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## We Wish to See Jesus

### John 12:20-26

**Intro:** Last week, we looked at the triumphal entry of Christ into Jerusalem. We noted that by John's time stamp in vs12, this was the second day of the last week of the Lord's earthly ministry. His entry into the city caused quite a stir among those who were there to attend the feast, with those who had witnessed the raising of Lazarus from the dead and, of course, with the ever-present and never-pleased religious authorities. It was here, at the triumphal entry, that they finally realize that all their effort and plotting against Jesus has come to nothing. The evidence of this to them was the large gathering of people who appeared to cheer Jesus as He entered Jerusalem. They declared, with some measure of exaggeration, "Look, the world has gone after Him!" Sadly, they didn't know how right they actually were.

**20-21-** Nothing is mentioned of the background of these certain Greeks. It's most likely that they were God-fearers: people attracted to Judaism for its morality and mono-theism but didn't care to become true Jewish proselytes by circumcision. It could be that they were simply Greek travelers who had heard about Jesus or may have seen His entry into the city and were curious enough about Him to seek an audience with Him. That's really what they wanted and apparently, they were not to be deterred. The verb tense for asked (21) is continuous, meaning they kept asking.

Now, no actual question is recorded but one is implied: Sir, we wish to see Jesus. See means to visit or interview. Anyone could see Jesus as He moved among the crowds but these Greeks clearly wanted more than that. They wanted to talk to Jesus, to get to know Him. How many souls have come to accept Jesus Christ as savior who were at first, merely curious about Him? Many in that day came out to see and hear Jesus because of what others had said of Him; then found their minds captivated by His teaching and their heart captured by His person. Zacchaeus was one such convert. Many people since that day have gone to hear someone speak about Jesus out of curiosity and have heard of His miracles and His mercies and in the hearing, have felt the power of the Holy Spirit and have become true converts of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

This is not the first time Jesus has been sought out by a group of Gentiles. The Gentile Magi traveled far to see Jesus when He was but a young child. The Wise Men came to the cradle of King of the Jews; these Greeks have come to His cross. It's commendable that they sought Jesus out at all, considering the social climate of the city was beginning to turn against Him. No doubt, many people wanted a private interview with Jesus but were afraid of the Pharisees. These Greeks, being foreigners, were either ignorant of the dangers or unfazed by the consequences. It's also interesting to note that the Jews would say, "We would see a sign!" but these men said, "We would see Jesus." This alone is enough to reveal both the openness of the Greeks hearts and the hardness of the Jewish hearts.

Another interesting thing about this passage is that we are never told if the Greeks who made this request actually met with Jesus. John treats their coming to Jesus as being significant but their further presence is not important to the text. What is important to John is the Lord's response to their question. This is because His response points to the significance of the fact that they had asked it! All of this is of the utmost importance to us today. Why? The main significance of this story lies in the fact that we will see Jesus when we properly understand His response

We're told that the Greeks came to Philip first. We don't know why they sought him out; maybe because he had a Greek name. We're also not told why he hesitated to bring them to Jesus immediately. We must admit, from the disciple's perspective, there had been some ambiguity in the Lord's dealings with Gentiles. When Jesus sent the 12 out on their first preaching mission, He instructed them, "Do not go into the way of the Gentiles, and do not enter a city of the Samaritans. But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." (Mt 10:5-6) When the Syrophoenician woman came to Jesus, begging Him to heal her daughter He told her, "Let the children be filled first, for it is not good to take the children's bread and throw it to the little dogs." (Mk 7:27) He had even informed the Samaritan woman that, "Salvation is of the Jews." (4:22) Still, Jesus had apparently gone out of His way to not only reach the Samaritan woman but to also preach to her entire town. He did, in fact, heal the Syrophoenician woman's daughter. Jesus was never bigoted in His statements or actions towards Gentiles; He just felt an obligation to proclaim the coming of His kingdom to Israel first, in fulfillment of OT prophecies. Plus, He knew these prophecies foretold of a turning to

the Gentiles after Israel had rejected her Messiah. Philip didn't know any of this at the time, so he called for back-up.

**23-** Jesus' answer here is surprising! I'm not sure what Philip and Andrew were expecting him to say when they told Him about the Greeks, but I'm pretty sure they weren't expecting this response! They might've expected Him to say, "I'm not seeing Greeks right now" or even "Bring them on over!" Jesus doesn't say either of these things. In fact, He doesn't make any reference to the Greeks at all, not now or later. This doesn't mean that He viewed their coming as insignificant. On the contrary, it was of the utmost importance to Him. Jesus seems to consider the coming of these Greeks as the evidence that the climax of His earthly mission had arrived at last. He's now ready to die for the world!

