

Morning Service | 26th Dec | John 12:20-36

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Preacher: James Ross

[0 : 0 0] Now let's turn back together to John chapter 12 in verse 20 onwards, so that we might worship Jesus, God's glorified King.

Over, I guess, two years now, I remember sitting in a pizza place at the top of Leith Walk, looking out when St. James' Quarter was still a building site, and I was having lunch there with a friend who was the site manager for the foundation work.

His job was to know what each man was doing, what every machine was supposed to be doing. I suspect some of you will be like me, you find a building site utterly baffling and bewildering, no idea how anybody knows what they're doing.

But he knew, and he knew the purpose for each person because he had the final plan. And it's true, isn't it, often it's knowing the final purpose that makes sense of present actions.

And that's absolutely true for Christmas, it's true for the incarnation, God becoming man, becoming one of us. Why does that happen? Then we need to think final purpose, and we need to move towards Easter also.

[1 : 2 3] To recognize the Son of God became man, to die for our salvation. In the birth of Jesus, we had the dawn of redeeming grace.

Here is the next phase, here is the beginning of the fulfillment of God's loving rescue plan, of sending his Son to pay our debt for sin, to purchase us for God.

That for all who know their needs of salvation, all who look to him by faith, like the Greeks that we read about here, we can find salvation, we can find redemption in Jesus.

So knowing the final purpose helps us to understand the action, understand the coming of Jesus. I want us to think of three wonderful things that we see here in this text.

There's a wonderful request from the Greeks. There's a wonderful example from Andrew the disciple, and to think about the wonderful response of Jesus to tie it to Christmas, but to tie it to his coming.

[2 : 2 6] So the wonderful request, look at verse 20 and 21. There were some Greeks among those who went up to worship at the festival. They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, with a request.

Sir, we would like to see Jesus. Two reasons this is a wonderful request. First, because of who is asking. So here is John again as he records the gathering of hundreds of thousands of people to the Passover festival.

He chooses to zoom in on these Greeks, these God-fearing Gentiles who have come to worship.

And incidentally, John's gospel doesn't tell us, but the other gospel writers tell us that they're able to come to the temple because Jesus has cleared the temple again.

He has cleansed it, making worship possible for these non-Jews. So it's wonderful to think that in God's grace, he's drawing the nations to worship.

It's that stream of grace that we see in the Old Testament. We thought about it a few weeks ago.

Even as the people left slavery in Egypt, some Egyptians went with them, having become part of the people of God.

[3 : 3 3] We can think about Rahab and Ruth, those prominent women in the genealogy of Jesus who are brought in from the nations. We can even think about the city of Nineveh, spared by God's mercy when they turn in repentance.

But that stream of grace in the Old Testament becomes an overflowing ocean in the New Testament, doesn't it? We see it with Jesus in his ministry, welcoming Samaritans in.

We see in the book of Acts, ministry to the Gentiles. We see in church history there. And we see within 10 years, actually, after the death of Jesus in the mission enterprise, that the gospel hits all

four regions of the Roman Empire.

And then we see and we enjoy being part of the expansion of the kingdom around the world. So the gospel even comes to Scotland and to us.

And that's only because of God's redeeming love in Jesus. So it's wonderful to think for us who are not Jews that here are these Greeks who come to worship.

[4 : 40] But it's also a wonderful request because of what they ask. Sir, we want to see Jesus. They want an audience. They want an interview. They want to know more.

Now, John doesn't tell us why they want to know more. It could be perhaps that they have heard the story about Lazarus and his resurrection from the dead as it spreads around the crowd.

Perhaps they've heard Jesus' words, I am the resurrection and the life. Perhaps as they've come to the temple and they're not sure whether they're going to get to the outer court and they're allowed in, they want to meet the one who's given them access and allowed them to worship their God.

But we don't know. But what we do know is that just like the Magi in Matthew chapter 2, they are led by God towards worship. Because when anyone chooses to worship God, that's a gift of God.

The Greeks here represent all people outside of Israel, outside of God's covenant. Everybody who's not a Christian where God in his grace has transformed our will so that we have that desire to see and to worship Jesus.

[5 : 49] This is our story for Christians. God has changed our hearts and our will to want to see Jesus. And so they ask this wonderful request.

Christmas, of course, is a time of request, isn't it? Perhaps at our workplace we had to request time off on holiday. Perhaps, boys and girls, you had lots of requests from your parents, what presents you might like, whether you could stay up late around Christmas, whether you could get up early at Christmas.

