



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of Dan Duncan

John 12: 27-36

Winter 2023

"The Marvelous Magnet"

TRANSCRIPT

Thank you Seth, and good morning to all of you. It's good to be back again this Sunday morning, as we continue our studies in the fourth Gospel, the Gospel of John. We're going to look at chapter 12 this morning, verses 27 through 36,

²⁷ "Now My soul has become troubled; and what shall I say, 'Father, save Me from this hour'? But for this purpose I came to this hour. ²⁸ Father, glorify Your name." Then a voice came out of heaven: "I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again." ²⁹ So the crowd *of people* who stood by and heard it were saying that it had thundered; others were saying, "An angel has spoken to Him." ³⁰ Jesus answered and said, "This voice has not come for My sake, but for your sakes. ³¹ Now judgment is upon this world; now the ruler of this world will be cast out. ³² And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to Myself." ³³ But He was saying this to indicate the kind of death by which He was to die. ³⁴ The crowd then answered Him, "We have heard out of the Law that the Christ is to remain forever; and how can You say, 'The Son of Man must be lifted up'? Who is this Son of Man?" ³⁵ So Jesus said to them, "For a little while longer the Light is among you. Walk while you have the Light, so that darkness will not overtake you; he who walks in the darkness does not know where he goes. ³⁶ While you

have the Light, believe in the Light, so that you may become sons of Light." These things Jesus spoke, and He went away and hid Himself from them.

John 12: 27-36

May the LORD bless this reading of His Word and bless our time of study in it together, for we have some great verses of Scripture before us.

LORD, we do ask Your blessing upon us. What a privilege it is to be here with Your people, opening the Word of God as we've done in reading this great text of Scripture, this revelation You've given us; and this statement our Lord made about being 'lifted up on the cross and drawing all men to Himself.'

LORD, we who are here, who've put our faith in that sacrifice for us, have been drawn by Your sovereign grace. And what a privilege and blessing it is: Not due to anything within us; it's grace. And grace is unmerited; grace is free. It's not anything that we achieve or earn—it's all of You. And by Your grace, You *drew* blind, willful sinners to Yourself. You gave us eyes to see, and a will to believe.

And LORD, we are new creatures as a result, so we thank You for that and pray that as we study these things together, You'd give us a greater sense of the Person and work of Your Son; in fact of the Triune God and what You have done for us.

And what You can still do for those who have not believed: Perhaps there are some in this audience who have not put their faith in Christ; He sets forth the way to Himself and to life. So LORD, we pray You'd bless. Bless us spiritually wherever we are, and whatever our condition is, and nourish us, feed us through the Scriptures.

We pray, LORD, for the material needs that we have; and there are many that we have to bring before You this morning. We won't cover all of the bases this morning in this prayer, but I do pray for those whose names are listed and who we've been made aware of.

This life is short. Regardless of how long we live, "Soon", (as Moses put it in Psalm 90, verse 10), "we fly away". As James put it, (4:14), we're "just a vapor."

A long life is really, brief; and it comes to an end for all of us. So may we live our life in light of that—live our life in light of the end and in light of the glory to come. May we live for that. Certainly that's what our Lord prayed in our text; that God's name would be glorified in all that took place in His life—and that should be our prayer as well.

So LORD, teach us that this morning. Bless us now, as we sing our next hymn. Prepare our heart for this time of study together. We pray these things in Christ's name. Amen.

(Message) In May of 1996, a catastrophe happened on Mt. Everest. The book, *Into Thin Air*, told the story. When climbers reached the summit, it was a clear day. But some noticed a small change: Wispy clouds began to fill the valleys below. What they didn't realize was the innocent looking clouds were the tops of thunderheads, which were the sign of a coming storm. Within a few hours, the storm blew across the Himalayas and claimed the lives of nine climbers.

Sometimes small events foreshadow big changes. One did in our Lord's life. When He was in Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover, some Greeks came seeking Him. Seemed innocent enough; but when He was told, Jesus knew what it meant, and He answered, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified." (vs23). He was referring to His death.

