

## “Sir, We Would See Jesus”

John 12:20-26

<sup>20</sup> Now among those who went up to worship at the feast were some Greeks. <sup>21</sup> So these came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and asked him, “Sir, we wish to see Jesus.” <sup>22</sup> Philip went and told Andrew; Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus.

<sup>23</sup> And Jesus answered them, “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. <sup>24</sup> 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. <sup>25</sup> Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. <sup>26</sup> 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. (ESV)

We are following the church calendar this year. It starts at Advent (or Christmas time, the birth of Jesus) and then immediately after that the Gospels launch into His ministry. For the past couple of months we’ve been looking at the Gospel of Mark, particularly chapters one and two. In chapter one Jesus came onto the scene preaching the kingdom and healing the sick and casting out demons. Then immediately in chapter two, He launches into a series of five different conflicts with the Pharisees, the religious leaders of the day. He forgave people’s sins, and they said, “Who do you think you are?” He had the audacity to hang out with sinners, and they accused His disciples of breaking the Sabbath. Every time, Jesus stumped them. I’ve been thinking through, “How do you understand what a Pharisee felt like?” At the end of the conflicts the Pharisees plotted with the Herodians how they might destroy Jesus. What is it that could make them so angry? What is it that can make them feel so frustrated, just on an emotional level? In some ways you can’t understand it unless you’ve watched “Looney Tunes.”

For all of you children whose parents have not given you “Looney Tunes” I apologize on their behalf. If you want to know what it means to feel like a Pharisee, you have to watch Looney Tunes, and I did extensive research. All the clips are on You Tube [<http://www.youtube.com>] of Wile E. Coyote and the Road Runner. Remember Wile E. Coyote and the Road Runner? Most people don’t know this unless you own the DVD set and have watched them all. Wile E. Coyote is a genius. He’s a genius and he is constantly plotting to catch and eat the Road Runner and yet every time he’s foiled. Some of my favorite ones are: he takes ACME leg vitamins (the company where he gets all his stuff is ACME), and his legs beef-up. Or he gets the ACME bat-suit or the ACME cannon or the ACME catapult, and it always backfires on him. My favorite one of all of his gizmos that he bought from ACME is the “instant manhole.” Wile E. Coyote would buy the instant manhole and sees the Road Runner coming (beep beep). As soon as the Road Runner would get close, he’d throw the instant manhole on the ground and the Road Runner would run right over it as if it didn’t exist. Then Wile E. Coyote would step onto it and whoosh, he’s gone. That’s what it feels like to be a Pharisee because the Pharisees did everything they could to catch Jesus. They did everything they could to stump him. They pulled out every one of their tricks. Every time they threw the manhole in front of Him He just walked over it. As soon as He walked over it they said, “Well, I thought that thing worked” and they stepped into it themselves. So, every time they opened their mouths they actually indicted themselves more until they came to the conclusion, “We have to get rid of this guy.”

Now we fast-forward to the Book of John. What we’re going to talk about today is the culmination of Jesus’ mission, or the culmination of what He came to do. It’s also the culmination of what the Pharisees decided they would do—the Pharisees, the religious leaders of the Jews. We’re going to look at three things this morning: three G’s. We’re going to look at the Greeks in this text, we’re going to look at glory, and after glory we’re going to look at grain (wheat). How do those things teach us the Gospel this morning?

Before we consider the Greeks, it’s helpful to get a little context because in John 11 Jesus had raised Lazarus from the dead; one of his best friends, Lazarus. Lazarus gets sick and Mary and Martha call for Jesus to come. He delays for three days and Lazarus dies. Then Jesus comes and raises Lazarus from the dead. As you can imagine a lot of people were very excited about that. Because of seeing Jesus raise Lazarus from the dead a lot of people were beginning to believe in Him. That just make the Pharisees that much more upset. Let me read to you what they decided to do in chapter 11.

<sup>45</sup> Many of the Jews therefore, who had come with Mary and had seen what he did, believed in him, <sup>46</sup> but some of them went to the Pharisees and told them what Jesus had done. <sup>47</sup> So the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered the Council and said, “What are we to do? For this man performs many signs. <sup>48</sup> If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation.” (ESV)

And then in verse 53:

<sup>53</sup> So from that day on they made plans to put him to death. (ESV)

So the Pharisees now have decided. They took the next step. They’re going to go ahead and try and kill Jesus. The next thing you see is that Mary anoints Jesus. She takes expensive perfume and pours it on Jesus’ feet and then dries it with her hair. Then Judas comes. You have to love the Gospel of John because he gives the commentary. Judas comes and says, “We could have

spent the money on the poor.” John says, “He didn’t care about the poor, he would just take the money for himself.” Jesus rebukes Judas and says, “Let her do that. She’s anointing Me for My burial. You’ll always have the poor with you but you will not always have Me with you. Let her do it.” The very next thing that happens is the Lazarus issue becomes even bigger. The Pharisees decide they need to kill Lazarus as well because if they don’t kill Lazarus then people are going to keep believing in Jesus even if He’s gone. Then the next thing that happens is the triumphal entry, and the city of Jerusalem as Jesus comes in on a donkey is just going crazy. They’re waving palms and everything is just nuts for this guy, Jesus. Which of course is just salt in the wounds of the Pharisees. The last line that you hear from the Pharisees helps us understand what’s going on in the first line of what I read to you in our text. Notice what the Pharisees say in the midst of all this hubbub.