We had that. Perhaps we say to people, will you come and visit? There's lots of requests that happen. But these Greeks, they offer the most wonderful request.

And in our best moments as Christians, isn't this the request that we long to hear? As parents and grandparents, isn't this our longing for our children and our grandchildren? They would want to see and to know and to worship Jesus for themselves.

When we think about our friends and our family who are not Christians, isn't that what we want for them? That they would see the hope of the gospel.

[6 : 54] They would see their need of salvation. And that they would want to know Jesus. Isn't this always one of the high points of life in a church where God draws people so they're asking questions.

Can you tell me about Jesus? How can I become a Christian when people come with their need and their longing? It's a wonderful request.

Before we move on from that request, two points by way of application. These Greeks, I think, are a reminder to us always that nobody is unsavable.

In Ephesians 2, Paul talks to Gentiles who've become Christians. So like these Greeks. And he reminds them, remember, that by nature, what were they? They were separate from Christ.

By nature, excluded from the people of God. By nature, foreigners to the covenant without hope and without God in the world. But now, Paul says to them, now you've been brought near.

[8 : 01] And I think there's a wonderful reminder all through the Bible that we shouldn't write anybody off. Indeed, if we're not Christians today, we shouldn't write ourselves off and imagine we are beyond grace.

The whole Bible is full of people who, in our view, we might think they're very surprising candidates for God's kingdom. But God, in his grace, chooses and delights to save and delights to surprise us. And so even as we think of these Greeks being led by God to come and worship, that it would increase our faith as we look around.

That it would increase our faith as we pray. Pray for folks who seem so far from the kingdom. Just by way of encouragement, we just heard yesterday of a family that we had known here when the boys were in nursery, now in the States.

Somebody who'd tried out different religions who'd just recently come to faith. God answers prayer in his timing, in his own perfect timing.

[9 : 11] So we keep going. Here's an encouragement for us as we look to share our faith. And we wonder, is this going to achieve anything? Well, in God's grace it can. And just to remind us,

secondly as well, that it's God who gives the desire to see Jesus.

We always need to remind ourselves of that. That it's not natural to us, but it's by grace. If we are Christians, if we've gathered here today, and let's be honest, it was difficult to gather here today with all the restrictions.

And we might have thought, well, church is going to be really different. It's going to be quiet. Why are we here? If God puts that desire in our heart to come and worship Jesus, that's a gift. And we should thank him for that. And it's also our hope in evangelism, isn't it?

As we're thinking about sharing our faith, we recognize that, yes, we are called to do our part. We're called to know the gospel so we can communicate the gospel. We're called to be drawn close to Christ to reflect his character.

But we recognize it's only God who saves. That's his job. And so we do our part and we ask God to do his. But it's also, I think, a reminder for us whenever we're coming to church or whenever we're reading the Bible that we should be asking for this spirit.

[10:22] What is it that we want? We don't want to just go through the motions. We don't want our coming to church or coming to God's word to just be routine. It's be a great prayer. We want to see Jesus.

We come to church. That would be what you would want from your preacher, sir. We want to see Jesus. So it's a wonderful request. And then there's a wonderful example from Andrew.

Boys and girls, I've already given you a little bit of a clue. Patron saint of Scotland. It's this guy here. This guy here in verse 22. So think about this.

The Greeks come with a request. We would like to see Jesus. They asked Philip. Philip went to tell Andrew. Andrew and Philip in turn told Jesus. Andrew's a wonderful guy.

You don't hear much about Andrew. But we do hear about him twice in John's gospel. We hear about him in John chapter 1. He was one of the disciples of John the Baptist who then spent the day with Jesus.

[11:25] And as he spends the day with Jesus, and as he becomes persuaded that Jesus is the promised Messiah, first thing he does is he goes to find his brother. To find his brother Peter to say, we have found the Messiah.

So he invites his brother to know Jesus. And then here, while it's not exactly clear, but you wonder whether the Greeks are not sure, will Jesus welcome them?

And then we might perhaps ask, well, why does Philip go to Andrew? Is Philip perhaps not sure? Will Jesus welcome them? Andrew is in no doubt. So Andrew takes Philip to talk to Jesus.

He wants to take others to Jesus to invite others in. And I think he's a wonderful example. And we think about him as our patron saint. Wouldn't this be wonderful if this was our mentality?

As Christians, in 2022, that this would be our heart, which we think about sort of next year. To be thinking to our friends and family. Let me tell you about Jesus.

