Jewish faith and sought to follow some of its tenets, but were not circumcised.

The “certain Greeks” named here belong to this third category. They are not simply Greek-speaking Jews, who might be of categories 1 or 2. Greek-speaking Jews were called “Grecians” (*hellenists*). These are called *hellhn*, which in the NT is always contrasted with “Jew.” Their **worship** would necessarily be constrained. They could not eat of the passover, or enter past the court of the gentiles in the temple to the court of Israel from which they could view the altar of burnt offering.

Thus the interest in the Lord is greatest among those who are most remote from the temple system, Gentiles who recognize the moral superiority of Israel's law but who have not converted. All the symbolism of the temple conspires to remind them that they are separated from God,

gentiles in the flesh, who are called Uncircumcision by that which is called the Circumcision in the flesh made by hands; 12 ... without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world” (Eph 2:11-12).

They are motivated by a sense of their own spiritual need.

Their question is confirmation of the concern of the Pharisees that “the world is gone after him.”

**21 The same came therefore to Philip, which was of Bethsaida of Galilee.**--Philip's name is Greek, unlike the names of most of the other disciples. His town was a border town, and he would have spoken Greek comfortably. So they naturally seek him out.

People rarely come directly to the Lord, but are introduced to him by those who already know him. Matthew Henry: “Paul must send for Ananias, and Cornelius for Peter.” Compare also:

- John the Baptist introducing Andrew and the evangelist to the Lord, John 1
- The man with the lunatic son bringing him first to the disciples, Matt 17:16

This is our most important task as his disciples: to introduce people to him.

**and desired him.**--The verb tense in Greek indicates continual, ongoing activity. They kept on asking him. Perhaps we are to picture them one after the other requesting interviews with the Lord. Their desire is deep and intense.

**Sir, we would see Jesus.**--They have traveled far to come to this feast. As gentiles, they were excluded from many attractions of the feast, such as entering the courts of the temple and observing the offering of animals on the altar. But there is one attraction they hope they may experience personally. They want to see Jesus. They do not mean that they simply want a glimpse of him. This they could easily have as he taught. They want a personal interview.

NB: the other categories deal with the response of people as the Lord comes to *them*. The Greeks seek to come closer to Jesus.

## ***The Challenge for Us***

To which of these categories do we correspond? John's vignettes are a filter through which we are to

examine ourselves. Are we motivated by what we read in Scripture, or the mighty works we have seen, or the testimony of others, or our own sense of spiritual need—or by jealousy and bitterness? Is our response to welcome the Lord and come to him, or to seek to frustrate his work?

## 22-50, The Lord's Public Lessons

Ironically, we do not know whether they ever get to see the Lord. Even among the small group of disciples, bureaucracy rears its ugly head. Philip's response to their query is the first stimulus in a series of exchanges with the Lord. The expository task is to figure out how the Lord's responses relate to the stimuli.

Structurally, the question of the Greeks is a hinge, connecting the five groups of people to the closing discourse.

- It is linked to the four previous groups by being a distinct group of people, and by the chiasmic linkage with the pilgrims of v. 12.
- It is distinct from the four previous groups by the particle *de* and by the inversion of the decrease of enthusiasm for the Lord that carries over the first four.
- It is linked to the final discourse because it sets the theme, of harvest and the need to follow the Lord.
- It is distinct from the final discourse because there is no subsequent reference or address to the Greeks.

Within the final section, the Lord begins with personal instruction to Philip and Andrew, then turns twice to the people, and finally withdraws from sight but utters a heartfelt cry. Note the increasing intensity and decreasing level of privacy. Three themes are in view:

1. His work to save his people and judge Satan and his followers
2. Their responsibility to follow him
3. His submission to the Father

The words to the disciples and the cry cover all three topics. The two utterances to the people deal with the first two topics. In each section, there is a stimulus, then a response.

### **22-28a, to Andrew and Philip: sowing and harvest.**

The first round of discussion is addressed to the disciples, though no doubt the people overheard.

## 22, Stimulus: questions from Philip and Andrew about Gentiles

**22 Philip cometh and telleth Andrew.**--He is unsure about the appropriateness of their request. Should he bring them to the Lord? They are Gentiles; maybe their presence would be defiling. So he first consults with Andrew.

This hesitation of Jewish believers toward the Gentiles persists into Acts, with the concern in Jerusalem over the reception of Cornelius (11:3) and Paul's mission to the Gentiles (Acts 15). So it is not surprising to find the disciples hesitant, though it is disappointing.

**Andrew and Philip tell Jesus.**--They decide that it is appropriate, so they consult the master, but by

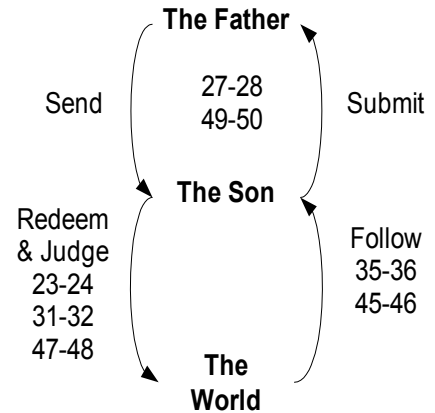


this time the Greeks have left the scene entirely. Apparently, the moment of opportunity has been lost. Hopefully, they were among those seven weeks later who heard Peter at Pentecost.

## 23-28a, Response

We may paraphrase the Lord's response thus: "Philip and Andrew, you are preoccupied with the conditions that the Gentiles must satisfy in order to become my followers. If only you could appreciate what *I* must do to make that possible for them." His response has three parts, which are a roadmap for the rest of this section.

- The Lord redeems and judges the world
- His people follow him
- The Father sends him, and he submits to the Father.



### 23-24, His actions toward mankind.

**23 The hour is come.**--The Lord's "hour" in John is usually, as here, the time of his glorification, the recognition of his authority as the divinely appointed ruler.

- 4:21, **the hour cometh**, when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father.
- 5:25 **The hour is coming**, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God: and they that hear shall live.
- 5:28 **the hour is coming**, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice,
- 13:1 **his hour was come** that he should depart out of this world unto the Father,
- 17:1 Father, **the hour is come**; glorify thy Son, that thy Son also may glorify thee:

Yet there are also ominous references to his hour, as something dark and troublesome:

- 7:30 no man laid hands on him, because **his hour was not yet come**.
- 8:20 no man laid hands on him; **for his hour was not yet come**.
- 12:27 Now is my soul troubled; and what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour: but for this cause **came I unto this hour**.

These two aspects of "his hour" are intimately connected with one another, and this paragraph explains the relation between them.

### *He is the prophesied Son of Man, who is to rule over all nations.*

**the Son of man should be glorified.**--His hour is the hour of his glorification. The Lord's response best corresponds to their question about the Greeks if it is an allusion to Dan 7:13-14,

13 I saw in the night visions, and, behold, *one* like the Son of man came with the clouds of heaven, and came to the Ancient of days, and they brought him near before him. 14 And there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages,

should serve him: his dominion *is* an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom *that* which shall not be destroyed.

“The time has come,” he is saying, “for me to take the dominion over all nations that has been prophesied for me.” The coming of the Greeks is evidence that this time has come.

***He must first die, in order to attain to this position.***

But there is the other side of “the hour,” the notion of darkness and death, and here he explains its relation to his glorification.

24 Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit.

The notion of God's people as a harvest is a common one in the Bible.

Matt 13:3-23, the parable of the sower

Matt 13:24-30, the parable of the tares

4:35-38 35 Say not ye, There are yet four months, and *then* cometh harvest? behold, I say unto you, Lift up your eyes, and look on the fields; for they are white already to harvest. 36 And he that reapeth receiveth wages, and gathereth fruit unto life eternal: that both he that soweth and he that reapeth may rejoice together. 37 And herein is that saying true, One soweth, and another reapeth. 38 I sent you to reap that whereon ye bestowed no labour: other men laboured, and ye are entered into their labours.

