

Exegesis

Vs. 34 – “The people answered him, We have heard out of the law that Christ abideth forever: and how sayest thou, The Son of man must be lifted up? who is this Son of man?” We can surmise from the crowd's response that they had picked up on Jesus' direct reference to his death. This shouldn't surprise us. As our discussion of vs. 32 showed, "lifted up" was a phrase commonly associated with, generally speaking, capital punishment (i.e., hanging, impalement, etc.) and, specifically, death by crucifixion. However, what is surprising is that by their use of the title "Son of Man," we can also deduce that, to some extent, they've also been following what Jesus had said since verse 23.

If you'll recall, in verse 23, Jesus said that the time for the "Son of Man to be glorified" had come, and he showed that, like the grain of wheat that dies, "the hour" of his glorification would be his death. In that verse, the crowds understood that the Lord was not only claiming to be the Messiah, but they also saw that Jesus was equating himself with the "Son of Man" figure from Daniel 7, and they understood that he was predicting his own death. In a remarkable turn of events, the crowd and John's readership were on the same page. Indeed, the people's awareness is to be praised here.

Furthermore, in light of that, we can now understand why they might've had some questions. After all, they had just hailed him as the "King of Israel" (cf. vs. 13), and Jesus had, unapologetically, accepted their accolades (*see notes vs. 14-15*).¹ He was, indeed, their King. But what sort of King, in his own inaugural address, not only spoke of his demise but revealed that it would be the sort of death reserved for the worst kind of criminal? It didn't make sense. It was like the people were still chanting, "long live the King," and Jesus was responding, "long have I been destined to die" (cf. Rev. 13:8).

To be fair, the crowd's confusion is based on a reasonable understanding of the O.T. As they mentioned, according to the "law," the "Christ" was supposed to abide "forever," not be crucified. And while it isn't clear which passage they might've been thinking of, the principle that the Messiah will never be defeated does have a basis throughout the Scriptures. For instance, "the throne of his (the Messiah's) kingdom [will last] forever" (2 Sam. 7:13).² And this notion is picked up by many other Biblical authors (cf. Ps. 61:6-7; 72:17; 89:3-4, 35-37; 110:4; Ezek. 37:25; Dan. 2:44; 7:13-14), including Luke himself. In the first chapter of his book, the

¹ Kruse (2017), p. 314.

² Köstenberger (2008), p. 385.

doctor-turned-evangelist relays how Gabriel told Mary that "...the Lord God shall give unto [Jesus] the throne of his father David: and he shall reign over the house of Jacob *forever*; and of his kingdom, *there shall be no end*" (Lu. 1:32-33; emphasis added). The Messiah was characterized as a triumphant and eternal being, yet Jesus was supposedly saying the exact opposite here.³ What gives?

The people's bewilderment is further exacerbated when they try to also grapple with Jesus' self-designation as the "Son of Man." They've heard him call himself by this title *many* times (cf. 1:51; 3:13, 14; 5:27; 6:27, 53, 62; 8:28). They understood that he was referring to the mysterious figure from Daniel's vision in which he saw a human—i.e., "son of man"—approach the "Ancient of Days"—i.e., God—and, rather than dying, this man was given "dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages, should serve him: his dominion is an *everlasting* dominion, which shall *not pass away*, and his kingdom that which shall *not be destroyed*" (Dan. 7:14; emphasis added). So, it wasn't that they didn't understand that Jesus was claiming to be the Son of Man. The issue for these people was that, like the Messiah, the Son of Man figure is also couched in language that refers to the figure's eternity and endlessness. Yet, again, Jesus (who presented himself as the Son of Man) spoke about his end. Thus, the question, "Who is the Son of Man," wasn't an honest request at all. Instead, it was an *indictment*. The question was more like, "What sort of a Son of Man are you talking about? He is certainly not the one for whom we are looking."⁴

In essence, the crowd's response perfectly summarizes everything the Lord claimed about himself. The problem they had, however, was the idea that, according to Jesus, the Messiah/Son of Man figure was destined to be *lifted up via crucifixion*. This was something they refused to accept. "For the crowd, a crucified Messiah is not only nonsensical, but abhorrent and heretical—even unbiblical."⁵ This is why we will shortly see the very people who participated in the Triumphal Entry turn their backs on Jesus in unbelief (cf. vs. 37). They were like those who, in 6:60, when Jesus presented himself as the Bread of Life, responded by saying, "This is a hard saying; who can hear it?" They were willing to accept Jesus, even hail him as king, so long as he conformed to their preconceptions of who they *thought* the Messiah/Son of Man ought to be. Interestingly, when Trypho the Jew debated Justin Martyr, a second-century

³ Keener (2012), 2:881, notes that the Jewish apocalyptic book claims "the Messiah dies along with everyone else" (cf. 4 Ezra 7:29). However, he also points out this view wouldn't have been as widespread as that of the "eternal Messiah." Beasley-Murray (1999), p. 215, also confirms 4 Ezra was the minority position.

⁴ Kruse (2017), p. 314; Beasley-Murray (1999), p. 215; Klink (2016), p. 557; Carson (1991), p. 446.

⁵ Klink (2016), p. 557.

