

Demands And Dreams

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[0 : 0 0] Well, today we are continuing our study on John's Gospel. We are in the middle of chapter 12, and I'd like us to read again verses 23 to 27. Jesus answered them, The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Truly, truly I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone. But if it dies, it bears much fruit.

Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. 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 honour him. 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. Our title today is Demands and Dreams, and I chose that title because I hope that it captures two crucial lessons that this passage is teaching us. It's teaching us that when it comes to our relationship with God, often we have demands that are too big, and we have dreams that are too small. And that's the two things, the two headings that I'd like us to think about today. So starting with demands that are too big. In John's Gospel, one of the themes that's been running through this whole book is how people respond to Jesus. And we've seen that over many chapters now. Different people responded to Jesus in different ways. And one of the key reasons why John keeps presenting that to us is because one of the great purposes of his book is to press home to us that we have to respond to Jesus as well. Now often the contrast that's been presented to us is between those who believe in Jesus and those who are hostile to him. And so you see that again and again, we saw it very clearly in the last chapter and in the early part of John 12, in the aftermath of the raising of Lazarus. Jesus had come, his friend Lazarus had died, but Jesus called him out of the tomb and raised him from the dead. Some people responded to that by believing in Jesus. They thought, wow. But others responded to it with increased hostility. And for the religious leaders, they resolved to kill Jesus. And often that contrast can leave us choosing a side. So you've got the people who believe in Jesus and respond positively on one side. You've got those who are opposing Jesus on the other. And we're kind of putting everyone in two camps. We're picking two sides. And I'm very confident that nobody in here is like, oh, well, I want to be with the Pharisees. I want to be with the ones who killed Jesus. No, we all, I think, would align ourselves with those who responded to Jesus positively. But there's a crucial lesson in this passage that all of us need to think about.

This passage is showing us that even within those on this side, within those who responded positively to Jesus, when you look at them, you don't see perfect examples of faith and understanding and commitment. Instead, even within those who are on the whole positively responding to Jesus, what you see in them is a mixture.

A mixture of getting things right, getting things wrong. A mixture of people who maybe are starting to realize who Jesus is, but they're still not really understanding why Jesus has come. And this is so, so important for all of us, because whatever stage we're at in our journey with Jesus, whether we are following Jesus and have been for many years, whether we've just started following Him, or whether we're not sure yet whether we're a follower of Jesus, we're all the same. We're all this mixture where we see and we understand more about Jesus. But at the same time, there's things that we miss. At the same time, we misjudge things that are happening. And we are all too aware that there's still a huge amount for us to learn. And so today, we're doing something very important. We're talking about mistakes that were made by people who actually like Jesus. And I think that that's such a crucial thing for us to think about, because I don't think anybody in here would make that doubt. Anybody watching at home would say that they disliked Jesus. We all admire Him. We respect Him. We like Him. But that doesn't make us immune from getting confused about things. And it's a very important thing for us to recognize and an important thing for us to think about. And in particular, I want us to talk about one of the biggest mistakes that we can make. And that mistake

is to have the wrong expectations of Jesus.

[5 : 21] That's one of the biggest mistakes that we can make. We have the wrong expectations of Jesus. And central to that very often is the fact that our demands are too big. And this passage touches on that and shows us three ways that that can happen. The first is the demand for Jesus to get rid of my immediate problems. Often that's what people think.

We definitely see it in this passage, the demand for people, the demand for Jesus to get rid of our immediate problems. Now, it might not be obvious as we look at it, but I hope we'll discover it as we think about these words a little bit more. We see the description of the crowd that have come to the feast, to the Passover feast in Jerusalem.

They heard that Jesus was coming. And so they took branches of palm trees. They went out to meet him and they were crying out, Hosanna, blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, even the king of Israel. So you've got this magnificent scene in Jerusalem. Crowds are gathering. People are coming onto the streets. Jesus is entering the city. And there's this wave of excitement and euphoria because of what was about to happen. But we have to ask the question, what were they excited about? What was it that they wanted? Well, for many of them, maybe even for all of them, the big problem that they had as Jews, they had many frustrations, but the big problem that they had was the Romans. And so they're standing in the capital city of their country, but it's not really functioning as a capital and it's not really a country of its own because it's all under the control of the Roman emperor.

