

Seeing Jesus

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[0:00] Let me invite you to turn back in your Bibles to John chapter 12, to words that we read from verse 20 to 26.

! That's going to be our focus this evening. We have the request from those who are visiting Jerusalem. Sir, we wish to see Jesus.

We wish to see Jesus. You can sense the anger and the desperation in the voices of the enemies of Jesus in verse 19.

They have witnessed the arrival of Jesus into Jerusalem with celebration, with adoration, and it has pressed every button in the minds and hearts of his enemies.

Their exasperation, you see that you are gaining nothing. Look, the whole world has gone after him. They say this despite the fact they put the word out like gangsters, that if anybody knew where Jesus was, they were to tell him or tell them, and they would sort the rest out.

[1:26] You have that in the very last words of the previous chapter. Chapter 11, verse 57. Chief priests and Pharisees had given orders. If anyone knew where he was, he should let them know so that they might arrest him.

They're behaving like gangsters, but nobody's listening to them because Jesus has raised someone from the dead. And that carries more credibility than what the religious leaders of the day are doing. And so in exasperation, they cry out that the whole world has gone after him. And then as if to illustrate that very truth, you have some Greeks who were visiting Jerusalem at that time, meandering their way through the crowds to the disciples who would largely have been surrounding Jesus or certainly been very close by.

And almost as if an illustration of how the whole world is going after him, here you have these non-Jewish people coming with a desire to see Jesus.

In some ways, the words of Jesus' enemies were prophetic, that the whole world has gone after him. Because if we trace the history of the Christian faith, that's exactly what's happened, isn't it?

[2:35] Unlike the other major faiths in this world, whether we think of Islam or Hinduism or Buddhism, they are still strongest in their heartlands. Where these movements began, and other than migration of those from these areas, they haven't really seen growth in any other part of the world, unlike Christianity.

Christianity, which is always on the move, whether from the start in the Middle East and heading westwards along North Africa and into Europe and then into North America.

And now what we see in our generation, we see the movement of Christianity is going south to South America, to Africa. And it's gone east with more Christians in China than our people living in the United Kingdom.

Because the message of Jesus truly has the world going after him. And we tonight are part of that worldwide movement of those who will hear of Jesus.

And of course, little did these enemies of Jesus realize how prophetic their words would have been, which is actually one of the things that reoccurs in John's Gospel. People speak about things that they don't actually realize how true they are.

[3:46] But what we see in the ultimate fulfillment, if we have the panoramic view that John himself is given in Revelation, we do see, do we not, that people from every tribe and nation and language and tongue are going to be before the throne.

They're going to be looking at this lamb that looks as if it had been slain. But this lamb is alive. This is the Lord Jesus himself. And so this evening, I want us to work through this section from verse 20 to verse 26.

Noticing, first of all, that there is a request. Very simply, there is a request. Sir, we wish to see Jesus. And Jesus' life, as you will know, is bookended by unexpected visitors.

At the start of his life, near the start of his life, he has these unexpected visitors from the east who want to come and bow down and worship. And here now, towards the very end of his life, he has these unexpected visitors coming from the west to simultaneously bow down and worship the Lord Jesus Christ.

The actual, behind the translation we have here, it says that there's a repeated asking that took place here. And it's put the disciples in a little bit of a quandary. Because they know that Jesus has a target on his back.

[5:09] And they know that the enemies of Jesus are looking for any opportunity to try and cause difficulty for him. So therefore, Jesus, speaking to non-Jewish people, at this time of the year, is that going to be, is that going to cause more difficulty?

And so Philip goes and tells Andrew. Then Andrew and Philip, verse 22, they went and told Jesus what was taking place. Because eventually they realised, from what they had seen in their front row seat, watching, observing, listening, learning from Jesus, that actually Jesus is someone who welcomes genuine interruptions.

They've seen that throughout the past three years. They've seen that with different people. As he's walking with Jairus to the home where his young daughter is dying, there is the interruption of this woman who's been plagued for the last 12 years with illness.

And Jesus sensed power going out from him. And so he stopped and he interacted with her. And she was made well. And so he welcomed that genuine interruption.

He welcomed the genuine interruption that children would bring. I don't know if there's many kids in here tonight. But one of the things I say to the schools that I go and visit regularly is that Jesus always had time for young children.

[6:38] And children were very different then to today. I mean, today we almost idolise at times our kids. Because back then they literally were the lowest of the low, but not with Jesus.