Revelation 14:14-16 14 And I looked, and behold a white cloud, and upon the cloud *one* sat like unto the Son of man, having on his head a golden crown, and in his hand a sharp sickle. 15 And another angel came out of the temple, crying with a loud voice to him that sat on the cloud, Thrust in thy sickle, and reap: for the time is come for thee to reap; for the harvest of the earth is ripe. 16 And he that sat on the cloud thrust in his sickle on the earth; and the earth was reaped.

There may be an allusion here to Psa 72:16,

There shall be an handful of corn in the earth upon the top of the mountains; the fruit thereof shall shake like Lebanon: and *they* of the city shall flourish like grass of the earth.

The word translated “handful” appears only here in the OT, and its meaning is uncertain, but if the AV is correct, the verse is describing how a little grain sown can become much. (For the background of this translation, see Calvin and the editor's note citing the Targum on 1 Kings 18:44.) The Psalm as a whole is undoubtedly Messianic, and was understood so by the Jews. What is noteworthy in this context is the Psalm's emphasis on the coming of the Gentiles in vv. 8-11. The Lord would be saying then, “The Psalmist prophesied that a handful of grain would have to be sown in order to reap this Gentile harvest. I am the seed-corn, of which these Greeks will be the first part of the harvest.”

### **25-26, His Followers' Responsibility toward Him**

To enjoy the hour of his glorification, he must endure the hour of his suffering. Similarly, his followers should be willing to lose all in order to follow him. He presents this first with a pithy proverb, then explains it in more detail.

## The Proverb about Saving and Losing one's Life

**25 He that loveth his life.**--With slight variations, this saying is one of the best-remembered sayings of our Lord. It appears six times, in all four gospels:

- At the sending of the disciples (Matt 10:39)
- After announcing his death (Matt 16:25; Mark 8:35; Luke 9:24)
- In his first discourse about last things (Luke 17:33)
- Here, in his last teaching before the upper room.

In all six cases, it is addressed to the disciples, not to the public at large. In its most direct application, the verse is about martyrdom, being willing to lay down one's physical life for the sake of the gospel, in anticipation of a future life. Thus it mirrors the twofold meaning of the Lord's "hour." But there is a deeper meaning.

1. The word translated "life" is most commonly rendered "soul," which in the Bible is the inner self, the part of us that experiences pleasures or sorrow. We should not think of it as disembodied—it is intimately connected with the body. By extension, it then refers to the experiences of life. Cf. Matt 6:25, where the "soul" is naturally concerned with what to eat and drink. "Life" or "self" is an excellent translation.
2. Our natural instinct is to love one's life experience, to seek to preserve and maximize it. In Matt 10:39, the Lord speaks of "find[ing] [one's] life," a strikingly modern concept (cf. such ideas as self-realization or discovering the "real you").
3. The Lord warns that the consequence of giving priority to one's own life experience will actually be to minimize it. The book of Ecclesiastes is eloquent testimony to this observation. Recall how that book opens:
  - a) 1:12-18, thesis proposal: "I gave my heart to seek and search out by wisdom concerning all *things* that are done under heaven" (v. 13)
  - b) 2:1-11, The Lust of the Flesh: "all *was* vanity and vexation of spirit, and *there was* no profit under the sun" (v. 11)
  - c) 2:12-17, The Pride of Life: "Therefore I hated life; because the work that is wrought under the sun *is* grievous unto me: for all *is* vanity and vexation of spirit" (v. 17)
  - d) 2:18-23, The Lust of the Eyes (labor as producing wealth): "For what hath man of all his labour, and of the vexation of his heart, wherein he hath laboured under the sun? 23 For all his days *are* sorrows, and his travail grief; yea, his heart taketh not rest in the night. This is also vanity" (vv. 22-23).
  - e) Conclusion: efforts to seek satisfaction by maximizing one's life experience are doomed to failure, and will lead to vanity and vexation of spirit.
4. To hate one's life, one's self, is to be self-denying, refusing to live for one's own gratification. It would be a mistake to see the Lord as praising self-denial for its own sake. Suffering has no intrinsic virtue, otherwise the promise associated with this would be meaningless. Our example is rather that of the Lord, who when presented with food to satisfy his hunger, said, "my meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work," 4:34. He set aside his own appetite in order to satisfy the desires of the Father, and found his fulfillment in serving the Father..

5. The promise of future reward: *swzw eis zwhn aiwnion*. Those who refuse to live to their own satisfaction, instead serving the Lord, will have their capacity for enjoyment preserved forever.

We sometimes speak of something as being “an acquired taste.” Smelly cheeses, or twelve-tone music, or durian are not necessarily things that we naturally enjoy. For me as a boy, tomatoes fell in this category. I had to develop the taste for them, and now I love them.

Similarly, living for the Lord is an acquired taste. It does not come naturally. But as we learn to delight in him, we discover a much deeper satisfaction than we could ever find on our own. And this delight is the only one that will last. One day we will enter the realm where God is “all in all,” 1 Cor 15:28. There will be nothing there to fuel our fleshly lusts or satisfy the world's idea of self-maximization. Our happiness there depends on our having cultivated a delight in the Lord as our greatest joy. The more we learn to enjoy him now, the greater will be our delight in eternity.

Isaiah wrote (12:3), “Therefore with joy shall ye draw water out of the wells of salvation.” This life is when we craft the buckets with which we draw from those wells. All of us will have our buckets filled to overflowing, but just how large our bucket is depends on our priorities during this life.

Thus the Lord is commending to them the path that he has chosen, being willing to lay down his life as seed-corn for the sake of the harvest to come.

## The Detail

Here the Lord amplifies what it means to “hate [one's] life in this world” and “guard it for eternal life.” The verse contains two conditional sentences, each with the same condition, but with different consequences, one relating to the Son, the other to the Father.

**26 If any man serve me, let him follow me.**--This describes what it means to hate one's life. It is to serve him, to follow him, to hang on his words and imitate his actions. This is what the early disciples did:

- 1:37, [Andrew and John] followed Jesus.
- 1:39, he said to them, “come and see.”
- 1:43, “Jesus ... findeth Philip, and saith unto him, 'Follow me.'”

Modern Christianity does not sufficiently recognize this characteristic of the Christian. It has too quickly settled for a weak notion of belief that is simply giving mental assent to the teachings of the Bible. We can see the true biblical emphasis by observing the words that Acts uses to describe the Christians.

- The English word “believer” appears only once (5:14), but even there it is really a verb that describes the Christians rather than a title for them, “those believing,” and that form (articular participle) appears only 10x in Acts.
- “Disciple” appears 31 times. It means someone who attaches himself to a teacher; a follower, an adherent. This word emphasizes our responsibility to the Lord, which he is emphasizing in this verse.
- “The brethren” appears 29 times, emphasizing our responsibility to one another.

Certainly, every one who follows Jesus must be a believer, but there may be those who “for a while believe, and in time of temptation fall away” (Luke 8:13), who are neither disciples to Christ nor brethren to one another. The Lord is calling us, not to bare belief, but to discipleship.

**where I am, there shall also my servant be.**--Here is the promise to those who undertake the path of discipleship. They will enjoy the Lord's presence. Recall his challenge to the Jews in 7:34 and 8:21, "Whither I go, ye cannot come." The Jews will want to be with him, and will not be able to join him. The reward for the disciple is to be with him. But recall our discussion of hating and loving life: this is only a reward if our delight is truly in him.

**if any man serve me, him will my Father honour.**--The condition is the same, but now the reward issues from the Father rather than from the Son. Just as the Father glorifies the Son for his obedience, so he will glorify the Son's followers for their faithfulness.

### **27-28, His Relation to the Father**

This verse is John's correspondence to the agony in the garden. As often, he omits some episodes that are in the synoptics, but records others, unknown to them, that closely conform to them in the lessons they teach. Examples:

- John has no record of the elements at the last supper, but records the Bread of Life discourse in ch. 6.
- John 6 defines distinct groups that are parallel to the soils in the Parable of the Soils.
- The synoptics record two occasions when the Father verbally endorses the Son: at the baptism, and again at the mount of transfiguration. John has neither of these, but does have the endorsement here in 12:28.