And the Jews had suffered a lot under their Roman rulers and there was just a huge sense of frustration and resentment at the fact that they didn't have their own nation. And one of their great expectations of the Messiah, of the king that the Old Testament promised, one of their great expectations was that he was going to come and he would be a political leader and he would raise up and mobilize the nation and they would fight off the Romans once and for all, they would get rid of their occupiers and they would restore the freedom of their nation. In other words, the Romans were the immediate problem and they expected God's Messiah to get rid of them. And that's part of what's captured in this word, Hosanna.

It's a word that means save us, we pray. And maybe there were some who cried out that word in the way that we would cry it out in a sense of please save us from our sins, but I am pretty certain that many, many people would have been saying save us as in save us from these Romans and give us our nation back. And so although it's a really positive scene, it's known as the triumphal entry, I don't think that everybody in the crowd had the right expectations of Jesus. And I think that that's proved by the fact that a week later, well not quite a week later, five days later, the same crowd are shouting crucify him because he didn't come to do what they expected him to do. The crowd wanted rid of their immediate problems. Second demand that we see in this passage and that we can often have is the demand for Jesus to make my life nicer. And so that's the kind of follow on, it's like

[9 : 01] Jesus get rid of my immediate problems, Jesus make my life nicer. And that's what the people longed for, they wanted their freedom back, they wanted their nation to be restored, they wanted to be able to live according to their laws, and they wanted their city to function their way. And they saw Jesus as the one who could make everything better, make life nicer.

They had suffered a lot, they were fed up, and they wanted a better life. And then the third demand that we see in this passage comes just a few verses later, which is the demand for Jesus to conform to what we want. Now again, it's not immediately obvious from the passage, but I think it's there in the text as we think about it. John records the fact that among those who went up to the feast were some Greeks, they came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee and asked him, Sir, we wish to see Jesus. Philip went and told Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus, and Jesus answered them, the hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Now, here's an interesting question for you to think about.

Here's the request from the Greeks. Sir, we wish to see Jesus. Was that a good request or a bad request? What do you think? And maybe to answer that question, a good thing to ask yourself is, what is the tone of that question? Because that's something that, you know, when we read words recorded like this, we don't actually know the tone in which they were said. So was it excited? Did they come and say, Sir, we wish to see Jesus? Was it impatient?

Did they come and say, Sir, we wish to see Jesus. Get him right now. Was it curious? We'd really like to see, we want to see Jesus. We'd love to find out a bit more about him.

Was it humble? Did they come up and say, we just wish that we could see Jesus? What was the tone of the question? The answer is, we've got no idea. We don't know what the tone of the question is. And that's a really, really important thing for us to remember that when we're reading the Bible, sometimes we can read into statements what our approach or our tone would be. So when I read that phrase, we wish to see Jesus. I think to myself, well, what would I think? And I would be thinking, well, I would be kind of curious, humble, thinking, I'd really love to see Jesus. And so I think that that's what they meant. But I don't know if that's what they meant because the text doesn't tell us. And that's a very important thing for us to always come back to the fact that we need to focus on what the text reveals. And yes, I totally agree. It doesn't really tell us much. But there's one thing it does tell us that's quite interesting. It's that Jesus doesn't actually respond to them. And he doesn't do what they ask him to do. So they came and said, we wish to see [12:21] Jesus. Jesus didn't say, all right, excellent, I'll go and meet you. He said, the hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified and the whole focus moves on. And it's just really interesting to think through what's going on there. And so if we're asking the question, is that request of verse 21 good or not? I think it's a mixture. I think it's good that they wanted to see Jesus. But the fact that Jesus doesn't respond, the fact that Jesus doesn't go to them, I think maybe indicates that what they were wanting didn't align with what Jesus was wanting to do. And they were wanting Jesus to come on their terms. And that was not something that Jesus was prepared to do. And so as we come with our demands, as we look at this passage and think about this topic, we can see that it's very easy to want Jesus to get rid of our immediate problems. It's very easy to want Jesus to make our lives nicer. And it's very easy to expect Jesus to conform to what we would like. Now, these are not necessarily bad things. And Jesus does not expect us all to just have a life of misery and problems and frustrations. But the key point we need to focus on is that these desires can so easily lead us to have the wrong expectations of Jesus. And we can find ourselves coming to Jesus wanting him to get rid of our immediate problems. And there's a whole host of things that could be. It could be concerns about your health. It could be frustrations in your job. It could be struggles in your marriage. It could be a weirdness of being single. It could be doubts, bruises. It could even be all because of somebody who's hurt you. And they seem to be getting on great. And we want Jesus to get rid of all of us.

