

## **“Sirs, We Wish to See Jesus”**

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In the twelfth chapter of John, Jesus returns to Jerusalem for the final time. On his way, He stopped in the small town of Bethany to visit with the family of Lazarus. This must have been a bitter-sweet occasion. Mary and Martha were grateful to Jesus for having earlier raised their brother, Lazarus, from the dead. But the impending death of Jesus hovered over them like a dark storm cloud about to burst.

Upon His arrival in Jerusalem, Jesus received a hero's welcome. He was celebrated through the streets like Judas Maccabeus had been celebrated in an earlier generation. Unlike Judas Maccabeus, Jesus was leading a true revolution. With the symbolism of Passover in the background, Jesus was going to lead a new exodus in the most unexpected way: by dying.

Passover was the highest holiday on the Jewish calendar. Many Jews from out of town were in Jerusalem. In John's account of these events, he describes several Greeks who had come to town. Notice the scene:

Now among those who went up to worship at the feast were some Greeks. So these came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and asked him, “Sir, we wish to see Jesus.” Philip went and told Andrew; Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus. And Jesus answered them, “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. 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. Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. 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 12:20-26).

While these men may have been from Greece, their description as “Greeks” is more about their ethnicity than their nation of origin. The point is that they were non-Jewish.

This encounter should be familiar to readers. It has echoes from a scene at the birth of Jesus. At His birth, Jesus was visited by wise men from the east: non-Jewish men. At His death, non-Jewish men want to see Him. But what does it mean?

## **A Surprising Answer to a Simple Request**

**1). The hour has come.** Throughout the gospel of John, he mentions the time: the hour of Jesus. This hour is a veiled reference to Jesus' death and resurrection. In answering the request of the Greeks, Jesus says, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified."

Whatever this means, Jesus likens His glorification to a grain of wheat being planted in the ground. Part of the grain dies but produces new life. Death precedes new life. While we understand Jesus to be speaking of His death and resurrection, no one at the time did. Somehow, Jesus' death would bring new life.

**2). The glorification of the Son of Man.** At this point, Jesus does not explain how the grain of wheat dying corresponds to His death. Instead, He says that it relates to how anyone can become becoming His servant.

If the Greeks or anyone else was interested in following Jesus, they would have to pay a price. As Jesus was known to do, He spoke in a paradox: "Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life" (John 12:25). Jesus was going to give everything to do the will of His Father. He was going to give His life. Likewise, anyone who wanted to follow Him, would have to become as self-giving as He was.

Being a follower of Jesus is about sharing in every aspect of Jesus. Discipleship involves following in the steps of Jesus' suffering. On an earlier occasion, Jesus used this paradox, but made a direct connection to His cross: "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me" (Matt. 16:24). By self-giving servitude, we can receive the honor of His Father.

**3). Being drawn to Jesus.** Jesus continued to bear His troubled soul. In anguish, His Father's voice thundered down from Heaven and said, "I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again" (John 12:28). The group of people listening were confused and afraid. Judgment had been pronounced. The Father would cast out the ruler of the world. Jesus would be lifted up, suspended between Heaven and Earth. In being lifted up, He would draw all men to Himself (John 12:30-32).

The Greeks wanted to see Jesus. Jesus wanted to draw them to Himself. We see people at a distance. Being drawn into the embrace of a loved one is as close as we can be to them. By His self-giving love, Jesus would attract people from every nation. Someone who was drawn to Jesus later wrote, "For the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died; and he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised" (2 Cor. 5:14-15).

## **Conclusion**

The encounter with the Greeks at the end of Jesus' life is curious. Broadening our perspective helps give context to the significance of non-Jewish people being present at both the birth and death of Jesus. Jesus did not come just to save Israel. Jesus came to save everyone. Jesus came to save us.

We also must personalize how we understand this encounter. Do we want to see Jesus? How do we see Jesus? As our suffering Savior? If we do, His self-giving love will draw us to His warm embrace.