So here, we see the same struggle with the coming suffering that is reflected in the agony in the garden. John takes Jesus to the Garden in ch. 17, but the prayer there is very different from the one in the synoptics. Yet here, we see evidence of the same struggle that the synoptics record.

**27 Now is my soul troubled.**--The translation obscures the linkage here with v. 25. He has asked his disciples to hate their lives/souls for his sake. Now he shows an example of this. For the sake of doing the Father's will, his soul is troubled. He is not taking the way of ease and comfort.

**what shall I say?**--Feeling confused and uncertain about hard decisions does not indicate a lack of spirituality. Here we see the same struggle in our Lord. What matters is not whether we struggle or not, but how we come out.

The Lord's deliberation passes through three steps: his fleshly desire, his reflection on the deeper values involved, and his final conclusion. The whole struggle reflects the theme of this paragraph and its correspondent in vv. 49-50, the fact that he has been sent by the Father and submits to him.

**Father, save me from this hour.**--Implicit in every struggle is the opposition of at least two divergent priorities. Here we see the first of these.

"Save me from" *swzw ek* is the same expression used in Heb 5:7 (*swzw ek*), which may have this utterance in mind. (Again, we see John's care to document dominical sayings, missing in the synoptics, that lie behind Pauline teaching. The synoptics' "Let this cup pass" hints at the same point, but much less directly.)

Let's briefly review the force of this request.

- Hebrews says that his request was heard. Thus he must have been "save[d] from this hour."
- Yet he did die.

- So we conclude that the request was not to bypass the cross, but to be delivered from death after dying. It is a request for resurrection. He realizes that the sins he bears are serious enough to merit eternal separation from the Father—he prays that this may not be the outcome.
- The synoptics also express the request, but more obliquely: “Let this cup pass from me.” He does not ask that it not come to him, but that after he has drunk it, it might pass from him.

Thus one side of the struggle for the Lord is his desire not to be separated from the Father, a separation that he knows could well be eternal. This side of the struggle is his love for his life, his soul.

**but for this cause came I unto this hour.**--Here is the other side of the struggle: his sense of purpose. He realizes that he is a man with a mission, and he is committed to fulfilling that mission. This side of the struggle explains what it means to save one's soul unto eternity—to fulfill the purpose for which God put me here.

**28 Father, glorify thy name.**--Here is the Lord's resolution of the tension. He chooses purpose over pleasure, mission over merriment, duty over delight. “It doesn't matter what happens to me,” he says, “so long as the Father is glorified.”

Notably, he does not say, “In view of this choice, I have chosen to glorify the Father rather than to please myself.” Rather, he asks the Father to glorify his own name. We do not have the strength in ourselves to carry out this awesome choice. It is God who must work in us both to will and to do of his own good pleasure (Phil 2:13).

### ***28b-33, To the People, in response to the voice from heaven***

The Father honors the Son's commitment with a heavenly voice, which shocks the people, drawing them more closely into the discourse. The Lord responds by amplifying the first of his three points, the one that describes his ministry toward the world. (Not *bat qol*—see Gill for observation that the Jewish refs are secondary to this.)

### **28b-29, Stimulus: the Father's voice and the people's reaction**

**Then came there a voice from heaven.**--In the synoptics, the Father speaks from heaven at the baptism (Matt 3:17) and again on the Mount of Transfiguration (Matt 17:5).

As parents, we know how strong our impulse is to comfort our children when they are confused or suffering. Here we observe the Father comforting his son in the time of his deepest struggle, as he wrestles with the need to hate his own soul in order to save it unto life eternal. We can learn from this how we should draw comfort when we are troubled.

**I have both glorified it.**--The Father reminds his son of the remarkable miracles by which he had previously manifested his glory.

- 2:11, in changing the water to wine at Cana, Jesus “manifested forth his glory.”
- 9:24, The Pharisees urged the man born blind, “Give God the praise” [lit. “glory”], acknowledging that his healing glorified God.
- 11:4, the sickness of Lazarus was “for the glory of God, that the Son of God might be glorified thereby.”
- 11:40, he says to Martha, “if thou wouldest believe, thou shouldest see the glory of God?”

**and will glorify it again.**--Thus he assures the Son that he will grant his request to “glorify thy name.” The fullest manifestation of this was in the resurrection:

- Romans 6:4 Christ was raised up from the dead by the **glory** of the Father
- 1 Corinthians 15:42-43 So also *is* the resurrection of the dead. ... <sup>43</sup> It is sown in dishonour; it is raised in **glory**:
- Philippians 3:20-21 For our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ: <sup>21</sup> Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his **glorious** body, [the one he received when he rose from the dead]
- 1 Peter 1:21 God, that raised him up from the dead, and gave him **glory**;

Thus the Father ends up giving the Son what the Son declines to ask for, resurrection from the dead, fulfilling the promise of v. 25!

The result of the Son's life was the testimony of the disciples, “the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,” 1:14.

An important feature of the Father's proclamation is that it looks in two directions, both backward and forward. God substantiates his promise of what he is about to do by reminding his people of what he has already done. This is a common claim in the Bible:

- Phil 1:6, he which **hath begun** a good work in you **will perform it** until the day of Jesus Christ:
- Isa 44:2, Thus saith the LORD that **made** thee, and **formed** thee from the womb, *which will help* thee;
- Exodus 19:4-6 4 Ye have seen what **I did** unto the Egyptians, and *how I bare* you on eagles' wings, and **brought** you unto myself. 5 Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then **ye shall** be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth *is* mine: 6 And **ye shall** be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation.
- Isaiah 51:2-3 2 Look unto Abraham your father, and unto Sarah *that bare* you: for **I called him** alone, and **blessed him**, and **increased him**. 3 For the LORD **shall comfort** Zion: he **will comfort** all her waste places; and he **will make** her wilderness like Eden, and her desert like the garden of the LORD; joy and gladness **shall be found** therein, thanksgiving, and the voice of melody.

Whenever we need assurance of God's future care, we need look no further than what he has done in the past. The old hymn has it right: “Count your blessings.” Or to put it more biblically, “In everything give thanks” (1 Thes 5:18); “In everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God” (Phil 4:6). We have an example in Paul, who opens each of his epistles with a prayer that begins with thanksgiving to God before it turns to request.

**29 The people therefore that stood by.**--The Lord's previous words were stimulated by the question of Philip and Andrew concerning the Jews, and were addressed primarily to the disciples. But the Lord is in the court of the Gentiles, with people clustered around him, and the Father's response could not be overlooked by these eavesdroppers. Thus the Lord's final words, begun in summary to the disciples, are now broadened out to a wider public.

It seems as though the Father wanted this message heard more widely, and through his voice from heaven drew the attention of those around to his Son. This is the right way to seek a public—not by personal ostentation, but by speaking out the truth to those who will hear, and counting on God to

expand our audience.

**... said that it thundered.**--They heard the sound, but could not understand the words. Something similar happened when the Lord spoke to Paul on the road to Damascus. He clearly heard a voice speaking with him "in the Hebrew tongue" (Acts 26:14). According to Acts 9:7, "the men which journeyed with him ... hear[d]," but in Acts 22:9 Paul reports, "they that were with me ... heard not the voice of him that spake to me." The difference appears to be that, like the crowd in Jerusalem in John 12, they heard the sound but did not understand the words.

There is an instructive lesson here: the word of God is unintelligible to the natural man, apart from the working of the HS. The words of God to his Son, or of Christ to Paul, could not be understood by those standing by, who were not the objects of the Spirit's work at that point.

**others said, An angel spake to him.**--Not everybody was void of understanding. The people are divided in their interpretation of the loud sound that they hear. Some attribute it to thunder, others (more sympathetically) to an angel. This latter group may show some influence of the Spirit.

