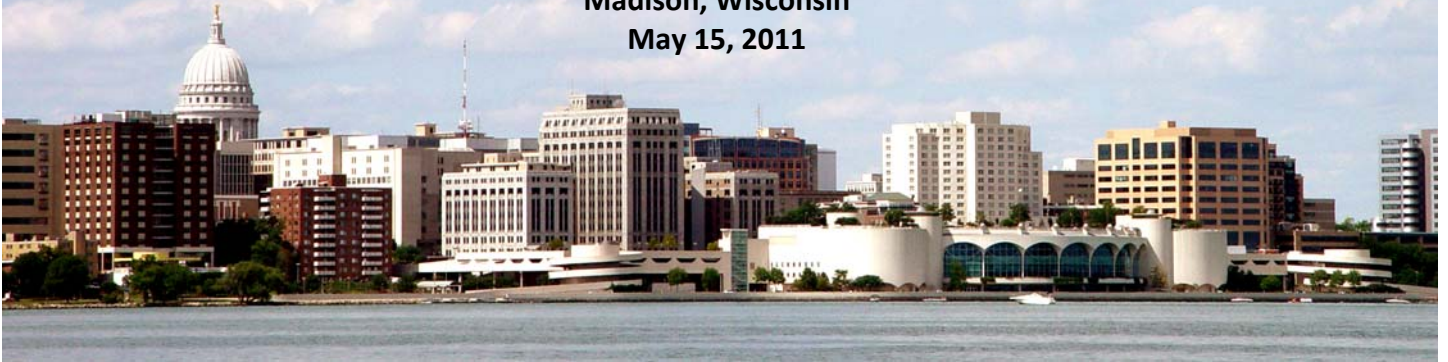


“Sir, We Wish to See Jesus”

JOHN 12:20-26

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This morning I would like for us to study an event from the Tuesday before Jesus died as some Greeks learned about Jesus and tried to set up a personal meeting so that they could learn even more. Jesus is the reason why we are here this morning, we have come here to learn more about the Lord ourselves, and so it is important that we study this passage so that we can learn what they learned. The passage is found in John 12 (p. 1680). There are several possibilities concerning why these particular Greeks wanted to learn more about the Lord, but the point is that right here near the end of Jesus' ministry, even those who were not Jews were getting interested in what the Lord was doing. All of this brings us to John 12:20-26 as a group of Greeks approach the apostle Philip and try to set up a meeting with the Lord. If you will, please look with me at John 12:20-26,

²⁰ Now there were some Greeks among those who were going up to worship at the feast; ²¹ these then came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida of Galilee, and began to ask him, saying, "Sir, we wish to see Jesus." ²² Philip came and told Andrew; Andrew and Philip came and told Jesus. ²³ And Jesus answered them, saying, "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 "He who loves his life loses it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it to life eternal. ²⁶ "If anyone serves Me, he must follow Me; and where I am, there My servant will be also; if anyone serves Me, the Father will honor him.

We find, then, that the Greeks were curious, they wanted to learn more about the Lord. You might remember how the Greeks in Athens questioned Paul on the Areopagus; they wanted to learn more, they were curious. And so perhaps in a similar way, these Greeks in John 12 approached the apostle Philip; however, Philip (for whatever reason) does not bring them directly to Jesus. It is almost as if Philip did not really know how to handle that request. Why not? Why would Philip be a little nervous about bringing a group of Greeks to Jesus? Well, you might remember that Jesus had always been very clear that His mission was to reach out to the Jews. As Jesus said to the disciples concerning the Canaanite woman who wanted her daughter to be healed in Matthew 15:24, ***"I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel."*** The disciples had already been rebuked, therefore, for bothering Jesus with the concerns of those who were not Jews. Philip, therefore, takes the concern not to Jesus but to Andrew! And, as Andrew has already done now on several occasions,

Andrew brings the concern directly to the Lord. Remember: Andrew is the one who brought his brother Peter to meet the Lord. Jesus called Andrew to be a disciple, and Andrew immediately went to his brother Peter and said, ***“We have found the Messiah”*** (John 1:41). Andrew is the one who brought the boy to Jesus, the boy who had five loaves and two fish (in John 6:8-9). Andrew, therefore, has a long history of bringing people to the Lord, and so it seems that he does it again here in John 12.