He would welcome genuine interruptions. Or you think of the blind men hearing that Jesus is walking along. And they're shouting and they're screaming.

And to everyone else, this is an irritant. Why can't they just keep their mouth shut? But no, not with Jesus. Because Jesus welcomes genuine interruptions. And of course we can culminate that line of thinking when we land on the cross.

Because you think, well, if there was ever a moment where Jesus would be excused for not actually receiving an interruption. It would be as he's hanging on the cross paying for sin.

And yet he hears somebody on a cross beside him saying, remember me when you come into your kingdom. And so having come to that conclusion that actually Jesus welcomes genuine interruptions. Andrew and Philip go and tell Jesus.

[7:41] And so we have the third reference in the Gospel of John of Andrew bringing people to Jesus. First of all, he brought Peter to Jesus. He then brings the young boy with his packed lunch to Jesus.

And here he is taking these foreigners to Jesus. Now, what an example Andrew is of being somebody who helps other people meet Jesus.

What an example to follow. But let's ask the question, why did they want to see Jesus? They've come with this request, we want to see Jesus. The question is why? Why do we want to see Jesus? Had they heard something of the power of his miracles? Had they heard that the authority of the words by which he spoke was in a different league to anybody else?

Had they heard that he was a man and a mission? We don't actually know the answer. All of these things or a mix of these things could be true along with many other things. But what we do know is that they wanted to see Jesus.

[8:51] So what will they see when they look to Jesus? What do we see when we look to Jesus? Well, when we look to Jesus, we see somebody who is fully human, with a fully human frame, just like you and I.

A frame that needs to be fed. And a frame that needs to be rested. A frame that needs to have water. A frame that could only be in one place at one time.

When we look to Jesus, we see someone who was, in that sense, fully human. He became man without ceasing to be God.

Because not simply is he fully human. When we look at our Savior, we realize that he is fully divine as well, is he not? Who else in history has had the power to drive out disease?

Either by the words that he spoke or by the very touch of his hand. Who else had the power to silence demons? To drive demons away?

[10:04] To free those who had been plagued by them? You live on a windy island. I grew up on a windy island. None of us have been able to ever stop the wind from blowing. Or the swell of the waves.

But Jesus could by just uttering a few words. Who else could speak into death and say to a little girl, Wake up. Reaching down into death.

Even by his words to bring her back to life. Who alone had the power to decree, declare someone's sins to be forgiven. All of these things are what we would expect. If somebody claimed to be divine, we would turn around and say, prove it.

And what we see when we look at Jesus is we see someone who is fully divine and someone who is fully human. It's not some mixture when it's 70, 30 or whatever.

Fully divine, fully human. That's who we see when we see Jesus. And he is the one who, having taken this human frame to himself without ceasing to be God, who came on this worldwide mission that all the way through John's Gospel we hear about.

[11:11] He's going to be the Lamb of God. He's going to take away the sins of the world. He's going to be the expression of the love of God. For God so loved the world. He declares himself not simply to be the light of the nation, but the light of the world.

God, he's the one who's going to gather his sheep from other pens, from other areas. He's going to bring them together. They are coming with this desire to see the one who stands alone as the God-man who has come on a mission to save men, women, boys and girls.

And so the request is the wisest request anybody could ever make. It is the wisest focus we could ever have, that we want to see Jesus.

And if we have seen Jesus for who he is, not simply fully God and fully man out there, but fully God and fully man who has come on a mission to save us, then making sure that our vision of who Jesus is doesn't get clouded by our responsibilities and by our duties and all the different distractions of this world, well, that's our responsibility.

We want to keep seeing Jesus because there is none else other than him, is there? So we see, first of all, in this passage, we see that they've come with a request not to be entertained, not to learn something, but they want to see the Savior.

[12:40] And this request is met in verse 23 and verse 24 with an answer. In fact, verse 23 to 25 is met with an answer.

Because frequently when Jesus is initiated in a conversation, whether it's a question or a statement, he frequently replies with a question himself.

And he comes not necessarily with the way that people would expect him to answer. He comes in different ways. And this is another one.

So, sir, we wish to see Jesus. They come to Jesus. And in response to this, he sees something they don't expect. Because he says, the hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.

And they're going, okay, that's not quite what we were thinking about. They just want to see you.

But Jesus is, as ever, multiple steps ahead. And he's going to deal with their request by actually clarifying what it is, who it is, that they're actually going to see.

