

“SIR, WE WOULD SEE JESUS”

John 12:20-33

Intro: Our text gives us a very interesting incident in the public ministry of our Lord. It has to do with “certain Greeks” who approached the Apostle Philip and told him that they wanted to “see Jesus.” Some expositors have felt that they were not actually Gentiles, but Hellenistic Jews, Jews who spoke Greek, and who were more inclined toward Greek customs and culture than they were of their own Hebrew culture. This is, of course, a possibility, but I am rather inclined to think that they were Gentiles.

If you read the verses which immediately precede this passage, you will see that our Lord's entry into Jerusalem had taken place, and that there was still a lot of interest in the fact that the Lord had raised Lazarus from the dead. The Pharisees were there, and these Greeks were “among them,” probably because they were very interested in all that was taking place, and in the controversy which surrounded our Lord, Who He was, and what His mission was.

I. THE REQUEST OF “CERTAIN GREEKS” (John 12:20-22).

The Greeks presented their request to Philip. It was a very simple request: “Sir, we would see Jesus.”

How many there were, we do not know. Where they had come from, we do not know. But it does seem that these Greeks had turned to the Jewish people and their temple with all of its traditions. Such people were called *proselytes*. We don't know how they had heard of the Lord Jesus, nor why it was that they wanted to “see” Him. They may have wanted to see Him perform a miracle, like Herod did. We can assume that they had never in a physical way laid eyes upon the Lord, but the word that they used for “see” can mean only to look at Him, but it also can mean that they wanted to become acquainted with Him and to learn more about Him.

Another thing that we do not know about this incident, is how often the disciples had received such a request. We do know that the multitudes crowded together with their sick to obtain healing, and that there were great throngs of people who gathered together to hear the Lord when He taught. But there was something different about this request. They came to Philip. Philip talked it over with Andrew, and the two of them went together to tell the Lord.

There have been many who have felt that the Lord ignored this request, and that is why we hear no more about these Greeks who told Philip that they wanted to “see” the Lord. But I am not satisfied with that explanation. It was not like the Lord to treat people that way. And while we must recognize that there were people who sought the Lord just out of curiosity, yet we also know that people never seek the Lord wanting to know Who He really is, and what He came to do, unless the Spirit of God has been working in their hearts.

And we can add to all that I have already pointed out, the fact that the Holy Spirit led the Apostle John to record this incident. It really falls into the category of that which must have prompted the Pharisee, Nicodemus, to see the Lord by night. And there is no doubt but that the Spirit was drawing Nicodemus to the Lord for salvation.

So the Spirit looked upon this incident as important, and the Apostle John believed it was important, and so did Philip and Andrew or they would never have brought this request to the Lord. All of this evidence indicates to me that we have here an indication that God was at work.

And the words with which verse 23 begins indicate that our Lord was responding positively to what Philip and Andrew had told Him about those Greeks, and He was either giving them a message to give to the Greeks, or the Greeks were there, having followed Philip and Andrew, and so the Lord was speaking to the Greeks. What exactly was the situation, we cannot tell, but the words of our Lord which are recorded in verses 23 to 26 were intended for those Greeks.

II. THE LORD’S RESPONSE TO THOSE “CERTAIN GREEKS” (John 12:23-26).

John is the Gospel writer who made much of the fact that throughout the Lord’s ministry he reminded his readers that the Lord was looking ahead to “His hour,” and that up to that time it had not yet come. Cf. John 2:4; 7:30; 8:20. Then we come to our text. And His “hour” was not only referred to in verse 23, but also in verse 27. The Lord was not talking about a sixty-minute hour, but He was talking about a period of time at the end of His earthly life which, we know now, would include both His humiliation in death, and His glorification in resurrection. The first was for all people to see; the latter was reserved only for those who truly believed on Him. And it is clear from our Lord’s first words in this response that the divinely appointed “hour” had come.

It is always important to notice the use of the Lord's Names in Scripture. And this applies to how people referred to the Lord as well as to the ways in which the Lord referred to Himself.

— The Greeks referred to Him as “Jesus.” This was His Name while He was here on earth. It is expressive of His true humanity. And it probably is an indication that this was really all that these Greeks understood about our Lord, that is, that He was a real Man, a true human being.

