

## The Greeks Must See John 12:20-22

There was a number of Greek people, who had come to Jerusalem for Passover. Though they are Greeks, they also identify the Lord God of Israel as the one true God. These were people who had not converted to the culture or ceremonies of the Jews, but they worship the Lord as the true God. Jews treated them as unclean and immoral. It's unfortunate that religious people can sometimes act in such a way.

1) If you have a group that essentially functions as a huddled group of self-righteous people, who are, relatively morally superior to society, would you call them a Christian church? Does it make a difference if they call themselves a Christian church?

The Jews wanted to see Jesus' miracles. These Greeks just wanted to see Jesus. In churches that are truly churches of Jesus Christ, the focus will not be on the life of the Christian rather than Christ and him crucified. The attitude we see from these Jews and the way they treated these Greeks is unfortunately still common today. It's because of things like this that many assume Christianity is good advice rather than good news, and that's the difference between religion and gospel. Religion says God will love us if we change; the gospel says God's love changes us. Religion says God's love is conditional on what we do; the gospel says God's love is unconditional because of what Jesus has done. Religion is about your transformation; the gospel is about Christ's substitution. Religion says "just do it"; the gospel announces "it is finished."

These Greeks just want to see Jesus. Their focus is on the gospel, not religion. They're not concerned with culture and ceremonies, they just want access to Jesus. So, they approach Philip. Philip is one of the only disciples with a Greek name, not a Jewish name. And he's from Bethsaida, a predominantly Gentile area.

2) Why do you think these Greeks approached Philip in an attempt to get to Jesus?

Philip seemed more accessible and relatable to them. The pertinent question that causes us to ask ourselves is how do we present ourselves as "Philips" to the world? What we see in Philip is not ceremony or religion. Rather, in Philip, we see someone who is accessible and relatable, and someone who can introduce people to Jesus. If people see you as a condescending, self-righteous, religious practitioner, they won't come to you in a way that allows you to be their bridge to Jesus, even if they love you. But if you are like Philip, a humble disciple of Jesus, then you will have opportunity to introduce people to Jesus.

## The Seed Must Die John 12:23-26

3) What point is Jesus making here as he talks about the seed?

Inside every seed is unactualized potential. Jesus is saying that is the case for himself too. In order for forgiveness and salvation to come into the world, it can only come through his death. For us to be saved from our sins, Jesus has to fall into the ground, lay down his life, and sacrifice his self-interests for the interests of the people whom he loves more than self. But as Jesus talks about the seed, he's giving more than just a description of how we are saved. He's also laying out what should be an operating principle of our lives too. We are God's seeds. If we are willing to say, "My life is not about me," we can die to our self-interests too. It's about the glory of the Father. Therefore, I'm willing to love and serve others ahead of self. Not only does Christ's resurrection produce an abundant harvest with the resurrection of all of us. But God also can produce an abundant harvest of selfless love in this world if we have the attitude to bury the seed of self and sacrifice for others. Jesus had to die to his self-interests in order to raise up humanity to heaven for all eternity. And he wants us to be motivated by that grace to also go out into the world and do the exact same thing. Abandon yourself that others may rise up.

## **Aiming for God's Glory John 12:27-31**

As Jesus is teaching about laying aside self-interest for the interests of others, look at what he's doing here. He's internally wrestling with what's on his plate in his life. He's overwhelmed with sorrow, his soul is troubled. He's breaking down psychologically, emotionally, physically—in a little bit he will sweat drops of blood. It feels awful. Every minute of it feels awful. And the whole thing absolutely glorifies God, because, to Jesus, the Father's glory is more important than whatever he feels or thinks. Jesus' aim was to glorify the Father. Jesus is willing to sacrifice his personal safety, his personal comfort, his personal pleasure, his worldly relationships. He's willing to sacrifice them at the altar of the cross, because they are an offering to his Father. What he says then is, "Are you willing to follow me and do the same?"

4) When you try to put others first, if you try to follow Jesus' example, what is your aim?

For the religious, the aim is often to look good or to be better than others. Sometimes the aim might be to make God love you, but that's religion without the gospel too. Maybe the aim is to save others, and that's great and selfless. But what happens when we feel like we've failed and no one is saved? Just do it all with the aim of glorifying God. Results don't matter, and those are up to God anyway. Put others first, not to get anything in return from them. Do it just to glorify God. By doing that, you also make yourself a Philip in their lives.

5) If our aim is to glorify the Father above all else, how does that apply to our current circumstances?

If we glorify our health more than our God, then we're going to be worried and angry in the face of this pandemic. If this life was all that there was, then our health would matter ultimately. But if we have eternal life, then our life here on earth matters relatively. Jesus was willing to die to save the world, in part, because he knew what was coming on the other side of that—an empty tomb and resurrected life! He lay down something that mattered relatively, that it might benefit others. What should we say, "Father, forgive us from these difficult circumstances?" No. It is for this reason that we have been brought into the world, because God's glory is going to be revealed through these difficult circumstances. "Father, don't remove me from these difficult circumstances. Father, glorify your name in these difficult circumstances." Things are going to turn out fine, because things are going to turn up resurrected. And I know that, because Jesus proves that.

## **The Cross Approach to Glory John 12:32-33**

Jesus is a king, and, like a true king, he's going to get lifted up and he's going to draw a bunch of people to himself. But he's not getting lifted up on a pedestal, and he's not getting lifted up to sit on a throne here on earth. He's getting lifted up to go to his own execution.

6) Jesus teaches greatness is achieved through service and he teaches us to follow his example of setting aside self in order to be focused on the interests of others. Does that mean we should be more hands-on in helping people right now, even at risk to ourselves?

It's complicated. If you have a specific societal duty, perhaps your work in healthcare, then you should not refuse to continue your duty. We should honor our duties, even if they become crosses. If you know someone who is sick, you should love them by caring for them. It's more likely that you don't know someone who is sick, so you love them by not contaminating them. If things get to a point that we need to love each other in non-digital ways, then that's exactly what we'll do. Until then, we will love each other by not potentially contaminating one another. Either one is a cross. Either one is embracing something I might not like. May we do it all to the glory of God.