The Greeks were the wispy clouds, signaling a great change that was coming soon: The beginning of a new age when salvation would go to the ends of the earth—to the Gentiles as well as to the Jews. But it also meant a storm was coming, a storm that would soon break on Christ. And so in verse 27 He said, "Now My soul has become troubled."

The cross was the instrument of salvation. It was the instrument of the Lord's glorification. It is the greatest exhibit of God's love for the lost and guilty; of God's unconditional love and salvation. But Jesus knew exactly what that meant for Him, and He could not contemplate the cross with dispassion and calmness. —He was deeply "troubled" by the thought.

That verb, "*troubled*", is vivid. It indicates being *unsettled*—or even thrown into *confusion, frightened, terrified*. I don't think all of that applies directly to our Lord here, but certainly what it expresses is great anxiety that He did experience. He felt that.

Now that is surprising to some. In the other Gospels He is resolute in His determination to go up to Jerusalem where He would be crucified. And He told the disciples what would happen there. But now He was 'deeply troubled'. It seems inconsistent, and even less courageous than many of the martyrs who went bravely to hard deaths—or even Socrates who drank the cup of hemlock, fearlessly.

But the Lord's death was not like anyone else's death. The Lord's death was unique. It was physical, painful, and shameful. In fact, our word, *excruciating*, comes from the Latin word for *crucify*, for the cross was designed for maximum pain.

But physical death, physical pain, that was minor when considering the Lord's suffering. It was the spiritual suffering and death that He foresaw, suffering that was infinite—beyond our comprehension. He was made sin for us, (not, 'He was made sinful'). He was perfect, but He became the sin *bearer*; He was made the guilt *bearer*. He was the one who was made a curse for us. He suffered the pains of hell for us in a death that was infinite in its value—and intensity.

And so He shuddered at the thought, but then asked, "...what shall I say, 'Father, save me from this hour?' ...", (Now that was the temptation He faced—to avoid it. But He quickly dismissed that, saying), " 'But for this purpose I came to this hour.' " (vs27b). He knew His mission. He didn't flinch from His mission. He never wavered in it—but His path to the cross was not an easy one.

And in that we see His true humanity. The eternal Son of God became a genuine man, and we see His humanity in this—which should encourage us when we face challenges in life, as we all do and as we all will. —Hard challenges. The Lord faced trials just as we do. He knew how hard, trials in this life can be. He sympathizes with us at every moment, in whatever experience we have as we go through 'the valley of the

shadow of death.' And He prays for us. He prays for us as our great high priest, who prays with great sympathy, who prays with power and with effect.

Now that's encouraging. But also, in verse 28, He shows us how we are to face the challenges of life. He met His with firm resolve, and prayed the prayer, "Father, glorify Your name." That, ultimately, is what was important to Christ. Not His own deliverance or comfort, but His Father's glory. And when He speaks of 'His name', it's a way of saying, "Yourself." The name represents the person of the name. And so He's saying, "LORD, glorify Yourself." And that, of course is to be our great desire.

That prayer is to be: 'Father, glorify Your name in whatever we go through, whatever we suffer. Whatever our experiences of life are, the good times, the bad times, whatever they are, may You be glorified in how we experience them.'

Now that's a difficult prayer. It is certainly not a natural prayer: 'God, I'm going through a difficult time. This is crushing me. Be glorified in it. That's what I care about.' It's hard to do that. But it is to be the prayer of God's people. But we pray to God, (and this is essential for us to understand), the way our Lord did, as "Father" —that's what He is.

The One who allows us to be tested in life cares for us as a Father who is all-wise and all-caring—and brings nothing into our lives that will not ultimately be for our good and our glory. Because whatever we suffer for Him, whatever we suffer for His name, whether it be as we seek to witness for Him or simply go through the trials of life and people watch us and see how we respond, regardless, we're to seek His glory. And when we do that, we know that He will pour out His glory on us, and glorify us.

