



Sermon

17th March 2024

The Seeking Greeks

John 12:20-33

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The question that the Greeks ask is famous. Many pulpits have it carved on them, "Sir we would see Jesus." This morning, I want to show you three aspects of Jesus life and character as John 12 portrays them. But first let's look at the context in which all this is happening.

The tension is increasing. Jesus is in greater and greater danger from the Authorities. All because He demonstrated who He is in a wonderful miracle. John has consistently used the word "sign" to describe our Lord's miracles. This last "sign" puts beyond all doubt that the Authorities are either dealing with a charlatan or the Messiah. They choose to opt for the charlatan (He can't be the true Messiah! He transgresses the Law!).

The return of Lazarus from death has stirred up a real hornet's nest. This miracle, this sign, cannot be argued away or pushed aside. Everyone that meets Lazarus can see the reality. He was dead. He is now alive.

Throughout chapter 12 the name of Lazarus appears three times; once when he is present at a dinner held to honour Jesus (verse 2) then when it is given as one of the reasons that the crowd gathered to see Jesus and, to see Lazarus. (verse 9) and finally when this same crowd are noted as still spreading the word that Lazarus had been raised from the dead (verse 17).

All of this leads the Authorities to the inevitable conclusion; not only Jesus but Lazarus too, must go. (11:53; 12:10).

This brings me to the first aspect of our Lord's life and character. **Jesus' claims about Himself are politically dangerous.**

The reasons the Authorities give are political. There is no doubt about this because John tells us what the High Priest said at the meeting of the Sanhedrin.

One of the things that has happened over the past few centuries is that all religious faith of whatever kind has been relegated to the PRIVATE sector of our lives. It is seen as what we do with our leisure time. Join a sailing or soccer club; go dancing or design clothes; be fascinated by food or enjoy flower arranging; and if you really want to join a church that is acceptable too.

BUT start taking the political implications of your Faith seriously, or worse still, acting on them and you are very soon told to stop interfering in things you cannot possibly understand.

This is foolishness of course. It assumes that other people are neutral in their decisions. Only religious people have an "axe to grind". Only religious people are biased. All others are just operating from unbiased reason. I have even heard on the radio one person say that as long as the Prime Minister leaves his religion out of his politics, he will be ok.

But Jesus claims to be Lord of all. If that is true, all leaders of whatever political persuasion are subject to His Lordship whether they like it or not. If Jesus is Lord Caesar is not. We will all test our politicians by what we believe will be best for the Nation. And what we believe is best for the Nation will come from our Faith.

Whatever anyone believes will affect how they vote.

So, we must understand that the Gospel of Jesus Christ the Son of God challenges ALL of life whether you are in the bedroom, boat club or boardroom.

BUT (and it is a very big but!) our Faith demands that that our attitude towards authority figures is respectful and that we speak the truth with humility.

The second comes from the reading for today. It has a stunning statement to make to us.

Some Greeks seek to see Jesus. They come to Philip, who went and got his partner and together go to see Jesus. Jesus, we assume, grants them an audience. Or does He? John is silent on this, and the Greeks are not mentioned again.

What is fascinating is what Jesus does with the news that some Gentiles want to speak with Him.

All through this Gospel Jesus is “pushing the envelope” as we would say. He cleanses the Temple. He speaks alone with a woman. He speaks alone with a woman who is a Samaritan. He tells a story where the hero is a Samaritan. He heals a man born blind. Each of these actions point toward something that the Jewish scriptures point towards. It doesn’t win Him any friends. That truth is this; Jesus is not only the saviour of Israel.

Jesus knows the story of the Bible. He knows that He is the Saviour of the WORLD not just the Jews. As Tom Wright puts it, Jesus is the “Israel’s Messiah and the world’s true Lord”. Later the Church will grapple with this, and the central principle will be finally established by the Council held at Jerusalem. (Acts 15.) No one must become a Jew to become a Christian. All are welcome by grace through faith. Baptism not circumcision is the sign of your membership in the Kingdom of God.

What we are seeing is Jesus as calmly as He could introducing His disciples to this radical and offensive idea.

In the letters to the Romans and Galatians Paul shows how this was God’s intention from the very beginning. When God calls Abraham, He says, “I will bless you..... and you will be a blessing..... *And through you all peoples on the earth will be blessed.*

What happens next is the stunning bit. Jesus declares, “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.” All through the Gospel Jesus keeps saying, “My hour has not yet come, my hour has not yet come.”

Now with the request of these Greeks, these Gentiles, these non-Jews Jesus knows that the final chapter has begun. His journey to the Cross which began some time before is now to be completed – to the devastation of His disciples and the benefit of the whole world. His hour has come. The Saviour of the WORLD is here.

The Third thing is to see what the Cross cost to Jesus. Even thinking about it disturbs Him deeply.

I want you to notice one word in the reading for today. It comes in verse 27. Now my heart is troubled. The word is used once before in John’s Gospel, and it tells of what Jesus was feeling as He came to the tomb of a friend. There it is translated “deeply moved in spirit and troubled.” It means that the person so moved inwardly that their body trembles.

Whenever we think of the Cross keep this in mind. As Jesus looks ahead to Calvary, He is gripped with deep emotion. Is it too much to say that He was horrified at the prospect of His?

The courage of our Saviour is amazing to see.

In the face of such horror Jesus is implacable in His resolve. He will settle this in Gethsemane. “What shall I say? Father, save me from this hour? No, it is for this very reason I came to this hour. Father, glorify your name!”

We are privileged to be given a glimpse into the very heart of our Lord and Saviour. Into the very heart of God Himself and see *the cost to the Holy Trinity for our salvation.*

Listen to the writer of the letter to the Hebrews. “Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our Faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the Cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider Him who endured such opposition from sinful people, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.” (Hebrews 12: 2-3.)

Here is St Paul on this. He has just been expounding the Gospel and has come to the final question, “So what?” Paul is more polite than those two words, but the meaning is the same.

“What then, shall we say in response to all this? If God is for us who can be against us? He who did not spare His own Son but gave Him up for us all-how will He not also, along with Him, graciously give us all things.” Romans 8:31-32.

At immense cost, we have been shown that NOTHING can separate us from the love of God. There is no good thing that the Father will withhold from us.

GOD IS FOR US.

We began with the request of the Greeks, “Sir, we would see Jesus.” We have seen three aspects of Our Lord’s character:

Jesus is Lord of the whole of life from the bathroom to the ballot box.

Jesus came to fulfil the promise of God to Abraham. Through you **all the world** will be blessed.

Finally, the immense cost to the Father the Son and the Holy Spirit of the salvation we have received.

My final word to you is a question from the Lord, “All this I have done for you. **What will you do with this gift I have given to you?**”