### **30-33, Response: Twofold effect of the Lord's death.**

This section corresponds to the first of the three paragraphs in 23-28, but introduces a new element. The glorification of the Lord anticipated in 23 is now balanced by the defeat of the current prince of this world. The addition reflects the broader audience. To the disciples, he spoke of salvation; to the people at large, he warns of judgment in addition to salvation.

**30 This voice came not because of me.**--He does not mean that the voice meant nothing to him, or that he did not need this encouragement. Certainly the Father's words were intended to answer his plea for the Father's glory. But if it were only for him, "it might have been whispered in his ear privately" (Matthew Henry). The reason for the striking form in which the answer was given was not for him, but for them.

**but for your sakes.**--This is puzzling. John has just told us that the hearers didn't understand either what was said or its source. If God intended his word for them, did he then fail?

The following verse explains the sense in which this word was "for your sakes." First, we must understand that the expression "for your sakes" really means "because of you," and does not necessarily imply "for your good," "for your benefit." In this case, the heavenly word has a more sober purpose.

**31 Now is the judgment of this world.**--Morris says, "The connection of this with the preceding verse is not clear." On the contrary, it is very clear, though it may be unpalatable to our carnal instincts. This clause explains in more detail how it is that the word from heaven came "for your sakes," "because of you." Specifically, it came for judgment.

- It came to show just how hard of heart you are.
- It came to leave you without excuse.
- It came to demonstrate that your sin is so deep, you not only reject the promised Messiah, the Son of God, but you cannot understand the voice of God himself.

Consider v.48, which corresponds with this one, and shows the judgmental nature of the Word.

It is not popular to contemplate that God's word may come for judgment, but the principle is attested throughout Scripture.

- Rom 1:18-20 explains that God's clear revelation of his might and power in nature leaves



people “without excuse.”

- John 15:22 22 If I had not come and spoken unto them, they had not had sin: but now they have no cloke for their sin.
- Joel 3:16 16 The LORD also shall roar out of Zion, and utter his voice from Jerusalem; and the heavens and the earth shall shake: but the LORD *will be* the hope of his people, and the strength of the children of Israel.
- Isaiah 42:13 The LORD shall go forth as a mighty man, he shall stir up jealousy like a man of war: he shall cry, yea, roar; he shall prevail against his enemies.
- Jeremiah 25:30 Therefore prophesy thou against them all these words, and say unto them, The LORD shall roar from on high, and utter his voice from his holy habitation; he shall mightily roar upon his habitation; he shall give a shout, as they that tread *the grapes*, against all the inhabitants of the earth. 31 A noise shall come *even* to the ends of the earth; for the LORD hath a controversy with the nations, he will plead with all flesh; he will give them *that are* wicked to the sword, saith the LORD.
- Hebrews 12:25-27 25 See that ye refuse not him that speaketh. For if they escaped not who refused him that spake on earth, much more *shall not* we *escape*, if we turn away from him that *speaketh* from heaven: 26 Whose voice then shook the earth: but now he hath promised, saying, Yet once more I shake not the earth only, but also heaven. 27 And this *word*, Yet once more, signifieth the removing of those things that are shaken, as of things that are made, that those things which cannot be shaken may remain.
- When the Lord Jesus returns, his main weapon is a sword that proceeds “out of his mouth,” Rev 19:15, 21.

The Lord's sword is described as two-edged (Rev 1:16, cf. Heb 4:12). In fact, every word of God is two-edged. To those who understand and obey it, it brings blessing. But it stands in judgment over those who disobey it. As with all law, ignorance is no excuse. There are those whose sin has rendered them unable to understand the Word of God, to whom it is mere noise. Their very ignorance emphasizes how culpable they will be. When men hear God's word and say, “It's just thunder,” we may know that the time of judgment is near.

The next few clauses correspond directly with elements of vv. 23-24

**now shall the prince of this world be cast out.**--If the time has come for the world to be judged, the ruler of the world must be first in the dock. v. 23 announced that the hour had come for the Lord to be glorified; corresponding to this, here we learn that his antithesis will be cast out. The usurper must be removed from the throne so that the true king can be established.

The “prince of this world” ἄρχων τοῦ κόσμου τούτου is unquestionably Satan. The Lord refers to him three times in John: here, 14:30, and 16:11. The title was common in Jewish writings, apparently of the angel of death. Later in the NT Satan receives a similar title: 2 Cor 4:4 “god of this world” θεὸς τοῦ αἰῶνος τούτου, Eph 2:2 “prince of the power of the air τὸν ἄρχοντα τῆς ἐξουσίας τοῦ ἀέρος. Recall from Eph 6:12 that wicked spirits are characterized as political rulers.

Matthew Henry has a fascinating analysis of this phrase.

At the death of Christ there was a famous trial between Christ and Satan, the serpent and the promised seed; the trial was for the world, and the lordship of it; the devil had long borne sway among the children of men, time out of mind; he now pleads prescription, grounding his claim

also upon the forfeiture incurred by sin. We find him willing to have come to a composition ([Luk 4:6](#), [Luk 4:7](#)); he would have given the kingdoms of this world to Christ, provided he would hold them by, from, and under him. But Christ would try it out with; by dying he takes off the forfeiture to divine justice, and then fairly disputes the title, and recovers it in the court of heaven. Satan's dominion is declared to be a usurpation, and the world adjudged to the Lord Jesus as his right, [Psa 2:6](#), [Psa 2:8](#). The judgment of this world is, that it belongs to Christ, and not to Satan; to Christ therefore let us all *atturn* tenants.

**32 And I, if I be lifted up from the earth ... signifying what death he should die.**--This is one of four places in John where the Lord speaks of being “lifted up”: John 3:14 (comparison to Moses' serpent), 8:28 (“when ye have lifted up the Son of Man”), here, and 12:34 (the people's response). We should notice two things about this statement.

1. John explicitly states that this is a reference to his death, and the discussion in ch. 3 shows the point of this reference, being lifted up on a stake in the process of being executed.
2. The verb is remarkable. While it literally refers to physical elevation, on the Lord's lips in the synoptic gospels it always refers to exaltation, and is translated “exalt.” For him, doing the Father's will was so important that he considered it an exaltation, even though in the world's eyes it was the lowest defeat.

(On *ek ths ghs* vs. *apo ths ghs*, see technical note below.)

**will draw all men unto me.**--This saying arrests our attention. Clearly, not all men follow the Lord. This is evident by the behavior of the Jews in particular. How, then, can the Lord say that he will draw all? Possible solutions:

1. Perhaps “draw” is only an influence, a tug that may be resisted. But this is contrary to the use of the word elsewhere in the NT. Compare in particular 21:6 describing the disciples' failure to “draw” the net of fishes to shore. John does not say that they drew it but it did not come; he says that they failed to draw it. So this explanation doesn't work at all.
2. Remember the context of this discussion, which was stimulated by the interest of the Greeks, and the hesitancy of Andrew and Philip to bring them directly to the Lord. An ancient explanation, going back to Chrysostom, is that “all” refers not to all individuals, but to all kinds of people; all without distinction rather than all without exception. See Bullinger p. 616 for other examples of this usage (e.g., 2 Kings 8:9; Joel 2:28 (3:1); Acts 10:12 (AV “all manner” is simply “all” in Greek), etc.
3. There is another possibility, which fits with the nearer context. Contrast this verse with 6:44. The Father draws only some, but the Son draws all. Is this perhaps correlated with 5:22, “the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son”? The Father, in elective grace, draws only some to saving faith in the Son. But when the day of judgment comes, the Son will draw all to himself. This is particularly appropriate in view of the emphasis on judgment in the previous verse. By his death, he has purchased authority over all men, reprobate as well as elect (cf. 2 Pet 2:1), and will exercise that authority in the day of judgment.

### **34-36, To the People: Carpe Diem**

Still speaking to the people, he now he turns to the second of his three points, and calls the people to the following required in v. 26

### 34, Stimulus: The people's question about how Christ can die

We have heard out of the law that Christ abideth for ever—Indeed they had.

- Psa 110:4 “thou art a priest for ever”;
- Ezek 37:25 “my servant David shall be their prince for ever”;
- Mic 4:7, “The Lord shall reign over them in Mount Zion from henceforth, even for ever.”

