

JESUS IS SOUGHT BY GENTILES
(John 12:20-26)

²⁰ And there were certain Greeks among them that came up to worship at the feast: ²¹ The same came therefore to Philip, which was of Bethsaida of Galilee, and desired him, saying, Sir, we would see Jesus. ²² Philip cometh and telleth Andrew: and again Andrew and Philip tell Jesus. ²³ And Jesus answered them, saying, The hour is come, that the Son of man should be glorified. ²⁴ Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit. ²⁵ He that loveth his life shall lose it; and he that hateth his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal. ²⁶ If any man serve me, let him follow me; and where I am, there shall also my servant be: if any man serve me, him will *my* Father honour.

John 12:20-26

Jesus has come to Jerusalem for the last time. And you might remember that this time he came into the city with great **fanfare**. Before this, Jesus had stopped walking in Judea because the Jews sought to kill him. (John 7:1) And when he came to the feasts, he came secretly (John 7:8) because his hour was not yet come. But on this last occasion, at this last Passover Feast, he sounded the trumpets. He didn't walk into the city, but he rode into the city in a first century limousine. That is, he borrowed a donkey from a nearby villager and he rode into the city. And a great crowd came out of the city to greet him on the road. And they waved their palm branches and shouted, "Hosanna. Blessed be the king who cometh in the name of the Lord." And they spread their garments and their palm branches in the way and there was a great royal welcome for Jesus on this occasion.

Now they would have made him an earthly king then and there and Jesus would have powerfully swept the Romans out of Jerusalem if it had only been his will. But it was not his will to be such a king. Jesus would later say,

My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews: but now is my kingdom not from hence.

John 18:36

Not only did Jesus come into Jerusalem this last time with great fanfare, but also he came in with great **authority**. And just like he did on his first public visit, he again threw the moneychangers and the venders out of the temple. (Mark 11:15-18) This was an astonishing public display in light of the fact that Jesus was a man marked out for death by the Jewish authorities.

So, Jesus came into Jerusalem with great fanfare, he came with great authority and he came with resolute **purpose**. He didn't come into the city to sit down in Pontius

Pilate's palace but he came to be hung on a cross and to die. And therefore, he was not concealing his whereabouts any longer. This time, he came publicly announcing, "Here I am, come and get me."

Now when we come to our text for this morning, the immediate context is that Jesus had come into the city and he was undoubtedly in the temple. In fact, it seems that he had passed through the Gentile courts and was in the inner portion of the temple exclusively reserved for Jews. You remember that the temple was partitioned off into various courtyards. The outer court was the court of the Gentiles. And then there was the court of the women. And as you passed on there was the court of the Jewish men. And then as you moved on in there was the Priests' Court where the Jewish priests performed all the Old Covenant rituals. And then, there was the inner sanctuary which corresponded to the Holy of Holies in the old Jewish tabernacle.

So, Jesus must have been in one of these inner courts and look what happened.

And there were certain Greeks among them that came up to worship at the feast: The same came therefore to Philip, which was of Bethsaida of Galilee, and desired him, saying, Sir, we would see Jesus. Philip cometh and telleth Andrew: and again Andrew and Philip tell Jesus.

John 12:20-22

Some Gentiles came to worship at the feast. This was not terribly unusual. As Jews spread out over the countryside, they carried with them their religion. And Gentiles became interested in the God of Israel and they became proselytes to the Jewish religion. And these Gentile proselytes would even come to the Jewish feasts in Jerusalem. But when they came to the temple they were second class citizens. They could only come into the outer court. They could only come as far as the wall of partition and they were excluded from the other parts of the temple.

And so, these Greek proselytes sought out Philip, one of Jesus' disciples. Now we don't know how they knew Philip. But our text mentions that Philip was from Bethsaida in Galilee. So, it could be that these Greeks knew him from his hometown of Bethsaida. But, for whatever reason, they came to Philip and desired to see Jesus. Now when it says they desired to see Jesus, the idea is that they desired to speak with Jesus. They didn't just want to catch a glimpse of him. They were seeking a private meeting with him.

Now Philip may have been nervous about asking Jesus to speak with these Gentiles. Gentiles were dogs. They were not entitled to eat from Jewish tables. Even Gentile proselytes were kept at a distance. And so, Philip went first to find his brother Andrew and they both went to tell Jesus that some Gentiles wanted to speak to him.

