

The Hour has Come

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[0 : 00] Thanks very much, Anne. Hello again. Why was I born? Why am I living? What do I get? What am I giving? Why do I want a thing I daren't hope for? What can I hope for?

I wish I knew. That cheerful ditty was written almost 100 years ago by Oscar Hammerstein, but for many people it would resonate today as well. What is the point? Is there any purpose in life? What should we be looking for? It was maybe put a bit more succinctly and more recently by Lana Del Rey. She wrote in one of her songs, You and I, we were born to die.

Quite depressing, isn't it, to think of life without a purpose? And yet I think many people today feel that, that life is a bit pointless, they don't know where they're going, they don't know why they're here, they don't know what's going to happen to them.

There's a website many of you may be familiar with called Quora. On Quora, people can post questions on practical, intellectual, philosophical things, and lots of people will pile in with their replies.

[1 : 14] And if you type in something like, Why was I born to die? You might get answers that sound something like this. We exist because of evolutionary pressures from the environment among us, occurring over millions of years.

There is no purpose to our existence, because evolution has no goal in mind or vision for how we should be. Evolution doesn't have a mind, we just exist.

Any meaning or purpose we ascribe to life or death is manufactured by humans to make our lives easier to get through, because it's hard for people to accept a meaningless thing.

Depressing, isn't it? Well, what I want us to take from this morning is that life does have a purpose, and our lives can have real purpose to them.

And we're going to see that because we're looking at the person who had the most awareness of the purpose on his life of anyone, Jesus Christ. We're going to think about what that purpose was.

[2 : 20] We're going to think about some of the people Jesus met and interacted with in the passage that I read to us, and the challenge that comes to us through them. Now, usually I'm going to start in the middle this morning, because I think that's where the core of the passage is, and it's where we get most of the background to it from.

So we're going to start, I'm going to read verses 27 and 28, where Jesus is speaking, and he says, Now my soul is troubled, and what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour.

No, it was for this very reason that I came to this hour. Father, glorify your name. Then a voice came from heaven. I have glorified it and will glorify it again.

As we read through John's Gospel, something that we find referred to many times is the hour, Jesus' hour. Three times in the earlier part of the Gospel we've looked at up till now, Jesus says, My hour has not yet come.

That was when he did his first miracle at Cana, and twice when people tried to seize him and couldn't, because the time hadn't yet come. And three times he says, My hour has come.

[3 : 41] So it was at the start of the passage we read, or at the start of the section that I'm looking at just now, in verse 23. He says it again, or said again about him, in John 13 at the start of his upper room ministry, and then again at John 17, as the Lord prays to his Father.

The whole of Jesus' life was centered around the fact that there was an hour coming. What was that hour? It was when he was crucified, when he died on the cross for us.

And the whole of his life was building up to that moment when he would go to the cross, and when he would take our sins on himself. I think we can learn three things about the hour from the verses that I read just now.

First of all, it was an hour of agony. Secondly, Jesus, as he looked forward to it, he was troubled. He says, Now my soul is troubled. What shall I say?

Father, save me from this hour. Mostly in the Gospels, we read, Jesus is going resolutely towards Jerusalem. He knows that it's God's will that he should suffer and die on the cross, and he is determined to fulfill that will.

[4 : 59] But just once or twice, we get a glimpse into what Jesus really felt about what was going to happen. The other obvious time is in the Garden of Gethsemane, when he says, Father, if it's possible, let this cup pass from me.

And he says, What shall I say? Father, save me from this hour. Because what was in front of Jesus was truly awful. I think at times it's easy to think of Jesus' sacrifice on the cross and to kind of have almost in our minds, well, he was God.

It wasn't as bad for him as it would have been for us. Well, Jesus was man, fully man, as well as God. And the betrayal by his friends, the mockery, the whipping, and the agony of crucifixion were very, very real to him, as they would be to us.

We can perhaps begin to feel what that is like. What I think is much more difficult for us to imagine and to understand is that when Jesus was dying on the cross, he was completely separated from his Father God.

Jesus took our sins on himself. And a holy God can't look on sin, and Jesus felt he had been abandoned, forsaken by his Father.

[6 : 29] And that, I believe, was the greatest suffering of all, as he took the punishment for sin, as he was separated from God. And so he's looking forward as he comes to his hour, and he is looking forward with dread to what is about to happen to him.

Second thing, though, it's an hour of obedience. So he says, Shall I say, Father, save me from this hour? No, it was for this very reason that I came to this hour.

When we think of reasons why Jesus came into the world, there are several. He came to show us what God is like. So we look at Jesus, and we can see God among us, and how God lives.

