

GOSPEL OF JOHN

Encounter Jesus – The Son of the Living God

Sir, We Wish to See Jesus

J. Vernon McGee served at the Church of the Open Door in downtown Los Angeles from 1949 to 1970. When you stood at the pulpit you looked out upon a massive auditorium that included a large balcony, and even a second balcony (probably similar to many mega-churches of our day). Stephen J. Cole wrote, “Although I never stood there, I was told that it gave you a feeling of importance just to stand there and look out at the large crowd that had gathered to hear you speak. But just as your ego might begin to inflate, you quickly came down to earth when you looked down at a little plaque fixed to the pulpit with the words *Sir, we wish to see Jesus (John 12:21)*. Today’s study begins with this scripture passage.

Read John 12:20-22 (ESV) ²⁰ *Now among those who went up to worship at the feast were some Greeks.* ²¹ *So these came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and asked him, “Sir, we wish to see Jesus.”* ²² *Philip went and told Andrew; Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus.*

Wiersbe says that the original text indicates that these Greeks were accustomed to coming and worshipping at the feast. They were not curious visitors or one-time investigators. No doubt they were God-fearers, Gentiles who attended the Jewish synagogue and sought the truth, but who had not yet converted to Judaism.

At the birth of Jesus, wise men (Gentiles) came from the east to see Jesus. Now, as the time for Jesus’ death approached, Greeks (Gentiles) came to Him. This would be the last week of Jesus’ physical life. The promised Messiah had been rejected by the Jews. We are told in **Matthew 12:38 (ESV)** ³⁸ *Then some of the scribes and Pharisees answered him, saying, “Teacher, we wish to see a sign from you.”* These Greeks came not to see a sign. They came to see Jesus.

Apparently Jesus had gone into the temple. Since there is a court for the women and a court for the Gentiles, these Greeks could not go straight to Jesus themselves. Philip had a Greek name and may have spoken Greek, which is probably the reason they came to him. Many times it may be common likenesses that provide us with opportunities to introduce others to Jesus. Philip went to Andrew for help. Wherever Andrew is mentioned in scripture, he is remembered for bringing someone to Jesus. What a legacy – to be remembered for bringing people to the Lord! It is something that all of us can do – that is bring people to Jesus.

Read John 12:23-26 (ESV) ²³ *And Jesus answered them, “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.* ²⁴ *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.* ²⁵ *Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life.* ²⁶ *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 honor him.*

John does not specifically say that Jesus talked to the Greeks but the message of Jesus seems to indicate that He did. I picture Philip and Andrew walking the Greeks to Jesus and their appearance prompted Jesus to say, *The*

hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. To hear that Jesus' hour had come must have shocked the disciples. These words are the fourth of nine references Jesus made of His hour or time. The disciples would have been surprised since the first three times Jesus said His hour had **not** yet come. Beginning here all the remaining quotes indicate that His hour had come. That hour would be the time of His arrest and the agony of the cross.

We have read of Jesus' *truly, truly* or *verily, verily* statements before. Recall that *truly, truly* or *amen, amen* is a proclamation that what follows is the truth and that the person making the statement has **firsthand knowledge** about it.

Jesus said: *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.* Jesus was describing His own death as a kernel of wheat. After a grain of wheat dies or germinates in the ground, it produces first a leaf, then an ear or pod, and finally the harvest. The grain must die to bring forth fruit. McGee says, "Many people think they have seen Jesus because they have read the Gospels and they have studied His life. They see the historical Jesus, but they have never seen Jesus until they comprehend His death and His resurrection. He died a redemptive death... You haven't seen Jesus until you have seen that He is the One who died for you on the Cross. He is the One who died for the sins of the world."

The grain of wheat is a picture of God's children as well. We are small and insignificant, but we have the Holy Spirit within us. We bear fruit when we yield ourselves to God and die to self.

Jesus said: *Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life.* These words are familiar from other gospels. There are a lot of deep theological comments on this verse. Let's keep it simple! Believers must establish our own priorities. We cannot give ourselves fully to this life and yet be committed to the life to come.

Jesus said: *If anyone serves me, he must follow me.* Jesus' life is the pattern we should follow. We can't have two masters. Jesus said in **Matthew 6:24 (ESV)**²⁴ "*No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other.* Jesus wants more from us than lip service. He wants life service.

Read John 12:27 (ESV)²⁷ "*Now is my soul troubled. And what shall I say? 'Father, save me from this hour'? But for this purpose I have come to this hour.*"

As Jesus neared the hour when He would become sin on our behalf, quite naturally His soul was deeply troubled because He would bear the wrath of God because of our sins. His thoughts turned to the possibility of asking the Father to save Him from the hour of the cross. But, Jesus would not do that because the cross was the reason He had come to earth. On the night of His arrest in the Garden of Gethsemane, angels would be sent to strengthen Him. In this narrative, His Father spoke to Him.

Read John 12:28-30 (ESV)²⁸ *Father, glorify your name.*" Then a voice came from heaven: "*I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again.*"²⁹ *The crowd that stood there and heard it said that it had thundered. Others said, "An angel has spoken to him."*³⁰ Jesus answered, "*This voice has come for your sake, not mine.*"

We all love immediate responses to our prayers. As Jesus prayed, *Father, glorify your name*, He received an immediate answer. The Father had been glorified in the life and works of Jesus. The Father would be glorified again in the hour of Jesus' death and resurrection because the grace of God would be most clearly seen then.