Well, that is the context. These Gentiles seeking a meeting with Jesus are not mentioned in the other gospels. And they are not mentioned ever again in John or in the Scriptures. We don't know if Jesus spoke to them or not. It says,

And Jesus answered them. . .

John 12:23

But this would seem to suggest that Jesus answered Philip and Andrew. So we just don't know if Jesus ever spoke to these Gentiles. What we do know is that these seeking Gentiles triggered a thought in the mind of Jesus and what we see next in our text is a mini sermon with these Gentiles in mind.

I would suggest that if these Gentiles were truly seeking Jesus, if they had a true spiritual question, if they were coming humbly to find salvation, then Jesus must have sought them out and gave them an answer to their questions. The Bible says, "Seek and ye shall find," and if they were seeking, I am sure they found Jesus at some point.

This appears to be the last public sermon of Jesus for after the sermon Jesus "departed, and did hide himself from them." (John 12:36)

In order to understand Jesus response I think we must bear in mind certain things about the ministry of Jesus.

1. Jesus' earthly ministry was focused almost exclusively on the Jews.

We should understand that one of Jesus' ultimate goals was to fulfill that old Jewish economy. He didn't come thumbing his nose at the Law, but he came obeying it and fulfilling it in every respect. Now no one had ever been able to meet the requirements of the Law before. In fact, every man failed under the Law. But Jesus came to successfully fulfill the requirements of the Law on behalf of his people. We couldn't do it, so he did it for us. And by doing the Law, he would finally put an end to the Law. The Law would have no more claims against his people because the Law was finally met in all of its parts. So, when Jesus died, the requirements of the Law were fulfilled and the Scriptures speak of the Law as a system being done away.

Well, we are not here to wrestle with that theological issue this morning, but I want us to understand that Jesus lived his life under that old system. Jesus was Jewish. Jesus was made under the law.

But when the fullness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law.

Galatians 4:4

The Law which came along with Moses was still in force when Jesus was born. Jesus was born under the requirements of the Law. Jesus was made under the Law. That is, he was required to obey it, to observe it and to live under its yoke.

Now one of the striking characteristics of the Mosaic Law was that it was exclusively Jewish. The Mosaic Law was not for other nations. It was for Israel. For a period of time under this economy, God imposed his Law on one tiny nation. And Jesus was born during the time of this Mosaic Law.

Note: The Mosaic Law appeared with Moses in about 1500 BC. And the Mosaic Law was ordained for a limited time, (Galatians 3:19) until the seed should come. But it seems that the Law was ordained to have a very specific ending point and that was at the death of Christ. But during the life of Christ, the Mosaic Law was still viable and operable. Look at Matthew 15:22-24.

One day, when Jesus was ministering in the cities of Tyre and Sidon, a woman of Canaan came to Jesus and she said,

Have mercy on me, O Lord, thou Son of David; my daughter is grievously vexed with a devil. But he answered her not a word. And his disciples came and besought him, saying, Send her away; for she crieth after us. But he answered and said, I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel.

Matthew 15:22-24

This is consistent with what he had already told his disciples . . .

Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not: But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.

Matthew 10:5, 6

Now it is clear that the gospel was ultimately intended for Gentiles according to the plan of God. God always planned to save people from all over the world. We have seen in John 3:16 that God so loved the world.

But it is very clear from the Scriptures that he planned to do so according to his own timetable. God is an orderly God. He does things in their own order. He is very patient. He doesn't get ahead of himself. He works here and he works there according to a very orderly plan. And it was his plan first to bring Jesus and the gospel to Israel and then in due time to bring him to the Gentiles. And this is why he said, "Go not into the way of the Gentiles but go rather to the lost sheep of Israel."

To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven.

Ecclesiastes 3:1

And it is clear that God had a plan of salvation for the world. And according to his plan, his gospel would go first to the Jews and then to the Gentiles.

For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.

Romans 1:16

Listen to the commentary of Albert Barnes on this verse. He says that “to the Jew first,” means,

“First in order of time. Not that the gospel was any more adapted to Jews than to others; but to them had been committed the oracles of God; the Messiah had come through them; they had had the law, the temple, and the service of God, and it was natural that the gospel should be proclaimed to them before it was to the Gentiles. This was the order in which the gospel was actually preached to the world, first to the Jews, and then to the Gentiles.”

