

John 12 v 20-25

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[0 : 00] Let's turn again to the chapter we read in John's Gospel, John chapter 12, and reading again at verse 20.

Now among those who went up to worship at the feast were some Greeks. So these came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and asked him, Sir, we wish to see Jesus.

Philip went and told Andrew. Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus. Now a couple of years ago at the communion, we looked at this whole section with regard to, and particularly down to, if anyone serves me, he must follow me, and the whole aspect of following the Lord Jesus Christ.

But I want us this evening more to focus upon this request that we find these Greeks making. So it tells us that among those who went up to worship at the feast were some Greeks.

And we don't know whether they might have been real Greeks, or they might have been, this might have been just an expression for Gentiles. Whatever group of people they were, they were people who had come to embrace the worship of the Lord.

[1 : 22] Now, some people will wonder, why didn't they go directly to Jesus himself? Why didn't they go to Jesus? Why did they go via, for instance, why did they go via Philip?

Well, some suggest that Jesus was in the temple at this particular time, and as such, that he was in a part of the temple that they didn't have access to.

Because we've got to remember that in those days, there was huge segregation. There was an outer court that non-Jews could enter into.

But beyond that, they couldn't go. The Jew, of course, was allowed further in. And so it's suggested that at that particular time, these Greeks had come, and they wanted to see Jesus, but because of where he was, they didn't have immediate access to him.

Now, one of the things that we've got to say with regard to that is how thankful we are that we live at a time when there is no segregation like that, because there was this incredible differentiation between people.

[2 : 35] That's one of the wonderful things that Jesus Christ has come to do, that he has broken down barriers. You know, we're great at building barriers. It's something that people continually do.

We're terrible for going into groups and building barriers. And causing divisions and making this group here and this group there. And it's one of the things, really, that Jesus, without a shadow of a doubt, that he did, that he has achieved, is in the breaking down of barriers.

And so there was this wonderful oneness as Jesus embraced all kinds. And he took all, we were looking just, was it last week, at those who are well do not need a physician, but those who are sick.

And that Jesus identified himself with the poor, with the needy, with the outcasts, with those that people wouldn't even associate with in any way. So there's this wonderful openness and the breaking down of these barriers.

And so we find that these Greeks had come, and there was this desire, there was this real longing. Sir, we wish to see Jesus.

[3 : 46] The actual language is, it's quite strong. We really want to see Jesus. Now, I don't think this was a desire that was out of curiosity. Although, there have been people who have come to faith in Jesus Christ, and the beginning of their journey was simply curiosity.

There are people who have started reading the Bible for, sometimes, for all their own reasons. We hear of people, sometimes, who were converted, who started reading the Bible for the sole purpose of trying to destroy Christian argument.

And they said, in order for us to get a full handle on our argument, we need to read the scripture so that we have an argument, an even stronger argument, and they've come to faith through it.

We know of people who come just, they've been curious, and they begin to sort of look around and feel their way. Zacchaeus, I suppose, is an example of someone like that.

He wanted to see Jesus, who he was. And remember, he was a small man, but he couldn't. Zacchaeus was curious, because he heard that Jesus was a friend of publicans and sinners.

[5 : 03] We mentioned this last week. That was a group of people, the tax collectors, who I'm sure could count their friends on one hand out of society, because they were the kind of people who were doing, they were always doing their friends, their neighbors, their community.

And so they were real outcasts. They were real lepers within the community. And here was this man. Zacchaeus heard of him. He was termed the friend of tax gatherers.

And he wanted to see who he was. But he was so small, and because there was such a crowd, he climbed up into this sycamore tree to see Jesus, who he was. So Zacchaeus' journey began out of curiosity.

And we remember what happened, that as Jesus was passing by, and he looked up into the tree, he stopped, and he says, Zacchaeus, come down. For today's salvation has come to your house.

One of these amazing moments. But I don't think the curiosity that we have here of these Greeks was that sort of thing. They weren't wanting to see Jesus as just kind of have an idea of what he looked like, or the color of his eyes, or what his accent was like, or any of these things.

[6 : 22] They wanted to—this idea of wanting to see Jesus was wanting to be with Jesus, to speak to Jesus, to engage with Jesus, they were obviously people who had a genuine desire and a longing within their heart.

So they said, we wish to see Jesus. So they came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida. People wonder, why was it Philip they chose?

