

Text: John 12:20-36

Title: Believe because He drew all men to Himself

Time: 6/1/2025 am

Place: NBBC

Introduction: In the town of Exeter, NH, at 74 Front Street, stands a small roadside marker bearing this inscription: "George Whitefield here preached his last sermon, Sept. 28, 1770." Whitefield preached his first sermon in New England thirty years prior in 1740. In between, our nation experienced its First Great Awakening. Over thirty years, George Whitefield was the gifted orator of the Great Awakening revival.

One New Hampshire forefather, who heard that last message in Exeter, recorded this about what he heard: "Mr. Whitefield arose and stood erect, and his appearance alone was a powerful sermon. He remained several minutes unable to speak; and then said, 'I will await the gracious assistance of God; for He will, I am certain, assist me once more to speak in his name.' He then delivered, perhaps, one of his best sermons. 'I go,' he cried, 'I go to rest prepared; my sun has arisen, and by aid from Heaven, has given light to many. It is now about to set for — no, it is to rise to the zenith of immortal glory. I have [not] outlived many on earth, but they cannot outlive me in heaven. O thought divine! I soon shall be in a world where time, age, pain and sorrow are unknown. My body fails; my spirit expands. How willingly would I live forever to preach Christ! But I die to be with Him.'" Two days later, Whitefield died of complications from asthma in Newburyport, MA.

In our passage Jesus preaches His last recorded public message. Like Whitefield, He anticipates the death He would die. Unlike Whitefield, who rightly saw his ministry of fruitfulness ending with his death, Jesus indicates that His death is only the beginning of His fruitfulness. That fruitfulness is summarized in verse 32, "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me."

It is the purpose of the Gospel of John to convince its readers to believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and by believing have life in His name (20:31). In our passage this morning, John tells us that we must believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and have life in His name, because by dying He drew all men to Himself. As we read through the passage, four voices are heard: (1) the voice of the Greeks; (2) the voice of Jesus preaching His last message; (3) the voice that comes from heaven; and (4) the voice of the crowd, from whom Jesus departs and hides Himself. We will look at each voice as we seek to understand the passage this morning.

I. The voice that came from the Greeks expressed every man's need (vv. 20-22).

Illustration: Hyperbole is a literary device we use for emphasis. It is an exaggerated statement that is not meant to be taken literally. For instance, we might say, "I am so hungry I could eat a horse," or we might tell our kids, "I have told you a million times not to do that." In reality, we could not eat a horse, and it is likely that we parents have told our kids not to do something four or five times, not millions of times.

Application: In the previous passage, Jesus enters Jerusalem triumphantly as the Passover Lamb brought into the house on the 10th of Nissan, the Sabbath Hagadol, for the Passover celebration. In verse 19 the Pharisees see this triumph and complain that "the world has gone after" Jesus. They likely thought that they were using hyperbole. They did not mean to be taken literally.

But John tells us next why the complaint of the Pharisees was prophetic, not hyperbolic. He gives an example of all the world going after Jesus. These Greeks were Gentile proselytes to Judaism. They tell Philip that they want to see Jesus. John uses them as representatives of "the world gone after Him" because everyone in the world needs to seek after Jesus.

The synoptic Gospels tell us that between verses 19 and 20 of our passage, Jesus cleanses the temple and declares to the moneychangers there: "Is it not written, My house shall be called of all nations the house of prayer? but ye have made it a den of thieves" (Mark 11:17). In other words, it has always been God's will to reach the nations, the Gentiles, these Greeks, you and me, and to include us in His house of prayer. Everyone everywhere needs to seek after Jesus. The voice that came from the Greeks expressed the need of the world, your need and my need. Like them, we should seek after Jesus.

Notice too that we who have found Jesus have a role to play in helping others find Him too. Philip and Andrew, former residents of Bethsaida of Galilee, would have been very familiar with Greek culture. Perhaps this is why we are told about Philip's hometown in this passage. He seems to want Andrew's help, and together they gain the courage to bring these Greeks to Jesus. We need to team up and encourage one another in our responsibility to help others find Jesus.