[12:26] Wouldn't that be wonderful if that was our heart? Would you like to read a gospel with me? If you're interested in discovering who Jesus really is. Wouldn't that be a wonderful heart to have? Would you like to come to church with me?

Invite someone in. And my father-in-law, Clive, his testimony 50 years ago was being invited to church as a non-Christian and coming to faith.

And he shared in lockdown with his church. And he said, let me encourage you all to remember the power of inviting someone to church. Don't give up on that. But back to Andrew.

Andrew is in absolutely no doubt that Jesus is someone for them. Jesus is someone who will welcome the Greeks. And so he comes to tell Jesus.

What does Andrew know about Jesus? He knows that he is God's saviour king. And he knows that he has good news to share. And he knows that he's good news not just for some, but for all. In that sense, Andrew reflects a spirit like that of the shepherds.

[13:32] Remember the shepherds, they hear the wonderful news of good news, of great joy for all the people. They go and they see the baby just as they've been told. And what do they do? They spread the word about Jesus. Wherever they go to, whoever will listen.

They've heard good news and they don't want to keep it to themselves. They want to share.

Christmas, although this gets a little bit different, but it's a time we typically invite others into our joy, don't we?

We want others to share the joy that we have. So often our meals will be spent with family or perhaps we'll invite elderly neighbours. Or we'll invite some folks who are on their own or some folks who are far from home.

We want others to be invited into joy. Wouldn't this be the very best invitation into joy we could ever give to someone? Just as Andrew's inviting the Greeks to know the joy of Jesus, that we'd be inviting others to know that joy too.

The joy of being saved from sin. The joy of meeting the one who would give eternal life. Who gives us fellowship with God. Two basic points by way of applying this before we move on.

[14 : 37] First to think about our prayers. Again, if anyone can be saved by faith. If anyone can be saved by God's amazing grace. Then doesn't this give us encouragement to pray and to pray urgently and to pray with perseverance.

And to pray for boldness. That God might use us. That we'd be praying for the Spirit to open people's hearts and minds to the truth of Jesus.

As we read our Bibles, we encounter a God who loves to save. A God who sent his Son to be Saviour. And we also encounter a God who loves to use ordinary Christians as his means of bringing people to himself.

So we pray and we act. But also, when we think about inviting people to Jesus, we need to think about the Gospel. We need to think, who are we inviting people to meet?

And we want people to meet the real Jesus, don't we? To recognize that the baby born in Bethlehem is the Son of God. Who became one of us.

[15 : 44] Who identifies with us. Who was a suffering servant for us. Who came to perfectly represent us. Obedient where we are disobedient.

Law-keeping where we are law-breakers. And as our representative, he gave himself as that once for all perfect sacrifice. Satisfying God's justice against sin.

And showing God's mercy to sinners. And that by faith, as we look to Jesus, we can be forgiven.

And this Jesus, who died then, rose and gives eternal life and rules and reigns in heaven.

Until the day when he comes back to make everything new. And takes all his people to be with him forever. That's the Jesus who we invite people to know.

That's the Jesus who brings joy. So that's Andrew's wonderful example. Last thing to notice is Jesus' wonderful response.

[16 : 48] So remember the request, sir, we would like to see Jesus. As Andrew and Philip go to Jesus. Jesus replies in a surprising way. Verse 23, Jesus replied, The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.

And what becomes apparent is the focus for Jesus is not the meeting, but the significance of the question that these Greeks are asking.

Three things that we can identify from Jesus' words in this text. First to think about the hour. So Jesus says in verse 23, The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.

So that is a theme in John. The hour is a theme in John. Up until this point, the hour has not yet come. But now, the hour has come. What is that hour?

It's that hour of suffering and shame, but also that hour of glory and being exalted. And what we understand here is that Jesus knew his purpose.

[17 : 58] Jesus knew he had come to save sinners by his death on the cross. And that explains the actions of his life. It explains his birth, his humble birth, his humble life, because he knew he'd come to be the suffering servant.

So thinking about that final goal of salvation helps to explain his actions. And we see the extent to which Jesus understands his purpose in verse 27, where he says, Now my soul is troubled, and what shall I say?

Father, save me from this hour. No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour. So here is another point where we see Jesus looking ahead to the cross, and he feels the horror of the cross, like in Gethsemane.

But what does he do? He reminds himself of his purpose. This is why I came. He was born in Bethlehem to die on Mount Calvary.

