

John 12:20-33

We Would See Jesus: Desiring to See Christ

In John chapter 11 we read of the dishonor done to our Lord Jesus, when the scribes and Pharisees proclaimed him a traitor to their religion, and put upon him all the marks of disgrace they could.

But the story in John chapter 12 balances that, by giving us an account of the honor done to the Redeemer, notwithstanding all that reproach thrown upon him. Thus the one was set over against the other.

Matthew Henry observes there are seven honors bestowed upon the Lord in John 12, “ I. Mary did him honor, by anointing his feet at the supper in Bethany, John 12:1-11. II. The common people did him honor, with their acclamations of joy, when he rode in triumph into Jerusalem, John 12:12-19. III. The Greeks did him honor, by enquiring after him with a longing desire to see him, John 12:20-26. IV. God the Father did him honor, by a voice from heaven, bearing testimony to him, John 12:27-36.

V. He had honor done him by the Old Testament prophets, who foretold the infidelity of those that heard the report of him, John 12:37-41. VI. He had honor done him by some of the chief rulers, whose consciences witnessed for him, though they had not courage to own it, John 12:42-43. VII. He claimed honor to himself, by asserting his divine mission, and the account he gave of his errand into the world, John 12:44-50.”

I would like to focus our attention upon the third honor: when the Greeks honored him by enquiring after him with a longing desire to see him.

We read in verse 20, “And there were certain Greeks among them that came up to worship at the feast: the same came therefore to Philip, which was of Bethsaida of Galilee, and desired him, saying, Sir, we would see Jesus.”

Is that your desire today, “I would see Jesus?” Are you here this morning to meet with Christ? Desiring to see Christ must be our highest aim in worship.

Notice the word *feast* in verse 20. It refers to the Feast of Passover, one of the three major feasts the Jews celebrate every year (the other two are Tabernacles and Pentecost).

The Book of Exodus records the first Passover took place in Egypt when the Angel of the Lord *passed over* the homes of the Israelites because of the sprinkled blood on the doorposts.

Similarly, The Lord Jesus Christ was crucified on the Passover, signifying when the blood of Christ is applied to the heart of a sinner the Lord's wrath will pass over them.

Later, the Apostle Paul, writing in I Corinthians 5:7 declares, "For even Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us."

The Feast of Passover would soon be fulfilled when Christ went to the Cross and died for the sins of His people.

Has the blood of Christ been applied to your sins?
Will God's wrath pass over you or will it destroy you?

During the Feast of Passover, there were some traveling Greeks who desired to see Christ. Who were these Greeks?

Adam Clark writes, “There are three opinions concerning these: 1. That they were proselytes of the gate or covenant, who came up to worship the true God at this feast. 2. That they were real Jews, who lived in Grecian provinces, and spoke the Greek language. 3. That they were mere Gentiles, who never knew the true God: and hearing of the fame of the temple, or the miracles of our Lord, came to offer sacrifices to Jehovah, and to worship him according to the manner of the people of that land.

This was not an infrequent case: many of the Gentiles, Romans, and others, were in the habit of sending sacrifices to the temple at Jerusalem. Of these opinions the reader may choose; but the first seems best founded: they were proselytes of the gate or covenant, who came up to worship the true God at this feast.”

Why did they want to see Jesus?

Albert Barnes writes, “It is probable that the word *see*, here, implies also a desire to converse with him, or to hear his doctrine about the nature of his kingdom. They had seen or heard of his triumphal entry into Jerusalem, and, either by curiosity or a desire to be instructed, they came and interceded with his disciples that they might be permitted to see him. In this there was nothing wrong. Christ made the curiosity of Zaccheus the means of his conversion, Lu 19:1-9. If we wish to find the Saviour, we must seek for him and take the proper means.”