That's what Paul told the Corinthians in 2 Corinthians chapter 4, verse 17. "For momentary, light affliction..." he wrote, (and he doesn't mean the easy things of life; well, that plus the tough ones), "...momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison." In other words, 'As difficult as the trials may be, they are light in comparison to the glory that God will give in place of them.'

God is not indifferent to the challenges that we face. He's far more aware of what we're going through and what we will go through than we are. He's not indifferent and He will bless us for them.

And He did that for His Son—and He answered Him immediately, 'in a voice out of heaven', "I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again." (vs28). His name, His person had been glorified in the past and in the present, (in Christ's supernatural birth, throughout His perfect life and ministry among men, with His teaching and with His miraculous signs), God was glorified in that.

And He would do it again by shining forth His glory seen in His love from the cross, and showing forth His power in Jesus with His resurrection and His ascension into heaven. He had been glorified, (the Father had), and He would be glorified in the future. God always answers submission with blessing; obedience with glory. He did with His Son, and He will do that with us.

Now that was a great encouragement to Christ; but it was also intended for the benefit of the bystanders there. As the Lord says, "This voice has not come for My sake, but for your sakes.' (vs30). I think we can probably understand it in this sense: 'This voice has not come for My sake only', (because I think the Lord was greatly encouraged by that), 'but the real reason it came, why this voice was heard, was for the sakes of those who were there, standing and hearing and watching Him. It was a sign to them.'

But like we see so often in the Gospels, and in this Gospel, they did not understand the sign. To them it was just a sound. Some thought it was "thunder". Others could detect some kind of a voice in it; 'they thought an angel was speaking to Him.' So, the fact that a voice spoke from heaven was sufficient to alert them, whether they understood it or not, alert them that something important was happening here. And what that was, the Lord now explains: The hour was coming, and it would be an hour of judgment on both the world and on the devil; "Now judgment is upon this world; now the ruler of this world will be cast out." (vs31).

The world thought that it has passed judgment on Jesus when it rejected Him. But in that rejection, it exposed its guilt and rebellion against God—and judgment was passed on it. The world was guilty; and it passed judgment, not only on the world but on the prince of this world, the devil. What appeared to be a victory to him in the crucifixion of God's Son was actually the Lord's victory and Satan's defeat. It was the fulfillment of the earliest prophecy given in the Bible; in Genesis chapter 3, verse 15, that 'The deliverer would come and crush the head of the serpent.' That happened at the cross.

He is still active. But as Luther put it, "His doom is sure." He is a defeated enemy, and in the future will be cast out—'Cast out of heaven in the great tribulation; and finally cast into the lake of fire forever, never more to trouble the souls of men.' (Rev 20:10).

But 'the hour of judgment' would also be, 'an hour of salvation' for multitudes, because the Lord adds, "And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to Myself." (vs32). He was referring to His crucifixion. Now that's clear from verse 33, where John explains, "He was saying this to indicate the kind of death by which He was to die." On the cross, He was "lifted up from the earth", and there He was punished for our sins.

But then He was lifted up from the grave and up to heaven. He was lifted up in execution, and He was lifted up in exaltation. This word, *lifted up*, is used in both ways in the New Testament; of *execution* and *exaltation*. But the cross was the first step in that exaltation. And it's the first meaning here as John explains: Because He was *lifted up* on the cross, He is now drawing men, drawing people, men and women, to Himself; drawing them to Himself, not as a good teacher or a brave martyr, but drawing them to Himself as God's Son—and the crucified Savior.

It is only because of the cross that they are drawn to Him. The cross has an attracting power; so it is sometimes referred to as a magnet that draws people out of

the world and into a relationship with the Lord God: 'Out of darkness into light, and into the position of being heirs of the kingdom to come.'

The appeal of the cross is found in the love of God revealed in it; that Christ suffered so much and so willingly; that He stooped so low in order to raise us up so high—there's no greater love than that. No greater demonstration of the unconditional love of God than that demonstrated at Calvary. And people can come freely to the cross and receive forgiveness in life.

Isaiah 65 gives us the picture of the Lord's eagerness for the guilty and the lost to be found and to come to Him, and His willingness to receive them in that statement, "I have spread out my hands all day long to a rebellious people." (Isa 65:2). That's patience; that's the love of God.