Through all of this, Jesus finally hears that these Greeks wanted to arrange some kind of meeting. They wanted to ***“see”*** Jesus (not just to look at Jesus, they could have done this anytime), but they wanted to get to know the Lord. They wanted some kind of an interview. And in response to this request, Jesus gives a very unusual answer. In fact, the Lord gives several answers, and each one comes in the form of a PARADOX. A paradox is a statement that seems to be absurd or contradictory, and yet it is in fact true, and there are three of these.

I. As we look at the Lord’s answer, we notice the first paradox in verse 24 as we find that LIFE COMES THROUGH DEATH.

And we find that the Lord starts out in verse 24 by saying ***“Truly, truly.”*** When you look it up, this is the word ***“AMEN.”*** Jesus, then, is saying, ***“Amen, amen.”*** The word ***“amen”*** is an affirmation of something being a true statement. When we say it after a scripture reading or a prayer, we are saying, “I agree with that prayer! I agree with what that passage is saying!” Jesus, therefore, says this about his own words. He is basically saying, “What I am about to say is a true statement.” He is basically saying, “All of you really need to pay attention to this. What I am about to say may sound absurd, but you really need to pay attention!”

And with that, the Lord talks about a grain of wheat that falls into the earth, and unless it ***“dies,”*** nothing really happens, but if it ***“dies,”*** that is, if it gives itself up, only then will it bear much fruit. And this is something that all of us understand. If we keep a seed all nice and neat in storage, that seed will stay in perfect condition. In fact, a seed can survive for thousands of years. But unless it is planted, unless it ***“dies,”*** nothing will happen. And so for a seed to really be worth anything, it needs to be placed in the ground, it needs to be buried, it needs to be watered, it needs to ***“die”*** in order for something to happen. Locked in that tiny seed is the potential for a huge and complex root system, a stalk, leaves, and eventually some kind of fruit. But nothing happens until the seed ***“dies.”*** Of course, we know that the seed doesn’t really ***“die”*** (Jesus knows this, of course), but the seed changes. The outer layer decays and the potential of that seed is released. It has been said that you can count the number of seeds in an apple, but you cannot count the number of apples in a seed. And that is a true statement, because the power in a single seed is tremendous. Think about the difference in value between a seed and a diamond. Most of us would rather have the diamond. But think about planting that seed, and then think about collecting the seeds at the end of the season and then doing all over again. After a hundred years, that original seed (although long gone) will actually be much more valuable than the diamond. The power in a seed is absolutely amazing.

And that is what Jesus is teaching the disciples here. Jesus is basically saying that in order to live they needed to die. Death is necessary for life...a paradox. In fact, it is a paradox that Jesus is about to demonstrate in a very powerful way. Within just a few days, the Lord would die, and yet His death would unleash a tremendous amount of power. Through the death of Christ, the sins of the world would be forgiven. Through the death of Christ, disciples would multiply all around the world for hundreds (and now thousands) of years. His death causes us as His children to grow and multiply. How are we doing with that?

Of course, death is something that most of us try to avoid. We want to go to heaven, but maybe not right this minute! Most of us have become pretty comfortable with this world. We would rather live than die. We go to the doctor when we get sick. We cry at funerals. For us, death is bad. Jesus, therefore, had to give all of us a reminder: True life comes through death. The Lord is inviting us, then, to share in His death. But it is not necessarily a physical death, but the Lord wants us to die to ourselves. He is looking for that change to take place, the transformation from one life to the next, the giving up of what we want to what He wants. In Galatians 2:20, Paul referred to being ***“crucified with Christ,”*** as he said that, ***“...it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me.”*** Being crucified with Christ means that we no longer live for ourselves, but we allow Him to live through us.

Like the farmer who puts the seed in the ground hoping for something better, Jesus is asking us to step out in faith, trusting Him with whatever happens next. He wants us to give up pride, and worry, and all other kinds of sin. In reality, the life that we have now is like a seed. If we hold on to the seed, if we refuse to put the seed in the ground, then all we have is the seed. And if all we have is the seed, then we had better make the best out of this life, because this life is all there is. If we hold on to the seed, then we had better make a lot of money, we'd better be healthy, we'd better have a nice house, we'd better have a good job, we'd better be famous and powerful, we'd better have the best mp3 player known to man, because if we hold on to the seed, then this is it.

