

## An Amazing Finish

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*John 13:31-35 31 When he was gone, Jesus said, "Now is the Son of Man glorified and God is glorified in him. 32 If God is glorified in him, God will glorify the Son in himself, and will glorify him at once. 33 "My children, I will be with you only a little longer. You will look for me, and just as I told the Jews, so I tell you now: Where I am going, you cannot come. 34 "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. 35 By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."*

Many of you know that I like to watch sports on TV, especially football. I also like to watch basketball. I followed the Mavericks this year. I still can't believe what happened to them in the first round of the playoffs! I also watched March Madness, the NCAA tournament. That was especially fun for me this year because Texas A&M was in the mix for a while. One Saturday afternoon, Cheryl and I clicked on the television to watch part of that tournament, but there was another game playing that was not yet finished. It was the NCAA Division II championship game between Winona State and Barton. I had never heard of either of these teams. As we were watching, we discovered that Winona State was the defending NCAA Division II champions from last year and had a 57 game winning streak. We saw the last 4 or 5 minutes of the game. With 45 seconds to go, Winona State had a seven point lead. I'm going to show you the last 45 seconds of the game this morning. ●

As I said, I watched this as it was happening. There was no way I could have predicted that ending. It was up and down, back and forth. A big comeback and a free throw opportunity with at chance to tie, only to miss the free throw, foul the other team, get the ball back, score to tie the game, steal the ball and score again at the buzzer for the win. **What an amazing finish.** Totally unexpected, but amazing. It was a gut-wrenching experience for both teams and their fans. The winner was not the one everyone thought it would be.

Today's Gospel reading is part of the dialog Jesus had with His disciples on the night he would be betrayed and handed over for trial, beatings, sentencing, and crucifixion. He was telling them that He must do all of this. It is the reason He came. This is how he will be glorified. In the eyes of the world, including His disciples, it didn't seem like He was being glorified, **but this is God being glorified.** Dying for the sins of the world. Dying so that we might live. Paying the price in our place so that we could be spared. Crucified, dead, and buried.

That should have been that. The disciples had been with Jesus about three years. They had traveled with Him, listened to His teachings, watched Him perform miracles and healings. They had heard Him proclaim the coming of the Kingdom of God. They believed He was the Messiah, that a new day was dawning, that they would be eyewitnesses to Jesus taking control and ruling over Israel. But when they got to Jerusalem, in spite of the welcome on Palm Sunday, things did not go as the disciples had planned. Jesus was gone. Game over.

But not so fast. When Barton was down by seven points with only 45 seconds left on the clock, many people, myself included, thought “game over.” Yet there was an amazing finish. If you had said that to the disciples on Good Friday, they would have thought you were crazy. First of all, they didn’t know what basketball was, but never mind that. They would have said, “How can you compare a game to a death? Death is final. Game over!” And so it would seem. But this was God being glorified. There was an amazing finish still in store. Jesus would remain in that tomb for the Sabbath, but very early, on the first day of the week, the most unlikely and unimaginable outcome began to unfold. The earth shook. Rocks split. An angel came down from heaven and rolled the stone away. The guards fled. **Jesus was alive!** This is God in all His glory. An amazing finish. Good News for you and me and all who will believe in Jesus. His death had paid for sin. His resurrection opens heaven for us. Because He lives, we have our own amazing finish in store. We will live also.

But today’s text is prior to all this happening. Jesus knew what was in store, but the disciples were watching it all unfold before their eyes, like watching a game and not knowing what the outcome would be.

Something else Jesus said in this passage is **Where I am going you cannot come.** He is speaking about going to His death that would be the payment for sin. In the following verses, Peter says he wants to go with him.

*Simon Peter asked him, “Lord, where are you going?” Jesus replied, “Where I am going, you cannot follow now, but you will follow later.” Peter asked, “Lord, why can’t I follow you now? I will lay down my life for you.” Then Jesus answered, “Will you really lay down your life for me? I tell you the truth, before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times! John 13:36-38*

Peter wants to be with Jesus, bragging that he would lay down His life for Jesus. He didn't know that is exactly what he would take. And Jesus predicts that Peter would deny even knowing Jesus before the night was over. Yet there is a hint of mercy and forgiveness and restoration here. He tells Peter that He would follow Him later. Peter would indeed lay down His life for Jesus. Peter's death would not be to pay for sin, like the death of Jesus, but he would give His life telling others who Jesus is and what He did for all people.

In the verses that follow this, the beginning of chapter 14, Jesus explains a little more about where He would be going. After His death and His resurrection, He would be returning to heaven, His Father's house, where He would prepare a place for His followers, so that you and I can be where He is. More of that amazing finish! This is when Thomas says,

*Lord, we don't know where you are going, so how can we know the way?" Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. (John 14:5-6)*

Now remember, all this is being said before the crucifixion, before the resurrection. As the evening progressed, the disciples watched in horror as everything unfolded. Peter took a stand in the Garden of Gethsemane, chopping off a guy's ear, but later he denied that he knew Jesus. Jesus was paraded back and forth between Pilate and Herod, enduring brutal beatings and false accusations. They watched Him nailed to the cross. They saw Him die. He was buried. But there was another amazing finish. One that He wants to share with everyone. **[Resurrection Clip]**

In this passage, Jesus talks about being glorified with His Father. We want to give Him all the glory for what He has done. We do that in many ways. One is when we share Him with others. Another is in our worship and singing. I came across a quote this week from an old Lutheran song writer, a fellow by the name of Johann Sebastian Bach:

**The aim and final reason for all music should be nothing else but the glory of God and the refreshment of the spirit**

And that made me think of that old Gospel Song, "To God be the Glory."

**To God be the glory great things He hath done, So loved He the world that He gave us His Son. Who yielded His life an atonement for sin, And opened the life gate that all may go in.**

**O perfect redemption, the purchase of blood, To ev'ry believer the promise of God; The vilest offender who truly believes, That moment from Jesus a pardon receives.**

Praise the Lord, Praise the Lord, let the earth hear his voice  
Praise the Lord, Praise the Lord, let the people rejoice!  
O come to the Father thro Jesus the Son, And give Him the glory, great things He hath done.

**To God be the Glory.** Because of what Jesus has done for you, there is an amazing finish in store for you.