We want Jesus to make our lives nicer. So we all expect the house and the salary and the car and the holidays and the warmth and the entertainment and the health care and the pension and the long life. These are all good things. We expect Jesus to provide them. And we want Jesus to conform to what we want. And so, you know, we wanted to meet with us on a Sunday. We wanted him to listen to us when we're in a crisis. But we would prefer him to keep out of our way at work or in our social life or in our resentment of people or in our thirst for more wealth. Even though we quite like Jesus, we wanted to fit around all of that. And all of these things are manifestations of the same problem. They all are rooted in the fact that we think that God owes us. We think that God owes us. And one of the reasons we are particularly prone to think like that is because of how the culture around us thinks.

We live in a culture today that has a very clear view of what a successful life looks like. You've got a career in the upper wage bracket. You've got a house in the nicer part of town. You can have a few years where you sleep with whoever you want. And then you can settle down and have a family. You get to enjoy nice holidays. You get fast broadband.

You've got a good golf course nearby. And if something goes wrong, it's generally the responsibility of the NHS or the schools or the government to sort it out. And the astonishing thing is that for many, many people in Britain today, that has become the bare minimum that we expect. We believe that that's what's owed to us and that anything below that is unacceptable. I think if our great-grandparents came to see us, I think their jaws would hit the floor. And yet that's how our nation thinks today. And when we take that mindset of our culture and bring it in to our approach to the Gospel, we look at Jesus and we think he owes us. And what that often results in is people who are maybe drawn to the Gospel initially because it sounds appealing and the promises are all lovely. But then we're quick to walk away when things don't go the way we want. And it's all because we think that God owes us. And one of the most important discoveries you can ever make is that he doesn't.

[17:20] God does not owe you anything. And if you think that he does, you will never understand the Gospel. And it's so fascinating because a Western post-modern, post-Christian worldview just

confirms all this. We know today better than any generation in history before us that we are the tiniest of tiny specks in a universe that is bigger than we can ever get our heads around. And yet today our nation is so full of people who embrace all of that. We abandon the idea of God and we say, well, we're just part of this material universe. We're just these tiny specks and a tiny planet in the middle of nowhere, yet the world should still revolve around me. And you think, really? Many people today have little time for God, but they still feel like he owes them something. And all of this is an example of demands that are far too big. Not too big in the sense that God isn't that powerful, but too big in the sense that you are not that important and you're not that smart. Now that probably sounds like the most insulting thing you've heard all week. But when I say not that important in the sense that we cannot put ourselves above Jesus. And when I say not that smart, it's because you and I don't know, we don't actually know what is best for us. And I can say that to you because I know it's true of myself. I can prove this from my own eyes.

