

Lifting Up Jesus

John 12:20-36

Go ahead and be turning to John 12 in your Bibles. You've heard someone say that all they want to do is "lift up Jesus," meaning that they want to GLORIFY Him. In the first century, however, being "lifted up" meant something very different. It meant DEATH...ON A CROSS. Today we'll talk about how the same phrase can be used to describe both concepts, and hopefully we'll leave with a more practical understanding of what it looks like to live life "Lifting Up Jesus."

Jesus has just raised Lazarus from the dead. In the aftermath of that miracle, the Jewish leaders began plotting to put Jesus and Lazarus BOTH to death! They had essentially put out an ALL POINTS BULLETIN on Jesus, demanding that people give up His whereabouts if they knew them. They had OFFICIALLY REJECTED Jesus. The tension was so high that those who had grown accustomed to His controversial appearances at Passover Feasts from years past were wondering if He'd even show up this year...AND HE DIDN'T DISAPPOINT. He rode into Jerusalem like a KING to the praises of many who would call for His execution only a few days later. As we begin walking through Jesus' last week before the cross, the Bible tells us...

John 12:20

Now among those who went up to worship at the feast were some Greeks.

These Greeks weren't Hellenized Jews, and they weren't Proselytes (Gentiles who had converted to Judaism) either; otherwise, they would've simply been called "JEWS." Therefore, these men might better be classified as "GOD-FEARERS," who traveled to take part in the Passover Feast. Other examples of such GENTILE God-fearers would be the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:27), the Roman centurion Cornelius (Acts 10:1-2), and Lydia, the seller of purple goods (Acts 16:14). These were all objective seekers of truth whose search ultimately led them to Jesus. Mark it down, if anyone is intellectually honest and objectively seeks truth, following the evidence wherever it leads, they will always wind up kneeling before the One who said "I am THE TRUTH."

These men likely attended a Jewish synagogue in the foreign country from which they hailed; they just hadn't become full proselytes, full CONVERTS to Judaism, hence the "Greek" label. Romans 1 states that **"what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them" (Romans 1:19)**. Therefore, **"they are without excuse" (Romans 1:20)**. These Greeks who requested to "see" Jesus at this Jewish feast are biblical proof that, when anyone desires to know the truth about God, He will guide him to that truth. Incidentally, as we just celebrated, not only was Jesus sought out by Gentiles just before His death, He was sought out by Gentiles right after His birth. Matthew tells us...

Matthew 2:1-2

1 Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the east came to Jerusalem, 2 saying, Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.

Wise men still seek Him. Again, the intellectually honest, objective seekers of truth will eventually and JOYFULLY kneel at the nail-pierced feet of Jesus.

John 12:21-23

21 So these came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and asked him, Sir, we wish to see Jesus. 22 Philip went and told Andrew; Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus. 23 And Jesus answered them, The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.

Unlike the Jewish leaders of Jesus' day who "[wished] to see a sign from [Him]," these Greeks just "[wished] to see Jesus." They wanted to have a conversation with Him. We know that the Pharisees had given orders to the public, demanding that they notify them if they became aware of His location. Given that it was well-known that they wanted to arrest and execute Jesus, you didn't want to be caught fraternizing with Him or His followers. However, these Greek visitors, probably from another country, were either unfamiliar with the Pharisees' orders concerning Jesus, or they were just unafraid.

The OFFICIAL REJECTION of the Messiah by the Jewish leaders and now this appearance of GENTILE GOD-FEARERS signaled a TRANSITION in Jesus' ministry. NOW, it was TIME for the Son of Man to be GLORIFIED. EIGHT previous times in John (John 2:4; 4:21, 23; 5:25, 28, 29; 7:30; and 8:20), we're told (sometimes even by Jesus) that His time had "not yet come." This is the first TIME Jesus says "It's time" in John's gospel.

Jesus had reached the ENDGAME of the Father's plan. It was time to accomplish the mission for which He'd come into the world...

John 12:24-26

24 Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone (lit. remains only a single kernel); but if it dies, it bears much fruit. 25 Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. 26 If anyone serves me, he must follow me; and where I am, there will my servant be also. If anyone serves me, the Father will honor him.

LIFE coming THROUGH DEATH, the seed ending and the SEEDLING beginning...Jesus died to live again and to give us life, and after His example, we die for His life to be lived through us. [Pull out a kernel of corn from your pocket.] Jesus talked about a grain of wheat. I've got a kernel of corn. Around here, we grow corn; corn is what I could find. I thought about just putting a picture of it on the screen, but I thought this was more appropriate. Can everyone see it? Not really???