[13:47] And so he sees and views this as a turning point. This is a turning point whereby here you have non-Jews coming to him with a desire to see him and to know him.

And now he sees the hour has come. That the request from these Greeks is a sign in the mind and understanding of our Savior that there is now a different moment that has been reached.

Because now is the time that the gospel, the message, the good news that he is about to secure is going to go beyond just the lost sheep of Israel.

You'll recall on a couple of occasions that phrase, the lost sheep of Israel, and similar phrases were used to narrow down the scope of Jesus' ministry.

That he sent his followers out to gather in the lost sheep. When you had the woman who came desperate for healing for her daughter, she recognized that she was not of Jewish origin.

[15:00] That she was one of the dogs in that sense, the derogatory term of the day. But she recognized that even the dogs would eat the crumbs that fall from the master's table because the scope of Jesus' ministry had been limited.

With this request, Jesus sees something change. Because he now moves on to the fact that in light of this request, the hour has come.

Because up until this point, the hour is always in the future. It is almost like a drumbeat that is beating at different times throughout the gospel of John.

His hour has not yet come. And yet we reach here and his hour has come.

We know that Jesus operated to a very different timeline and timetable, didn't he? His family, who up until that point didn't believe in him, thought it would be very straightforward for him to take his miracle roadshow from the north to Jerusalem in chapter 7 for the Feast of Tabernacles.

[16:10] And Jesus reminded them, for you any time is right, but not for me. Because Jesus was living this perfectly obedient life in every single detail, according to the Father's will, according to the Father's timetable.

And yet now he realizes something is different here. This is now an occasion that has moved on to the next stage, if you like, of his mission.

That with this hour coming, his death and all that is going to unfold with regard to his death and all that his death is going to secure, that's now come closer into view as we have this request from these non-Jewish people.

And so this hour has arrived. And he said, it's the hour for the Son of Man to be glorified.

And it's that phrase, Son of Man, that stands out. Because if we were there and if we'd had some of the knowledge of the Old Testament that some of the people standing there would have had, their ears would have picked up at the use of the term Son of Man.

[17:21] This would have been loaded with significance for them. It's almost as if they would have looked to somebody around them and said, did he actually see that? He said Son of Man, didn't he?

With some of them, their hearts would have begun to beat that little bit faster. Because this term was loaded with significance. The significance you find in the Old Testament, you go back to Daniel chapter 7, and it talks about this worldwide never-ending rule that will come with the Son of Man, come with the one sent by God.

And here is Jesus referencing himself as the Son of Man, as the one who has come. And a little bit like you, I mean all these analogies, they work to an extent and then they don't.

But you think of how candidates for the US presidency, when they're about to announce their nomination to put themselves forward as a candidate for their party, that they'll go to a location that's significant for them.

And the setting will just be what it needs to be. And the wording will just be what they think it needs to be. And everything will be planned and coordinated for this great statement that they are in this race, and they're going to bring change and whatever else they promise that never actually materialises.

[18:38] But that's how they do things, isn't it? Well, we reverse back a few thousand years, and this is what some of the people there would have been thinking. Here is Jesus. He is, we're at Passover time.

And he's talking about himself in terms of the Son of Man. We are now moving on to a new level.

The hope that we've been waiting for is about to be realised. And so for the folk who were listening, it was falling into place.

And yet what they hadn't realised, didn't realise, perhaps had forgotten, what Jesus had said earlier on in chapter 3, when he talked about that for the Son of Man to be the one who would ascend, he needs to be the one who first of all descends.

No one has ascended into heaven except the one who descended from heaven, the Son of Man. For Jesus to be this Son of Man, for him to be the one who was going to secure the freedom that they desperately needed, which was on a spiritual level rather than on a political or physical level, then he not simply would have to descend to live among them, but his descent was going to be a descent to death, which is why, again in John's Gospel, Son of Man is quoted in relation to the crucifixion of Jesus Christ.

And so we have this request, and we have this answer that is given, where Jesus is bringing the focus round to what's about to take place.

[20:17] The hour has come, and the Son of Man is now going to be glorified. And the glorification is going to involve a dying.

Verse 24, unless a grain of wheat falls to the earth and dies, it remains alone, but if it dies, it bears much fruit. He's talking about being glorified in the context of dying.

And for us, that seems very odd, because in the occasions that we do speak about glorification, if we do speak about trying to give people the recognition that they deserve, well, that almost involves a sense of exaltation, doesn't it?