You will notice that the Lord responded by using a title which He repeatedly used of Himself, which also spoke of His humanity: “the Son of man.” And here He projected the revelation of Himself beyond the time of His humiliation, His death on the Cross, to the time when He would be revealed in all of His glory, as God the Son Who had become Man. And so if these Greeks really wanted to know the truth about “Jesus,” that full revelation was yet to be given even though many had already come to the realization that “Jesus” was more than just another human being.

— However, as we go on to the Lord's words in verse 24 we find a very interesting revelation that He gave to those Greeks (and to His disciples as well). He introduced it with those words which the Apostle John used over and over as having been spoken by the Lord, words which we all have read many times in John's Gospel, and words which speak of the absolute truthfulness of what the Lord was saying, plus an indication of the great, divine authority which was behind all that our Lord taught. Of course I am referring to His words, “Verily, verily, I say unto you.”

These words denote the absolute dependability of what the Lord was about to say, and they emphasized that the Lord was speaking, and that His message was directed in a special way to those who were listening to Him. These Jews had come to “see Jesus.” At this point He was going to show them how He wanted to recognize Him.

He pictures Himself as “a corn of wheat.”

— I couldn't help but think as I meditated on these words of the Lord Jesus, that the One speaking here was the Creator of heaven and earth. He made the first grain of wheat, although it may have been as fields were filled with grains of wheat.. He was the One Who determined even before creation how wheat would grow. And He did it knowing even then that it would be the perfect illustration of His death and His resurrection. I can guess (and that is what I am doing) that these Greeks had been attracted to

the Lord by His miracles, like so many others were, without realizing that to really “see Jesus,” one needs to have his or her eyes opened to the realization that the true picture of Christ, the fulness of His glory, the true revelation of His Person, is to be seen in His death and resurrection.

When we understand Jesus as He is pictured by an apparently insignificant grain of wheat, then we are seeing the Lord Jesus Christ as He really is.

A grain of wheat falling into the ground pictures the death of our Lord. And through that death and the resurrection which follows we have the “much fruit” which has covered the earth generation after generation. As a grain of wheat possesses life in itself, placed there by the great Creator, so the Son of man has life in Himself from all eternity, and He produces those who are predestined to be just like He is, a picture of what it means that through Christ, Who is our life, we are the possessors of eternal life.

This is the truth the Lord spoke in verse 24, and this is what those Greeks needed to “see” if they were to understand Who Jesus was, and why He had come to the earth.

But what did the Lord have in mind as He spoke the words we find in verses 25 and 26?

He was speaking of that which would characterize those who were the fruit of His own death and resurrection. They do not love their lives in the sense that they will live to do what they want to do, but they reject mere life in this world for the greater prospect of the joys connected with eternal life. And instead of living as we might have lived, we live to serve the Lord, following Him throughout our lives, with the prospect that where He is, that is where we will be, and we will be there to be honored, rewarded by the Father.

And so in verse 24 we have the Lord and His ministry on earth presented as a grain of wheat, and in verses 25 and 26 we have the lives of His people, saved by grace, throughout their lives here on earth, and eventually in heaven where the Lord has now gone to prepare a place of us. To be honored by the Lord there will be greater than any glory, or all of the glory, that could be bestowed upon us here on earth.

This passage concludes with:

III. THE LORD’S PRAYER (John 12:27-28).

As the Lord contemplated His work of redemption, His soul was troubled. This is what He experienced in Gethsemane, and what He experienced again on the Cross. It is all very easy for us to talk about the death of our Lord, that He bore our sins in His body on the tree, that He was made sin for us, that He was the Lamb of God Who takes away the sin of the world. But I doubt if we will ever fully know what was behind those words which our Lord spoke when He said, "Father, save Me from this hour." And then immediately He followed those words with, "But for this cause came I unto this hour." And then His petition of complete submission to the Father's will: "Father, glorify Thy Name."

Concl: Tonight we observe the Supper which our Lord established just before He went out to die for our sins. Tonight we are remembering our Lord as a grain of wheat, "disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God, and precious" (1 Pet. 2:4). He did not save us by His life, as perfect as it was. But it was His perfect life that showed that He was the Lamb of God without blemish, Who could bear our sins because He was "without sin." Remember how He was "troubled" in His soul, and yet fully submitted Himself to do the Father's will when He said, "Father, glorify Thy Name."