So the love of God seen in the cross of Christ has, "The powerful draw of a marvelous magnet", as it's been called. But that draw is not natural. In fact, the natural response of man, men and women, is to pull away; to despise the cross rather than desire it. Paul makes that clear in 1 Corinthians chapter 1, verse 23, where he wrote that, 'The preaching of the cross and a crucified Savior is a stumbling block to the Jews, and foolishness to the Gentiles.' The world is not drawn to a suffering servant for a Savior. They want a conqueror, a strong man with charisma who crushes the enemy—not a man who's crushed by the enemy.

German philosopher, Frederick Nietzsche, hated Christianity because he considered it weak. He advocated, 'the will to power.' He looked forward to a race of super men, and a daring 'ruler race'. And he dismissed Christianity disparagingly as, 'God on the cross.'

Well, he was right about that. It is the Lord God on the cross. The God-man who suffered in His humanity for us. Nietzsche was right about that, but to him and the world, that's foolishness. And people do not come to what they feel is foolish—they don't come to Christ naturally.

But people do come. In fact, multitudes are drawn to the cross. How is that? There's something supernatural in it, something supernatural involved in this 'magnetism of the cross.' And what that supernatural thing is, is a person; it's Christ. He's the one who draws. He said that; "and I will draw all men to myself." (vs32).

But He does that on the basis of the cross, on the basis of His death—which in a sense, *permits* or *authorizes* Him to draw sinners. And that's because it was there that He paid for the sins of all for whom He died. He paid up all our debts, every wicked deed, every rebellious thought. All our unbelief was punished on the cross. "It is finished!", He said. We'll read that later in chapter 19, verse 30. "It is finished!"

That was a triumphant statement. The mission was complete—and sufficient. There's nothing left to punish; no penalty left to be paid. He bought us; He ransomed us at the cross, and now nothing is left to do but bring us to Himself. It's His work. It's the work of the Godhead from start to finish.

That was stated earlier, as you'll remember, in chapter 6. We have these great statements of the sovereignty of God in that chapter, but in chapter 6, verse 44, the Lord used the same word, *draw*, as used here in the statement, "No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me *draws* him."

So the Father *draws* people, and here the Son *draws* people. It's not in conflict. This *drawing* is the work of the Godhead: the Father, the Son, the Holy Spirit. And that's always successful. That word indicates that; it never fails. People may resist. There's often a spiritual struggle in the human heart, but human resistance to this drawing of the Lord is never final, and never triumphant—the Lord is triumphant.

And that's clear from the use of this word; whether it's *drawing* a fishing net out of the sea, or *drawing* people—the drawing is always successful. God always completes what He is doing. This drawing is not partial; it doesn't work for some and not for others. All He draws—come. That's the encouragement of that statement, and the encouragement of the sovereignty of God that it gives. He does not fail to draw anyone that He is drawing.

In theology that's called '*irresistible grace*'. And some don't like that expression because there is some resistance that we give, people give, as they're feeling a sense of conviction. So others have settled for '*effectual*' grace, '*effectual*' calling. It's always effective: It's the work of the Holy Spirit in bringing people to faith that involves making unwilling hearts, willing—opening eyes to see the Savior. When a person has spiritual eyes and sees the reality of Christ, His beauty and grace; and then the reality of his or her own condition, the sinful fallen condition, guilty condition; and in light of Christ and His love, he or she naturally and gladly, and inevitably, comes to Christ. —Believes.

People are drawn to Christ; drawn to Christ, not driven to Christ—not forced to come to Christ against their will; that's not the way it is at all. They come; they're drawn, drawn by grace; and grace that is universal. That's the broad scope of this, because the Lord says that, He "will draw all men to Himself."

Now obviously, "all men" does not mean, '*all* who will ever live'. The entire number of the population of the world, whatever that will be, is not what He speaking of here. And this is not, 'all without exception', but 'all without distinction'—all kinds of people. And the context of the passage makes that clear. The Lord has been speaking of judgment: 'The world is judged'; multitudes will perish; that's verse 31. 'Those who love their life will lose it. Those who hate their life will keep it for eternity.' That's verse 25.