Some have suggested that there is a hint of Greek within the name of Philip, that there might have been some link somewhere in Philip, in Philip's ancestry, or his people that in some way tied him to the Greeks, and that it was for that reason.

And Philip went straight away. We mentioned Andrew this morning. Philip went straight away for Andrew. That's what it tells us. Philip went and told Andrew.

And Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus. Andrew, the accessible one. It would appear that Andrew, out of all the disciples, was the one who was most approachable.

[7 : 34] You remember when there were the huge crowds, the thousands, and they didn't know how were they going to feed all that number? You remember that there was this young boy with the loaves and the fish?

Who was it? Who was it that was involved in going to tell Jesus? It was Andrew. Andrew seemed to be the disciple that the people gravitated to.

He was the approachable one. He was the approach road to Jesus. It was Andrew, as we mentioned this morning. He was so different to his brother Peter.

But it was Andrew who introduced Peter to the Lord. Andrew was a man who was quite happy to be in the shadows, quite happy to be in the background.

He was quite happy to do his little bit and then to pull out of the way. Obviously a gracious, a humble man, and yet incredibly approachable. And there must have been a real quality, a godliness about him because you've got to remember that Andrew ministered to his brother.

[8 : 42] He witnessed to his brother Peter and he took his brother Peter to meet Jesus. And that's the hardest place to witness is in your own home.

It's harder to witness as a Christian in your own home. Because it's a place where people know you the best. In many ways it's a lot easier to witness when people might only know a little bit about you.

And they might only see, as it were, the very Christian side. But the more they get to know you, the more they're able to see warts and all. And they're able to see, oh, the inconsistencies.

And they're able to see aspects of your character maybe that they hadn't seen before. And so at home people really know you. They know the kind of passion you are.

They don't know you entirely. Because nobody really knows anybody exactly what we really, really like. But at home is where people will know you best.

[9 : 47] And that is where it is so hard to witness. And yet Andrew was able to witness to Peter. And Andrew was able to lead and to bring Peter to meet with Jesus.

So it's very obvious that Andrew was, although he's not in the inner three of the disciples, he was a very, very vital and important part of the work of our Lord in this world.

So, sir, they said, we wish to see Jesus. So Philip went and told Andrew. And Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus. Sir, we wish to see Jesus.

I wonder if there are people like that in here tonight. In the quietness of your own heart, you're actually saying, you know, that's what I would love.

I would love to see Jesus. Well, can I say to you, if you're here tonight and you're not somebody who has ever, what we would term, a professing Christian.

[10 : 54] Somebody who has, as it were, nailed their colors to their mast, to their mast. Somebody who has clearly stated that they are on the Lord's side. But you're saying, you know, my desire, this is what I want above anything.

I would love, I would really, really love to see Jesus. I would really like to be a Christian. I would say that is an incredibly positive sign and mark.

Because I believe that within this town, there will be many people who tonight have no desire to see Jesus. If Jesus were to come back on earth, not as he's going to come in the second coming, but if he were to come back to earth, as he was here 2,000 years ago, and he was to be here tonight in Kenneth Street, and the opportunity was given to everybody in the town to come in to meet with Jesus, I believe there would be a lot of people who would pass on that.

And they would say, no, actually, Jesus does nothing for me. And that's what the Bible says. And the prophecy of Isaiah, chapter 53, talking about Jesus, it says of this, they saw no beauty in him that they should desire him.

In fact, to them, he was like a root out of a dry ground, without form or comeliness. In other words, there was absolutely nothing attractive at all about him.

[12 : 38] Not somebody that they in any way desired to see, to look at, to get to know, to be involved in. And Jesus doesn't interest me at all.

That is really what the prophet Isaiah was talking about. And that is still true to this day. For many people, Jesus doesn't mean anything.

So, if tonight you are saying, I actually would like to see Jesus. Not to see the, as we say, what he looked like physically, but to see him by faith.

To see through all these clouds that are swirling around, and just block any idea that I have. I want to be able to separate through all this, this kind of fog that's there.

And I just want to be able, I want to be able to see sufficiently, sufficient of Jesus to know, to believe. I want to be a Christian.

[13 : 43] Well, if that is your desire, let me tell you, that is not a natural desire. I believe that that is a God-given desire. I believe that the Holy Spirit has put that desire within your heart.