<sup>19</sup> *So the Pharisees said to one another, “You see that you are gaining nothing. Look, the world has gone after him.” (ESV)*

That’s how bad it has gotten for Wile E. Coyote. Not only have we not tricked him, not only have we not stopped him, but the whole world is starting to follow this guy. Then the very next thing you have is some Greeks showing up. Let me read that to you again.

<sup>20</sup> *Now among those who went up to worship at the feast were some Greeks.* <sup>21</sup> *So these came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and asked him, “Sir, we wish to see Jesus.” (ESV)*

In order to understand what Jesus says a little bit later you need to understand the significance of the Greeks showing up. Out of four Gospels, John’s Gospel is the only Gospel that has this event in it, that talks about these Greeks coming and asking to see Jesus. Why does John put it in there? What is the significance of the Greeks showing up? At some level, who knows? On the other level, even if we don’t see any significance on the surface of them showing up, apparently they hold an incredible significance to Jesus.

So who were the Greeks? Why were they even coming to Jerusalem? Basically the first thing you need to know about the Greeks here is that they probably were not Greeks. What do I mean by that? They probably were not from Greece. Greek is a technical term in the New Testament for people who were Greek-speaking Gentiles. So even if they were not from Greece they were Greek-speaking Gentiles. It says they came up to the feast to worship. They were God-fearers. What do I mean by that? God-fearers in the New Testament are people who were Gentiles who followed the Jewish religion, on one hand. On the other hand, they didn’t want to go through with circumcision (understandably). So they were Jews in all ways except that they were not circumcised, so they were not formally proselytes, but still would go to worship.

Here these Greek-speaking Gentiles come and go up to the feast and hear about Jesus, see Jesus, and ask to see him. They go to Phillip and say, “Sir, we would see Jesus.” Or “We would wish to see Jesus.” They don’t mean “see” with their eyes; what they’re asking for is an interview here. They want to talk to Jesus. The question is, “Why did they want to talk to him? Why did they ask Phillip and not just Jesus?” In other words, why did they go by proxy? Why did they seek out Phillip and not go straight to Jesus? A lot of people did that. We don’t know for sure why exactly they wanted to see Jesus, but we can speculate. We can connect some dots. Maybe they were just curious because of all the hubbub that was going on in the town among the Jews. They sort of followed the Jewish religion and wanted to see what that was about. A lot of commentators speculate that they actually saw Jesus cleanse the Temple. Remember when Jesus cleansed the Temple he cleansed a very specific part of the Temple. He cleansed the court of the Gentiles. The court of the Gentiles would have been in the outermost part of the Temple. Gentiles could go there but they couldn’t go in to the Temple. There was a dividing wall between Jew and Gentile. In Ephesians it said that Jesus tore down that dividing wall through the cross. But either way, Jesus cleaned out the court of the Gentiles and among other things He said, “My father’s house shall be a house of prayer.” For whom? For all nations. They probably wondered, “This guy Jesus, will He receive Gentiles? He’s Jewish, all of His followers seem to be Jewish. Will He receive Gentiles? They were probably unsure, which is probably why they went to seek out Phillip. Mistake number one. If you remember, Phillip is not the sharpest knife in the drawer when it comes to the apostles. They go to see Phillip. Why? No one knows why they went to see Phillip. Some people speculate it’s because his name was Greek. But several of the disciples had Greek names, so we don’t know why they sought Phillip. But what we do know is that Phillip was just as uncertain as they were. Phillip didn’t immediately say, “He’d love to see you. Let me take you right to Him.” Phillip wasn’t sure, and the way we know Phillip wasn’t sure is that Phillip went to see Andrew. You can understand Phillip’s apprehension. On one hand Phillip might have just been a good disciple. He realizes Jesus is busy and He can’t see everybody, so he’ll take a message and tell him to call them later. He might have been doing something like that. Or, he might have been truly unsure because in Matthew chapter 10 when Jesus sent the disciples out on their mission he said, “Go out and seek only the lost sheep of Israel. Don’t go into Gentile towns. Don’t seek the Gentiles. Seek the lost sheep of Israel.” So Phillip might have thought, “I don’t know if Jesus is for Gentiles or not. Andrew, what do you think?” They have a little pow-wow and then Andrew (I’m sure) said something like, “Jesus always said you have not because you ask not. Let’s just go.” So the Greeks talk to Phillip, Phillip talks to Andrew, and Andrew and Phillip go and talk to Jesus. When they talk to Jesus, Jesus responds, which tells us the significance of the Greeks showing up. What is Jesus’ response? On some level it seems a little bizarre because Jesus never that we know of talks to these Greeks. He never says,

“Sure, I’ll see them.” He never says, “Sure, what do they want to know?” Jesus seems to go off on some completely different tangent and yet it makes sense when you think about it. So, what does Jesus say when they come to Him?