We hopefully have gathered here today in the Lord’s House with the same expectation and desire as the Greeks had, to see Christ. Therefore, the title of my message is, *We Would See Jesus: Desiring to See Christ*. What was it that the Greeks saw in Christ? What did they hear Christ say? The things they saw and heard about Christ are the same things that we must see in Christ today. There are two things we see regarding the Lord Jesus Christ from John 12.

1. First and most striking observation we see is Jesus preparing to die.

We read in verse 23, “And Jesus answered them, saying, The hour is come, that the Son of man should be glorified.”

Christ was referring to his death. This must have come as a complete shock to the inquiring Greeks when they heard these foreboding words of death from Christ. They probably witnessed his triumphal entry into Jerusalem. Some might have even hoped that Christ would bring social and political reform to the region, and drive out the cancer known as the Roman Empire.

Rather than inciting revolution, **Christ speaks about his appointment with death**, “*The hour is come.* The time has come for me to die,” says Christ. The word *hour* commonly means a definite part or a division of a day; but it also is used to denote a brief period, and a fixed, definite, determined time. It is used in this sense here. The appointed, fixed time is come—that is, is so near at hand that it may be said to be come.

We read in I Peter 1:18-20, “Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers; But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot: **Who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you.**”

Christ was foreordained to die for the sins of His people. He was appointed in the Divine purpose to be sent into the world.

Barnes adds, “That is, it was foreordained, or predetermined, that he should be the great atoning Sacrifice for sin. On the meaning of the word foreordained. The word is rendered which knew, foreknew and foreknow. It does not elsewhere occur in the New Testament. The sense is, that the plan was formed, and the arrangements made for the atonement, before the world was created.

It was arranged by the Eternal Godhead, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, before the foundation of the world that Christ would die as a sacrifice for the sins of His people. It was before man was formed; before the earth was made; before any of the material universe was brought into being; before the angels were created.”

The Greeks saw a Jesus that they perhaps did not expect to see- the sinless, peerless Lamb of God appointed to die for the sins of His people. Do you see your need for Christ? Christ died so that sinners might live.

We see Christ moves from his appointment with death to his comparison of death.

We read in verse 24, “**Verily, verily**, I say unto you, Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit.”

The words verily, verily is an expression denoting the great importance of what he was about to say.

Albert Barnes observes, “We cannot but admire the wisdom by which he introduces the subject of his death. They had seen his triumph. They supposed that he was about to establish his kingdom. He told them that the time had come in which he was to be glorified, but not in the manner in which they expected. It was to be by his death.

But as they would not at once see how this could be, as it would appear to dash their hopes, he takes occasion to illustrate it by a beautiful comparison. All the beauty and richness of the harvest results from the fact that the grain had died. If it had not died it would never have germinated or produced the glory of the yellow harvest. So with him.

By this he still keeps before them the truth that he was to be glorified, but he delicately and beautifully introduces the idea still that he must die.”

We see his comparison of death.

In addition to the appointment and comparison of Christ’s death, we see **the prospect of his death**, and it was grim.

We read in verse 27, “Now is my soul troubled; and what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour: but for this cause came I unto this hour.”

While Christ was preaching of his own death and sufferings, a natural horror of his approaching passion seized upon him. The Father was giving him a taste of that wrath which he was to undergo upon the cross for our sins.

He felt the infinite weight of becoming sin for his people. Horatius Bonar writes, “Ah! Mine iniquity Crimson has been, Infinite, infinite Sin upon sin.” The infinite sin of sinners was to be laid on the sinless, perfect Son of God.

The mention of his death brought before him its approaching horrors, its pains, its darkness, its unparalleled woes. Jesus was full of acute sensibility, and his human nature shrunk from the scenes through which he was to pass.

A theologian writes, “What shall I say? This is an expression denoting intense anxiety and perplexity. As if it were a subject of debate whether he could bear those sufferings; or whether the work of man's redemption should be abandoned, and he should call

upon God to save him. Blessed be his name that he was willing to endure these sorrows, and did not forsake man when he was so near being redeemed! On the decision of that moment--the fixed and unwavering purpose of the Son of God -- depended man's salvation. If Jesus had forsaken his purpose then, all would have been lost.”