It involves a sense of prominence, a sense of attention being given in that sense. And yet Jesus is going in the very opposite, and he's talking about glorification in the context of death.

Now, we know that as the passage, as the chapters unfold, the glorification in the context of the crucifixion is going to be made clear, again in this chapter, again in the following chapter.

[21:27] And so what the people of the day would class as the greatest humiliation, and what people throughout history have classed as not simply a humiliation, but a conundrum that cannot be solved, if Jesus was who he was, why on earth did he die in that way, is actually going to be the very means of his glorification, in the same way that this seed has to die before life can come from it.

So Jesus has to die before this worldwide mission is going to move forward. And so he is receiving this request, they want to see him, and you're going to see me, but you're going to see me in a very different way to how you imagine me to be, because the hour has come, and the Son of Man is about to be glorified, and you think exaltation, but actually it's going to be humiliation.

You think coronation, but it's actually going to be crucifixion. That is how you're going to see me. And it reminds us, does it not, that actually we need more than just Jesus' example, outstanding though it was.

We need more than Jesus' teaching, authoritative and unique as it undoubtedly was, what we need is the death of a substitute in our place, so that we may be set free and welcomed into a relationship with God.

And so the Son of Man, he is at this hour going to be glorified. I suppose in life we've all been in this situation, that when we go through certain events, or we meet certain people, then our lives change.

[23:22] Those of older generations, who in Providence had to endure the war years, were very much shaped by the war years. On a more positive note, when you met your now spouse, then life was never the same after meeting your spouse.

When we go through certain events, when we meet certain people, our lives are changed, and they are not the same again. Jesus goes on to talk about our lives being changed when we see the identity of Jesus Christ, and we see the mission of Jesus Christ.

That when we recognise that he is the Son of Man who was glorified in his crucifixion for us, then life changes. Verse 25, whoever loves his life loses it.

Whoever hates his life in this world will keep it forever. If anyone serves me, he must follow me. And where I am, there will my servant be also. If anyone serves me, the Father will honour him.

This is telling us the outworking of seeing Jesus is that we're going to see ourselves very differently. We're going to see our lives very differently. We're going to see our acts of service very differently.

[24:42] This is where we take the teaching of Scripture, and we could maybe talk about it in a theological sense, and now the practical implications of that, because seeing Jesus for who he is changes how we view ourselves and how we view others.

Jesus makes it clear here that a love of the self actually leads to self-destruction. But the converse is true, is that when we actually have a love for our Saviour, and all that will come to us from that, including the various different suffering and struggles that will come our way for having a living faith, then the reward is so very different.

And so seeing Jesus changes how we view ourselves and how we view others. It moves the agenda from ourselves to others in a way that it was not like that before.

Let me illustrate. Some of you will have heard of a guy called George Muller. He lived a long time ago. He was an evangelist, and he also helped initiate and then organise orphanages, cared for tens of thousands of children in the day, back down in the Bristol area.

He was asked at one point, what was the secret to his effectiveness as a follower of Jesus? And he bowed his head and he answered along these lines that the secret of his effectiveness was the day he died.

[26:24] And he bowed his head a little more. The day I died to my opinions, to my preferences, to my taste, to my will.

The day I died to the approval or censure of this world. The day I died even to the approval and blame of my brothers who didn't understand some of what I was doing.

He's illustrating in a very clear way what happens when somebody meets Jesus. that our lives are turned the right way round. And our perspective about our rights and our preferences and our desires and our demands go off in a different trajectory.

The effectiveness of this guy's ministry and life was orientated around seeing Jesus for who he is because that exposes us for who we are and in light of what we are then we wish his will to be done and not our will to be done.

And so the surprising greatness of what Jesus promises us here is that those who do see our lives through the lens and rubric of who Christ is actually have the honour of the Heavenly Father resting upon us.

[28:02] Let me look at this from a slightly different angle. There was a guy in the 1960s called J.W. Tucker. He was a missionary and he was actually martyred for his faith in the I think it was the Congo DR Congo or the other Congo I'm not sure which.

He was martyred for his faith. He was attacked he was killed he was bundled into the back of a truck and then he was thrown into the Bomo Kande River apologies for the pronunciation it's probably incorrect Bomo Kande River where his remains were then eaten by crocodiles.

