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We Want to See Jesus

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This week's bible reading is from John chapter 12 verses 20 - 33.

Introduction

Before we start to unpack this passage from John's Gospel to see what we can learn from it – it might help if we first fill in a bit of background and put the passage in context. At this point in John's Gospel, Jesus' public ministry is beginning to draw to a close. He is in Jerusalem for the Passover, but His arrest and crucifixion are imminent. "The Hour" as Jesus calls it, is nearly upon Him, the hour for which He had come. But by this time, Jesus' fame had spread beyond the borders of Israel, and now some Greeks, also in Jerusalem for the Passover, wanted to see Jesus, so they approach Philip requesting to see Jesus.

Now we don't know why they wanted to see Jesus - whether they were just curious and were simply attracted by stories of miracles, or whether it was because they had a genuine desire to learn more, perhaps even wanting to become disciples – we don't know. But when this is brought to Jesus' attention, His response to their request is – at first sight – rather cryptic. But in fact Jesus makes three important points, all of them aimed at those who might be thinking of becoming His followers.

Harvest

Firstly in verse 24 Jesus says:

"I tell you the truth, unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds."

It's highly unlikely the crowd had much idea of what Jesus meant by this, but it's clearly a reference to that fact that Jesus was soon to face death. And, when Jesus, like a grain of wheat, dies and is buried, then, following His Resurrection, there will be a great harvest of souls. Through His blood, shed on the Cross, the seed of the Gospel will multiply. Out of death comes life.

Using this simple farming illustration of planting a single seed and it then bringing forth an abundant harvest, Jesus highlights the great spiritual truth that life comes through death. Unless Jesus dies, there can be no eternal life for us. Unless His blood is shed, there can be no forgiveness of sins, no salvation. This is a fundamental principle upon which our salvation rests. Only through Jesus' death can we be reborn into eternal life.

But the analogy goes even further than this. To become true followers of Jesus, we too must die -not literally as Jesus did, but metaphorically - we must die to self. Meaning that, when we commit to following Jesus, our old life, our old sinful habits, standards, attitudes and priorities – they must die; they must die on the cross with Jesus, so that our new selves emerge, reborn. In Christ, we are born again anew. Our old selves die on the cross, so that our new life in Christ can flourish and bring forth the fruit of the Spirit. St Paul put it this way, he said:

*“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, they are a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!”
(2 Cor 5:17).*

Where Your Treasure Is

In verse 25 this principle is developed further, because finding life comes ironically, through losing life; because the second thing Jesus said is this:

“The one who loves their life will lose it, while the one who hates their life in this world, will keep it for eternal life.”

This initially seems like a rather cryptic, contradictory statement from Jesus, but it’s actually a very challenging comment. Because in effect, what Jesus is saying to those who want to be His followers is, ‘what do you really want from life? What is it you truly desire? And what are your real priorities?’

Is it money, comfort, nice things, security, status, influence that you desire? Or is your desire for the Kingdom of God and the Gospel? What and to whom does your heart truly belong? Does it belong to God? Or is your heart committed to the joys and pleasures of this world? As Jesus also said:

“Where your treasure is, there your heart is also.” (Matt 6:21, Lk 12:34)

So we need to ask ourselves, is our treasure the Kingdom of God, or the things of this world? Or to put it another way: what would you be willing to sacrifice to see the Kingdom of God extended? How much time, effort and resources do we commit to extending the Kingdom of God? And how much do we commit to the other things in our life?

Seek First the Kingdom

Now these are demanding and challenging questions for anyone, and they challenge me as much as they challenge anyone. Lent and especially Holy Week, is a good time for us to take a long, hard look at our priorities, our goals, our resources and how we use them. God doesn’t demand that we live in poverty, of course, but He tells us quite clearly that, as His followers, we are to seek first His Kingdom – that should be our number one priority; then everything else will fall into place.

The one who commits their life to Christ and the Kingdom – they will save it, says Jesus; but the one who spends their life largely committed only to themselves and their own pleasure and wellbeing –

well, they will lose it. To find eternal life in Christ, you must first give up your own life by giving it back to Jesus.

Live to Serve

Then thirdly, in verse 26, Jesus said to the crowd:

“Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honour the one who serves me.”

This effectively builds on the first two statements Jesus has already made. Once we have died to self, and been born again in Christ, we then live to serve. That is our primary purpose, to serve God and to serve one another. Jesus, as we know came to serve, not to be served, even washing the feet of His disciples, a job usually done by only the lowliest of servants. If Jesus was prepared to do this, how then can we do less?

There are many ways in which we can serve, and many kinds of service. And we must never grow tired of serving, because it is through service of one another that we serve God; and it is through genuine selfless service – service without thought or hope of reward - that we show our love for one another and for God. Again as Jesus said:

“A new command I give you: love one another as I have loved you; by this all men will know that you are my disciples.”

Back to the Greeks

Bringing this full circle then, we don't know whether Jesus actually met with these Greeks or not, but they, like everyone else, will have their chance to accept Jesus as their Lord and Saviour when He is lifted up on the Cross. Because Jesus ends this passage by telling His disciples that, when He is lifted up from the earth, He will draw all men to Himself – Jews, Greeks, slaves, free – everyone and anyone.

What Jesus meant was this: these Greeks wanted to see Him, OK, that's fine said Jesus, but if they really want to see me, if they really want to know who I am, and what I have come for, then they need to look to the Cross. Only then will they fully understand who Jesus is and what He has done. The Cross is the answer to everything we need to know about Jesus.

So those who, like these Greeks, seek the truth about life - they will find true life only when they turn to Christ and embrace Him and His death and resurrection. For only He, and He alone, can grant forgiveness, salvation and eternal life. Amen.