He came to be an example to us, to show us how we should live, the kind of lives that should characterize us. He came to bring us God's words.

We were thinking of that in the early service this morning, that Jesus came with the word of God to speak to us. But above all, he came to die.

[7 : 39] The reason he came into this world was that he should die for our sins. Only if someone was able to take the penalty for our sins, take the punishment that was due to us, could we be forgiven.

And no one but Jesus could have done that. He was the only one who met the requirement of being absolutely sinless, and therefore able to take the punishment for us.

And so whatever the cost, Jesus was determined he was going to obey the will of his Father, and he was going to go and to die on the cross.

The hour of agony was also an hour of obedience. Obedience even to death on a cross. Then the third thing is that it is an hour of glory.

Now you might think, looking at it superficially, that someone dying on a cross is perhaps the least glorious thing almost that you could imagine. It's humiliation, it's shame, it's pain, it's the mockery of people round about.

[8 : 49] What is glorious about that? And yet Jesus says, the hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.

And then he says again, Father, glorify your name, and the confirmation comes from God. I have glorified it, and will glorify it again. This is one of only three times when we hear that voice from heaven.

The others were at Jesus' baptism, and at the transfiguration, and at this third really significant moment in his life, he gets again the affirmation from his Father.

Through the cross, Jesus is glorified. Through the cross, God is glorified. And Jesus gives us a little indication of what that was in the following verses.

So in verse 31, he says, Now is the time for judgment on this world. Now the prince of this world will be driven out.

[9 : 51] The cross at Calvary might have seemed at that time to many people to be defeat for Jesus. He had traveled around Galilee and Judea for three years.

He had enjoyed a lot of popularity. We'll come back to the early verses of his entry into Jerusalem. He enjoyed a lot of popularity. And then he was nailed to a cross. And people looking at that thought, Well, that's him defeated. I think the disciples felt that too, because they didn't really understand what was going on. But Jesus says, No, it's not defeat. It's victory. When I die on the cross, I will overcome the evil one once and for all. The world is going to be judged through my action. And the evil one, the print of the world, will be driven out. Now that was not an immediate thing. We still have the work of the devil. We still have evil in our world as we see every day. [10:51] And yet the devil has been defeated. And one day that will be obvious. And he was defeated by Jesus dying on the cross. By the punishment Jesus took, and by the fact that he could shout at the end, It is finished.

The work that God had given him, he had done. And that is glorious. The other glorious thing is in verse 32. Jesus says, I, when I am lifted from the earth, will draw all people to myself. This little incident was prompted originally by a question for some Greeks. She said, We want to see Jesus. And I think that is what triggered Jesus to say, My hour has now come. Because God's word was about to go beyond just the confines of Israel, beyond just the Jewish nation, and to go into the whole world through Jesus. And how did that happen? It happened by being lifted up on a cross and dying for our sins. And the glory of Jesus on the cross is what has attracted many of us to him. [12:00] And we are part of his reward for what he did as he died for our sins. So the hour that Jesus is talking about is an hour of agony.

It's an hour of horrific suffering. But it's also an hour of obedience, of obedience to God. And it's an hour of glory as evil is defeated, as Jesus is able to bring the whole world to him, all those who will believe.

Before we go back and look at the rest of the passage, let's just take this challenge for ourselves. Do we believe that? When we look back on Jesus, when we look back on the cross, do we understand how much he went through for us? Do we understand the extent of his obedience to God? Do we understand the glory that is there? And have we taken him for ourselves? Have our sins been forgiven by trusting in him? Now let's go back, and we'll just walk quite quickly through the whole of the passage. And this time as we go through, what I particularly want to look at is how Jesus challenges us and how people respond to him.

[13:13] So there'll be two things there as we go along, the challenge of Jesus and the response of the people. So I've headed the first part of the passage, coming as a king.

This is the very familiar story to most of us of Jesus' triumphant entry into Jerusalem, Palm Sunday. John tells us slightly differently from the other Gospels, and I want to focus particularly on what John has to say to us through it.

And the first thing we might notice is that there are two crowds in the section from verse 12 through to verse 19. There's a crowd that's come to Jerusalem for the festival.

Many of them probably had come from Galilee, so they would have seen the miracles that Jesus did when he was there, and they already would have an idea of how special he was.

The second crowd is in verse 17, and that is the crowd that had witnessed the raising of Lazarus that we looked at two or three weeks back. That miraculous event where Jesus brought back to life someone who had been dead for four days.