Yeah, that's kind of the point. When we "white knuckle" our lives, making it all about us, our lives are about as significant as this piece of corn that you can barely even see from the back. I have trouble even finding it in my pocket! It's nowhere near as visible or meaningful as this...



Vibrant and green, not only alive, but LIFE-GIVING, there's probably around 800 kernels on that ONE EAR, and there are likely another two ears on the stalk. Can you imagine foregoing THAT in order to hold onto THIS? "This kernel is MINE! My 'precious.' I've got to look out for it! Can't let anything happen to it!" You know, polish it every day, maybe grab a selfie with it from time to time, make social media updates about it (you know, #cornlife #keepinitcereal), amass debt and plan our schedules and our lives around it.... That would be CRAZY! IT'S JUST A PIECE OF CORN! It's meant to be STUCK IN THE GROUND! Anything else is a WASTE (I mean, feeding it to something is fine too, but you get my point)! Our lives are meant to be PLANTED and BEAR MUCH FRUIT to the GLORY OF GOD!

As you leave today, I've got a piece of corn for you. Only grab one. You see, apart from God and His will, this is about as significant as your life is, and grabbing a handful tricks you into thinking otherwise. I know you can't plant this right now, but that's a good thing because it gives you time to PUT IT UP and think about it. [Tape it to the wall.] You will do one of three things with this piece of corn...

- You'll LOSE it (or not even grab one) and not think twice about it, which is cool; it's just a kernel of DEER corn.
- You'll hold onto it like it's the last kernel of corn on earth, your most prized possession (sounds silly, doesn't it?), OR
- You'll SET IT APART for planting come springtime.

Now, I'm not going to think poorly of you if you lose your kernel or forget to plant it, though it would be kind of cool to see a few families let this be a bit of an ongoing illustration of what it looks like to lose your life for Christ's sake. As followers of Christ, our lives have been SET APART FOR CHRIST'S SAKE. It's

only when we let go of this—the insignificant kernel that it is—that God multiplies the FULLNESS and the IMPACT of our lives and is GLORIFIED. Just as you typically plant more than one kernel of corn in your garden, when others see you lose your life for Christ’s sake, they’ll be encouraged to bury theirs alongside yours!

Verse 25 rephrases Jesus words, interpreting them for us. If we live seeking to protect the things of our lives in this world (“huddle” or “overshadowing” motion), all those things will slip through our arms like an ARMFUL of kernels. If we love and pursue Jesus and His will to the degree that it looks like we “hate” or don’t care about anything else in this world, we put our life in His hands, and He looks after it unto eternity. It’s little wonder that the apostle John, being so inspired to include these words in his gospel, heavily emphasized in his first epistle how we’re not to love the world because **“the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever” (1 John 2:17)**. The LORD keeps his life for eternal life. It’s seeing your life as the SINGLE KERNEL that it is and GIVING IT UP.

Jesus tells us that a follower goes where the One he's following goes. You can't serve someone if you aren't with them; therefore, if they're on the move, so are you. You must FOLLOW them, and when we follow and serve Jesus, the Father makes us a promise: He will honor us. God's followers will have received little to no honor in this world for the way they lived, but that's okay. They will receive it from the only One who matters, and that honor will last forever. The one who follows and serves will be honored by the Father, like Jesus being raised, glorified, and seated at His right hand; WE'LL SIT THERE TOO!!!

Jesus said the one who serves Him would be where He was, and He was getting ready on a cross. He was saying, *"I'm going to die, and if you would follow Me, you must die too."* Dietrick Bonhoeffer, the German pastor who faithfully continued to serve God and stand against the Nazis in Germany during WWII, said...

"When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die."

This is the “crucified life” that Paul wrote about that sets us free from slavery to sin to fully and freely surrender to God will. However, before we could do that, Jesus had to surrender to the Father’s will Himself. Jesus said...

John 12:27-28

27 Now is my soul troubled. And what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour? But for this purpose I have come to this hour. 28 Father, glorify your name. Then a voice came from heaven: I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again.

Jesus’ soul was TROUBLED. Yes, He was completely God, fearing and lacking NOTHING, but being completely man, the understanding of His IMMINENT CRUCIFIXION had struck His spirit with fear and dread, rendering Him anxious and distressed. From eternity past, Jesus knew this moment was coming.

However, that knowledge hadn't made the moment any less fearful, nor did it cause Him to hesitate in surrendering to His Father's will. This is a prelude to Jesus' agony and surrender in the Garden of Gethsemane.

