

Jesus is Totally Committed to Saving Sinners!

(John 12:20–33) ²⁰ Now there were some Greeks among those who went up to worship at the festival. ²¹ They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, with a request. “Sir,” they said, “we would like to see Jesus.” ²² Philip went to tell Andrew; Andrew and Philip in turn told Jesus. ²³ Jesus replied, “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. ²⁴Very truly I tell you, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds. ²⁵Anyone who loves their life will lose it, while anyone who hates their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. ²⁶ Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honor the one who serves me. ²⁷ “Now my soul is troubled, and what shall I say? ‘Father, save me from this hour’? No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour. ²⁸ Father, glorify your name!” Then a voice came from heaven, “I have glorified it, and will glorify it again.” ²⁹ The crowd that was there and heard it said it had thundered; others said an angel had spoken to him. ³⁰ Jesus said, “This voice was for your benefit, not mine. ³¹ Now is the time for judgment on this world; now the prince 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 show the kind of death he was going to die.

In Christ Jesus, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, dear fellow redeemed,

Maybe you’ve heard the story about the two animal friends, Hen and Hog? They were walking down the street together when they came upon a local church with a sign that read: “Breakfast for The Needy on Wednesday. Can you help?” The two began to discuss ways that they might assist. Finally, it was Hen who said, “I know what we could do! We could give them ham and eggs for breakfast!” Hog was horrified. “That’s easy for you. For you it’s only a contribution. For me it’s total commitment.”

It’s a silly story, I know, and yet it captures quite well how many people tend to think of Christianity. Some, like the hen in our story, want Christianity to be something they can participate in, to the degree that they’re comfortable. Others, like the hog in our story, fear that Christianity will be the end of life as they know and enjoy it. They view Christianity as something that demands their total commitment in order to be right with God.

Of course, neither view captures the real essence of Christianity. Oh, it’s true enough that biblical Christianity is all about “total commitment,” but contrary to popular thinking, it’s not first and foremost about our commitment to God, but rather his total commitment to us sinners. This is God’s truth for us to treasure as we take a look at our text today under the theme: “Jesus is Totally Committed to Saving Sinners!” 1) You see this at the cross. 2) You hear this in the gospel.

Our text takes us to Tuesday of Holy Week. Jesus is coming to the end of a long day, during which, various Jewish leaders have questioned his authority as a teacher. They want to be rid of him. They despise him. But apparently, not everyone feels that way about Jesus. As Tuesday draws to a close, some Greek converts to Judaism tell Philip, “**We would like to see Jesus.**” (**John 12:21**).

Philip and Andrew bring this request to the Savior. I don’t know if the Greeks near enough to hear Jesus’ response, but he makes it clear that their interest in him, signals the “beginning of the end” of the Savior’s mission. Jesus announces: “**The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.**” (**John 12:23**). For three years, Jesus has gone from town to town, seeking to reach the lost sheep of Israel. But now his mission was moving into its final phase. It was time for Jesus to

be glorified – not in the way we saw him glorified on the Mount of Transfiguration – not shining with the radiance of heaven or wearing clothes brighter than anyone could bleach them. This glory would come from being tortured, bloodied, and killed. It sounds so strange, doesn't it? But Jesus gives us a word picture to help us understand: **“Very truly I tell you, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds.” (John 12:24).** A seed sitting on a shelf is not serving the purpose for which God gave it to us. It won't produce the plant from which many more seeds will come.

In the same way, unless the Son of God dies as intended, he can't raise up godly offspring for his Father. But what would motivate him to do such a thing for a world of sinners? He tells us in our first Scripture lesson for today from Isaiah 43, **“But now, this is what the LORD says— he who created you...”** Jesus has a vested interest in us as our Creator. He made us so that we could be his and he could be ours.

Of course, sin changed all that. It broke our relationship with the Creator. Before sin, we would have found complete satisfaction in being the people of God. But in our sin, we turned away from God, convincing ourselves that his will and ways would smother us. Sin turned us inward so that all we can think to do by nature is satisfy our sinful cravings and desires. Sin has made greed the king and lust the queen of our hearts. Under their control we are as selfish as can be. We want what we want and pity anyone who gets in the way of us having it, even, or should I say, especially those closest to us. We see this selfishness at work in our parents, in our children, in our spouse, in our friends and coworkers. And they see it in us. This is not some minor character flaw. It's deadly! It destroys body and soul in hell forever. Jesus makes this very clear when he says: **“Anyone who loves their life will lose it...”** In other words, those who make this life all about themselves and their happiness, they spend their eternity in hell. **“...while anyone who hates their life in this world” says Jesus, “... will keep it for eternal life.” (John 12:25).**