In this context, given the Lord's introductory use of the title “Son of Man” (v. 23), they probably have in mind two verses in the great messianic vision of Dan 7, in which “one like unto the Son of Man” comes near unto the Ancient of Days to receive his authority.

- Dan 7:14, “his dominion is an everlasting dominion,”
- 27, “whose kingdom is an everlasting kingdom”;

**how sayest thou, The Son of man must be lifted up?**--Their quotation combines vv. 23, 32, which is appropriate, since both amplify the first point of the Lord's three points.

**who is this Son of man?**--They had thought that “Son of Man” was a Messianic title. Yet Daniel 7 teaches that the Messianic Son of Man abides forever, and the Lord has just taught that he will be crucified. They cannot—or will not—reconcile the two.

The OT is full of prophecies of the death of Messiah. The Jewish sages cited in Edersheim's Appendix 9 includes portions of both Isa 53 and Psa 22. In particular,

- He must be “cut off out of the land of the living” and “slain ... for the transgression of my people,” Isa 53:8.
- Psa 22:7, All they that see me laugh me to scorn: they shoot out the lip, they shake the head
- Psa 22:15, My strength is dried up like a potsherd; and my tongue cleaveth to my jaws; and thou hast brought me into the dust of death.
- See Edersheim for a Messianic interpretation of Ruth 2:14 that discusses the sufferings of Messiah and his appearance, disappearance, and subsequent return.
- Dan 9:26, after threescore and two weeks shall Messiah be cut off,

These they conveniently forget. Thus we should probably understand their question, not as honest confusion, but as “a reproachful question” (Calvin).

### Response

Before expounding the next two verses phrase by phrase, we should inquire how they respond to the question that the people have just asked. On the surface, the response appears oblique and evasive:

Q: How can the Messiah die?

A: Walk in the light.

Their question has to do, not with how they should walk, but with the OT description of the Messiah as eternal. His answer appears to have nothing to do with that description.

If their question is an honest one, the Lord is guilty of evading it. But we have seen that their question is captious, not an honest inquiry. The Lord's response is at a deeper level. “I am the light. The truth of

my claims is self-evident. If you were honest, you would acknowledge that my teaching about my death is completely compatible with the law. Open your eyes, and pay attention.”

**35 Yet a little while is the light with you.**--Throughout John, the Lord is described as Light. The most direct references are 8:12 and 9:5, “I am the light of the world,” but see also 1:8 and 3:19.

They are saying, “If you die, you can't be the Messiah.” He says, “Don't focus on what happens after my death. Pay attention now. I am the light. I am here for a little while longer. Take advantage of that revelation.”

See the Table: in v. 26 he spoke of their being with him; here he speaks of the period while he is with them.

In the image that follows, he returns to the application of this image that he has already used with the disciples in 11:9, 10, “If any man walk in the day, he stumbleth not, ... But if a man walk in the night, he stumbleth.”

Now we have two commands, largely synonymous, each with a motive. The first motive is negative, while the second is positive.

**Walk while ye have the light.**--The right use of light is not to argue about whether it is really darkness, but to walk, to take advantage of it for guidance.

See the Table: this clause is a figurative restatement of the exhortation, “Let him follow me.”

**lest darkness come upon you.**--The exhortation is a metaphor for travel in the ancient world. Men ought to walk during the day, and rest during the night. When you are on a journey between two cities, you must move quickly so that you are not overtaken by darkness. Compare the Levite retrieving his concubine in Judges 19; 11-14 show the urgency of finding shelter as night begins to fall.

The application of the metaphor is that the time of the Lord's teaching on earth was a time of unique opportunity for the Jewish people. This is when they should have been sitting at his feet, learning from him, becoming his followers. It was a limited time of opportunity, an “accepted time” (2 Cor 6:2), a time when the Lord was near and might be found (Isa 55:6, “Seek ye the LORD while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near”).

The picture is appropriate for us today, not only for coming to Christ, but in the matter of obeying him. Don't hesitate when the light shines. Take action. Walk in the light. Obey immediately.

**he that walketh in darkness knoweth not whither he goeth.**--Here is the other side of the metaphor. Those who waste the day and then try to walk at night will get lost.

See the Table. Here is someone losing his life for lack of attention to spiritual priorities.

The Lord is drawing here on a warning from the prophets, who describe God's judgment as the withdrawing of light from travelers.

- Isaiah 59:9 [Because of the sins described in vv. 1-8,] Therefore is judgment far from us, neither doth justice overtake us: we wait for light, but behold obscurity; for brightness, *but* we walk in darkness. 10 We grope for the wall like the blind, and we grope as if *we had* no eyes: we stumble at noonday as in the night; *we are* in desolate places as dead *men*.
- Jeremiah 13:16 Give glory to the LORD your God, before he cause darkness, and before your feet stumble upon the dark mountains, and, while ye look for light, he turn it into the shadow of death, *and* make *it* gross darkness.

- Jeremiah 23:12 Wherefore their way shall be unto them as slippery *ways* in the darkness: they shall be driven on, and fall therein: for I will bring evil upon them, *even* the year of their visitation, saith the LORD.

**36 While ye have light, believe in the light.**--He repeats the exhortation, “Walk while you have the light,” in slightly different terms. To believe in the light is to recognize that it reveals, and to act in that revelation, to walk in it. Or, to develop the parallel shown in the Table with v. 26, to believe in the light and walk in the light is to serve the Lord Jesus.

He continues to urge the self-authentication of his revelation. “Believe in the light” sounds tautological. How could one not believe in it? But it will not always shine as brightly as it does this moment. They should cease their captious questions and submit to him.

**that ye may be the children of light.**--The first time he urged them to walk in the light, he gave a negative motive, the risk of getting lost at night. Now he gives a positive motive, becoming a child (lit. “son”) of light.

This is an important Jewish phrase. Our Lord echoes it again in Luke 16:8, and Paul uses it in 1 Thes 5:5. (Eph 5:8 is “children,” not “sons.”) It’s clear enough from these references that it designates the righteous, but this became even clearer after the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls. One of the Scrolls (1QM) describes an eschatological “war of the sons of light against the sons of darkness.” It has been argued (<http://www.ne.jp/asahi/luke/ueda-sarson/NewSonsOfLight.html>) that the scroll dates to the time of the Maccabees, and was written to encourage them in their struggle with the Seleucids. For our purposes, it shows that the terminology “son of light” was well established in Jewish usage. It describes those who are on the right side of the battle, those who (see Table on v. 26) will be honored by the Father.

But how does one become a “son of light”? Not by being of Jewish birth, or fighting against the Syrian army, as the Maccabees thought. Rather, one becomes a son of light by accepting the light and walking in it.

So here is the choice. Jesus is the Light of the world. He calls the world to walk in the light, to serve him, to follow him. Those who do will be honored by the Father with the title, “sons of light.” Those who do not will stumble in darkness. And with that challenge, he dramatically disappears from the stage.

### **36b-50, The Cry from the Unseen Lord**

After addressing first the disciples in the temple area (23-27), then the people who overheard that discussion (31-36), the Lord’s final public utterance is a cry from a hidden location—the most public of all, and the least personal. Like the others, it is in response to a stimulus, the divided nature and weakness of the response to him.

### **36b-43, Stimulus: the Public Response.**

**These things spake Jesus, and departed, and did hide himself from them.**--A dramatic preparation for his final cry.

The stimulus for this cry is a description of the feeble state of mankind:

- Division within the Jews, with many rejecting him outright;

- Weakness on the part of those who did believe, who refuse to confess him.

### **37-41, Unbelievers fulfill Isaiah's prophecies**

**37 ... they believed not on him.**--John observes first the general disbelief. Then he shows 1) that this is intrinsically unreasonable, 2) a fulfillment of prophecy, and 3) a direct result of divine judgment. The last two rest on a pair of passages in Isaiah that, taken together, depict the very paradox of exaltation in humiliation that the Lord has been emphasizing.