II. The voice that came from Jesus promised to meet man's need (vv. 23-28a).

Illustration: In John 2 when Mary asked Jesus to help with the empty wine jars at the wedding in Cana, Jesus told her, "Mine hour is not yet come" (v. 2). In John 7 and 8, at the Feast of Tabernacles the previous fall, temple authorities tried to arrest Jesus, but in both chapters: "no man laid hands on him, because his hour was not yet come" (7:30, 8:20).

Application: But here Jesus states plainly that His hour has come (v. 23). His hour is the event by which the Son of Man is glorified. He comes to this hour as the Son of Man, man's son, the Second Adam, the representative of the world in need.

He then explains what is going to happen in this hour of His glorification. He talks about two grains of wheat. One grain

keeps its form and brings forth no fruit, no fellow seeds. The other grain falls into the ground and dies, so that a fruit-bearing plant might bring about a great harvest of additional seeds (vv. 24-25). The first grain of wheat is the person who loves his life, literally his soul or himself. Not only does this person remain alone and unfruitful. Jesus warns that the person who loves himself destroys (loses) himself. The second grain of wheat is the person who does not love his existence in this world, and because of this sacrifice keeps his soul secure unto life eternal.

Jesus is the second kind of grain of wheat (vv. 27-28a). His troubled soul prepares to die. He wants not to be saved from this hour. He wants His Father's name to be glorified in this hour. He came to this hour for this purpose:

Isa. 53:2-5, "For he shall grow up before him as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground: he hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him. He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed."

If we are to be His disciples, we have to be that kind of grain of wheat too, the kind that dies to self so that others can live (v. 26; *where I am* = in the ground dying to be fruitful). That is our choice – live for self and be destroyed; live to die to self with Christ, choose to be in the ground with Him, and be honored by the Father as one who lived unto life eternal. What choice have we been making? The voice of Jesus promised the meeting of man's need, and with our need met, He calls us to follow Him that the needs of others might be met too.

III. The voice that came from heaven announced a great victory (vv. 28b-33).

Application: The Gospels tell us that the Father spoke from heaven three times during the earthly ministry of Christ – at His baptism, showing Him to be the anointed divine King, whose sandal John the Baptist was unworthy to untie; at His transfiguration, showing Him to be the anointed divine Prophet, whom the Father commanded be heard, even more so than Elijah and Moses; and here at the temple, showing Him to be the anointed divine Priest, who would glorify the Father's name by dying a certain kind of death (v. 33).

The spiritually hard-of-hearing that day thought only about thunder and angels, but Jesus knew that the day would come when they and us would read about this voice from heaven and truly know what it meant for the name of God to be glorified by Jesus, the anointed divine Priest (vv. 29-30). Jesus explains that His death would be a victory in three ways:

(1) Jesus's death would victoriously judge the sin of the world (v. 31a). 1 John 2:2, "And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world"; 2 Cor. 5:21, "For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him." Isa. 53:6, "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned everyone to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all." When Jesus died, He was judged for the sins of the world, your sin and my sin.

(2) Jesus's death would eventually cast Satan out of the world (v. 31b). Ps. 110: 1, "The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool"; 1 Cor. 15:24-26, "Then cometh the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power. For he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet. The

last enemy that shall be destroyed is death"; Rom. 16:20, "And the God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly." Because Jesus died, the day is coming when the world shall be rid of this tyrannical destroying ruler.

(3) Jesus's death would draw all men to Himself (v. 32). The word translated here *draw* means *drag*, not *coax*. In John 18:10, Peter draws a sword; in John 21:6 and 11, the disciples haul in a fishing net; in Acts 16:19, Paul and Silas are dragged into the marketplace of Philippi; in Acts 21:30, Jews drag Paul out of the temple; in Jam. 2:6, rich people drag believers into court.