And Jesus knows that. And Jesus goes obediently forward. So he talks about the hour. Then he talks about the seed in verse 24.

[19 : 13] There he says, Very truly I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds.

So there's a picture from farming. There's a picture of planting. Planting a single seed in the soil as it's covered. Over it is, as it were, buried. And it's in that burying and planting that it produces a crop.

And Jesus is understanding this is a truth for him, that his death and burial will produce a spiritual harvest. It is the means of salvation, the source of new life in the hearts of his people.

Jesus must die so we might live. But then he applies it further as well. He applies the principle to the lives of his followers. Verse 25.

Anyone who loves their life will lose it. Well, anyone who hates their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. Dying to self and the rule of self, choosing eternal life over the best life now, is the way to enjoy and to receive eternal life.

[20 : 24] Whoever serves me must follow me. And where I am, my servant also will be. My father will honor the one who serves me. To know honor from the father is to follow Jesus, our master, in being willing to die to self in order to live a life of self-giving, obedient sacrifice.

And then let's think about the glory that Jesus talks about. His glory and his father's glory. Having said that it was for this very reason, I came to this hour, verse 28.

He says, Father, glorify your name. Then a voice came from heaven. I have glorified it and will glorify it again. So again, let's think of the pattern of Jesus' life from the manger to this point and beyond.

Jesus is the perfectly obedient son of God. Jesus is the one who always lived seeking his father's glory. Jesus is the one who is always found doing his father's will.

And this again is what makes him that perfect representative for us because he succeeds at every point in which we fail. And so there is wonderful promise from Jesus in this hour which brings for him suffering and shame.

[21 : 53] It also brings for him glory. The father declares he will be glorified. And we need to ask ourselves, well, how can there be glory in his death on the cross? Where's the glory?

Where's the glory? There is glory. There is glory. And this represents the climax of Jesus' perfect obedience. There is glory as we see a completion of God's plan of salvation.

There is glory in this demonstration of God's redeeming love for sinners like us. So the Greeks come with their request.

And Andrew sets that example of bringing that request to Jesus. But when he hears it, what we discover is that Jesus' mind instantly is on his purpose.

Why he came? To be the saviour for the world. And it's because of that purpose, because of his coming to the cross, that the Greeks, the world, you and me, can truly know him.

[22 : 58] Look at verse 32, and we'll see that connection, I think. Jesus said, And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.

So in his lifting up, John is deliberately ambiguous, lifting up in the sense of being lifted up on the cross, but being lifted up in glory, and that lifting up, it is the way for you and I to know Jesus as he truly is.

God's saviour king, God's once for all sacrifice for sinners. In the lifting up of Jesus, is the way for us to know full access to God, so that we can approach freely.

In Jesus being lifted up to die, we can know the promise of eternal life and eternity with Jesus.

And so Jesus connects his being lifted up with his drawing of people to himself. In his death is that power, the power of God to draw us, to draw us from death to life, to draw us from sin to forgiveness, from separation to adoption into the family of God, from hopelessness to being hope-filled.

[24 : 26] So let me close here with two thoughts. First, to recognize that Christmas and the cross must always be connected.

To understand that Jesus, the God-man, is born to die. The New Testament speaks about the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me.

And to do that, Jesus had to be made like me and like you. If we think about Christmas as being love coming down, we understand Easter as love being lifted up.

The love of God demonstrated the manger, and at the cross. Is this where we find our joy, our hope, our peace this Christmas?

And secondly, to truly see Jesus always leads to worship. When God draws someone by his grace, whether that be the shepherds, whether that be the magi, whether that be the Greeks, whether that be you, and me, his goal, is that we would worship.

[25 : 48] That we would see and enjoy his glory. That we would worship Jesus, our King. So may this be the pattern for your life and mine this Christmas season and beyond.

Lord, let's pray together briefly. Lord God, we thank you for another chance to reflect on Jesus, the one who was born for us, the one who lived for us, the one who died for us, the one who rose for us, the one who rules and reigns and will return for us.

Lord, thank you for the blessings that we enjoy in this life because of Jesus. We thank you for the promise of greater things still to come when our faith is in Jesus.

Lord, we thank you for your word, the bread of life. May you give strength and health to us as we receive it, as we reflect on it.

Help us to grow in obedience and love and worship as we consider your love and as we fix our eyes on Jesus, our Savior.

[27 : 18] Amen. Now, we will close with a Christmas hymn, Come, O Long-Expected Jesus.

And again, let us stand to sing.