Albert Barnes (Comment on Romans 1:16)

I suppose God could have sent the gospel first to Syria or to Greece or to Rome or to any other people. But by his sovereign and wise plan he sent it first to Israel. And he saved his elect out of Israel. But then, God patiently waited as the leaders and the masses of unbelieving Jews fully rejected his gospel of Jesus Christ. And God waited until he crucified his Son. It was only then that it was due time to send the gospel to the Gentiles.

Consider the parable of the husbandmen.

Hear another parable: There was a certain householder, which planted a vineyard, and hedged it round about, and digged a winepress in it, and built a tower, and let it out to husbandmen, and went into a far country: And when the time of the fruit drew near, he sent his servants to the husbandmen, that they might receive the fruits of it. And the husbandmen took his servants, and beat one, and killed another, and stoned another. Again, he sent other servants more than the first: and they did unto them likewise. But last of all he sent unto them his son, saying, They will reverence my son. But when the husbandmen saw the son, they said among themselves, This is the heir; come, let us kill him, and let us seize on his inheritance. And they caught him, and cast him out of the vineyard, and slew him. When the lord therefore of the vineyard cometh, what will he do unto those husbandmen? They say unto him, He will miserably destroy those wicked men, and will let out his vineyard unto other husbandmen, which shall render him the fruits in their seasons. Jesus saith unto them, Did ye never read in the scriptures, The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner: this is the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes? Therefore say I unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof. And whosoever shall fall on this stone shall be broken: but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder. And when the chief priests and Pharisees had heard his parables, they perceived that he

spake of them.

Matthew 21:33-45

This parable suggests that God came first to Israel. And he rented out his vineyard (or his kingdom) to them first. But when he sent his servants to receive the fruits of the kingdom, Israel killed the servants. God sent other servants but the Jews killed them as well. (It seems that the servants whom God sent to Israel correspond to the prophets.) Finally God sent his own son. And they killed his son. And when they killed his son, God promised to take the kingdom away from Israel and give it to another nation which would bring him fruit.

You get the idea. There is an orderly progression to the kingdom of God – first to Israel, then to the Gentiles when the kingdom is rejected by Israel.

Look what Paul told the Jews in Perga

Then Paul and Barnabas waxed bold, and said, It was necessary that the word of God should first have been spoken to you: but seeing ye put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles.

Acts 13:46

So it is easy to see that during the earthly ministry of Jesus, the will of the Father was that the gospel would go first to Israel. And out of obedience to the Father, Jesus patiently brought his message to the nation of Israel and he did not take it to other nations.

2. During the earthly ministry of Jesus, he continued to observe the wall of partition.

During the ministry of Jesus there was still a wall of partition standing which separated Jew and Gentile. And Jesus observed that wall. It was the Mosaic Law that erected the wall. Until the Mosaic Law there was no distinction among nations. It was the Mosaic Law that made the distinction between Jew and Gentile. And that distinction would not be done away until the Law was done away. And so, Jesus observed the distinction that was made under the Mosaic Law between Jew and Gentile.

3. It was the death of Jesus that would do away with the Law and thereby break down the wall of partition.

But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ. For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us; having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; for to make in himself of twain one new man, so making peace; And that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity

thereby.

Ephesians 2:13-16

The death of Jesus was the event that had cataclysmic soteriological consequences. In particular the death of Christ marked the end of the Mosaic period. It marked the end of the Jewish age and the beginning of a new age in which Gentiles would be welcomed to the gospel in mass. Notice the following statements of Christ.

And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me.

John 12:32

As the Father knoweth me, even so know I the Father: and I lay down my life for the sheep. And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd.

John 10:15, 16

All of this was to show you the significance of John 12:20-22 where Greeks are seeking Jesus. Jesus is in the Jewish temple and Greeks are standing out beyond the wall of partition wanting to see Jesus. And Jesus told Philip and Andrew, "I must die first."

The Response of Jesus

And Jesus answered them, saying, The hour is come, that the Son of man should be glorified.

John 12:23

The Gentiles are waiting outside and Jesus tells the disciples, "The hour is come, that the Son of man should be glorified." What Jesus is saying is that there is one great act that must be accomplished before it is the "Time of the Gentiles." The Jewish age is about to pass away and the Gentile age is upon us. And this great change from the Old Covenant to the New is contingent on his death.