[14:21] And these people too would be coming in the crowds, and they were talking to others about the wonderful things that they had seen. And as these two crowds come together and others along with them, the atmosphere becomes one of celebration and one of anticipation.

So they see Jesus coming into Jerusalem, and they think this could be the moment when Jesus frees us from the Romans. We have this great, powerful man who can do such wonderful things, a charismatic figure.

He's the one who's going to finally free us from the bondage of Rome. And what does Jesus do? He sits on a donkey. He finds a donkey, and he sits on it to go through the crowd.

It would have been a familiar sight in many cities for a victorious emperor or general to come back and for the crowds to throng around him. And he would be on a war horse, the biggest horse you could imagine, so that he was seen as someone who was really powerful and was really to be

feared.

Jesus chooses to come and to sit on a donkey. And by that, I think he's saying that his kingship at that time was not in overthrowing the Romans.

[15:47] He was coming as a king, but he was coming as God's king as the one who would do God's will. And I think that's the quotation from Zechariah that the disciples say they only understood later.

That's the significance of that. It's the king coming, but he's coming in humility. He's coming as the servant king. He's coming as the savior king rather than as one who is going to come at that stage with military might.

And yet the people don't understand. Most of the people want him to be king and want him to go and overthrow the Romans. The disciples may be rather confused.

John says they only understood later the significance of what was happening. And the rulers, the Pharisees, they were worried. They thought he's becoming just a bit too popular.

And so that would have made them even more resolved that they would get rid of him, that they would ensure that he died. But he was coming as a king, but not as a king that the people expected.

[16:54] The middle section, and we've talked quite a lot about that already, so we'll go through it a little more quickly now, I've called going like a grain. And there's this wonderful picture at the centre of it of the grain of wheat that falls into the ground and dies.

Now again, we might think about some of the reactions around to what's said here. The Greeks, I think, were more than just curious sightseers. They actually genuinely wanted to see and to understand Jesus.

At the end, the people were saying, well, we don't understand. They couldn't accept what Jesus was saying to them. But in the middle, there is this challenge. The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.

Jesus says, unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds. Now we look at that and think that is true of Jesus.

That is what has happened with Jesus. Jesus died on the cross for our sins, and he brought many, many millions of people to know God and to have eternal life.

[17:58] And yes, it certainly is true of Jesus. But the application he gives is not to himself. It's to us. The grain of wheat that falls into the ground and dies and then springs up, Jesus says, we should be like that.

Anyone who loves their life will lose it, or anyone who hates their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. Whoever serves me must follow me and where I am, my servant also will be.

My father will honour the one who serves me. So the challenge to us is, are we willing and able to follow the example of Jesus?

Are we willing to give our lives for him, perhaps literally, but certainly in terms of the sacrifices that we are prepared to make? Jesus never promises that life with him will be easy.

Indeed, at the moments of his greatest popularity, these are the moments when he issues these kinds of challenges. John chapter 6, defeating of the 5,000. The people want to make him king.

[19:11] And then Jesus gives some very difficult teaching about the bread of life and what that means. And most people then decide, well, actually, we're not going to follow him. because their trust in him was very superficial.

And maybe he's doing the same thing here. You've got people who feel he's very popular, who feel he's someone really to be admired and looked up to. You've got others who are wanting to find out more about him.

And Jesus says, if you follow me, it will be difficult. Don't come expecting just to be part of a victorious army that will sweep the land and will get rid of all the Romans.

If you follow me, you have to be willing to make sacrifices. I think that's a very good lesson for us as well. If we're Christians, if we believe in the Lord Jesus, we need to be willing to make sacrifices for him.

Often when we think about Christian service and we talk to people, and if you become a new member of the church, we talk to you about how you can serve. Often we think about what are the things people will enjoy? What are the things they're good at?

[20:22] These are the things that we'll ask them to do. And quite right, we want people to enjoy their service. We want them to do things they're really gifted for. But not all Christian service is like

that.

And in our service, there will be times when there are things that are really hard that God calls us to do. And like Jesus, we need to be willing to do them.

I talk frequently and I don't apologise for it about my grandparents. My grandparents were missionaries in India. And one of the yearly events of the missionaries in India was a festival at a place called Antarvedi.

It was just a few miles from there where they were working. And it was a massive Hindu festival. But a quarter million or more Hindu people used to come on pilgrimage every year.

And they came to bathe at the junction where the Godafri River flows into the Bay of Bengal to bathe, I think, for washing away of sins.

[21 : 22] But it was a huge event and a real festive atmosphere and there were stalls and all sorts of things there. And the missionaries used to go every year and they would stand and they would hand out tracts, they would sell gospels and they would talk to people who were willing to listen.

