

## Hebrews 5:5-10

5 So also Christ did not glorify himself in becoming a high priest, but was appointed by the one who said to him, "You are my Son, today I have begotten you"; 6 as he says also in another place, "You are a priest forever, according to the order of Melchizedek." 7 In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to the one who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission. 8 Although **he was a Son, he learned obedience through what he suffered; 9 and having been made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him,** 10 having been designated by God a high priest according to the order of Melchizedek.

## John 12:20-33

20 Now among those who went up to worship at the festival were some Greeks. 21 They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and said to him, "Sir, we wish to see Jesus." 22 Philip went and told Andrew; then Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus. 23 Jesus answered them, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. 24 Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. 25 Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. 26 Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also. Whoever serves me, the Father will honor. 27 "Now my soul is troubled. And what should I say--"Father, save me from this hour"? No, it is for this reason that 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." 29 The crowd standing there heard it and said that it was thunder. Others said, "An angel has spoken to him." 30 Jesus answered, "This voice has come for your sake, not for mine. 31 Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be driven out. 32 And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself." 33 He said this to indicate the kind of death he was to die.

### **Believing in Jesus turns everything upside down:**

Our Gospel text today delivers us a series of interesting inversions.

The scene starts with some Greeks wanting to see Jesus. What the Greeks represent is not entirely clear, but it probably means that the word (preaching) of Jesus, and Jesus' word of grace, has reached far and wide. His evangelism program was working.



Jesus can now move to Jerusalem sure that he will draw all persons (people) to himself (12:32).

The request of the Greeks, transmitted through Philip and Andrew, sparks a series of reflections by Jesus, made as pronouncements, and here's where the inversions (the pineapple upside down cake) come in.

- **First**, Jesus declares that the hour has come, the hour of his glory. We've been waiting a long time for this hour and time, mainly because Jesus keeps saying it "has not yet come" (see John 2:4, 7:6, 7:8, 8:20). But now it has – the hour/time of glory has arrived. But "glory" is not what we might think, which is the **first** inversion. It is not, that is, Olympic glory, or Super Bowl glory, or promotion glory, or Valedictorian glory. **It is cross glory**, suffering glory, obedience glory. It is not, in short, glory as the world would define it, which is the heart of these inversions.
- **Second**, this pattern continues, as Jesus next pronounces, "Those who love their life **lose it**, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life" (12:25). Again, not what we would expect, and certainly not what the world promises. *"Hate" in John is not so much the sense of "detesting" someone or something as it is "rejecting" something or someone.* In this sense, v. 25 represents a summary of the inversions Jesus offers, as he says that **those who do not reject the material values** and world view of the present age will, like the material things they love, eventually pass away. Those who realize *there is more to this life than the trinkets* will enjoy eternal rewards.
- **Third**, Jesus then rejects – and thereby inverts – the understandable reaction of most persons (including the Jesus portrayed in all the other gospels!) facing his immediate future: "What should I say – "Father, save me from this hour"? **No**, it is for this reason that I have come to this hour." (v. 27). *Jesus rejects fear at losing his mortal, physical life because he knows that God is with him*, that, indeed, God sent him for this purpose, to reveal God's abundant life, something *more* than the usual symbols of life – wealth, youth, power – that the world offers.

In these and other "inversions," Jesus invites us to consider with care what we have come to value,

- what we have come to accept as "the way of the world,"
- what we have come to define as desirable.
- Moreover, Jesus promises that God is always at work, drawing life from death,



- calling what looks shameful something beautiful,
- turning suffering and desolation into a time and place of revelation. All of which can give us a new perspective on those parts of our lives – and ourselves – that we feel are dying, shameful, or desolate.

God is at work...even in the darkest, hardest, loneliest parts of our lives.

God can bring something good and beautiful from suffering. Look at what happened at the cross roads of the Cross and human life. God not only does not abandon us during the painful times of our lives but is at work using those moments for something good.

*But... and this is a really important caution! ... saying God is at work in and through the difficult and tragic elements of our lives **is not the same as saying God causes them.***

If there is a danger in Fourth Gospel, it is perhaps that sometimes this author seems so intent on revealing God's unexpected and surprising presence in suffering that it almost can seem as if what Jesus undergoes only "looks like" suffering (but is really glory), and that, combined with Jesus' words about "his hour," can make it feel like suffering, loss, tragedy are all part of God's plan and truly faithful Christians would realize this and, like Jesus, show no signs of struggle.

John's Jesus does indeed seem nearly unaffected by what happens to him, which is why I am so grateful that we have four gospels, and in this case especially Mark who displays the more "human" side of Jesus more fully.

John's desire to have everything fall together, for everything to make sense, to not only assure us of God's presence but also lend a divine order to the chaos of our lives should not tempt us to imagine **that God causes** the pain and suffering and tragedy of our lives *as part of some larger plan.*

Amid the material and ever-decaying physical world of our universe, God embraces the God-rejecting world (*kosmos*) in love (3:16), and continues to be at work wrestling life from death. He is a God who surprises us by being able to redeem even the deepest pain, assuring us that while God never desires that we suffer, yet God can and does work through that suffering for good.

God is here. God is at work. God is not afraid of those parts of our lives that frighten us.

God does not value us as the world does. It is upside down from the worlds values. God will not give up. God is on the side of life and love. And the love, mercy, and life God offers is stronger than the hate, judgment, and death that too often colors the world.



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*The grain of wheat has fallen into the earth.* (John) Christ has died.

*Christ became the source of eternal salvation.* (Hebrews) Christ is risen.

*The days are surely coming, says the Lord.* (Jeremiah) Christ will come again.

One more thing. Tucked deep within the gospel are these words, difficult words indeed from which to mine even the smallest nugget of gospel.

“Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life.” But maybe, just maybe, the life Christ calls us to hate is the life hyper focused on *me* (myself . . . my self). The resolute promise of the one who has given his life for the love of the world is that our baptismal death to self will raise us up to a life that really is worth living. One life lived in community, that bears much fruit for many, maybe even for all.

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Our baptismal covenant draws us to God’s heart through Christ and draws God’s light and truth into our hearts. We see God’s heart most clearly in the way Jesus shares human suffering, in an agony both the John and Hebrews readings describe.

The first covenant God describes is one that responded to the poverty, oppression, and powerlessness that called for an end to slavery in Egypt.

The second covenant is God’s promise to move from the exterior realities people face to inhabit the inner being: “I will put my law within them . . . write it on their hearts . . .” (Jer. 31:33).

There is a difference between the image of God in the “old” and “new” covenants. The first is YHWH as husband, who is all-powerful; in the second covenant, God is a grain that dies and bears fruit.

Dying to self speaks of what it is to be a follower of Jesus. “Those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life” (John 12:25). A grain of wheat that dies is multiplied, and community is born. The fruits are many. “Where I am, there will my servant be also” (v. 26).

**These are not prescriptive but descriptive statements.** Being loved by and loving the Lord engenders living such that the center of one’s life is everywhere—not solely within the self. To die is to give away what could be hoarded, to expand horizons and embrace what is strange.

But this dying is tricky for us to understand. The aim of the dying needs to be love, not denigration.

