

G R A C E

Reformed Baptist Church

Soli ♦ Deo ♦ Gloria

THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

Sermon Notes

Greeks Seek Jesus

John 12:20-26

January 22, 2006

Verses 20

- ❑ In Verse 19, the Pharisees said to one another, "...look, the world has gone after Him."
- ❑ Now, here, in Verse 20, John tells his readers that "there were some Greeks...saying, "...we wish to see Jesus."
- ❑ So, the Greeks, in this Verse represent "the world" spoken of by the Pharisees in Verse 19.
- ❑ Also, the Greeks stand in contrast to the Pharisees. In other words, the Pharisees knew the Law. They were experts in the Law. However, they rejected the One who fulfilled the Law. The Greeks, on the other hand, were "unclean" Gentiles; yet, they, and not the Pharisees, were the ones seeking Jesus.
- ❑ John calls those who sought out Jesus "Greeks."
 - In this context, a "Greek" was not necessarily someone from Greece. The term was used to describe **Gentiles** from the greater Greek-speaking world.
 - It is quite possible that these were those Gentiles known as "God-fearers." The reason this is possible is because John states that they "were going up to worship at the feast."
 - Also, it is somewhat possible that these were full proselytes, i.e. Gentiles who had fully converted to Judaism and were allowed to worship with the Jews.
 - Scripture records that there were Gentiles who respected the traditions and ways of Judaism without converting. Such individuals were Cornelius (Acts 10) and the centurion of Luke 7:5 who even built the Jews a synagogue.
 - These Jews, although never converting, often attended the Feasts of Israel. Although not allowed to officially worship with the Jews, they were permitted into the Court of Gentiles in the Temple area. Signs were posted in the temple courts that threatened all Gentiles [except proselytes] with death if they entered the Inner Court.
- ❑ However, the point, here is that these were **not Jews**.

Verses 21 – 22

- The Greeks, first, went to Philip “who was from Bethsaida of Galilee”
 - It is not clear why the Greeks went to Philip first, but there are a few possibilities:
 - They found someone with a Greek name. Both the names of Philip and Andrew were Greek.
 - If they were from areas north and east of the Sea of Galilee, then they may have searched from the disciple who was from an area closer to their home. This would have been Philip of Bethsaida.
 - Lastly, they may have approached Philip, as opposed to Jesus, first, because they were not yet certain as to how Jesus would receive Greeks (i.e., Gentiles).
- The Greeks tell Philip, “Sir, we wish to see Jesus.”
 - The word for “see” simply means, “to have an interview with.”
- Apparently, Philip did not know exactly what to do, so he went to Andrew. In earlier parts of this Gospel (1:42; 6:8-9), John records Andrew bringing people to Jesus.

Verse 23

- The response of Jesus to the request of the Greeks is fascinating: He does not even address them.
- The reason for this is found in the content of His response, “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.”
 - The term “the hour” in the Gospel of John refers, almost exclusively, to the “hour” or the time of the crucifixion of Jesus Christ.
 - Further, the “glorification” of the Son in this Gospel refers primarily to the crucifixion of Jesus Christ as well.
 - Recall the Wedding at Cana when Jesus tells His mother, “My hour has not yet come.” Compare that statement with this one: “The hour has come...”
 - The reason that John reveals the crucifixion as the “glorification” of the Son is for several reasons:
 - It represents the perfect obedience of the Son to the will of the Father.
 - It is the path back to the glory Jesus shared with the Father before the Incarnation.

- Because Jesus Christ was fully God and fully man, the Father demonstrated, in the horrific crucifixion, His hatred for sin and the zeal He had for His own glory.
- The crucifixion represents the fulfillment of Jesus Christ as the perfect Passover Lamb who “takes away the sins of the world,” both removing the sin from His people and appeasing the wrath of God towards His people.
- The words of Jesus, here, are quite possibly a reference to Isaiah 52:13: “**Behold, My servant will prosper, He will be high and lifted up and greatly exalted.**”

Therefore the coming of the Greeks to Jesus acts as a sort of “trigger,” serving as the impetus for His statement concerning His glorification (i.e. His crucifixion). In other words, it is through the “glory” of the cross that Jesus Christ will serve as the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the “world” (i.e. not only Jew but also the Greek). Consequently, the Greeks will come to Jesus as born-again believers because of His “glorification” on the cross of Calvary. Today, we are living proof of this truth.