Over the past few days, my daughter has really been into making some Mr. Potato Heads, and she's been doing it with real potatoes, and they look really cool—little hats, and eyes, and everything! But let's apply that in a spiritual way: People in this world are playing Mr. Potato Head. They are adding all of the jewelry and all of the accessories, but in the end for those who refuse to follow Christ, all they're really doing is decorating a potato! In reality, though, what we really need to be doing is looking at this life as a seed for the next, allowing ourselves to die so that Christ can live through us. And that is the first paradox that Jesus addresses here in John 12: True life comes through death. We die to ourselves and allow the Lord to live through us.

II. There is a second paradox in this little paragraph, and that is: TRUE GREATNESS IN THIS LIFE COMES THROUGH SACRIFICE.

As Jesus says in verse 25, ***“He who loves his life loses it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it to life eternal.”*** And I realize that the word “sacrifice” is not found here, but it seems as if Jesus is talking about what Paul was saying in Romans 12:1, that we are to present our bodies to God as a ***“living and holy sacrifice.”*** In other words, we are not to go around loving this life, but when compared the eternal, we are to ***“hate”*** this life; not that we are to literally hate this life, but we are to love this life less than we do eternal life. My understanding is that this was a common figure of speech back then. By hating one thing as opposed to something else we give preference to one over the other by comparison. I love Reese's Peanut Butter Cup as a flavor of the day, but compared to my wife, I hate that flavor. Not that I hate anything at Culvers, but there is no comparison. That is what Jesus is saying here. If we love this life, we will end up losing it, but if we love eternal life by comparison, we will end up gaining it. And so it is a matter of priority. Knowing what we know about how this world will end, we can live our lives as living sacrifices.

When we decide how to live, we are weighing our options, we are counting the cost. Sure, I love doing this (whatever it is), but I love God so much more; therefore, it is almost as if I ***“hate”*** this thing over here. And this over here may be something good. It may be family, or a career, or a hobby, or a sport, or a car, or a pet,

or an education, but whatever it is, true greatness in this life comes when we realize that God means so much more than anything else. Jesus spoke of this earlier in Matthew 16:24-27, where He said, ***“If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it. For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul? For the Son of Man is going to come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and WILL THEN REPAY EVERY MAN ACCORDING TO HIS DEEDS.”*** We are talking, then, about a life of self-denial, a life of sacrifice, a new life. As Paul said in Romans 6:4, ***“Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.”*** It is this new life that Jesus is talking about here in John 12. It is the life referred to by Paul in Colossians 3:1-3, ***“Therefore if you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth. For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God.”*** True life, true happiness, true greatness comes through living sacrifice.

III. There is a third paradox in this paragraph, and that is: **TRUE HONOR COMES THROUGH BEING A SERVANT.**

And here again, this is the opposite of the way most people normally think. Most people think that a truly important person will HAVE servants. Some might say, “Oh, we don’t have servants these days!” And yet we do. Have you ever been out to eat at a restaurant? I remember Dave Ramsey talking about this on the radio several years ago. He makes the point that when we eat out we are treating ourselves like kings. Whether we admit it or not, we are saying, “I am too good to cook; therefore, you people over here must kill the chicken, you people over here must grind the spices, you people over here must squeeze the lemons, you people over here must heat the oil and watch the fire.” And then when it comes to the meal itself, we are basically saying, “Bring me my food, and make sure it’s on time, and make sure it’s hot, and make sure it tastes good, and if not I’ll send it back, bring me silverware, keep my drink full, bring me silverware, bring me something to wipe my mouth, and whatever you do, make sure you smile while you serve me.” And so yes, we do have servants today. Mr. Ramsey was making the point that when we are in financial distress we have no right to demand that we be treated like kings by eating out. That is not my point this morning. My point is simply that we do have servants, and usually we do not think of being a servant as a position of great honor. Being a “waitress,” that is, someone who waits on other people, and being a “server” at a restaurant is not normally considered a career goal for most people. It is something that many of you have done out of necessity, but it is not usually considered a great honor.