Thus, the first point of Jesus' reply is that His hour had come. This makes us think of all the times in John's Gospel when we were told that His hour had not yet come. The first time was in **ch2**, when His mother told Him the wine had run out at the wedding. His response to her was, "Woman, what does your concern have to do with Me? My hour has not yet come." (**2:4**) Jesus wasn't being contrary here; He's simply saying the hour of His crucifixion hadn't yet come and He didn't want to draw attention to Himself thru a public miracle. When His own brothers egged Him to go up to Jerusalem in **ch7**, His response was the same, "My time has not yet fully come." (**7:8**) On 2 other occasions, the religious leaders were unable to arrest Jesus because, as John tells us, "His hour had not yet come." (**7:30; 8:20**)

This was the case for 3.5 yrs of His ministry, now it suddenly changes. Why? All because of the coming of these unnamed Greeks to Him in Jerusalem. What was the significance of this to Jesus? Clearly, this was a sign that the turning point had come, the result of which salvation would now be offered to Greeks as well as the Jews! This would be the beginning of the proclamation of the Gospel to the whole world! John implies this major shift by using contrast in the text. The contrast is seen in the picture of these Greeks vs. the picture of the Pharisees in **vs19**. The Pharisees had rejected Jesus. They were Jews, the most highly regarded of religious figures. Yet they had rejected Jesus and were trying to kill Him. But, here were Gentiles, strangers and aliens from the house of Israel, seeking Him. It seems the entire world, as represented by these Greeks, was beginning to follow after Him (**19**).

The second part of Jesus' response here in [vs23](#) is that now is the time for Him to be glorified. There are 2 ways that this was true. It was obviously glorifying to Jesus to have the Greeks come to Him, to have all men come to Him for salvation. People tend to think the opposite way. We tend to think we've "made it" when we become exclusive. The more exclusive we are, the more glorious we appear. It's difficult to "rub shoulders" with the "great" of this world. We call them "the upper-crust" or "1%ers." They spend a lot of time trying to keep people out of their circle while most everyone else is trying to get in it. In pursuit of this goal, they exclude others to prove they're getting there.

Jesus didn't think this way. His glory consisted of opening the door ever wider so that men and women from every tribe, tongue and culture could be members of His spiritual family. This is almost the last view we have of Jesus for John records in [Rev 5:9-10](#) a new song that the redeemed of earth will sing in praise to Jesus Christ. If you want to see Christ glorified, help others to find Him. Your praise will be better when it's joined by those you've lead to Him.

Primarily, Jesus would be glorified by the cross. That's the hour He's talking about: the hour of His death, burial and resurrection. It was by dying for us that He would be glorified. It was only by dying that Jesus could save men and draw them to Himself. If Jesus didn't die, there'd be no salvation for sinners. But if He did die, many would be saved.

It's only the crucified Christ dying in the place of sinners who saves. The example of Christ doesn't save us. Jesus isn't saying that if we just follow His example and try to live as He lived we'd find happiness in this life and salvation in the world to come. That's not His message at all. No man was ever saved by following Christ. Following is part of the Christian life, of course. After we're saved we should follow Him. But we're not saved by following His example. We're only saved through faith in what He's done on the cross. After that we can follow Him. Also, we're not saved by His teaching. Jesus never said He could point out the way to God and if we'd only follow that way, we'd find Him. That's what teachers of the other world religions do, but not Jesus. He didn't say, "I'll show you the way." He said, "I am the way." Besides, the entire teaching of the Word of God is that He made the way by dying for us.

The glory of Jesus is: He died for us! It's in this above all else that He should be honored. Will you honor Him? The best way is to come to Him in faith and receive Him as your Savior. Or, if you already know Him as your Savior, the best way to honor Him is by living as He lived and by bringing others to Him. You've heard the saying, "To know me is to love me"? That is supremely true of Jesus Christ. To see Him as the crucified savior is to truly know Him and to know Him is to love Him fervently. Those of us who truly know Him can also glorify Him by living our lives according to His Word and in the power of His Spirit.

**24-26-** The world we live in is conscious of the value of life, at least in some areas. We have all kinds of life saving devices: life vests, life belts, life rafts, life boats, lifelines, life nets, lifeguards, not to mention all the medical and pharmaceutical innovations. With this emphasis on life saving all around us, it's not hard to see why the Lord's instruction here strikes many a person as being a bit strange. Man says, "The one who would save his life must save it." Jesus says, "The one who would save his life must lose it, for only by losing it can he save it for the life to come."

Why should we listen to advice that sounds so foolish? Well, for one thing, the One who spoke those words did exactly what He said: He gave up his life and He did it in such a way that we could hardly consider it as being foolish.