Verse 24

- The use of agricultural references is common throughout Scripture because of the type of society Israel was during Biblical times.
- In light of Verse 23, the crucifixion of Jesus, this appears to be reference to His burial [“unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies”] and resurrection [“it bears much fruit”]
 - The Apostle Paul uses this same imagery in reference to the resurrection in 1 Corinthians 15:36-38
 - Also, it is no coincidence that Paul refers to Jesus Christ as “the first fruits” (1 Corinthians 15:20-23).
 - Indeed, Jesus Christ was resurrected from the dead on the Feast of First Fruits.
- In the fourth century, Augustine said, with respect to this Verse, “**Jesus spoke of Himself. He Himself was the grain that had to die, and be multiplied; to suffer death through the unbelief of the Jews, and to be multiplied in the faith of many nations.**”
- As is true in the world of sowing seeds, so it is true in the work of Jesus Christ –

The death of one seed produces many living seeds.

Verse 25

- ❑ Jesus now makes it clear that He is not the only one who is to die – His followers are to as well.
- ❑ These final two Verses are two of the most difficult in all of Scripture.
- ❑ ALL believers in the Lord Jesus Christ are called to “hate our lives.”
 - Yet, Christ makes it clear that we are to “hate our lives **in this world.**”
 - Because we are sinful human beings, we are of this world. Therefore, as disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ, we are called to **die.**
 - “The person who loves his life will lose it: it could not be otherwise, for to love one’s life is a fundamental denial of God’s sovereignty, of God’s rights, and a brazen elevation of self to the apogee of one’s perception, and therefore an idolatrous focus on self, which is the heart of all sin.”
D.A. Carson

**IN ORDER FOR US TO ENGAGE AND TRANSFORM THIS WORLD FOR THE
LORD JESUS CHRIST, WE MUST FIRST DESTROY THE GRIP THAT THE WORLD
HAS ON US!**

**...AND THE ONLY WAY THIS WILL HAPPEN IS THROUGH THE DEADLY, YET
EFFECTIVE WORK OF THE CROSS.**

Verse 26

- ❑ We are not to simply hate and lose our lives, we are to focus on Christ and serve Him.
 - This is why the author of Hebrews states, “...let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, fixing our eyes on Jesus...” (Hebrews 12:1,2)
- ❑ Christ says, “If anyone serves Me, he must follow Me; and where I am, there My servant will be also;”
 - Given the context of this passage, the phrase “follow me” means to “follow me” to the Cross.
 - The Apostle Paul stated, “I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live...” (Galatians 2:20)
 - Therefore, we must consider the cost of true discipleship and ask ourselves the question “Is it worth it to me?” Jesus Himself asks this question in Luke 14:28, asking, “For which one of you, when he wants to build a tower, does not first sit down and calculate the cost to see if he has enough to complete it?”
- ❑ Finally, Jesus states, “if anyone serves Me, the Father will honor him.”
 - To honor the Son is to honor the Father.

- Although following Christ will lead us to the cross, we will be rewarded by the Father.

- ✳ So the question remains: **Is a deep, meaningful, and intimate relationship with Jesus Christ worth the high cost of true discipleship?**
 - Throughout Scripture, and throughout the history of Christianity, when God used someone mightily, He first uprooted them from this world and focused their attention on Him. Think of how God did this in the lives of the following men:
 - ⇒ Abraham
 - ⇒ Moses
 - ⇒ David
 - ⇒ Paul
 - ⇒ Peter
 - Without exception, each one of these men endured hardships and suffering to a degree that most Christians today would see as unthinkable.

- Until we “pick up our cross” and follow Christ, we cannot call ourselves true disciples of Jesus Christ. However, when we do, we, like Christ, are “lifted up” from this world...uprooted from all of its trappings, and used by God to proclaim the truth of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

- **There are five aspects of “losing our lives” that we must understand:**
 - **It is necessary** [if we desire to be genuine disciples of Jesus Christ]

- We are called to hate our lives “in this world” and to follow Christ to the cross that we too may be crucified with Him. When we do not do this, we elevate our selves to a level that is sinful and idolatrous. Possibly no author in modern times has better explained the importance of submitting to the Cross of Christ better than A.W. Tozer in his classic, *The Pursuit of God*.

Self is the opaque veil that hides the face of God from us. It can be removed only in spiritual experience, never by mere instruction. We may as well try to instruct leprosy out of our system. There must be a work of God in destruction before we are free. We must invite the cross to do its deadly work within us. We must bring our self-sins to the cross for judgment. We must prepare ourselves for an ordeal of suffering in some measure like that through which our Savior passed when He suffered under Pontius Pilate.