And so when Jesus talks about being honored for being a servant, He is presenting a paradox, a seemingly contradictory statement that really is true, ***“If anyone serves Me, he must follow Me; and where I am, there My servant will be also; if anyone serves Me, the Father will honor him.”*** The world around us says that if we have servants, if we eat out all the time, that we have honor. But Jesus says that if we want true honor we will serve Him. In reality, this world has it backwards. Real glory and real honor comes from serving God. The one who brings communion to an elderly widow will have more honor than the highest paid professional athlete. The one who picks up trash in the name of Christ in an effort to point people to the one true church, that person will have more honor than the most powerful politician. The one who signs up to shovel snow so that God’s people can safely come together to worship, that person will have more honor than the most successful investor on Wall Street. Because we are serving God, true honor comes through being a servant.

Conclusion:

As we close our thoughts on this passage, let's back up and remember that all of this is in response to a certain group of people who just wanted to see Jesus. As I look back on this little paragraph, it is not clear to me whether these people ever really met Jesus. In verse 23, the Bible says that Jesus answered "**them**," but the "**them**" might be referring to Philip and Andrew. I don't know. But the answer Jesus gives seems to say that people would be able to see Jesus through the lives of His followers.

- If you want to see Jesus, look at His followers who are giving up an old way of life so that they can truly live.
- If you want to see Jesus, look at His followers who are living lives of greatness by sacrificing their own personal wants and needs.
- If you want to see Jesus, look at His followers who are reaching for glory by living lives of service.

And these are lessons that we need to hear. All around us, people may not even realize it, but they are looking for Jesus. And I would suggest that they can see the Lord by looking at His people. As John would go on to say in 1 John 4:12, "**No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us**" (NIV). People all around us are just barely making it through the week—marriage trouble, job trouble, kid trouble, money trouble, body trouble, car trouble—what people need is Jesus, and they can see Jesus by looking at us. Is that true? If so, let's keep it up, but if not, let's make it right. Over each of the next seven days, I would challenge all of us to be Jesus to someone today. What we do will be different based on the situation, but let's make a goal of being Jesus to someone today.

Last week we received a missionary report from brother Daniel Frerot who preaches for the Lord's church Strasbourg, France. This is the congregation where our family worshiped when we traveled to Europe several years ago. They meet in a rented motel. It was a wonderful experience with a great group of people. But as we think about our text for this morning, I would like to read just one paragraph from their latest report, and as I read, please notice how brother Daniel's family became Jesus to a young man from China who is living in Strasbourg (I have changed the young man's name):

Last month, we had the opportunity to start a new home Bible study with one of our contacts. Each Friday, we now meet with Fred, a Chinese student who arrived in France about three years ago. Fred first came in contact with us through the Let's Start Talking program we had in place. He met with our AIMer's for a while, but it quickly became obvious that he only was interested in the English aspect and not the Bible. He soon dropped out of the program, but maintained a friendship with us. He also continued to regularly visit our Sunday morning worship services. When I asked him why once, he said it was because he liked the singing and he felt love between us. So with the years, we have adopted Fred. He comes regularly to do his laundry in our home and we take care of his apartment when he travels abroad or goes back to China. With time, Fred has come to trust us and he has opened up about the reasons why he is an atheist. About a month ago, following one of our talks, he asked if we could start personal Bible studies with him. I was thrilled by it. We blocked our Friday nights and I pulled out the Fishers of Men series that I had translated. Those seemed perfect to me because they start with the reasons why we believe God exists and why we believe the Bible to be inspired and infallible. My whole family sits in on that study. It always works out beautifully, because my girls have simple ways of answering the questions, and their children's logic is hard to be contested. For example, when we talked about Romans 1:20-21 and Hebrews 3:4, Marilena said, "Yea, if

someone sees a car built out of Legos they are not going to believe that it happened by itself.” She said it was the same with the building blocks of the universe. How could Fred or anyone deny this simple fact? I can see our studies are weighing on him as he says he has never considered things with this light. Only God knows what will come out of these studies.

Did you notice how the Frerot family became Jesus to that young man? They invited him into their home, they invited him in for meals, they basically adopted him as he was far away from home, they invited them in to do his laundry. Over this next week, I would encourage all of us to follow that example, that we make it a personal goal to be Jesus to someone today.

The good news is that Jesus died in our place, and His blood has the power to forgive our sins, and that is absolutely amazing! For our part, we must believe that Jesus is the Son of God, we must turn away from sin, and then we must allow ourselves to be immersed in water so that our sins can be washed away. At that point, we are born into God’s family and the Christian life begins. If you have any questions, please ask. But if you are ready to obey the gospel right now, you can let us know as we sing this next song. Let’s stand and sing...

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