I. The Principle Stated: In order to bear much fruit, Jesus must first die.

Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit.

John 12:24

Up until this time in history, the fruit of salvation was sparse. God was gracious even in the Old Testament. But he saved only here and there. You remember in the day of Noah, only Noah and his family were saved from the flood and it appears that of all the people on the face of the earth only Noah and his family knew the Lord.

In the day of Elijah the prophet, Elijah sat down under the juniper tree and wept, thinking he was the only man in Israel who had not bowed the knee to Baal. But God told them there were 6000 in Israel who had not bowed to Baal. But this was a mere pittance of all the people in Israel.

The northern kingdom of Israel was carried off to Syria and a few years later the southern kingdom was carried off into Babylon because salvation was sparse in Israel. In Jesus' day, he didn't find great faith in Israel. But what he found was a people devoid of faith and life. He found a nation of people who were enslaved to the Romans because of their apostasy and their cold-hearted rejection of their God.

But Jesus said,

Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit.

John 12:24

This he spoke of himself. You see, according to the plan of God, the much fruit of salvation would follow the death of Christ. Up until this time there were tokens of salvation. But when the Savior would die, then the floodgates of salvation would be loosed. And that has proven to be true, hasn't it.

This age that we live in is called the age of grace. Not that God is any more gracious now than he always has been. But this is the time of grace. Why? Because the kernel of wheat has been planted in the ground and it is now harvest time and the wheat fields are now white unto harvest.

In the times of the Old Covenant, there were thousands saved. But after the death of Christ, in the times of the New Covenant, there are millions upon millions who have come to know the Lord. The Lord has opened up his arms and embraced Gentiles as well as Jews. Salvation has gone to the ends of the world. Fruit has sprung up in all parts of the globe – because Jesus was put to death.

It is true that when we believe in Christ that Jesus' perfect life is imputed to our account. His righteousness is imputed. There is no doubt that his life counts for us. But our text focuses on his death. And it says,

Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit.

John 12:24

This word, "except," is a strong word. It means there was no other way. It had to be death. Except Jesus die, there would be no harvest. Jesus told Nicodemus,

As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so, must the Son of man be lifted up.

John 3:14

This was the great principle that applied to the life of Christ. There was always a principle of death pervading his life. He knew that he came to die and that principle was always present with him.

Now we have seen the principle stated; that Jesus must die to bear much fruit. And now, we see the principle extended to every man.

2. The Principle Extended

He that loveth his life shall lose it; and he that hateth his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal.

John 12:25

This statement by Jesus is recorded in the Scriptures a total of six times. (Matthew 10:39; 16:25; Mark 8:35; Luke 9:24; 17:33; John 12:25)

The meaning is clear. He who loves his life in this world shall lose his life in the next. On the other hand, he who cares little for the things of this life but puts the things of the kingdom of God first will find life in the next.

The whole world lives for self, don't they? This is the characteristic of the world. Worldly gain is everything. And Jesus said, "What shall a man be profited if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul? (Matthew 16:26)

By contrast, the man who lives his life according to the principle of Christ may never possess the things of this world, but if he is saved by faith in Christ, he has gained everything! This worldly life that we live is a vapor that appears for a little season and then vanishes away. But the life that comes after spans the unending ages of eternity.

Listen again to the words of Jesus.

Read Matthew 6:25-34

Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; not yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment? Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they?

A Discussion of the Old Covenant and the New Covenant

- I. The saving plan of God has always been universal.
 - A. From Adam to Moses there was no distinction among nations and God saved whomsoever he willed from all families and tribes and nations.
 - B. Beginning with Moses around 1500 BC, there was a relatively short interval of time when God focused his attention on one nation.
 - a. His Covenant with Israel was not a grace covenant.
 - b. His Covenant with Israel was a works covenant.
 - c. His Covenant with Israel was not a saving covenant.
 - d. His Covenant with Israel was a temporary covenant. (Galatians 3:19)
 - e. His Covenant with Israel was a typical covenant. (Hebrews 10:1)
 - C. Beginning with the death of Christ, with the passing away of that temporary covenant, there was a return to a universal application of God's attention.