<sup>22</sup> *Philip went and told Andrew; Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus.* <sup>23</sup> *And Jesus answered them, “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. (ESV)*

What is the significance of the Greeks coming to see Jesus? In Jesus’ mind, He says, “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.” The Greeks showing up were some kind of catalyst in Jesus’ mind that things had changed. Up to this point several things have happened. The Jews (by that we mean the leadership) had rejected Him. The Old Testament said that when Messiah is rejected by the Jews, He will seek after the Gentiles and the Gentiles will seek after Him. So now the Gentiles are coming. Up to this point also, several times (especially in John’s Gospel) Jesus said, “The hour is not yet.” Remember when His mother came to Him at the wedding in Cana and said, “They’re out of wine. What are you going to do?” I loved Jesus’ response. He said, “Woman.” “Woman, my time has not come yet.” There are several times in John’s Gospel where He says, “My time is not yet.” Not the time. People want to lift Him up and make Him king and it wasn’t the time. No. Not now. Greeks show up out of nowhere and as soon as they say, “We want to see Him,” Jesus says, “Now is the time. Right now. My hour has come. The climax of everything I came here to do has arrived right now, and those guys brought it.” What does He mean by that? What do I mean by that? It’s just this: Jesus came not to die just for the lost sheep of Israel. Jesus came to die for all lost sheep and make a new Israel. Did you notice the word He uses for “die”? Now is the time, the hour for the Son of Man to be “glorified.”

How is glory equivalent to death? Or, how does His death equal glory? You’d think it would be shameful and humiliating, and it was. How is all that glorious? How did all that exalt Him? Let me read to you what Isaiah says in chapter 52.

<sup>13</sup> *Behold, my servant shall act wisely; he shall be high and lifted up, and shall be exalted. (ESV)*

So Isaiah, talking about the Christ says, “He will be exalted. He will be raised up.” How is He going to be exalted?

<sup>14</sup> *As many were astonished at you— his appearance was so marred, beyond human semblance, and his form beyond that of the children of mankind— <sup>15</sup> so shall he sprinkle many nations; kings shall shut their mouths because of him; for that which has not been told them they see, and that which they have not heard they understand. (ESV)*

And then down in chapter 53:

<sup>4</sup> *Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. <sup>5</sup> But he was wounded for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his stripes we are healed. <sup>6</sup> All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all. (ESV)*

Somehow that equals glory. It equals glory in two ways. On one hand the glory that is found in Jesus’ death is like that manhole. During Holy Week when the Pharisees finally got Jesus, when they finally arrested Him, when they finally falsely accused Him of blasphemy, when they did all these things they thought that they finally pushed Him into the instant manhole. They got him. The ACME manhole worked and He was gone. What the Pharisees didn’t realize is that instant manhole is really a portal. Through Jesus’ death that manhole would be a portal to His resurrection, exaltation, and His sitting at the right hand of God the Father, and His coming back to judge the quick and the dead. So the very act of them killing Him actually became the portal for His greatest exaltation in glory. But there’s something else to it as well. You want to know how you can see someone’s glory the most clearly? Or when they appear to be most glorious? It’s when they give it up.

For example, I was chaplain several times in seminary for the Orlando Magic. It’s a long story. They had a bad chaplain and they needed a nobody and I was there. I had never even been to a professional basketball game before. The first time I got to see the Orlando Magic, they were playing the Knicks. I remember Shaquille O’Neil running by me and I was just awestruck. It’s amazing to watch these guys. For whatever reason, the chaplain, for that game, got to sit literally right beside Patrick Ewing the whole game. I smelled him the whole time! It’s one of my ADD superpowers. He was there. But he was so big. Even sitting beside him my head came up to about his shoulders. It was amazing! You know what makes someone like that seem even more glorious, and it’s more eye opening to us? It’s when you see someone like Shaquille O’Neil in a hospital room with a kid. No one knows he’s there. He’s holding the kid’s hand. Why? Because he’s all this glory and instead of manifesting it, instead of showing people, he gives it up and goes in quietly to take care of a kid. That’s big. Your heart knows when you see someone who has as much glory as that give it up. The actual glory that they had seems even bigger. So when you look at the person and worth of Jesus, what you see is God in the person of His Son giving up all of His rights, giving up all of His glory, giving up everything that He has in order to go and die on the cross. The reason He dies on the cross is not just a giving up of glory, it’s not just giving up of rights. He could have asserted Himself and said, “I didn’t do anything wrong.” He not only gives up His rights

but He takes the blame for other people. He takes the blame for you and me. That's what the whole Gospel in a nutshell is: that you and I are sinful and broken and in need of a savior, and Jesus gives up His right to judge, He gives up His right to glory, and He takes our blame upon Himself. He bears the curse for us. He lives the life we should have lived and He dies the death we should have died, and that, Jesus says is, where His glory lies. That's where your glory lies, too.