When I was 16, do you know what I was going to be? I was going to be a member of the most successful rock band that the world had ever seen. And I had a bit in your arm off for that to have happened. And aged 40, I am so glad it never happened. Often our view of Jesus can be generally positive, but our expectations are frequently wrong. Our demands are far too big. But is that it? Is that just a case of God kind of, you know, is the gospel a case of God just putting us back in our place and saying, you know, get your mindset in order, keep your mouth shut? No, no, not at all. The truth is, the gospel offers us far more than we could imagine. The truth is, your dreams are too small. And that's the other thing that this passage presents to us. And it's fascinating. John 12 is a crucial turning point in his gospel. In many ways, it finally looks as though the crowds are getting behind Jesus. As he came through those streets, as they got their branches and waved as people shouted, you can imagine the disciples thinking, Oh, at last, we're getting somewhere. Things are looking on the up. But right at that moment, just as though Jesus is heading up to get a status and a recognition that he had never had before, right at that moment, Jesus makes it so clear. I have come to this city to die. And that's what's captured for us in these verses that we read. And Jesus responds to Philip's request by changing the subject completely. And he says, the hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.

And then he speaks about death, using the image of a grain of wheat falling into the earth and dying and by doing so, bringing life. And this crucial turning point is revealed by a word, a very important word that John uses that he's already used several times.

And that's this word here, the word hour. Throughout John's gospel, we've already been told that Jesus's hour has not yet come. You can see it there in chapter two, my hour's not yet come. You can see it in chapter seven, his hour had not yet come. You can see it in chapter eight, his hour had not yet come. But now it changes. Now the hour has come.

[21 : 50] Now there's loads and loads that we could say about that. I just want to focus on one thing. I want us to focus on the fact that Jesus's choice of words is absolutely amazing.

He's telling us that he's come to the city to die. He's not on an upward path to glory and status and popularity. He's not coming to meet the expectations of the Jews who want the Romans overthrown. He's on a downward path that's going to take him to the cross.

And that means that he's telling us that the hour has come for him to be betrayed, to be arrested, to be humiliated, to be mocked, to be condemned, to be nailed to a cross and abandoned. The hour has come for Jesus to be crushed. But that's not how he describes it. He says the hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. The pathway to death, the pathway to glory. This is what his mission and purpose is all about. This is everything that God has planned. As Jesus steps forward on that brutal path leading to the cross, his Father tells him that this is all going to glorify the name of God. Jesus said, Father, glorify your name. He says, I have glorified it and I will glorify it again. What does that mean? What does it mean when Jesus talks about being glorified? What does glory mean?

Glory is one of those words that's so familiar to us yet it's really hard to define. A one-sentence definition of glory is difficult. It's very hard to talk about glory without using the word glory. What does glory mean? Well, it's something that has glory, which that's not a very good explanation at all. It's hard to define. But I want to suggest to you that if you want to understand what glory means, a good place to start is to think of stuff that is just utterly brilliant. So a beautiful summer's day at Dalmore, that's glorious.

A wedding like we had here on Friday when the church was full and you had the bride and groom standing in front of you, that is glorious. A sunset over the Loch is glorious.

[24 : 40] A winning goal in injury time is glorious. A roaring fire when the weather outside is horrendous is glorious. All of these things that we describe as glorious are examples of the same thing. They're all stuff that's brilliant. They're all encounters with the beauty and joy and awe and wonder that we know that life can bring. If something is glorious, we might not be able to describe that perfectly, but we know that it's utterly brilliant. And all of that's telling us that as Jesus turns towards the cross here in John 12, as he steps into Jerusalem, something utterly brilliant is happening. In fact, Jesus, the Son of Man, He has come to do the most utterly brilliant thing that has ever been done because the whole purpose of His death is to bring life. Unless again, if we'd fall to the earth and die, it remains alone. But if it dies, it bears much fruit. His death is all for the purpose of bringing life. He came to die so that our sins can be forgiven, so that our guilt can be washed away, so that our alienation from God can be reversed, and so that all of our brokenness can be healed. Now, you might be listening to all of that thinking that just sounds like theological jargon. It's not. It's actually talking about the thing that affects you more than anything else. It's talking about the thing that bothers you more than anything else. Because if you go down a few verses, if we read on verses 29 to 33, it says, the cloud that stood there and heard, the voice said that it had thundered.

Others said an angel had spoken to Him. Jesus said, the voice has come for your sake, not mine. Now is the judgment of this world. Now will the ruler of this world be cast out?