Secondly, by giving up His life, He was greatly successful; He not only gained His own life but a multitude of others! Let's look at what Jesus is saying here. His words hold clues as to how we can be able to see Him for ourselves.

**24-** A declaration of a tremendous spiritual principle: there can be no glory without suffering; no fruitful life without death; no victory without surrender. The grain of wheat perfectly illustrates this paradox. Unless the seed falls into the ground and dies, it will not bear fruit. It's only through death that its potential for fruitfulness is realized.

This principle is a general truth in agriculture, but it's particularly true in spiritual matters. It's only when we are able to say NO to ourselves that we become capable of saying Yes to God and thus receive His fullest blessing. This is what Paul's saying in **Gal 2:20** when he says "I have been crucified with Christ..." He simply means that he had died to self so that he might live



for God. Paul's identification with Jesus Christ in death made it possible for him to live for Christ and to live by Christian values instead of living for the world and its values.

The problem with this principle is that it is so abstract, meaning: it's difficult to relate to ourselves and our situation. There is both beauty and bounty when a seed dies and fulfills its purpose. The only way it can fulfill its goal is by being planted. This is an undeniable truth but what does it actually look like in my own personal life? Jesus knew we would struggle with this so in His very next statement He actually makes the application of this principle for us.

**25-** This verse contains an important contrast that is not readily apparent in English. The first word John uses for life is the Greek word *psuche*: *life of the mind*. We call it the ego. It refers to the human personality that thinks, plans for the future and charts its course. Jesus is saying that this must die. The independent will of man must be put to death so that the follower of Jesus can actively submit his will to He who saved him. The second word for life is *zoe*, which, when joined with eternal means the divine life. Every Christian has this eternal (divine) life now, but they only have it in its fullness when their entire personality, with all its likes and desires, is surrendered to Jesus. Christians only experience the fullness of God's blessing when they consciously and deliberately walk in God's way.

This is the reason so many Christians today are miserable. They believe they can enjoy the fullness of God's blessings without accepting the full Lordship of Jesus into their lives. They flout God's laws and ignore His holy instructions and then can't figure out why they are always so miserable. The reason is they've not died to their own desires so that they might live for Christ. They've not been crucified with Him. They've not obeyed Him. Jesus is their Savior but they have not made Him their Lord, truly or completely.

It's not pleasant to be crucified, but you'll never truly live in the full spiritual sense until you are. This doesn't mean you have to give up everything for Christ, it simply means you must be willing to do anything for Jesus, if He calls you to do so. It won't be a sad or gloomy thing either, as some believe. The sad thing is to not obey Jesus. To obey Him is a joy. Even Jesus knew this to be true ([Heb 12:2](#)).

**26-** The 3<sup>rd</sup> element of His teaching about life through death is an invitation. He has declared the spiritual principle and applied it. Now He invites each of us to put it into practice by following Him. How do we do this? By taking up our cross (through self-denial) and following Him. This doesn't automatically mean a total change in what you're doing in your life, but it might. None of us are doing all that the Lord has for us to do. The issue is with the will: are you willing to do whatever Jesus calls you to do? We can also follow Him in service (to the least of these). We can follow Him in holiness (enemies found no fault in Him). Follow Him in faithfulness to His teaching (avoiding fads and foolishness).

If we accept his invitation to follow Him, He offers us the promise of 2 important things: His presence and honor from the Father. To follow Jesus is to enter into the fellowship of His suffering. Being where the Lord is involves difficulty. But, which is better: to be in the best of circumstance without Jesus or be with Jesus even if it means persecution or suffering? It's better to be with Jesus no matter the consequences, costs or conditions. Jesus is worth any cost. Of course, if you are with Him, it only stands to reason that He is with you.

He also tells us that the Father will honor those who follow Him in this life. In this life, His way often involves suffering. Sometimes it involves death for His sake. It always involves self-denial. But, Jesus promises us that the suffering will be followed by honor and the self-denial will be rewarded with praise. For the servant to follow the Master means to share the Master's suffering, but it also means we'll share in the Master's glory as well!

"We wish to see Jesus!" That is a good thought for any preacher or teacher of God's Word to have in mind as they prepare and deliver their messages. At the same time, this is also a word for all who hear or read their messages. Do you wish to see Jesus? If so, then in one sense you'll never be disappointed; because you will find Him. Any given sermon may be disappointing. I've heard quite a few of them in my time and have delivered a few myself. Still, you will find Jesus if you seek Him. He will reveal Himself to all who seek Him diligently, earnestly and honestly (**Lk 11:9-10**). This is His promise to you! 😊