In other words, because of the victory of Jesus's death, Phil. 2:9-11 is going to happen. The day will come when every knee bows and every tongue confesses. For some it will be in the midst of the fires of God's judgment on unbelief. For others it will be in the midst of the blessings of eternal life. But all men will be dragged to Jesus to bow and confess to the glory of God the Father, because He was obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Where will we do our bowing and confessing? The voice from heaven announces this victory for our sakes, so we can believe before it is too late.

IV. The voice that came from the crowd misses the danger of hesitating unbelief (vv. 34-36).

Illustration: Nov. 9, 1965 is remembered as the day of the Great Northeast Blackout. From New York State, through New England, and into Canada, the east coast went dark just before 6pm. Commuters were stranded, 800,000 people were trapped in New York City's subway system, and thousands more were stuck in the dark offices and elevators of buildings. Altogether, 30 million people lost their lights that evening. It is remembered as our nation's worst blackout.

Application: Verse 36 of our chapter describes a blackout that is much more tragic. Jesus goes away from this crowd and

hides from them. When He does so, the lights go out for them — not just any lights, but the light Jesus tells them about here. It was the light that was with them for a little while. It was a light by which they could walk knowing where they were going. It was a light that must be believed, a light that once believed changes a blind sinner into a child of light. It is the light that can keep the darkness from overtaking you. Jesus is this light of the world.

The question the crowd asks in verse 34 is their way of avoiding everything that Jesus had just said about the victory of His death. They did not want the Son of Man that died for the world's sins. They wanted the Son of David that did not die. It was the offense of the cross that caused their hesitation. It was their unbelief that made them ask the question they asked. They hesitated, not seeing the danger of the coming darkness.

What will you believe about Jesus's death? Do you see it was necessary for you and provided for you? Do you see His light can save you from the coming darkness?

Conclusion: Phillis Wheatley heard George Whitefield preach in Boston in 1764 when she was 11 years old. It was then that she first trusted Christ as her light and Savior. She had been born in Africa and sold into slavery just a few years prior. She belonged to the Wheatly family of Boston, who encouraged her to learn to read, write, and pursue poetry. She became the first African American woman to earn money by publishing her poetry. When she was 17, she learned of Whitefield's death and authored a poetic eulogy in his honor. Two of the stanzas said this about the preacher:

“He pray’d that grace in ev’ry heart might dwell,  
He long’d to see America excell;  
He charg’d its youth that ev’ry grace divine  
Should with full lustre in their conduct shine;  
That Saviour, which his soul did first receive,

The greatest gift that ev'n a God can give,  
He freely offer'd to the num'rous throng,  
That on his lips with list'ing pleasure hung.

“Take him, ye wretched, for your only good,  
Take him, ye starving sinners, for your food;  
Ye thirsty, come to this life-giving stream,  
Ye preachers, take him for your joyful theme;  
Take him my dear Americans,’ he said,  
‘Be your complaints on his kind bosom laid:  
Take him, ye Africans, he longs for you,  
Impartial Saviour is his title due;  
Wash’d in the fountain of redeeming blood,  
You shall be sons, and kings, and priests to God.’”

May we like George Whitefield and Phyllis Wheatley, take Jesus by faith as our the light and Savior. May He drag us to Himself as children of His light, who follow Him and encourage others to do the same.

“A man came—I think it was actually in Philadelphia—on one occasion to the great George Whitefield and asked if he might print his sermons. Whitefield gave this reply; he said, ‘Well, I have no inherent objection, if you like, but you will never be able to put on the printed page the lightning and the thunder.’ That is the distinction—the sermon, and the ‘lightning and the thunder.’ To Whitefield this was of very great importance, and it should be of very great importance to all preachers, as I hope to show. You can put the sermon into print, but not the lightning and the thunder. That comes into the act of preaching and cannot be conveyed by cold print. Indeed it almost baffles the descriptive powers of the best reporters.”

—David Martin Lloyd-Jones,

*Preachers and Preaching*