And when I'm lifted up from the earth, I will draw all people to myself. He said this to show what kind of death He was going to die. Jesus is talking about the ruler of this world. What was He talking about when He says that? He is talking about the power of sin and death.

And I don't need to persuade any of you that death rules. Because when we are on our own, death rules. Death wins. Death can't be stopped. We can't stop it from taking the people that we love. And we can't stop it taking us as well. And it wrecks everything. Death is like the opposite of glory. It's the thing that makes everything utterly rubbish. And everybody here, everyone knows how that feels. And Jesus is telling you, that is what I have come to fix. And in dying on the cross, Jesus restores a pathway for us to return to God.

And in rising from the dead, Jesus proves that the enemy of death, the ruler of this world, has indeed been defeated and cast out. And now He calls all of us to put our trust in Him and to share in that eternal life with Him. And He describes it so beautifully in verse 32. He says, when I'm lifted up from the earth, I will draw all people to myself.

[28 : 30] He's drawing you. And if you are a believer, that's why you're a believer. He's drawn you. And if you're not yet, I believe it or not, sure He is drawing you again today.

And the key point is this, in God's eyes, all of that is glorious. In other words, in God's eyes, saving you is utterly brilliant. To God, saving you, this is, I don't know if this is like a little session or not, but to God, saving you is like a 95th minute winner for Scotland. To God, seeing you smile is like watching a sunset over a little Burner there. To God, holding you forever is like being curled up in front of a warm fire because to God, sending His Son to the cross to save you is glorious. It's utterly brilliant. The cross is where we see the goodness and power and majesty and awesomeness of God more clearly than anywhere else. And as a result of the cross, God the Father makes you His child. God the Holy Spirit comes to dwell in your hearts and God the Son is your brother and friend forever. And as a result of that, we're together brought into a church family.

We've got a purpose and a unity that we share in. We've got a basis for recognizing right and wrong as we look at the world around us. We know that God is the judge who will put right everything that has gone wrong in human society. We've got a teacher who's going to help us understand ourselves and how we should live our lives. And more than anything else, God is telling you that He will just love you and hold you and pour His goodness into you forever. And the minute we see that, we realize that the kind of daft demands that we have are not really that important at all. And the dreams are nowhere near big enough.

Because what God wants to do for you is bigger than them all. And the utterly incredible thing is this. God doesn't owe you any of it. Instead, He freely gives it. He gives it to you. So what should you do now as we conclude? Well, I'd like you to think about your demands.

I think that's a really good and important thing for every one of us to think about. To think about our demands. Have we made unwise demands of God? And maybe to ask the question, do you feel

like God owes you? And that can be a danger for us as Christians. It can be a danger for any of us who are maybe not yet Christians or not sure. And be very, very careful not to bring the idea of owing into your relationship. Because if you bring owing into a relationship, it ruins it. We had a beautiful wedding here on Friday. It was amazing.

[32 : 04] And you had Alexander the groom standing at the front and Alanis the bride at the back ready to come in. And it's a beautiful moment. Imagine that just before Alanis came in, we just had a moment's pause and Alexander took a huge wedge of cash out of his pocket and gave it to Alanis's father and said, there's the payment. Now, now I'm old, your daughter.

It would be like, ew. Because what made Friday so special is the fact that Alexander and Alanis owe each other nothing. But they promised to love each other for the rest of their lives.

And that's what makes marriage so beautiful, that it's grounded on love, not on a deal. And the gospel is exactly the same. It's never that God owes us. Instead, it's all because he loves us. And so think about your demands. But I also want you to think about your dreams.

What do you dream of? And when I say dreams, I don't just mean dreams for this life. More importantly, what are your dreams for eternity? What's the best it could possibly be? The amazing thing about the gospel is that what God promises is even better than that. And so whatever stage you're at, if you're a Christian, think of your dreams and thank him and get excited. If you're not yet a Christian or if you're not sure, pray to him. Ask him to save you. Follow him. You'll never regret it. Amen.