Not all will be saved. But all whom the Lord draws will be born again, enlightened, and drawn to Christ. And they will be Gentiles as well as Jews, all kinds of people without distinction: Some "from every tribe and tongue and people and nation", as it is stated in Revelation chapter 5, in verse 9. That's the scope of God's grace.

Well, this is what Jesus' answer was to the Greeks. They had come, wanting to see Him—and in a short time they would be able to come to Him as freely as the Jewish disciples came. He would break down all of the racial, religious, and social barriers. He was *lifted up* to die for them; for an innumerable multitude whom He saved on the cross. And following His resurrection and ascension, the Gospel went throughout the

world and multitudes have been drawn to Christ and the cross, as by, 'an irresistible magnet.'

In one of his books, John Stott recorded a conversion of an Iranian student who described his conversion in that way. When Christian friends brought him to church and encouraged him to read the Bible, he learned that Jesus died for his forgiveness. And he said, "For me, the offer was irresistible and heaven sent." He cried out to God to have mercy on him through Christ. "Almost immediately," he said, "the burden of my past life was lifted. I felt as if a huge weight had gone. With the relief and sense of lightness came incredible joy. At last it had happened, I was free of my past. I knew God had forgiven me, and I felt clean. I wanted to shout and tell everybody!" Stott wrote, "It was through the cross that the character of God came clearly into focus for him."

The cross does have an attracting power. That's the Lord's promise: "And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to Myself." That is certain because when He laid down His life for the sheep, He paid for their sin in full. It is finished; with the result that there's nothing left to punish. The result: God cannot condemn those for whom Christ died. He must forgive because our substitute has already suffered everything in our place; otherwise, God would punish the same offense twice, once in Christ, and then again in the sinner.

But that would be unjust. God cannot be unjust. And so because of Christ's death in our place, the Holy Spirit applies the benefits of the cross to His people and they are drawn to Him through faith. Because He was lifted up to die, we are lifted up to live—and live forever.

Now all of this caused a response from the crowd that was gathered around Him. Earlier, Jesus had referred to Himself as the "Son of Man". Verse 23, "The hour is coming for the Son of Man to be glorified." They knew that He was speaking of Himself, as the 'Son of Man', which is a Messianic title. And *glorified* was something they could understand of the Messiah, but this idea of *being lifted up* puzzled them greatly.

Evidently they sensed from that that, 'He was going away', 'lifted up', 'being taken away', somehow. So they wanted to know what kind of 'Son of Man' is this that is 'lifted up'?

They had some reason for believing that the Messiah would be eternal. The Bible taught that, 'He would remain forever', in the text that they may have referred to—the text that gives us originally this title, "Son of Man", Daniel, chapter 7. In that night vision Daniel sees heaven and, "One like the Son of Man", (vs13), 'coming to the ancient of days and receiving glory and the kingdom.' And in verse 14, Daniel wrote, "His dominion is an everlasting dominion which will not pass away."

There are other texts like 2 Samuel 7, verse 13, where the LORD said, "He will establish the throne of His kingdom..." (the throne of the Son of David, the throne of the Messiah), "...forever." That was the Messiah that they were expecting—an eternal king.

But there are also passages that describe the Messiah as 'a suffering servant', 'a suffering Savior'. Psalm 22, verse 16, "they pierced my hands and my feet ." Well David wrote the Psalm, but David's hands and feet were never pierced. It's a description of the Messiah—It's a prophecy.

Isaiah 53, He is described as, "Smitten of God", "Pierced through for our transgressions", "A lamb lead to slaughter", "Cut off out of the land of the living." Zechariah chapter 13, verse 7 speaks of, 'The shepherd who is slain by the sword that God commands to strike Him down.'

There are numerous passages in the Old Testament that indicate that the Messiah, the Son of Man, would enter His glory and power through suffering, through death. But the Lord didn't cite any of those texts or others in response to the crowd. He didn't even answer the crowd's question.