So, Jesus is saying there's a chance to save ourselves from our sinful, selfish ways? Yes, if we can stop putting ourselves first, and instead make God the number one thing in our lives – always. But that's not possible for any of us to do. Oh, on our best days, I suppose we can spot the destructive nature of our self-centeredness. We can see that by always putting ourselves first, we ruin ties with family and friends. On our best days we can spot the short-lived nature of sinful pleasures, how they always let us down in the end. And yet, like people with an addiction, in our case a sin-addiction, we always go crawling back to our selfish, stubborn ways. We must confess with the Apostle Paul: **“For I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing...”²⁴ What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death?” (Romans 7:19,24).**

We can't help ourselves. That means that it's up to our Creator to rescue us. But why would he help sinners? Because, to him, you are not some failed science experiment to be swept into the trash bin of hell. Instead, in love that we can't comprehend, he, our Maker, is totally committed to restoring us to our former, perfect state and our glorious relationship with him. But saving sinners is not accomplished with the snap of one's fingers.

Our Creator's total commitment to us cost him dearly. It meant leaving his throne in heaven, putting on the flesh and blood of the very rebels who deserted him, living a perfect life among them for which they hated him even more, and then, sacrificing that perfect life on the altar of the cross. I can't and I don't want to imagine the excruciating pain involved in such torture. And yet, that was not the worst of it. The Savior's total commitment to saving sinners is seen not only in the method by which he chose to be executed, but even more so in the guilt he chose to carry to his cross. For there, he bore the sins of the world – not just the sins of the people living at that time, but the sins of all who came before and after. He became the Substitute of every sinner ever. This is why he said: **“Now my soul is troubled...” (John 12:30).** You can see why. At his cross,

he became humanity's lightning rod before God, drawing to himself, and away from each of us, all of God's wrath for all our sin – wrath that Jesus would suffer far from God in the depths of hell.

Jesus lived every minute of his life knowing that it was counting down to this hour. He knew that he was that kernel of wheat that must fall to the ground and die. Anyone else, having such knowledge, would have stayed as far away from Jerusalem as possible, but not our devoted Savior. Instead, he asks, **“What shall I say? ‘Father, save me from this hour’? No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour. Father, glorify your name!” (John 12:27-28).** With these words, Jesus entrusts himself, his mission, and all of us to his Father's care. **Then a voice came from heaven, “I have glorified [my name], and will glorify it again.” (John 12:28).** God had brought glory to his saving name by sending his Son into the world. Now he brings the ultimate glory to his name, by accepting his Son's once and for all sacrifice for sinners, and on the basis of his finished work, he declares the world forgiven and at peace with heaven.

This, my friends, is the message of the gospel: Jesus' total commitment to bringing sinners to faith in his promises, keeping them out of Satan's reach, and finally bringing them safely to the eternal joys of heaven. Jesus speaks to the importance and power of his gospel when he says **“This voice was for your benefit, not mine.** Although you and I were not there on that Tuesday of Holy Week to hear the Father's voice, the echo of his words has reached our ears through the gospel to our eternal benefit. Thanks to that voice, we now know and believe that Jesus' death and resurrection are the most important events in all of history. Jesus himself says so right here: **“Now is the time for judgment on this world; now the prince of this world will be driven out.” (John 12:31).** It is no overstatement to say that the eternal fate of the entire human race depended on what would happen during the hours that Christ hung dying on his cross. If his mission failed, all would be lost. On the other hand, if Jesus succeeded in canceling the world's sin-debt by his sacrifice before God, Satan would be sent packing, having lost all leverage over every sinner who hears and believes Christ's saving gospel.

You and I are living proof of these words. Thanks to Jesus, Satan holds no power over us. His threats and accusations mean nothing. Think about it! Satan accuses us of being too much in love with our lives in this sinful world. We must confess that he's right. But what can he do about it? For **“...there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.” (Romans 8:1).** Jesus has paid for our sin, and more than that, he covers us with his holiness. That means that we who trust in Christ, we get to claim his total, perfect commitment to God as our very own. AND, we get to claim his victory and glory as our own. Jesus says: **“Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honor the one who serves me.” (John 12:26).** To serve Jesus, to follow him, means nothing else than to trust him and his total commitment to our eternal welfare. This trust isn't something that we create in ourselves, but something that God has worked in us through his gospel promises – like the promise we have here – the promise that he will honor each of us with life at Jesus' side in heaven.

Dear Christian, what peace and security come from knowing that we are not spiritual accidents. We haven't stumbled into the Christian faith by luck. Jesus tells us, **“And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.” He said this to show the kind of death he was going to die. (John 12:32-33).** We didn't go looking for Christ. No, he was and is committed to drawing us to himself, and not us alone. We can help our relatives, friends, and neighbors to rethink religion, to see that it has nothing to do with Hen's half-hearted devotion or Hog's fear of total commitment. No, Christianity is all about the Lamb and his total commitment to freeing us from sin's grip and guilt so that we will be his and he will be ours forever. Amen.