The Father's voice was audible even though the hearers did not have the spiritual perception to understand it. Some took a naturalistic approach saying that it had thundered. Others did react spiritually saying that an angel had spoken to Jesus. But, it was not an angel. It was the Father who spoke. They missed the truth that God was authenticating Jesus and His ministry. Jesus will later speak of their spiritual blindness. (**John 12:37-40**)

There were three times in Jesus' ministry that the Father spoke verbally from heaven: His baptism, the Transfiguration, and here. Each time the Father endorsed Jesus and His ministry. The voice from heaven was for the sake of those who heard it. After all the miracles they had seen, they should have heard God setting His seal of approval on Jesus.

It is natural to wonder how could the voice from heaven have been for the people's benefit if they did not understand it? Jesus said in **Matthew 11:15 (ESV)** ¹⁵ *He who has ears to hear, let him hear. We hear what we want to hear! Still today as God speaks through His Word, nature and His children giving testimony of Jesus as the only Savior many refuse to hear.*

Read John 12:31-33 (ESV) ³¹ *Now is the judgment of this world; now will the ruler of this world be cast out.* ³² *And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.* ³³ *He said this to show by what kind of death he was going to die.*

The ruler or prince of this world is Satan. He became the prince because he is a usurper. He stole man's authority over the earth from Adam and Eve in the Garden. Even then God promised a Redeemer (**Genesis 3:15**). Jesus is that Redeemer who redeems us from our sins. Jesus was not indicating that the time had come for the world to be finally judged. Jesus said in **John 12:47 (ESV)** ⁴⁷ *If anyone hears my words and does not keep them, I do not judge him; for I did not come to judge the world but to save the world.* He did NOT come the first time to judge. He came the first time to save. The second time Christ comes, He will come in judgment.

We have studied the phrase *lifted up* before in **John 3:14** and **John 8:28**. Wiersbe points out that although the basic meaning is as John explained *crucifixion*, it also carries the idea of *glorification*. **Isaiah 52:13 (ESV)** ¹³ *Behold, my servant shall act wisely; he shall be high and lifted up, and shall be exalted.* Wiersbe says, "The Son of man was *glorified* by being *crucified!*" Don't conclude that *all people* indicates universal salvation. It is instead a reference to no distinction between people – Jew or Gentile – slave or free – rich or poor. Jesus was *lifted up* on the cross for everyone. However, in this age Jesus does not force people. He draws us!

There will come a day when the One who was lifted up on the cross will sit on the throne of judgment – the Great White Throne, and then all men will be drawn to Him – not wooed like He does now but forced to come and stand. You may say 'that is NOT fair'. Others may say, 'But I don't want to give an account to Him.' But you will not be asked what you want. The time of wooing will be over You will have to face Him and stand in the presence of Him who says, *If I be lifted up, I will draw all men unto Me.* This is why it is so critical that we share the good news of Jesus Christ now.

Read John 12:34-36 (ESV) ³⁴ So the crowd answered him, “We have heard from the Law that the Christ remains forever. How can you say that the Son of Man must be lifted up? Who is this Son of Man?” ³⁵ So Jesus said to them, “The light is among you for a little while longer. Walk while you have the light, lest darkness overtake you. The one who walks in the darkness does not know where he is going. ³⁶ While you have the light, believe in the light, that you may become sons of light.” When Jesus had said these things, he departed and hid himself from them.

They didn’t get it. Who is this Son of Man anyway, they said. They were looking for a Messiah to destroy their enemies – a worthy ruler NOW! Jesus had made a triumphal entry into Jerusalem. They were expecting Him to free them from Roman bondage. Apparently, they did recognize Jesus words of being *lifted up* as talk of His death. And, they didn’t want to hear that.

We have spoken before of the Old Testament prophets who often looked through the Telescope of Time by faith and saw what can be described as two mountain peaks: Mount Calvary on the Mount of Olives where the Messiah would suffer and die and the Mount of Olives that will be split in two when the conquering Messiah will victoriously return. Through their telescope, the prophets could not see the space of time between the Messiah’s death and the Messiah’s return as conquering King. From a distance, both peaks appeared as one. Between the events on the mountain peaks there was a time period not visible to them – the church age – the time in which we are living today. These hearers had heard the Old Testament prophets and it was like the hearers of Jesus were saying. ‘We know the Son of Man who is to abide forever, but this Son of Man who is to die we don’t know Him.’

As He often did, Jesus did not answer every question people raised but He gave them the words they needed. Jesus had already explained that He was the Light of the World in **John 8:12**. They did not have much time left to remain with the literal Light! Some believe it might have already been the Wednesday before Jesus was crucified. As we think back to the first desire of the Greeks who came to Philip and said, *Sir, we wish to see Jesus*, I am reminded how difficult it is to see in the dark. Those of us who live in cities do not have much comprehension of total darkness but we have all experienced power failures in the night and understand what it is to stumble in the dark. As believers when we allow ourselves to walk in the darkness, we cause ourselves to stumble and even worse others will not be able to see the reflection of Jesus in our walk. When John the disciple first began his gospel, he wrote of John the Baptist in **John 1:8 (ESV)** ⁸ *He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light*. That is our job today – to bear witness of the Light – to be sons and daughters of the Light so that others can see Jesus.

Although He would experience a public execution, this was the last public appearance where people had an opportunity to learn and interact with Jesus. Just a reminder to us to avoid missing the opportunities we have now to walk in step with the Light of the World.