Instead He made an oblique reference to His death, and encouraged the people to believe in Him while they still had opportunity. He really cuts to the chase, as it were. Verses 35&36, "So Jesus said to them, 'For a little while longer the Light is among you. Walk while you have the Light, so that darkness will not overtake you; he who walks in

the darkness does not know where he goes. While you have the Light, believe in the Light, so that you may become sons of light."

He is the Light. He's the Light of the world. He is the revelation of God, and He is the giver of Light. Life is in Light; there's no life without light. And if they would know truth, know God and have life, then they must come to Him. They must believe in Him. But they cannot delay.

That's the warning in His words. He would be taken from them by the cross, and it would not be easier to put their trust in Him after the cross. Darkness would fall. They would not have the revelation of His words and deeds. And so the time for them to believe was then, while they had the opportunity, while they had the Light shining before them.

It's not enough to have illumination. It's not enough to have Light, not enough to have truth; a person must also respond to it. A person must believe it. People must put their trust in Him, in Christ as the Light, as the Son of God, the Son of Man, the Savior of the world. Those who do are given a great promise; they become "sons of Light". (vs36). They know the truth and reflect His life and grace in their lives. They're made into new creatures. They walk in the Light. They live by faith and obedience in Him. They bring great glory to God. That was the Lord's invitation to the people. And with that, He left them, "He went away", John said. (vs36b).

But He didn't leave them with a warning only. He left them with hope. He left them with the hope that He offered with urgency: Darkness was coming; the day was about to end. He would be taken from them; and so He invited them to come to Him, to believe while they had the opportunity.

Did they seize the opportunity? Did they believe in Him? We don't know. Many probably neglected it—ignored His signs, rejected His teaching, and perished. It's what happened to those who died on Mt. Everest in the spring of 1996. They died largely because of bad judgment and neglect. That was part of the tragedy; they could have avoided disaster. Some were experienced climbers, but they stayed on the mountain too

long. They failed to consider the time of day and the signs that they saw— and the weather came, and with it a terrific storm.

There are people like that spiritually. They don't realize that the day is almost gone and opportunity is almost passed to believe in Christ, to believe in the Savior. We would all be like those who neglect, and all who drift, and all who fail to heed the signs or heed the words of Scripture except for grace; sovereign grace; free grace. Not one of us has this insight, or this will to come, apart from God's good grace. It draws us. Otherwise we would not come. And yet, we're all responsible to come, to believe in the only way of salvation.

The world is like a heap of iron filings and ashes. You can't separate them or distinguish them. They all look the same to us, if we look at this pile. But when a magnet is thrust into the pile, then the two are separated, iron from ashes. And that's the cross.

It's what Christ is doing, based on the cross. Charles Spurgeon said, "The cross is a wondrous magnet, drawing to Jesus every man of the true metal." Are you of the true metal? You are if you've been drawn to the cross and believed in Him who died for sinners. If you have not done that, if you haven't put your faith and trust in Him, don't neglect it. "While you have the Light", don't 'Let the darkness overtake you.' Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, the Savior, and become a son, a daughter of Light with eternal life. Well, that's grace.

Father, a great sinner wrote the words to that hymn, and he knew that. But he also knew they had a great Savior, who obtained amazing grace for him—and for multitudes. LORD, we thank You for that grace. May we understand it, understand that we are saved solely by Your goodness and grace, and we have nothing to add to it—for You've done it all for us through Your Son.

Make us grateful; and in that gratitude may we serve You faithfully, and joyfully—willingly going through 'the valley of the shadow of death', whatever trials or troubles

we face, with the desire to glorify You. And LORD, the glory that will come back to us is something we can't even imagine. We thank You, Father.

We pray for those that are going through difficulties now; give them strength and encouragement, and give us all that, that we might live lives that bring glory to You.

Now the LORD bless you and keep you. The LORD make His face shine on you and be gracious to you. The LORD lift up His countenance on you and give you peace.

In Christ's name, Amen.

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