And more often than not, they had a really hard time. People would shout abuse at them and sometimes they would throw things and it was only the rubbish the missionaries feel they got off fairly lightly.

I was struck by something that one of the missionaries wrote about this. He says, we attend in fear and shall be very glad when it's over kind of feeling. It was something they felt was God's will for them to do.

It was the right thing to do. But it was really difficult. They didn't look forward to it. They didn't enjoy it. But they had the satisfaction, I'm sure, looking back, of knowing that they had done what they thought was right.

And for us too, there may be situations which are really hard for us. Perhaps when we put somewhere where people are not sympathetic to Christians and we need to let people know who we believe in and what we stand for.

[22 : 32] And that can be really, really difficult. And yet we can know that Jesus has been through something much, much more difficult than we ever will. And that when we face these things, he will be with us.

We are the grains of wheat that need to be willing to sacrifice ourselves for the great harvest that can come from it.

Finally, just very briefly, let's look at the last couple of verses. Verses 35 and 36. Jesus told them, you're going to have the light just a little while longer. Walk while you have the light before darkness overtakes you.

The theme of light is one that we get throughout John's Gospel. I think as we come to the end of Jesus' public ministry, John is very deliberately reminding us of the very start of his Gospel. where John says the light came into the world and the darkness, now shone in darkness, and the darkness could not overcome it.

[23 : 40] Then we have chapters 8 and 9 where Jesus talks about being the light of the world. We have that great miracle where he gives the blind man back his sight. And now at the end of his public ministry, Jesus gives a very stern warning.

He says, you've had the light. I've been with you. You've had the opportunity to believe and to follow me. And that opportunity is about to go.

I won't be here very much longer. What is your response to that? Will you believe in the light while you still have time?

Or will you choose still to walk in darkness and to walk in your own way? If you have the light, you can live life with a purpose. You can see where you're going.

You can see what the right thing is to do. If you're walking in darkness, then life does become a bit aimless like we were thinking about at the beginning. Only in the light is there true fulfillment.

[24 : 46] Now, we're not in an identical situation. Jesus hasn't been physically among us. But in many ways, it's very similar.

The call still comes to walk in the light. To look at Jesus and to see in him everything that we should be and to take his guidance through the Spirit about how we should live.

And for all of us, there will come a time when that's no longer possible. We don't know how long we've got in this world. And it's really important while we have the opportunity to trust in Jesus, to accept forgiveness through him, and to live lives that are obedient to him, that are walked in the

light, that are walked the way that Jesus walked.

Let's all make sure that we do live in the light of Jesus. Let me end by going back to where we were at the beginning and talking about purpose.

One of the most influential Christian books of this century was by Rick Warren from Saddleback Church in California called The Purpose Driven Life.

[26 : 06] And Rick Warren identifies five particular purposes that each Christian should have, and they're very much connected and not surprisingly with the kind of purposes that we as a church would have, the priorities that we would give.

And the challenge for us if we're Christians is do we fulfil all these purposes? Or are there some where we think yes, that's quite good and others we're not really taking heed of?

So the five purposes I've paraphrased slightly. We want to worship God. We want to recognise the greatness of our God and to bring to him the worship of our voices but the worship of our lives as well.

We want to love others. We want to show the love that Christ had to everyone round about us and to do it unselfishly. To look for the interests of others rather than our own interests.

We want to become like Jesus. That's what we call discipleship. Becoming like Jesus and following his example. We want to serve God serve him in the church and serve him among one another.

[27 : 15] And we want to reach out we want to witness to others to tell them about Jesus. Are these not five great purposes for us to have?

Life is not meaningless. Life is not pointless. Life that is truly lived to the full it is life that seeks to glorify God as Jesus did in everything we do.

And that's reflected by our attitude to God our relationship with him it's reflecting our relationships with one another and it's reflected in our relationships with those who don't yet know the Lord Jesus as we would seek to witness to them.

Let's live life with a purpose. Make sure that we know Jesus as our saviour but also that we follow him as our Lord. Let's pray together.

Father we thank you for your word this morning. Thank you for the challenge that Jesus brings us that we should be like him that we should be willing to give our lives for your glory.

[28 : 20] And we thank you for the tremendous example he sets and particularly for his death on the cross that great purpose for which he came into the world that hour that was always in his mind as he went around and that hour when he took on himself our sins and the punishment that we deserve.

We thank you for him and pray that all of us will put our trust in him and will choose to follow him and to enjoy real purpose in our lives. We give you our thanks and we commit ourselves to you now in Jesus name.

Amen.