**though he had done so many miracles before them.**--Their unbelief is, first of all, unreasonable. They had irrefutable evidence, in the form of his miracles, of his authority as one sent by the Father. The Lord's works are not his only witness (5:33-39), but they are one in which John has particular interest, and one that might be expected to seize the attention of the unbeliever. Cf. 20:30-31.

**38 That the saying of Esaias the prophet might be fulfilled, ... Lord, who hath believed our report?**--Second, their unbelief fulfills prophecy. John quotes Isa 53:1 to show that the Scriptures anticipate an unbelieving response.

Though he quotes only the first verse, he no doubt has the entire chapter in mind. The people have rejected the Lord based on their theological conclusion that the law teaches that "Christ abideth for ever," v. 34. What Isaiah prophesied is not just that the people would not believe, but specifically that they would not believe in the sufferings to be endured by the Messiah.

**39 Therefore they could not believe.**--Third, their unbelief is not a failure of divine power in the miracles, but actually a demonstration of the divine power in reprobation. John now turns to Isa 6:10. There, God commanded Isaiah to "make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes." Because God commands it, he is ultimately responsible for it, so John attributes the action directly to him: "He hath blinded their eyes, and hardened their heart." The interpretation is consistent with other passages in Isaiah, e.g., 28:11-13, which depicts God as bringing confusion on the people. Cf. also the withdrawing of light as judgment, discussed under 12:35b above.

John's use of Isaiah here anticipates Paul's teaching in Rom 9 that Jewish unbelief is ultimately the result of God's sovereign hardening. Romans 9:18, "Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will *have mercy*, and whom he will he hardeneth." This teaching is consistent throughout John:

- 1:13, Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.
- 3:3, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.
- 6:44 No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him:
- 6:65, no man can come unto me, except it were given unto him of my Father.

But this is the strongest teaching yet—not just that saving faith is the gift of God, but that blindness to obvious evidence is the result of God's judgment on sin. This teaching is deeply offensive to the flesh, which wants to think that it retains the capability to make an independent evaluation of the evidence. In fact, it has no such independent ability. It is under judgment, and only by God's mercy can it see the salvation that can set it free.

**41 These things said Esaias, when he saw his glory, and spake of him.**--This is a chiasmic summary of the two citations from Isaiah. "When he saw his glory" describes Isa 6, while "spake of him" is an assertion of the messianic nature of Isa 53.

It is fascinating that John reads both passages as describing the Messiah. This is not unusual for Isa 53, which was understood this way even by the Jews (Edersheim app. IX). But Isa 6 is a vision of Jehovah exalted in his temple. Yet John summarizes it by saying that Isaiah “saw his glory,” where “his” must have the same antecedent as the “him” of whom Isaiah spoke in ch. 53. As often, John amplifies his initial claim (1:1) that “the Word was God.”

### **42-43, Believers fear men more than God**

**42 Nevertheless ... many believed on him.**--John marks a contrast. After describing those who rejected him through hardness of heart, he turns to those who did believe. We have often seen the dividing effect of the Lord's ministry. Three times so far we have read of a division among the people:

1. 7:43, over his place of birth, whether Messiah could come from Galilee
2. 9:16, over whether the glory of a miracle (healing the blind man) outweighed the fact that the healing occurred on the Sabbath
3. 10:19, over the Lord's sayings, including his claims to be the good shepherd (in contrast to the hirelings) and to be able to rise from the dead.
4. Recall that here (12:34), the dispute is over whether the Messiah can die.

Compare these with the witnesses of 5:31-39. #1,4 are over the Father's testimony in the scriptures. #2 is over the testimony of the miracles. #3 is the only one not directly related to the witnesses. It is primarily a political issue: he is condemning the current temple leadership as hireling shepherds. Thus the divisions are for the most part over the authority and meaning of the witnesses to him.

**the chief rulers also.**--Nicodemus was in this class (3:1). The people asked in 7:26 whether any in this category had believed. We already knew about Nicodemus, but even his colleagues asked in 7:48, “have any of the rulers believed on him?” Here we get the answer to that question.

**but because of the Pharisees they did not confess him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue.**--Recall 9:22, where the blind man's parents refused to answer questions about their son's healing “because they feared the Jews: for the Jews had agreed already, that if any man did confess that he was Christ, he should be put out of the synagogue.” Note how self-perpetuating this social pressure is. It falls not only on the people (as in ch. 9), but even on the leaders themselves. No one of them is willing to step out and challenge the group as a whole.

**43 For they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God.**--We have heard this diagnosis before. John is recalling the Lord's words in 5:44, “How can ye believe, which receive honour one of another, and seek not the honour that *cometh* from God only?” the word “honor” there is the same as “praise” here, and is more commonly translated “glory” or “glorious” (155x/168). We must choose whose praise we value more. As a boy, I put little effort into athletics, preferring the honor of the report card to that of the sports fans; other students made just the opposite choice.

The choice here is a case of the one the Lord articulated in 12:25, whether one will hate or love one's soul. One element of our soul, our life-experience, is “the pride of life.” These people loved the praise of men so much that they would not seek the praise of God. The Lord's personal choice was just the opposite (5:41, “I receive not honor from men”).

## 44-50, Response

The Lord has disappeared from the midst of the crowd (v. 36), and John has summarized the division among the people over him. One would think that the narrative of the Lord's public ministry is at an end. The show is over, the audience has begun to gather their coats and rise from their seats. Then, suddenly and unexpectedly, a loud shout rings out over the court of the Gentiles. The Lord Jesus, though unseen, makes his voice heard, and repeats all three themes of 23-36.

**44 Jesus cried *krauzw*.**--This is an unusual action for our Lord. Isaiah even prophesied of him, "He shall not cry (*krauzw*<sup>1</sup>), nor lift up, nor cause his voice to be heard in the street" (Isa 42:2). Many people cry out in the gospels, including both his friends (the Baptist in 1:15), the people at the triumphal entry (12:13), and his enemies (the Jews calling for his death in 19:12), and in the synoptics, the Lord only cries out in the agony of the cross (Matt 27:50, 46 with a different verb). But John marks three of his utterances as cries: this one, and two at the feast of Tabernacles.<sup>2</sup>

John 7:28-29 28 Then cried Jesus in the temple as he taught, saying, Ye both know me, and ye know whence I am: and I am not come of myself, but he that sent me is true, whom ye know not. 29 But I know him: for I am from him, and he hath sent me.

John 7:37-38 37 In the last day, that great *day* of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink. 38 He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water.

All three of these were, as Isaiah prophesied, not "in the street," but in the temple precincts. They are a glimpse beyond the humble suffering of his first coming to the triumphant and authoritative stance of his return. They show us "the Lord, whom ye seek, ... suddenly com[ing] to his temple," Mal 3:1.

Notably, the two previous statements deal with two of the three themes that occupy the Lord's final discourse in 12:22-50.

- 7:28-29 deals with his authority as one sent by the Father, presented in 12:27-28; 49-50.
- 7:37-38 is a call to follow him, presented in 12:25-26, 35-36, 44-46.

The fact that he emphasizes these themes with loud cries makes them especially worthy of our attention as critical summaries of his teaching.

### **44-46, The World's Obligation to Follow Him**

This saying responds to the division among the people obvious in the previous section, and builds on the corresponding elements in the previous panels.

- v.26 emphasized that serving the Son would bring people into a special relation with the Father.
- The parallel in v.36 described "serving" as believing in the light.

Observe how both these elements are repeated here.

**44 He that believeth ... 45 he that seeth.**--The parallelism between these two phrases reflects the association of "believe" with "light" in v. 36. Note also the order of the verbs.

- The world says, "Show me, and I will believe."

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1 The quotation in Matt 12:19 uses *kraugazw*.

2 At the raising of Lazarus, he also cries *kraugazw*.



- The Lord Jesus insists on the opposite order.
  - 7:17, If any man will[s to] do his will, he shall know of the doctrine
  - 11:40 if thou wouldest believe, thou shouldest see the glory of God?