Because, as we said, the natural person, the person in and of themselves, they see no beauty in Christ that they should desire. To have that desire, to have this longing, to know Jesus, to accept Jesus, to be a Christian, is a desire that has been given by the Lord.

And you know, when that desire is given by the Lord, you know why he gives it? He gives that desire in order to satisfy it. The Lord doesn't give us a desire to frustrate us.

He doesn't put a longing in our heart just to play games with us. He puts that desire within our heart in order to satisfy and fulfill the desire that is there.

So tonight I would say to you, please keep seeking. Keep searching for the Lord. Because if you seek, you will find.

[15 : 01] Now, Jesus, in response to that question, and we've looked at this before, so I'm not going to say very much at all about it, Jesus answered them and said, The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.

Of course, he's talking here about going to the cross. And he's saying to them, 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. And Jesus is saying, really, to these Greeks, you're wanting to see me. Well, do you know, the only way, really, you can see me is to see me with regard to my death.

because it's through my death that you really come to understand who I am, why I have come. And he gives us this wonderful description about himself with regard to a grain of wheat.

And he's saying, if you have a grain of wheat and you keep that grain of wheat and you put it, put it on the shelf or keep it in your pocket or put it in that tin, it'll remain just that, a grain of wheat.

[16 : 09] It'll never become anything else. It'll be just that little grain there. Or if you had a handful of them, that's what they would be. You could keep them in your pocket. You could take them out every day and look at them and they wouldn't change to be, they wouldn't become anything else.

But if you went and put them into the ground, then an amazing process takes place. And that grain of wheat that you put into the ground, it dies.

But from it comes, growth comes fruit. And as we all know, that's the way when we plant anything in the garden, if we're going to plant vegetables or if you're going to plant corn or grain or wheat or any of these things, barley, it's this process of where we plant into the ground and there's death and from death comes life.

And Jesus is highlighting that this is the way, that he has to die in order to bring life. If you went to, say, to a farm and, say it was maybe at this time of year and you saw the, you opened this door and there's this pile of seed lying there.

And you say to yourself, well, I wonder what's going to happen with that. But it's not a huge pile of seed. And then you come back at autumn time or at harvest time and the barn door is opened and there's all this wheat there.

[17 : 39] And you say to yourself, my word, where did all that come from? And the farmer says, I will remember the seed you saw lying there. That's the result of the planting of that seed.

And you know, my friends, as people looked at Jesus dying on the cross, his arms outstretched, beaten, disfigured, the most awful looking picture of human misery that we could ever imagine.

And people would look and say, oh, that's the end of all Jesus' hopes because he was so revolutionary and radical when he came and he taught so wonderfully and he healed and there were so many people who were in admiration of him during his time on earth.

And they'd be looking there and they'd say, oh, you know, all his dreams are dying with him. What a fearful end. Humanly speaking, that's who it was.

But at that moment, Jesus was like that seed going into the ground. He was dying. And if at the end of the age the doors of heaven are opened and we look in on this great harvest, there will be a number that no man can number.

[19 : 04] We spoke about that recently of trying to explain that. Where the doors of heaven opened will display a harvest, a rich harvest of souls where all have been born and again brought in by the blood of Jesus Christ.

They are part of this fruit. My friend, this is how we see Jesus. Now, as I said, maybe there are things and aspects to the Christian faith you don't understand.

Well, please don't let any of the problems regarding the Christian faith or problems regarding Christians sidetrack you or turn you away because at the end of the day, this is personal.

It's between you and the Lord because remember, come judgment day, you will be on your own. You won't be there as a family. You won't be there as a community. You'll be there as your own.

I'll be there on my own. And you and I will give an account for our life here, whether it be good or bad, personally before the Lord. And Jesus is going on and he says, whoever loves his life loses it and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life.

[20 : 24] My friend, it is so important that you focus upon Jesus. And as I said, forget all the other issues because, you know, it's so easy.

So often I hear people, and I might say a wee word to somebody about Christian faith and if we've got a Christian, quite often you'll hear people say, oh, hi, but look, you've got an awful lot of problems in the church and such like.

Yeah, there are. Nothing new. There have been problems right throughout. You go to the New Testament, the days of Paul. Paul wrote to every, every church, every particular church that he established had problems.

