

See Jesus

Good Friday | John 12:20–36; Mark 15:39

BibleWay Sermon Alignment

Good Friday asks us a question we don't often slow down long enough to answer: when you look at Jesus, what do you actually see? The crowds in John 12 thought they were seeing him clearly. They had watched him raise Lazarus. They had heard his teaching. They had even come to the feast hoping to get a closer look. But Jesus knew that what they were seeing was only the surface. His truest glory was about to be revealed in a way none of them expected—on a cross. This week, as we sit in the shadow of the crucifixion, we are invited to move past the externals of Jesus and see him as he really is.

1. Past the Externals — The Grain of Wheat

“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.” — John 12:24

When the Greeks come to Philip and say, “Sir, we wish to see Jesus,” they want what we want. They want to experience him. They had heard about the miracles, the walking on water, the raising of the dead, the way he upset the religious establishment and made Rome nervous. That kind of power draws a crowd. But Jesus answers them with something strange. He talks about a seed.

A seed has a hard shell. It looks unbreakable. But when you put it into the ground and the water gets in, that shell cracks open—and what was hidden inside comes pouring out as new life. Jesus is saying that his miracles, his teaching, his kindness to outsiders—all of it was real, but none of it was his truest glory. His truest glory was the cross. “Death will break me,” he says. “It will break me wide open. And when it does, the life that is in me will be released.”

It is so easy, especially for those of us who have been around church a long time, to settle for the externals of Jesus. The nice services. The familiar songs. The benefits package. But the invitation of Good Friday is to *move past the externals* and let yourself be drawn into his full glory—the glory of a God who loved you so much that he allowed himself to be tortured, shamed, and buried, so that life could come out of him and into you.

Discussion Questions

1. The Greeks come to Philip in John 12:21 and say, “Sir, we wish to see Jesus.” They had heard about his miracles and his power and they wanted to get closer. Read Philippians 3:10 together: “That I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death.” As a group, share with each other: when you first wanted to know Jesus, what was it that drew you in? What part of him did you see first—his power, his kindness, his teaching, something else?
2. Jesus uses the image of a seed falling into the ground and dying in order to bear fruit (John 12:24). Read 1 Corinthians 15:36–38 where Paul picks up the same image. As a group, talk about why God so often uses this pattern—that real life comes through something dying first. Where have you seen that pattern at work in the life of someone you know? What does it teach us about the kind of God we follow?

2. The Crowd He Came to Draw — Lifted Up

“And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.” — John 12:32

When Jesus says, “When I am lifted up,” the crowd doesn’t understand what he means. We do. He is talking about the cross—his hands stretched out, the nails driven through his palms and feet, his body hoisted up between heaven and earth. And he says that this is how he will draw a crowd.

It is an odd kind of crowd. What kind of people are drawn to the death of a failed Messiah? The crowd around Jesus needed him to be a different kind of Christ. They had political problems. They had Rome on their backs. They had been waiting their whole lives for someone who would come down and deal with the people they hated and the neighbors they didn’t want next door. So they pushed back: “We have heard from the Law that the Christ remains forever. What do you mean, lifted up?”

But Jesus is drawing a different kind of crowd. He is saying, in effect, *I did not come just to fix your politics. I came to deal with the sin in your heart.* The Messiah the crowd wanted would only have drawn factions—people who already agreed with each other, people who already hated the same enemies. The Messiah Jesus actually is draws a different kind of crowd: people from every nation, every background, every corner of history, who finally recognize that this man is the payment for their sins. That is why the Greeks show up in the verses just before. Jesus is not just drawing Israel. He is drawing you.

3. At the Foot of the Cross — Who Do You See?

“And when the centurion who stood facing him saw that in this way he breathed his last, he said, ‘Truly this man was the Son of God!’” — Mark 15:39

Picture the centurion the way you would picture a warden at a state penitentiary. He has done this before. He is the one who oversaw the beating, the nails, the lifting up. He has watched men die. And in the moment Jesus breathes his last, this hardened Roman soldier looks up and says the most unlikely sentence in the Gospels: “Truly this man was the Son of God.”

In the first three centuries of the church, the cross was not a piece of jewelry. It was an embarrassment. Even Jesus’ own followers did not want to talk about it. So for this centurion to look at a crucified man and call him the Son of God—that is a kind of seeing that pierces straight through every social expectation, every pressure to look away. He saw what was really there.

There were others at the foot of the cross who saw differently. One thief sneered: “Are you not the Christ? Save yourself.” Maybe that is where you are this Good Friday. Maybe you look at Jesus and see failure, or you are not even sure he is real. The other thief saw a king, even when everything around him said otherwise: “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.” He just wanted to be with him. And the centurion—something broke open in him. He saw that this death was not defeat. It was revelation. The question Good Friday puts to each of us is the same: when you stand at the foot of the cross, who do you see?

Discussion Questions

5. The centurion in Mark 15:39 had every reason not to see Jesus clearly. He was a Roman soldier. He had likely participated in the execution itself. And yet he is the one who says, “Truly this man was the Son of God.” Read 1 Corinthians 1:18 together: “For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.” As a group, share with each other: who in your life saw Jesus from an unlikely place? Someone you would not have expected to come to faith, who did. What was it that finally opened their eyes?
 6. In Luke 23:39–43, two thieves are crucified next to Jesus. One mocks him. The other asks to be remembered. Same Jesus, same cross, same suffering, two completely different responses. As a group, walk through what you notice about each thief—what they were focused on, what they were asking for, what they could and couldn’t see. What do their two responses teach us about what makes the difference between people who look at the cross and see foolishness, and people who look at the cross and see their Savior?
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His truest glory was not his miracles, his teaching, or his kindness. His truest glory was the cross—and the love that put him there for you.