He said, **"What shall I say? Father, save me from this hour?"** and He said it as if it was WRONG to even ask. When we go through hardship, we can be quick to ask God, "WHY IS THIS HAPPENING TO ME?" or "FIX MY PROBLEMS!" Remember the "Staples' 'EASY' Button?" We can begin to treat God like that. "Uh, oh! Problem ahead! God, make it EASY!" as if "easy" is what's going to conform us to the image of His Son. And while God understands our weakness, if all we want is OUT, our thinking is wrong. That's what Jesus is saying here. His question demonstrates the correct understanding of hardship: God has a PURPOSE for allowing it in our lives! HIS GLORY!

My wife and I like watching some of these smithing videos online, knife-making and whatnot, and when I think of God's refining purpose in life's hardships, I think of the forge. I think of white-hot metal being hammered and pressed into shape.



The metal comes out of the fire white hot, and then it's PRESSED. It's HAMMERED, and if you watch, with each application of pressure, the glow fades, from white hot to bright orange to dim orange. It's got to go back into the fire. The hammer and anvil are like the hardships we face; they SHAPE us, but they also take the fire out of us. We have to stay hot enough for the forging process, so we go back into the fire, which is like our personal time with the LORD in His Word and prayer. WHAT'S WILD is that, when you think about it, just as the hammer and the press absorb some of the heat of the metal being worked, when we recognize (like Jesus) that THIS IS ALL FOR THE FATHER'S GLORY, and we keep going to Him for FIRE, the situations that He uses to press upon us and forge us into His ultimate design, those situations ARE INFUSED WITH HIS POWER! He's got a purpose for it!

That's why it's so important to SEE OUR TRIALS FOR WHAT THEY ARE! The Father isn't torturing us, and He isn't failing to protect us from the snares of the devil (James 1:13; Isaiah 59:1-2). Neither is He testing us so that He knows the strength of our faith. He TESTS us so that WE AND OTHERS know the strength of our faith. He leads us NOT TO TEMPTATION, but through TRIALS, giving us the OPPORTUNITY TO GLORIFY HIM! Everything that God allows to enter our lives is for OUR GROWTH and HIS GLORY. With each test, I've got TWO OPTIONS: 1) SUBMIT TO and GLORIFY HIM, or 2) RESIST Him and GLORIFY MYSELF and ultimately the DEVIL. Jesus, the perfect Son of God and Son of Man, perfectly understood this, and LEANING INTO HIM, said, "FATHER, THIS IS HARD! BE GLORIFIED!"

This is also part of the life that LIFTS UP JESUS. When we DIE with Christ, we're not only set free from sin, but we embrace the understanding that IT'S NOT ABOUT ME!!! This is what it looks like to die, to bury your kernel in the ground, your life ending as His life gloriously sprouts forth in you. Paul affirmed this TO HIMSELF and those he disciplined when he said...

Galatians 2:20

I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

As Jesus told those around Him, our trials are opportunities to glorify God. The trial you're going through might be a broken relationship, health problems, mental or emotional distress, trouble at work, financial issues, or a dry, desert season in your walk with the LORD. God doesn't always speak into our spirits in the midst of our trials, much less audibly from heaven, but when He does, it's just as PRECIOUS and POWERFUL as a shout from heaven. John records...

John 12:29-33

29 The crowd that stood there and heard it said that it had thundered. Others said, An angel has spoken to him. 30 Jesus answered, This voice has come for your sake, not mine. 31 Now is the judgment of this world; now will the ruler of this world be cast out. 32 And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself. 33 He said this to show by what kind of death he was going to die.

Some heard "thunder." Others heard an angel. Whether or not anyone understood the heavenly utterance, they had to have been encouraged by it. They had witnessed Jesus pray to the Father and RECEIVE A RESPONSE FROM HEAVEN. This is actually the THIRD AND FINAL time that Scripture records the Father speaking to Jesus from heaven during His earthly ministry, once at the outset of His ministry, His baptism, AGAIN when He was on His way to on the mount of transfiguration, and HERE on His final approach to Calvary. Each time, these AUDIBLE UTTERANCES was for the edification of the hearers.

After the heavenly utterance, Jesus began talking openly about His death. He declared that, upon being "lifted up," an idiomatic expression for CRUCIFIXION, there would be JUDGMENT. Because of the cross, the world (kosmos) would be judged, Satan would be judged (and cast out), and ALL PEOPLE (even those GREEK guys) would be drawn to Him.