Some 30 years later a friend of this man Tucker went back to that country and he heard what had happened after the martyr of J.W. Tucker he heard that there was one person who actually came to a faith when Tucker was alive.

He was a local policeman and the policeman came to see Jesus and to follow Jesus' feet to live his life for Jesus things changed and he had this burden placed upon him by God for this particular group that had murdered J.W. Tucker but he just didn't know how to connect the message of Jesus to them until one day somebody told him of a tribal tradition for that people group and the tradition went something like this that if the blood of any man flows in the Bomo Kande River we must listen to his message.

The policeman heard this and he thought that's my key so he went to this area and he said that sometime a man was killed and you threw his body into the Bomo Kande River where he was then eaten by crocodiles and his blood flowed through that river before he died he left me a message so at that point it's all ears the blood of anyone flowing in the Bomo Kande River we need to listen to his message and so he said he left me a message he left me a message about God the God who made everything that we have a message about the God who made everything who loved this broken world so much that he sent his son into this world and his son lived a perfect life in this world in fact he was the only one to ever live a perfect life and do you know what happened to his son that his son ended up being crucified on a cross not for his own sin but for the sins of his people for the sins of the world and as he explained the gospel to this tribal group many of them were converted so 30 years later when this friend of G.W.

[31:00] Tucker went there there were thousands of Christians in that tribal group who had come to faith on the basis of somebody who was willing even to suffer to the point of death so that people might see Jesus because seeing Jesus is so remarkably serious because seeing Jesus

and keeping our eyes on Jesus is where we must be in these days of communion as we see Jesus our minds inevitably focus on the cross don't we and they focus into the cross that place where we see the glory of God displayed with the holiness of his justice and the depth of his love on that cross we see the remarkable dual truths there that we are perfectly known by God and yet simultaneously perfectly loved by God because the glory of Jesus that we need to see and respond to is what we see on the cross so with all of that being said what takeaways do we have from a passage like this this evening let me ask you first of all have you seen Jesus do you want to see Jesus the Bible makes a promise that those who seek will find don't rest until you have seen and savoured bowed before the living Lord Jesus for yourself and if you have seen the Lord Jesus how wonderful it would be to glorify the Lord Jesus by being like Andrew and helping other people to see the Lord Jesus because what more could we do for our family and friends and communities and country than help people to see Jesus and if we want other people to see Jesus then as I alluded earlier on we need to make sure that we are keeping our eyes on Jesus that we are setting our affections on things that are above where Christ is that we have our eyes fixed on him there's much that can distract us some good things can distract us and some not so good things can distract us but keeping our eyes on Jesus is so very very precious and perhaps even there may be some of us this evening who have seen the preciousness and the delight and the wonder of how this saviour could love someone like me someone like you but you've not yet made that known that Jesus is precious well maybe it's time isn't it to let other people know that you have seen Jesus and you do savor

Jesus and you want to serve Jesus in the strength that he's given to you and if that's the case well come and join us be with us as we see our saviour and as we savor him at his table this coming Lord's day if we're spirit and well amen let's bow our heads as we pray father thank you for a passage like this there's so much in it we pray that you would help us to think deeply upon what your word says to us and again we pray father that if this has been a season whether a long season or a short season whereby our vision of Jesus has been clouded by other things father we pray that these clouds might be lifted and that we would have a clear vision of the wonder of the saviour who loved us and gave himself for us we pray this in his name amen we're going to conclude my singing in psalm number 22 psalm 22 from the sing psalms verse of the psalter you'll find this on page 27 psalm 22 from verse 27 on page 27 psalm 22 verse 27 page 27 and we sing these words through the lens of our understanding of who Jesus is that these words remind us and can only really apply to our saviour in that sense the whole earth will remember him and turn towards the lord their god all peoples will bow down to him the nations of the world abroad down to verse 30 posterity will serve the lord and generations still to come will tell a people yet unborn the righteous acts that he has done we're going to stand as we praise god 27 to the end the whole the whole the whole earth will remember him and turn towards the lord their god all peoples will the the the!

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the!! the! the earth will! the earth will feed and worship with an offer in all those whose destiny is dust will hum!

[37:18] the need need need need need And generations still to come will tell the people yet unborn the righteous acts that he has done.

Until the Lord returns, Orantly calls us home. May the Lord bless you and keep you. May the Lord make his face to shine on you and be gracious to you. May the Lord turn his face towards you and grant you his peace.

And the people of God said, Amen.