Such was the intense emotion of horror about his death Christ takes himself to prayer, “Father, save me from this hour...” This was the harmless inclination of his sinless nature, which abhorred laying under wrath, and therefore prays again unto his Father to dispose of him as may most and best conduce to the purposes of his glory, “Father, glorify thy name.”

Will you face and experience the horror of God’s wrath for your sin? Or will you believe in Jesus Christ, and as your substitute, avoid the horror of being the object of God’s anger and fury? Christ must be the object or you must be the object of God’s holy indignation against sin. What will it be? You or Christ?

We see the prospect of Christ’s death.

We see the glory of his death.

We read in verse 28, “Father, glorify thy name. Then came there a voice from heaven, saying, I have both glorified it, and **will glorify it again.**”

The theme of glory continues in verses 32 and 33, “And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me. This he said, signifying what death he should die.”

Christ was to be glorified in his death. How?

The Father is saying to His Son, “I have sent thee into the world to make an atonement for the sin of the world, and to satisfy my offended justice. I will finish my work. You will shed your blood upon the cross. My glory is interested in the consummation of your sacrifice. But, in procuring my own glory, I shall procure yours. Your life and your death glorify me: I have glorified you by the miracles which have accompanied your mission; and I will continue to glorify you at your death, and your resurrection will be the completion of your glory and of your exaltation.”

Clarke adds, “Christ was glorified: 1st. By the events which happened at his death. 2. In his resurrection. 3. In his ascension, and sitting at the right hand of God. 4. In the descent of the Holy Ghost on the apostles. and 5. In the astonishing success with which the Gospel was accompanied, and by which the kingdom of Christ has been established in the world. 2Co 2:14.”

Ultimately, The death of Christ would not end in defeat and tragedy but in victory and glory to God the Father and Jesus Christ, and in the salvation of sinners.

We see the glory of Christ’s death.

We see Jesus calling men to follow Him.

We read in verse 26, “If any man serve me, let him follow me; and where I am, there shall also my servant be: if any man serve me, him will my Father honor.”

You might think with how Christ spoke regarding the necessity and certainty of his death that there would be no point in calling men to follow after Him. But the death of Christ was not the end of Him.

If anything, Christ's preparation for death underscored even more the urgency and importance of men following the Lord. Christ exhorts men to follow Him.

Christ is saying, "Let him imitate me; do what I do, bear what I bear, and love what I love. He is discoursing here particularly of his own sufferings and death, and this passage has reference, therefore, to calamity and persecution. You see me triumph-- you see me enter Jerusalem, and you supposed that my kingdom was to be set up without opposition or calamity; but it is not. I am to die; and if you will serve me, you must follow me even in these scenes of calamity; be willing to endure trial and to bear shame, looking for future reward."

We read in I Peter 1:6-9, "Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations: That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ:

Whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory: Receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls.”

Are you following after Christ? Are you suffering trials and difficulties in your life? Christ did and so must we as His followers. We must take up our Cross daily and follow after Him. The power of Christ that saved us from sin is also the same power that sustains and strengthens us in this world.

In closing, there were some Greeks who wanted to see Jesus. What did they see? They saw a man preparing to die. They heard Christ speak about various aspects of His death. Christ’s death was appointed. Christ’s death was compared to a seed of wheat that falls to the ground and dies and bears much fruit. Christ’s death was a horrible prospect. Christ’s death was for the glory of God and for the salvation of sinners. The Greeks also saw Christ calling men to follow after Him. Christ calls you to follow him today. Will you follow after Christ? Do you see Christ dying on the Cross for your sins? Do you see how terrible and awful your sin is? Might we all see Jesus today and follow after Him with all of our hearts. Let us pray!