First one believes, under the influence of the Holy Spirit. Then one sees. Cf. Heb 11:8 “not knowing”

**44, 45 me ... him that sent me.**--Here is the second theme from the preceding panels, that responding to the Son brings us into relation with the Father. It brings us his honor, and makes us his children. This can only happen because Jesus is the Father's representative.

v.46 expands v.26a and v.35a, and even more closely recalls the wording of 8:12.

8:12	12:46
I am the light of the world:	I am come a light into the world,
he that followeth me	that whosoever believeth on me
shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.	should not abide in darkness.

**I am come a light into the world.**--In 8:12, he simply claimed to *be* the light of the world. Here he emphasizes that this is not a permanent state of affairs. His light came into the world at a specific time (compare 1:9; 3:19). , but something that begin at a point in time, and thus may end. Thus he reinforces the warning of 35a, “yet a little while is the light with you.”

**whosoever believeth on me.**--This is parallel to “follow me” in 26 and “walk while you have the light” in 35. It is nonsense to say that we can believe in Christ and yet not follow him. To believe is to follow.

The juxtaposition of believing with light reflects v. 36, “believe in the light.”

**abide in darkness.**--This describes those who “walk in darkness” in 35b. But the promise goes a bit further. Though we walk in the light of the celestial sun, we cannot follow it fast enough. Eventually it sets and leaves us in the dark. But if we walk in the light of God's Son, he promises that we will not “abide in darkness.” Instead, “where I am, there shall also my servant be,” v. 26. Though his light will leave those who do not follow him, we will continue to enjoy its direction.

### **47-48, His Role in Judging the World**

Now the Lord picks up the theme of judgment that he introduced in v.31. Though the events of the next few days will condemn the Prince of this World, people should not expect to see Jesus in a judicial demeanor. His focus at this time is on saving his people, not judging them.

**47 And if any man hear my words, and believe not.**--This verse rounds out 5:24, which describes what happens to him “that heareth my word and believeth.” The light shines on all, but not all respond to it. Many hear Christ's words, but do not believe them, just as in vv. 28-29, all heard the voice of the Father, but most did not understand it.

**I judge him not.**--At first, this is shocking, for two reasons.

First, the Lord has clearly taught of the *fact* of judgment. We have already been told that those who believe not are condemned already:

3:18 He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.

3:36 He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him.

Second, the Lord has eloquently revealed his *role* as judge, in 5:19-30.

But he goes on to resolve the paradox. We will understand the resolution better if we emphasize the word order and the tense by translating, “It is not I who am judging him.” The two resolutions are presented chiastically.

**for I came not to judge the world, but to save the world.**--The first resolution of the paradox is implicit in the present tense of the verb in the previous clause. The Lord does not say, “I will not judge him,” but “I do not judge him.” This is not the season of judgment. It is the season of salvation. The door is open to “whosoever will,” exhibiting the longsuffering of God (2 Peter 3:9).

“To save the world” recalls the end of v. 24, “bringeth forth much fruit.” They will not see him in judgment fury at this time, because his focus is on salvation, not judgment.

**48 He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him.**--Here is the second resolution. Those who reject Christ will indeed be judged, but the focus of that judgment is not on the whim of the judge. “It is not I who am judging him.”

Note that rejecting Christ is here defined as not receiving his words. To reject Christ, it is not necessary that one bring railing complaints against him. Simply not receiving his words is basis for condemnation.

**the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him.**--When the judgment does happen, it will be a judgment on the basis of the word that Christ has already uttered. His teachings during his earthly sojourn will be the standard against which men will be held accountable.

We are rightly critical of judges whose decisions are based on favoritism or personal inclination. The notion of the rule of law, a fixed standard against which people are held accountable, is firmly established in Scripture. When Christ sits in judgment in the future, the standard will be the revelation that has been available for the past two millennia and more.

**in the last day.**--Now we return to the first resolution, emphasizing the temporal difference. The manifestation of the judgment awaits the last day.

### **49-50, His Mission from the Father**

The Lord closes his dramatic cry by reminding them of the point in vv. 27-28, that he is subject to the Father.

**49 For I have not spoken of myself.**--As often in this gospel, the Lord emphasizes that his authority is derived from the Father, and that everything he does is under the Father's command.

**but the Father which sent me, he gave me a commandment, what I should say, and what I should speak.**--This is a direct allusion to God's words to Moses in Deut 18:18:

Deut 18:18	John 12:49
I will <b>raise them up</b> a Prophet from among their brethren, like unto thee, and will put <b>my words</b> in his mouth; and he shall speak unto them all that I shall <b>command</b> him.	<b>the Father</b> which <b>sent</b> me, he gave me a <b>commandment</b> , what I should <b>say</b> , and what I should <b>speak</b>

He is claiming to be the prophet “like unto” Moses, “that prophet” whom the Baptist denied being in 1:21.

**50 his commandment is life everlasting.**--”His commandment” is not the law, nor the gospel message, but the same commandment mentioned in the previous verse, the commission that the Father gave to the Son, promised in Deut 18:18 and now under execution. This commandment has as its objective everlasting life for God's people.

**I know.**--This personal note is touching. At the beginning of this discourse (v.27), he showed uncertainty: “What shall I say?” Now he has come to a firm and settled knowledge. God's commandment to him is the means of giving everlasting life to his people. This is the “joy set before him,” Heb 12:2. Matthew Henry:

This Christ says he knew: “I know it is so,” which intimates how cheerfully and with what assurance Christ pursued his undertaking, knowing very well that he went upon a good errand, and that which would bring forth fruit unto life eternal.

**whatsoever I speak therefore, even as the Father said unto me, so I speak.**--He closes by reminding his hearers that his words are the words of the Father. Thus it is fitting that his last public teaching should echo out over the temple from an unseen speaker, just as the Father's words did in v.28. By issuing them in this way, he emphasizes dramatically the point that this final statement makes verbally.

## Notes

### ***“Blessed be the king”***

How often in the Bible do people bless the king? Keep in mind the principle of Heb 7:7, “the less is blessed of the better,” so it would be unusual for the people to bless the king.

Search on bless\* and king. Categories:

### **King blesses the people**

Gen 14:18, 19, cited in Heb 7. Melchizedek blesses Abraham. This is the first instance in the Bible.

1 Sam 23:21, Saul to the Ziphites who offered to betray David.

2 Sam 2:5, David to the men of Jabesh-Gilead, who had buried Saul

2 Sam 6:20, David comes to bless his household after ushering the ark into Jerusalem

2 Sam 13:25, David blesses Absalom in refusing his invitation to the sheepsheering party at which Amnon is killed.

2 Sam 19:39, David blesses Barzillai for his hospitality east of Jordan

1 Kings 8:14 = 2 Chr 6:3, Solomon blesses the people upon the dedication of the temple

### **King blesses King**

2 Sam 8:10 = 1 Chr 18:10, Toi king of Hamath blesses David

## People bless the king

2 Sam 14:22, Joab blesses the king upon his decision to bring Absalom home, One must keep in mind that Joab, though inferior in rank to David, was always viewed by him as in some sense more powerful. Compare 2 Sam 3:39, his comment when Joab slew Abner, “I *am* this day weak, though anointed king; and these men the sons of Zeruiah *be* too hard for me.” Joab's blessing may in fact be very patronizing.

1 Kings 1:47, the people bless David upon the succession of Solomon to the throne. Significance: the people's acceptance of the king.

1 Kings 8:66, the people bless Solomon at the end of the feast of Tabernacles that followed the dedication of the temple. Significance: points to the Tabernacles theme?

1 Kings 21:10, 13, Nadab accused of “blessing God and the King”-- verb is semantically polarized to meaning “curse”

Psa 72:15, the messianic king will be blessed daily (by those who bring him gifts and who pray for him) (passive; might be understood in the other order; but see v. 17)

## Other

2 Sam 18:28, Ahimaaz blesses God before the king for the defeat of David's enemies

## Daughter of Zion

The phrase appears 23x. “Daughter of Jerusalem” appears 5x, 4 of them in parallel with “daughter of Zion.” The plural also appears, most frequently in Canticles, Isa 3:16, 17; 4:4; Luke 23:8;

“Son of Zion” and “son of Jerusalem” never appear. “Sons of Zion” appears 2x.