That's what these letters are all about. Because there were problems in the church. Nothing new under the sun. So don't let the problems sidetrack you. Problems in the church won't stand you in any good stead come judgment day.

It's personal about yourself, but you've got to get right between yourself and the Lord. And so don't be sidetracked by these, by all these kind of issues and secondary issues.

[21 : 29] The important, the all important issue is how am I with the Lord? And Jesus says, do you know what you've got to do? You've got to die to yourself.

Wow, that's hard. You've got to lose your own life. Lose your life in me. And that's a sticking point so often because we don't want that.

it's the one area where we say, oh, hold on. I don't know if I'm ready for that because we want to hang on.

It's my life. The old anthem, the old song said, it's my life and I'll do what I want. And that is, that is so true. That's how we want to live our lives.

It's my life and I'll do what I want. And the Lord says, you know, that spirit has got to be broken because what I want, I want your life to become mine.

[22 : 35] I want you to lose your life in me. And that's where we have to come to the Lord and say, Lord, please break my heart so that I may come to accept you as Lord.

And it's here you've got to trust the Lord. Because the Lord wants you. Because it is through you He will bring glory to His name in this world.

Not in your resisting of Him, but in your accepting Him. And you know, the big problem when you stand on the other side before becoming a Christian is you think that the Lord, that becoming a Christian is going to be really, really difficult.

and your life's going to be all messed up. And all the things that you loved and you wanted and that did, that that's going to be the end of everything. You know, that's a lie from the pit.

You trust the Lord. You put your life in His hand. And you will find that He will do you nothing but good into your soul, into your heart.

[23 : 44] He will bring a purpose and a meaning. He will satisfy. He satisfies a hungry soul. And when that desire has begun in your heart, when you want to be a Christian, He will satisfy that hunger within you.

See what these Greeks did. Sir, we wish to see Jesus. So they came to Philip who was from Bethsaida and they said, we want to see Jesus.

Can I suggest something here? There might be people in here tonight and for a long time you wanted to be a Christian and you've kept all these thoughts to yourself.

Can I suggest from what we have here that we have a biblical precedent of going to speak to somebody who you know who's a Christian and tell them how you feel.

Maybe some of you want to do that but you think, oh, they'll think I'm stupid. I don't want to own up to exactly where I am. You know, it's quite a big thing to go to a Christian and to say, you know, I'm not a Christian.

[24 : 58] But I'd like to be. That's a massive step. But that's what these Greeks did. It's like they took the bull by the horns and they went and they had to bear their soul in many ways.

Now, I'm not saying, don't get me wrong. First and foremost, we go to the Lord. But the Lord has put people in our way, people around us and about us. I know every Christian in here tonight will look back and they'll be thankful when they were searching, sometimes in a fog, that there was somebody here and somebody there that they were able to maybe say something to.

I can look back and I thank the Lord for people who were put, as it were, beside me that I was able to say something to because I found it so difficult to in any way bear my soul about what I was feeling and what I was thinking.

I know how difficult these things are. But I would suggest bite the bullet and say, look, I would like to know.

That's one of the great things about, for instance, the Kabba faith. It is an opportunity to discuss, an opportunity in an informal setting to speak about the things of the Lord.

[26 : 23] But you speak to people, speak to somebody and say, I want to speak to you in conference. Come and speak to me if there are these things.

It's not that, that, it's not another person can make you a Christian, but all they will do is point the way. But it's sometimes through speaking to somebody else that it, it kind of opens doors.

It helps you. And you'll be amazed at how many, supposing everybody in here tonight who's following the Lord got up and gave their testimony for five minutes.

There will be many common points, but there will be many points of difference. because the Lord works so differently within people. And there might, maybe, you know this, there might be quite a number of you tonight and you're saying to yourself, oh, for years I wanted to be a Christian.

Maybe you are. Maybe you're already in the kingdom, but you're still waiting for something sensational to happen. And that's why it is good to talk to others.

[27 : 31] Because as you share with others, you yourself may come to realize that what you're looking for you already have. And so we find that Jesus is here saying this wonderful thing, whoever loves his life loses it.

and whoever hates his life, in other words, is prepared to give up your own life. In other words, to have a new king on the throne of your heart, King Jesus.

I would ask you tonight, will you ask Jesus to be king of your life? Let us pray. Lord, Lord, Lord,