Christian apologist, he admitted that Jesus' crucifixion was the very thing that disproved his Messiahship. Trypho wrote,

“These and such like Scriptures, sir, compel us to wait for Him who, as Son of man, receives from the Ancient of days the everlasting kingdom. But this so-called Christ of yours was dishonorable and inglorious, so much so that the last curse contained in the law of God fell on him, for he was crucified.”⁶

Dear reader, never forget that a crucified King/Messiah was (and still is) a *ludicrous* idea to almost everyone. Paul even picks up on this idea when he writes to the church in Corinth that the crucifixion is a "stumbling block" to the Jews and "foolishness" to the gentiles.⁷ For the Jewish world, the Messiah was supposed to live forever, not die. And for the non-Jewish world, a King's throne was a chair, not a cross. And so the Passion stands in defiance of human reasoning. But the Apostle to the Gentiles goes on to point out that, despite its seeming insanity, there is a third group (a mix of both Jewish and non-Jewish people) who is "called" by God and, rather than be repelled by the cross, they're *drawn* by it. Paul explains that to this special group, Jesus Christ crucified is not weakness or foolishness but the actual "power" and "wisdom of God."⁸ "But why," might we ask, "did God choose such a divisive thing—i.e., the cross—to reveal the Messiah?" It was so that no man or woman could boast in God's presence.⁹ At Calvary, the human ego finds no purchase, nor is it given any quarter. God alone is glorified by the cross. Therefore, "He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord" (1 Cor. 1:31).

Vs. 35-36 – Jesus does not directly answer the crowd's questions here because, as John's readership already knows, the Lord had responded to those questions elsewhere.¹⁰ And, as our discussion showed in verse 34, the crowds were not even looking for answers. They had already made up their minds. So, rather than provide yet another counterargument to their messianic misunderstandings, Jesus calls them to trust him; he implores them to *believe*.¹¹ The Lord expected them to act in light of what they had *already* heard him say and what they had *already* seen him do.¹²

Jesus said, "Yet a little while is the light with you." As he told his disciples in 7:33, so now he tells the crowd that "the light"—i.e., Jesus (cf. 1:4; 8:12)—is only with them for "a little while."

⁶ Kruse (2017), p. 315, quotes from *Dialogue with Trypho*, 32.1.

⁷ 1 Corinthians 1:23.

⁸ 1 Corinthians 1:24.

⁹ 1 Corinthians 1:29.

¹⁰ Carson (1991), p. 446.

¹¹ Kruse (2017), p. 315

¹² Morris (1995), p. 533.

Jesus' earthly ministry lasted only three years, and, considering the Lord is now less than a week from his death, time is, indeed, about to run out. And so, Jesus admonishes them to "Walk while ye have light, lest darkness come upon you: for he that walketh in darkness knoweth not whither he goeth." Only with Jesus as their light will the crowds be enabled to "walk" as they should. So, how will they walk when "the light" is taken away via the crucifixion? After all, without light, one may walk, but it is impossible to see where to go because all one sees is "darkness" (cf. 9:4). So much so that a person walking in darkness "knoweth not whither he goeth" and even stumbles about (cf. 11:10).¹³ But this eventuality is avoidable. The people didn't have to be lost in the dark. This is why the Lord tells them, "While ye have light, believe in the light, that ye may be the children of light." Here Jesus shows that to "have light" is to "believe in the light," and if a person believes in Jesus, they will become "children of light." Meaning once someone puts their faith in Jesus Christ, they are no longer the offspring of the night but of the day (cf. 8:44-45; 1 Thess. 5:5; Eph. 5:8). And as children resembles their parent, so the disciple exemplifies the traits of Christ. The implication is that believers carry the light wherever they go. The Light of the world shines through the glow of his children (cf. Mat. 5:14-16). And if believers are "children of light," then they will never be consumed by darkness and can see where they're going. Believing in Jesus illuminates our path (cf. Ps. 119:105).

As if to illustrate in the most dramatic way possible that "Yet a little while is the light with you," John tells us, "These things spake Jesus, and departed, and did hide himself from them." One minute the Light was there with the crowd talking and imploring them to believe, and the next, the Light was gone. And not just gone; Jesus *purposefully* "did hide himself from them." His last public discourse ends with the Lord concealing himself from all but his own disciples (cf. 8:59).¹⁴ The Light will not force himself on anyone; he allows those who love darkness to stay in the dark. The next time these sons and daughters of darkness will see the Light is on his way to his glorification.¹⁵ Quite frankly, this was the easiest it would ever be to believe in Jesus. Putting your faith in someone after seeing that person get crucified will be even more challenging. After all, once resurrected, Jesus only revealed himself to those who were *already* his disciples (cf. 14:22-24).¹⁶ Therefore, time wasn't against Jesus but the crowds. They had better believe before it was too late, a reality still true today. Those who do not take hold of the light when it is offered to them will, eventually, lose it.¹⁷

¹³ Keener (2012), 2:882.

¹⁴ Köstenberger (2008), p. 387.

¹⁵ Beasley-Murray (1999), p. 215.

¹⁶ Kruse (2017), p. 315.

¹⁷ Morris (1995), p. 533.

VIDEO DESCRIPTION

Wednesday Night Live | John | Week 36

Text: John 12:34-36

Today, we'll see the breaking point between Jesus and the masses. Though they hailed him as King and welcomed him into Jerusalem, we'll watch as they will ultimately refuse to follow him to Calvary. They thought, "What sort of Messiah came to die?" It was nonsense and possibly even heretical to a first-century Jewish mind to believe that their long-promised king would die a traitor's death. And so, they rejected Jesus. They would rather walk in the darkness of ignorance than in the light of God's Son. And though many would later be converted on the day of Pentecost, doubtless, this would be the last opportunity to be saved for many others. This is why we find Jesus imploring these dear people to believe in him before it is too late. If they did not believe in him before the crucifixion, it would be even harder to believe in him once they saw him hanging on the cross. Sadly, this shows us that those who do not take hold of the light when it is offered to them will, eventually, lose it. Today, not tomorrow, is the day of salvation; after all, today is all we have. Who's to say that tomorrow will ever even come?

Pastor's manuscript can be found here: