

May 3, 2015
Sunday Morning Service
Series: John
Community Baptist Church
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To Ponder . . .

Questions to ponder as you prepare to hear from John 12:20-26.

1. What does the Greek word *Helein* found in verse twenty mean?
2. Why does it appear that Philip and Andrew were confused?
3. Why did Jesus respond to this request by talking about His glorification?
4. Why is it necessary for us to die to self if we will be used to show others to Christ?

SOMEONE DESIRES TO SEE JESUS

John 12:20-26

How many Jewish people do you know who are followers of Jesus Christ? Actually most of us know very few Jewish people to begin with. And of those few acquaintances, very few are born again. It is an amazing story that reveals God's gracious plan.

Jesus taught that it was God's plan to present the good news of salvation to the children of Abraham first. He told the Samaritan woman that salvation is from the Jews (John 4:24). That is because God promised Abraham, the father of the Jewish nation, that the whole would be blessed through His posterity. Jesus the Savior was born in Abraham's lineage. He was Jewish. He is the blessing for all people.

But as John told us in the opening verses of this Gospel, Jesus came to His own people and they rejected Him. That opened the door for the most amazing outpouring of God's grace toward people who are not

born in Abraham's line. That is the rest of us. We are Gentiles. As we peruse the annals of Church history, we are struck by the fact that almost everyone who has responded to the invitation to be born again through faith in Jesus Christ is Gentile. In fact, it seems that the common opinion today is that apparently God intended that the gospel was for only the Gentiles.

That Gentiles would be brought into the family of God is promised over and over in the New Testament writings. Paul taught in Romans 9:30 that Gentiles have received righteousness through faith. He reminded us that Isaiah had promised way back in 700 BC that this would happen (Romans 10:20). That is what he meant when he wrote, "*And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, 'In you shall all the nations be blessed'*" (Galatians 3:8). Jesus taught the same thing when He told the Jewish listeners, "*And I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd*" (John 10:16).

As events were quickly reaching the point when God the Son would pay the penalty for sin through His suffering and death, this issue about God's grace to the Gentiles popped up—seemingly out of nowhere. It was the week of the Passover, one of the most significant weeks on the Jewish calendar. Jesus had entered Jerusalem like a victorious General to the shouts and accolades of the crowd. Probably the next day He cleaned from the temple the merchants who made up the Sadducee's Bazaar. That action escalated the ire of those who wanted to kill Him.

It might be within that immediate context that these Greek people showed up seeking a meeting with Jesus. They were Gentiles. They were devoted to what they knew about God. And Jesus' response is packed with significance for everyone who desires to be right with their Creator and a special challenge for everyone who would tell sinners how to be right with their Creator.

A Request to Meet Jesus (vv.20-22).

We might be surprised by who desires to see Jesus. John wrote, (20) *Now among those who went up to worship at the feast were some Greeks. (21) So these came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and asked him, "Sir, we wish to see Jesus."* Right away we are

faced with a question when we read this opening statement. What were Greeks doing at the Passover Feast? The New Testament word for Greeks is *Helein* which gives us our English name Helen. The word or concept referred to anyone who subscribed to or promoted the ancient Greek culture. Sometimes the word pointed out the contrast or conflict between Jews who desired to maintain strict Jewish distinctions and those who desired to fit in with their “modern” world. Ultimately, it came to refer to Gentiles as a whole being contrasted to Jews.

It was no secret in that day that the Jews who gathered for this significant celebration of Passover would not welcome pagan Gentiles with open arms. Even God’s plan for the temple area dictated that the people of Gentile lineage had to stay in the outer court which was located on the outskirts of the temple compound. This encouraged the general attitude of the Jewish people and especially their leaders who saw Gentiles as outcasts who were unacceptable. The extreme view held that God created Gentiles to fuel the fires of hell.

But there they were. Some Gentile people who believed God, worshiped Him, and desired to know more about Him showed up at the feast. It is possible that some of them were proselytes who were devout worshippers of God. Proselytes would have been baptized into the Jewish religion and then willingly subjected themselves to the Mosaic Law. No doubt many of the proselytes, like many of the Jews, were looking forward to Messiah coming to establish His Kingdom. We know that one of the first deacons of the Church was Nicolaus a proselyte of Antioch (Acts 6:5).

At the same time, there were other Gentiles who worshiped God who were not proselytes. We know from the story in *the Acts* that at the celebration of Pentecost, forty days after this Passover, there were **devout** men from every nation staying in Jerusalem (Acts 2:5). That word (*devout*) describes Gentiles who loved God and worshiped God, but who were not a part of Judaism. That would be a guy like the Ethiopian eunuch who worshiped at Jerusalem but could not be a proselyte because he was a eunuch. Cornelius was a devout worshiper of God who impacted his entire household (Acts 10:2). But he could not have been a proselyte because Peter considered him unclean.

These devout Gentiles might easily have been considered by pure Jews like people who don’t fit our mold for the kind of people who would like to see Jesus. Are we surprised to learn that there are people of a different race who are searching for Jesus? What do we think when

we hear that people from different nationalities like Asians or Middle Eastern people would see Jesus? What about eternal souls who grew up and embrace different religions like Hindu or Islam? Would they ever desire to see Jesus? Let’s not forget that some of the very first people to visit the King at His birth were scholars from Persia—they were almost certainly non-Jewish. Why do we think that only people from a Christian-Judeo background want to see Jesus?

Furthermore, we are prone to wonder why the Gentiles chose to speak to Philip about the matter. The text mentions that Philip was from Bethsaida in Galilee. Okay, but so were his fellow disciples: Andrew, Peter, James and John. That would not have been a compelling reason to talk to Philip. Maybe they went to Philip because his was a particularly significant Gentile name. Philip of Macedon was the father of Alexander the Great. Philip the Tetrarch was the half-brother of Herod Antipas who stole his wife Herodias (Mark 6:17). Is it possible that the Gentiles could have sensed that a man with a Greek name could identify with them better?

They said to Philip, “*Sir, we wish to see Jesus.*” Why did they want to see Jesus? Their request can be interpreted to mean, “We have the desire, we wish . . .” It is more like the request was to have an interview with Jesus or spend some time with Him than to simply see Him or look at Him. Therefore, the request was much like the message Jesus received that His mother and brothers were outside desiring to see Him. They didn’t just want to see Jesus. They wanted to talk to Him (Luke 8:20). It was much like Herod’s desire to see Jesus (Luke 9:9).

The Gentiles’ request indicates that these people were not just curiosity-seekers like the unbelieving Jew named Zaccheus who climbed a tree in order to get a view of this Jesus fellow. In fact, it is altogether likely that these Gentiles were also looking for Messiah. Maybe Jesus’ miraculous signs and authoritative teaching attracted their attention. We must remember that this request for a meeting came after the triumphal entry and probably after the cleansing of the temple. Those events alone would have caused the Gentiles to think, “Okay, this man is important. Could He be the Christ?”

How odd that at the very time the Jewish authorities were trying to get rid of Jesus, the Gentiles wanted to talk to Him! And so, having been crucified and risen from the tomb in order to offer salvation through His sacrifice, it is not the Jewish people, but the Gentiles by and large, who have embraced that sacrifice for salvation. Why do people in your

culture want to see Jesus? And what do we tell them when they indicate this desire?

When people ask to see Jesus, we ought to be able to introduce them. Instead, we read that *Philip went and told Andrew; Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus (v.22)*. Why was there an apparent confusion here? It seemed like Philip didn't exactly know how to respond. So he enlisted Andrew's help, who also didn't know for sure what to say. Maybe we can explain the disciples' hesitancy by considering their past experience. Previously Jesus had sent the twelve apostles to minister specifically to the Jews. Matthew recorded, *These twelve Jesus sent out, instructing them, "Go nowhere among the Gentiles and enter no town of the Samaritans" (Matthew 10:5)*. But at the same time, Jesus showed kindness and grace to Gentiles. For example, there was the Canaanite woman whose daughter Jesus released from the power of demons (Matthew 15:22). Then there was the Roman Centurion whose servant Jesus healed and Jesus commended the man's faith (Matthew 8:13).

So Philip consulted with Andrew, and they both went to Jesus—wherever He was. Maybe He was in the temple area where the Gentiles could not go? Maybe He had just run the merchants out of His Father's house.

An important question generated by this story is, "How do you respond when someone asks you about Jesus?" You might answer that question by saying, "No one ever asks me about Jesus." Why not? Do they suspect that you do not know Jesus? If sinners presume that you are just like they are, why would they ask you about Jesus the Savior from sin? What if the person who asks about Jesus is not in your "class" of people? Will you tell someone from a different race about Jesus? Will you tell someone from a different religion about Jesus, or will you assume they just want to argue? Will you tell a poor person about Jesus? Will you talk to a person who embraces same-sex attraction about Jesus?

When we do have the opportunity to speak about Jesus, what do we say? Normally, we want the seeker to know that Jesus loves them, that God their Creator loves them through Jesus, and that they can have assurance of a mansion in heaven if they will just be kind enough to believe in Jesus. But Jesus didn't respond to the request like that.

A Surprising Response (vv.23-26).

Essentially, Jesus' response when the two disciples told Him that the Greeks were without, was to say, "I am about to die." More precisely He told them that it was time for Him, the Son of Man, to be glorified. *And Jesus answered them, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified" (v.23)*. There is no indication that Jesus directed this statement to the Gentiles who requested a meeting. It seems more likely that He spoke to Philip and Andrew or maybe all of the disciples.

Whoever received the message, it is clear that now, at this moment, it was time for the Son of Man to be glorified. Jesus almost always used the title Son of Man in connection with suffering and paying the price for redemption from sin. Up to this point in the story of Jesus' ministry, this hour of glorification had always been future. We read in John 7:39 that Jesus was not yet glorified. We just studied last week that the disciples didn't understand what the triumphal entry was all about until Jesus had been glorified (John 12:16).

The glorification of God the Son was not one particular point or action, but a process that involved many significant events over a period of many days. Therefore, Christ was glorified when Judas began the process by betraying Him to the authorities. He was glorified when He was mocked and lied about at His trial, but did not revile in return. He was glorified when He was scourged and tortured by the Roman soldiers taking stripes that should have been ours. He was glorified when He was killed on the cross of shame, paying the price for our sins. He was glorified when He was buried, making His grave with the rich. He was glorified when He rose triumphant over death, taking away the sting of death for all who will trust Him. He was glorified when He ascended into heaven to be seated at the right hand of God the Father where He intercedes with His blood for us.

In eternity, God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit had determined the precise hour for this glorification to begin. But how does this truth connect with the Gentiles' desire to meet Jesus? Christ's glorification—His suffering, death, resurrection, ascension and interceding—is the basis of anyone's or everyone's relationship with Him. A relationship with Jesus is not based on His mighty works—though they are instruments to attract us to believe in Him. A relationship with Jesus is not based on us being impressed with the authority with which He taught—though what He taught is absolute truth.

If we will meet with Jesus, we must embrace by faith the reality that He has suffered, paid the price for our sin, and intercedes for us in heaven. To that end, death for Jesus was His glory. He told the disciples, *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 (v.24).*

In order to explain His glory, Jesus shared a picture that everyone who lived in that agrarian society would understand. The farmer places one grain, one kernel of seed corn in the good soil. In time, a stalk of corn grows up and on it are multiple ears of corn. On each ear of corn are dozens more kernels that look just like the one that was put in the dirt.

Jesus said that like that seed, He needed to die. When in His death the Son of Man paid the price for our freedom, we discover the most glorious moment of salvation history. God had promised this truth centuries earlier. Isaiah declared, *Behold, my servant shall act wisely; he shall be high and lifted up, and shall be exalted (Isaiah 52:13).* Because God the Son died, He produces spiritual fruit to His own glory. Through His death, He offers to us abundant life—life the way our Creator intended for us to live it. That is why Jesus promised, *“The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly” (John 10:10).*

God the Son had to endure incomprehensible suffering, shame, and death. In that, He was glorified because He paid the price for sin. He proved victorious when He rose from the grave and ascended to heaven. “Now, Mr. Philip and Mr. Andrew go tell the good news to the Gentiles who would see Me.” Oh, but the principle of dying seed producing fruit can be painful. Eleven of the disciples would prove how costly with their lives.

Here is the lesson we must not miss. If you are going to show people to Jesus, you will need to die (vv.25-26). That requirement fits with God’s odd principle that losing is gain. Human nature doesn’t see it that way. Nevertheless, Jesus taught, *“Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life” (v.25).*

To love myself is to deny my Creator His right to own and rule me and to deny His desire to love me. Self-love does not leave room for others to love. Self-love is a misperception of one’s own depravity and need for redemption from sin. And yet we all know that self-love is normal in this world. Yes, but God also teaches that the present world in which we live is an evil world. It is an evil world because it is awash in

sin. God teaches that sin leads to death; indeed, we are dying while we sin. Against that backdrop, it is wonderful news to hear that Jesus came to give life. He gives abundant life now. He promises eternal life in the future.

All that is required to have this God-kind of life is our death to self. The Lord’s promise is that if we choose to love this life (which is considered normal and perfectly acceptable), we will lose it. Conversely, He promised that if we die to the normal desires of this life, we gain eternal life. That is what “blessed are the poor in spirit” means. Normal people do not understand this. Only God’s gracious work through the Holy Spirit will open people’s eyes to this truth.

Here is the connection. Telling this wonderful story demands death to self because people often do not respond pleasantly to the news. But that’s okay because Jesus promised that faithful service results in honor. Yes, the cost for service is high. Jesus said, *If anyone serves me, he must follow me; and where I am, there will my servant be also (v.26a).* “Me” (referring to Jesus) is the key here. The object of our love is revealed by our focus. Focus is revealed in following. If we are to serve Jesus Christ, we must follow Him. The idea of following is as in the disciple who gives all to become like the Master. When Jesus said, “Follow Me,” He also said “Take up your cross and follow Me.”

The cost is high, so count the cost carefully. Be careful to consider all the cost like a builder who is planning to build a house (Luke 14:28). Or be careful like the king who is planning to go to war (Luke 14:30).

The cost for serving Christ is high, but the reward is higher. Jesus went on to say, *If anyone serves me, the Father will honor him (v.26b).* Jesus taught that the Father gives honor even in this life. *Jesus said, “Truly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands, for my sake and for the gospel, who will not receive a hundredfold now in this time, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions, and in the age to come eternal life” (Mark 10:29-30).*

From this statement we also learn that God will honor the faithful servant in the age to come with eternal life. Mansions, gold streets, golden crowns, white robes? —none of that matters as long as we have the promise of living forever with our Savior and being like Him.

People still need to meet with Jesus just like those Gentiles did. For the most part, people are so busy living life that they never get around to asking where and how they can meet with the Savior. But when

someone asks, we should be ready to give them an answer. We need to be prepared as Peter said. *But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled, but in your hearts regard Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you (1 Peter 3:14-15).* We need to be prepared to pay the cost. We need to be prepared to tell them the good news that Jesus died and rose again so that they might have abundant life and eternal life. To tell the good news will require us to die to self in order to produce fruit for God's glory.