## “Fear Not” vs. “Rejoice”

*Al* + imperfect of *yr*) appears 74x in OT; imperative of *\$mx*, *rnn* (G or H) or *gyl* appears 27x.

There are a few contexts where they occur together:

- Isa 54:1,4
- Joel 2:21-23 (2x each)

But in general, they are very differently distributed.

“Fear not” is common in the historical narratives of the OT (41x in Gen-Neh) “rejoice” appears only 3x, and only twice unconditionally, in Deut 32-33, both of which are eschatological in nature.

“Rejoice” appears 7x in the pss; “fear not” only once (49:17).

Isaiah uses both expressions extensively, but “rejoice” appears mostly in passages that describe eschatological deliverance, while “fear not” appears mostly in passages dealing with current crises.

The NT usage of the terms invites to observations.

1. Paul frequently exhorts believers to rejoice. This may represent a recognition that include a recognition that the Messianic age is dawning, but it may simply be comparable to the exhortation in the pss.

2. “Fear not” appears after John only three times. Acts 18:9 and 27:24 concern the fear of men, not of God, but in Rev 1:17 (Johannine!) the risen Lord says “fear not.” This corresponds to the dominant use of the term in theophanies throughout the narrative portions of the OT.

Further study should consider the object of fear or rejoicing in each case, especially in the OT, where data are more abundant.

## ***Bear Witness***

- In ch. 1, the main role of the baptist was to bear witness of him. We have here an example of witness-bearing: “behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.”
- In ch. 5 and 8, the Lord points out the other witnesses he has, in addition to John. These include his miracles, and the Father speaking through the OT scriptures.
- Jesus himself bears witness:
  - that a prophet is without honor in his own country, 4:44
  - to the world's sinful works, 7:7
  - to himself, 5:41; 8:14, 18
- 15:26, the Comforter bears witness to Jesus
- 15:27, so will the disciples, because they have been with him.
- v.17 is an instance of other individual witnesses. A previous example is the woman in ch. 4 (v. 39).

LXX correspondences:

marturia: 4x (ed, 1x (edut, 1x &axaduta

marturew: 1x each (nh, )\$mh, (wd

marturion: 142 mw(d, 51 (edut, 27 (dh, 12 (d, 2 m\$kn, 3x1 others

martus: 42 (ed, 1x gl(d

## ***Save unto Eternal Life***

Collocation common in the sense of “escape into the land of ...”, Gen 19:17; 1 Sam 27:1; 2 Kings 19:37; Isa 66:19; 1 Macc 2:44

A very close Greek parallel is 4 Macc 15:2-3, “2 Two courses were open to this mother, that of religion, and that of preserving her seven sons for a time, as the tyrant had promised. 3 She loved religion more, the religion that preserves them for eternal life according to God's promise.”

2 Tim 4:18, “preserve me unto his heavenly kingdom.”

## ***Where I am, there shall ye be also***

Five passages in John deal with the theme of our being with the Lord: two are warnings to those who cannot be with him, while the other three describe enablers for our presence with him.

**7:33-34, 36** is the Lord's warning to the Jews,

“Yet a little while am I with you, and *then* I go unto him that sent me. <sup>34</sup> Ye shall seek me, and shall not find *me*: and where I am, *thither* ye cannot come.”

They cannot follow him because he goes to the Father, and the Father's abode is inaccessible to those who are yet in their sin.

**8:21-24** echoes 7:34.

<sup>21</sup> Then said Jesus again unto them, I go my way, and ye shall seek me, and shall die in your sins: whither I go, ye cannot come. <sup>22</sup> Then said the Jews, Will he kill himself? because he saith, Whither I go, ye cannot come. <sup>23</sup> And he said unto them, Ye are from beneath; I am from above: ye are of this world; I am not of this world. <sup>24</sup> I said therefore unto you, that ye shall die in your sins: for if ye believe not that I am *he*, ye shall die in your sins.

**12:26** relates being with Christ to serving and following him:

If any man serve me, let him follow me; and where I am, there shall also my servant be: if any man serve me, him will *my* Father honour.

Gill and Henry see this as a reward. Constable has an interesting and alternative take on this: that presence with Christ here is not meant as a *reward* for following him, but as a *description* of it. Calvin's comment appears to be the same: “The future tense, *shall be*, (ἔσται) is put for *let him be*, according to the custom of the Hebrew language.” The difference seems to turn on whether one views being with Christ as a burden (joining him in death) or a blessing (being with him in heaven, or more generally enjoying his presence). The other references are all positive; so we should treat this as the first of two rewards for following him. This is also consistent with the internal parallelism of the verse (two conditional sentences, each with the same protasis but with different apodoses).

Cf. Luke 22:28-30,

<sup>28</sup> Ye are they which have continued with me in my temptations. <sup>29</sup> And I appoint unto you a kingdom, as my Father hath appointed unto me; <sup>30</sup> That ye may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom, and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

Here, the duty of presence with Christ (as in John 12:26) leads to the promise of presence with Christ (as in 14:3).

**14:2,3** points out that our presence with him requires not only our obedience, but his departure.

I go to prepare a place for you. <sup>3</sup> And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, *there* ye may be also.

It seems clear that this “going” refers to his ascension to the Father, not just to his coming death: 14:12, 28; 16:28.

**17:24**, the Lord intercedes with his Father for our presence:

Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me: for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world.

This hope of being with Christ is pervasive in the NT: Phil 1:23; 1 Thes 4:17. Here we see the *purpose* of our presence with him: that we may behold his glory.

## ***Uyow ek ths ghs vs. apo ths ghs***

### **Apo**

This is closer to the original physical meaning, describing the object above which one is elevated.

Gen 7:17 [the ark] it was lifted on high from off the earth.

Deut 17:20 that his heart be not lifted up above his brethren,

1 Kings 16:2 I lifted thee up from the earth, and made thee ruler over my people Israel; and thou hast walked in the way of Jeroboam, and hast caused my people Israel to sin, to provoke me with their vanities;

Psa 17:49 [et 18:48] He delivereth me from mine enemies: yea, thou liftest me up above those that rise up against me: thou hast delivered me from the violent man. (contrast 2 Sam 22:49)

cf. 1 Sam 2:8 He raiseth up *anisthmi* the poor out of the dust, *and* liftest up *egeirw* the beggar from the dunghill, to set *them* among princes, and to make them inherit the throne of glory: = Psa 113:7

### **Ek**

The emphasis here is on separation as a result of the exaltation.

2 Sam 22:49 ἐκ τῶν ἐπεγειρομένων μοι ὑψώσεις με thou shalt set me on high from among those that rise up against me (3x verbs with MN- *ek*, contrast Psa 18:48)

Psa 9:13 thou that liftest me up from the gates of death:

Sirach 50:22; Now therefore bless ye the God of all, which only doeth wondrous things every where, which exalteth our days from the womb, and dealeth with us according to his mercy.

This is how a plant grows, Genesis 2:9; 19:25; Psa 85:11; 104:14; ; and elsewhere.

Cf usage in John 3:31, describing John the Baptist

### **Discussion**

When commentators note the preposition, they often say that *ek* emphasizes the resurrection. But this would seem inconsistent with John's explanation of *uyow ek ths ghs* as describing the Lord's death.

The doublet in Psa 17 (18) and 2 Sam 22 cautions against making too much of the difference. The same Hebrew phrase can be translated both ways.

A better explanation appears to be that to raise someone *apo (ths) ghs* is a set phrase for elevating a poor person to a position of importance, 1 Kings 16:2; 1 Sam 2:8; Psa 113:7, which is not at all what the Lord means to say here. So he chooses the alternative preposition.

Thus the difference needs explanation only if someone notices it. There is no need to bother with it for a reader of the English Bible.