So, Jesus says, "My glory abides in my dying." Then He takes it one step further. The next thing He says, is about this grain of wheat.

<sup>24</sup> *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.*

First, just a side note where He says, "Truly, truly." People often ask me, "Why does Jesus say that? Why does He say, 'Truly, truly' twice?" In the New Testament, in the Greek, it really is the word "Amen, Amen." If you were anything but Presbyterian it would make common sense immediately. What do I mean by that? Because in the synagogue and in a lot of other Christian denominations a teacher teaches and people respond back. A preacher would say, "Jesus died for sins. Amen." And the congregation would say what? "Amen." They would holler back. In the synagogue they would do the same thing. The rabbi would say, "Amen" and the congregation would say, "Amen." I'm saying, "Is this the truth?" And you're saying, "That's the truth." The beauty of what Jesus does. He does not ask your opinion. That's why he says it twice. Jesus says, "I'm going tell you the truth. It's the truth." He doesn't ask you to respond. He says, "I'm going to affirm to you right now. You don't need any other witness, I'm telling you right now that what I'm saying is true. It's infallible. You can take it to the bank."

What does he say that's true? "Unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone; but if it does fall to the earth and dies, it bears much fruit." That's common sense at some level. You have to plant seeds in order for them to grow. It's common sense and yet some people don't. Because even planting a seed that way is an act of faith, is it not? What if it doesn't grow? What if things go wrong? What if things go poorly? So you would have a choice to either keep all of your seeds or to plant them and have a whole field. Jesus' metaphor here says, "Unless the thing dies, unless the grain of wheat dies, it can't produce much fruit."

What did Jesus come to do? Jesus came to build a church for Himself. He came to save a church unto Himself from every tribe, tongue, and nation (getting back to the Greeks). When you look at the end of the Bible, you have the kings of all the nations coming in and bringing their glory into it. It's every person. Jesus says, "Unless I die that can't happen. But if I die it will happen." Fortunately for us, God wasn't selfish. God could have said, "You know what, Jesus, I don't want to see You go though that. I don't want to smite You. I don't want to crush you. I don't want to have You beaten, spit upon, mocked. I don't want any of that for You. It would just be a log easier for you to just stay here with Me and the Holy Spirit. We've got DirecTV. Whatever it is, stay with Me." If He'd done that you would have remained alone. Here's the beauty of it. God doesn't need you. He doesn't need any of us. God didn't send Jesus because God was lonely. God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit dwelled together in perfect fellowship and perfect harmony. Why would God do that then? Why would He give His Son? It wasn't because God needed something. It wasn't because He was lonely. He did it because He wanted to. God sent Jesus not because He needed to. God sent Christ to die for your sins and my sins because He wanted to. By doing that He produces much fruit, people from every tribe, tongue, and nation.

Let me close with this. When your hour has arrived, whenever you have arrived at something, it's almost always when we speak of it in terms of exclusivity. In other words, maybe you're in sales and you're trying to get to be number one and you finally get there. You've arrived, haven't you? But it's only you. It's exclusive. Maybe you went to law school or medical school and a lot of people don't pass those things, but you graduated and you've arrived—just you, not everyone else. One of my proudest days is graduating from Ranger school. You're standing out on the parade field to receive that tab, and you've arrived—just you. The difference between us and Jesus is when Jesus talks about having arrived, when Jesus' hour has come, when Jesus' hour has arrived, it's always in terms of inclusively. Jesus' hour doesn't arrive until He can include everybody, every tribe, every tongue, every nation, and every conceivable kind of sin. Jesus says, "You're the one I came for." Some of you are out there thinking, "My sins are too great. Jesus couldn't forgive it." I'm telling you that's why He came. Some of you are thinking, "I'm pretty good. I don't really need that." You're in worst shape than the person who thinks he's too bad. Think about that. I ask you, when you look at this, when you really consider the Gospel, would you see Jesus? Do you want to? If you're a Christian, do you really believe that, because if you really believed that Jesus took away all of your sins it changes everything, it changes the game. You're free now to struggle. If you're not a Christian, would you see him? Would you trust him? Would you put your faith in him? Would you give him the benefit of the doubt? Think about that.