By the cross, sin would be atoned for, and the systems of the world, all its goals and priorities would be seen for the EMPTY foolishness that they are. What's more, the ruler of the world, Satan, would be DRIVEN OUT by Jesus' work on the cross. While the devil is still in the world, he's a DEFEATED FOE, his power to enslave us to sin and separate us from God has been STRIPPED from him. Nothing would stand in the way of anyone who would come to God. High up on that cross, Jesus would be seen by all then and throughout history, and they would be convicted of their own sin and drawn to Him as the One who could save them from it. Do you get that? If you're have yet to call upon Jesus to save you from your sin, HE IS DRAWING YOU. He's drawing you RIGHT NOW! Your loved ones who don't know Jesus, He's drawing them. It's His will that NONE should perish, that ALL should come to repentance (2 Peter 3:9). There's no question as to whether or not it's God's will that they're saved. IT'S HIS WILL. Believe Him for it! Keep praying and sharing the gospel with them! Jesus promised He'd draw them when He was lifted up. He was lifted up, we continue to lift Him up in the eyes of the world as we bow our lives to His will, and He continues to draw.

Again, "lifted up" was an idiomatic expression for BEING CRUCIFIED. Jesus had already told Nicodemus...

John 3:14-16

14 And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, 15 that whoever believes in him may have eternal life. 16 For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

And even in this moment, God was drawing, not just Israel, but the WORLD to Himself through His Son. These Greek God-fearers who sought out Jesus were some of the people Jesus had already told the Jewish religious leaders about when He said...

John 10:16

And I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd.

Now, there's nothing in the passage that indicates that Jesus ever spoke with the Greeks who sought Him out; there at the end, we just see Him disappear once again. Regardless, Jesus came to rescue them and bring them into that ONE FLOCK. However, part of all this was really puzzling the people...

John 12:34

So the crowd answered him, We have heard from the Law that the Christ remains forever. How can you say that the Son of Man must be lifted up? Who is this Son of Man?

The people understood that the Messiah and Son of Man were the same Person, and that the "Law," meaning the entire Old Testament in this case, taught that He would remain forever. They only saw the ONE coming. They were likely thinking of the words of Ethan the Ezrahite in Psalm 89, where he wrote...

Psalm 89:35-37

**35 Once for all I have sworn by my holiness;
I will not lie to David.**

**36 His offspring shall endure forever,
his throne as long as the sun before me.**

**37 Like the moon it shall be established forever,
a faithful witness in the skies. Selah**

Or this understanding of the ONE PERMANENT coming of the Messiah could've been inspired by Isaiah's prophecy that's especially familiar this time of year. Isaiah said...

Isaiah 9:7

**Of the increase of his government and of peace
there will be no end,
on the throne of David and over his kingdom,
to establish it and to uphold it
with justice and with righteousness
from this time forth and forevermore.
The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this.**

They didn't understand how the Son of Man could be crucified AND remain forever, and Jesus didn't delve any further into the issue; His followers would come to understand that truth three days after His death. Instead, He chose to address their inquiry about the identity of the Son of Man.

John 12:35-36

35 So Jesus said to them, The light is among you for a little while longer. Walk while you have the light, lest darkness overtake you. The one who walks in the darkness does not know where he is going. 36 While you have the light, believe in the light, that you may become sons of light. When Jesus had said these things, he departed and hid himself from them.

Jesus said that the Son of Man is the LIGHT! Jesus encouraged them to "**walk while [they had] the light,**" that is, walk IN the light, which is synonymous with BELIEVING in the light and thereby BECOMING SONS of light. Jesus had already told the people that He was the Light of the World, but that Light was getting ready to be snuffed out. Soon it would be dark in the middle of the day and when the Son breathed His last on the cross, the veil would be torn top to bottom, revealing that the glory of God had departed from the Temple and the dead ritualism of Judaism. Those who went after the Light would become His sons, but those who walked in darkness would continue wandering farther and farther away from Him.

"The one who walks in darkness does not know where he is going," and isn't that what we see with the lost?! I don't know about you, but I need reminding of this all the time. The way that lost people think

and act MAKES NO SENSE to us, and we struggle to understand how it does to them, but THEY DON'T KNOW WHERE THEY'RE GOING!!! They're "LOST" in every sense of the word!

However, in Christ, we have Light. Through His Word, we know what our lives are to be about, WHO they're to be about. We plant our lives, surrender to the Father's will, and walk in that Light. This is the crucified life that the world pronounces dead, but in actuality, it's ALIVE TO GOD ONLY. Like John the Baptist, we decrease so that Christ may increase. Jesus was lifted up in crucifixion. Today, as we live crucified, dead to this world and alive to Him only, we LIFT HIM UP, GLORIFYING HIM in true worship and as a testimony to the world of who He is and what He's done. As we wrap up today (and don't forget your corn kernel when you leave), can we end our time together standing and singing a few words we sang earlier? Will you do this with me (motioning)?

*You stretched Your arms out wide
I lift my hands up high to my Savior
You stretched Your arms out wide
I lift my hands up high to my Savior*

*So Lord I run
To the cross to the cross
Surrender all to my Savior King
Be my everything*