Let us remember that when we talk of the rending of the veil we are speaking in a figure, and the thought of it is poetical, almost pleasant, but in actuality there is nothing pleasant about it. In human experience that veil

is made of living spiritual tissue; it is composed of the sentient, quivering stuff of which our whole beings consist, and to touch it is to touch us where we feel pain. To tear it away is to injure us, to hurt us and make us bleed. To say otherwise is to make the cross no cross and death no death at all. It is never fun to die. To rip though the dear and tender stuff of which life is made can never be anything but deeply painful. Yet that is what the cross did to Jesus and it is what the cross would do to every man to set him free.

Let us beware of tinkering with our inner life, hoping ourselves to rend the veil. God must do everything for us. Our part is to yield and trust. We must confess, forsake, repudiate the self-life and reckon it crucified. But we must be careful to distinguish lazy “acceptance” from the real work of God. We must insist upon the work being done. We dare not rest content with a neat doctrine of self-crucifixion. That is to imitate Saul and spare the best of the sheep and the oxen.

Insist that the work be done in very truth and it will be done. The cross is rough and it is deadly, but it is effective. It does not keep its victim hanging there forever. There comes a moment when its work is finished and the suffering victim dies. After that is resurrection glory and power, and the pain is forgotten for joy that the veil is taken away and we have entered in actual spiritual experience the presence of the living God.

- **It is painful**

- In his book, *Hard to Believe*, John MacArthur tells the story of the great Puritan, John Bunyan who was told by the authorities not to preach, or they would put him in jail. He knew that if he was thrown in jail, there would be no one, except the Lord, to provide for and protect his family; but Bunyan kept preaching the Gospel, and he was thrown in jail as a result. It was in jail that he wrote his classic work *Pilgrim's Progress*.

In an appendix to his autobiography, *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners*, Bunyan wrote:

The parting with my wife and poor children hath often been to me in this place [jail], as the pulling of the Flesh from my bones; and that not only because I am somewhat too fond of these great Mercies, but also because I should have often brought to my mind the many hardships, miseries, and wants that my poor Family was like to meet with, should I be taken from them, especially my poor blind Child...O the thought of the hardship I thought my blind one might go under, would break up my heart to pieces...But yet, recalling my self, thought I, I must venture you all with God...O I saw in this condition, I was a man who was pulling down his house upon the head of his wife and children; yet thought I, I must do it, I must do it.

- **It is unifying**

In his classic work, *The Pursuit of God*, the late Pastor and author, A.W. Tozer, recalls the scene at Mount Moriah with Abraham and Isaac. God had commanded Abraham to sacrifice his son, and Abraham went, in an act of obedience, to the altar. Then God, just before Abraham was to slay his own son, provided a sacrifice instead. Tozer wrote the following analysis of this moment in Abraham's life:

God let the suffering old man go through with it up to the point where He knew there would be no retreat, and then forbade him to lay a hand upon the boy. To the wondering patriarch He now says in effect, “It's all right, Abraham. I never intended that you should

actually slay the lad. I only wanted to remove him from the temple of your heart that I might reign unchallenged there. I wanted to correct the perversion that existed in your love. Now you may have the boy, sound and well. Take him and go back to your tent. Now I know that you fear God, seeing that you have not withheld your son, your only son, from Me.” ...Everything Abraham had owned before this was his still to enjoy: sheep, camels, herds and goods of every sort. He had also his wife and his friends, and best of all he had his son Isaac safe by his side. He had everything, *but he possessed nothing*. There is the spiritual secret...After than bitter and blessed experience I think the words my and mine never again had the same meaning for Abraham. The sense of possession which they connote was gone from his heart...

- **It is glorifying**

- For the greater glory of God, we must pray that He would uproot us from this world in which we live.

- **It is worth it**

- The Apostle Paul describes his heart’s cry in Philippians 3:10: “I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death.”

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- In Hebrews 11, the writer describes those “who by faith...were tortured, not accepting their release, so that they might obtain a better resurrection; and others experienced mockings and scourgings, yes, also chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were tempted, they were put to death with the sword; they went about in sheepskins, in goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, ill-treated (men of whom the world was not worth), wandering in deserts and mountains and caves and holes in the ground. And all these, having gained approval through their faith...”

When I Survey the Wondrous Cross

by Isaac Watts, 1707

NOTE: It is reported that Charles Wesley stated that he would have given up all of his hymns to have written this one.

When I survey the wondrous cross
On which the Prince of glory died,
My richest gain I count but loss,
And pour contempt on all my pride.

Forbid it, Lord, that I should boast,
Save in the death of Christ my God!
All the vain things that charm me most,
I sacrifice them to His blood.