

115. The Gospel of John—12:17-24

“Dying to Live” Pt.1

(9/20/20)

As we have already pointed out—John’s gospel is unique when compared with the other gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke)—known as the synoptic gospels.

Almost one half of John’s entire gospel deals with the last week of Jesus’ life before His crucifixion (chapters 12 thru 19)—and half of that focuses on the last twelve hours of His life before the cross.

And so once again, as we enter into chapter 12, we enter the final week of Jesus’ life before His crucifixion—an incredibly special week that Christians refer to as *“Passion Week”*.

“Passion week” begins with His Triumphal Entry on Palm Sunday and culminates a week later on Resurrection Sunday when our Lord rose from the dead.

John 12 opens up— **“Then, six days before the Passover, Jesus came to Bethany...” (v.1)**

From the timeline of John’s gospel, it seems that Jesus came to Bethany 6 days before the Passover—sometime Friday afternoon.

When the sun went down, it became Saturday (our Friday evening).

John 12:12 says—**“The next day a great multitude that had come to the feast...”**

This next day would have been Sunday, the 10th of Nisan (NYE-san)—the day Jesus made His Triumphal Entry into the city of Jerusalem.

Verse 20 of chapter 12 takes place two to four days before that—

John 12:20 (NKJV)

²⁰ Now there were certain Greeks among those who came up to worship at the feast.

Now, before we look at this, keep in mind that it was the events of chapter 11 that really set in motion much of what goes on in chapter 12.

Chapter 11 deals with the death and resurrection of Lazarus.

It was the resurrection of Lazarus by Jesus that really began to heat up Kingdom fever in the hearts of the Jewish people as the news spread like wildfire that, *“Jesus of Nazareth raised a man who had been dead for 4 days—He must be the Messiah!—The Kingdom of God is near!!”*

So, the emotion and excitement in the hearts of the people in chapter 11 began to build and by chapter 12 reached a fever pitch as chapter 12 opens—

John 12:1 (NKJV)

¹ Then, six days before the Passover, Jesus came to Bethany, where Lazarus was who had been dead, whom He had raised from the dead...

John 12:17-19 (NKJV)

¹⁷ Therefore the people, who were with Him when He called Lazarus out of his tomb and raised him from the dead, bore witness. ¹⁸ For this reason the people also met Him, because they heard that He had done this sign. ¹⁹ The Pharisees therefore said among themselves, "You see that you are accomplishing nothing. Look, the world has gone after Him!"

One author provides perspective—

“As the crowd grew in size, and interest in the Savior mounted, the Pharisees were beside themselves. Nothing they could say or do had the slightest effect. With frenzied exaggeration, they cried out that the whole world had gone after Jesus. They did not realize that the interest of

the crowd was but a passing thing, and that those who really were willing to worship Jesus as the Son of God were very few.”

J. Vernon McGee comments on the fickle enthusiasm of the crowd—

“My favorite painting of the Crucifixion shows three empty crosses. The bodies of the crucified have been taken down from the crosses and lie in the tombs. In the background is a little donkey eating on a palm frond. What a message! The discarded palm branch and the cross are the tokens of His so-called triumphal entry. Where is the crowd that cried, “Hosanna: Blessed is the King of Israel that cometh in the name of the Lord”? They may be the same crowd that four days later shouted, “Crucify Him!” Now they are gone, and He is in the tomb. You see, He offered Himself to them publicly as their King, but He was rejected.”

And that brings us to verse 20—

John 12:20 (NKJV)

²⁰ Now there were certain Greeks among those who came up to worship at the feast.

Verse 20 begins a very important transition in the ministry of Jesus—the transition from Him offering salvation to the Jewish people (those He came primarily but not exclusively to save yet for the most part had rejected Him)—to now turning to the Gentiles who came seeking Him and whom He would receive and allow to become part of His covenant (new covenant) people.

Up until this point in His ministry, Jesus concerned Himself primarily with, “*the lost sheep of the House of Israel*”.

In fact, in Matthew chapter 10, when He sent out the 12 apostles to evangelize the lost—He told them, “*Do not go into the way of the Gentiles...but rather go only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.*”

And yet, even though God had ordained that the children of Israel were to be the first to be offered citizenship in His coming Kingdom by receiving Jesus as their King—they rejected Him.

And so, after having been offered the gospel of the Kingdom first but rejecting it—Jesus now turns to the Gentiles with the offer of salvation—as was illustrated in the Parable He told of the Marriage Feast as found in Matthew chapter 22:1-14.

Paul tells us in Romans chapter 11 that Israel's rejection of Messiah caused salvation to come to the Gentiles.

Were the Gentiles an afterthought? —No, it was in God's plan from the beginning to save them:

Genesis 12:3 (NKJV)

³ I will bless those who bless you, And I will curse him who curses you; And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."

Isaiah 42:6 (NKJV)

⁶ "I, the LORD, have called You in righteousness, And will hold Your hand; I will keep You and give You as a covenant to the people, As a light to the Gentiles,

Isaiah 49:6 (NKJV)

⁶ Indeed He says, 'It is too small a thing that You should be My Servant To raise up the tribes of Jacob, And to restore the preserved ones of Israel; I will also give You as a light to the Gentiles, That You should be My salvation to the ends of the earth.' "

Romans 9:24-26 (NKJV)

²⁴ *even* us whom He called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles? ²⁵ As He says also in Hosea: "*I will call them My people, who were not My people, And her beloved, who was not beloved.*" ²⁶ "*And it shall come to pass in the place where it was said to them, 'You are not My people,' There they shall be called sons of the living God.*"

In John 10 Jesus had affirmed this very thing when He said—

John 10:16 (NKJV)

¹⁶ **And other sheep I have which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they will hear My voice; and there will be one flock *and* one shepherd.**

The “**other sheep**” which were “**not of this fold**” (the fold of Israel), is a reference to the Gentiles whom He would gather to Himself and make one flock consisting of both Jewish and Gentile believers (the Church—Eph.2:14-18) and He Himself would be the One Good Shepherd over them all.

So, this was all part of God's plan of redemption for the world from the beginning—Jesus the Jewish Messiah rejected by His people became the Savior of the world for all who would receive Him—

John 1:11-12 (NKJV)

¹¹ He came to His own [Israel], and His own [the Jewish people] did not receive Him. ¹² But as many as received Him [Gentiles], to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name:

So this now becomes a very important section of Scripture (John 12:20 and following) in that it marks the beginning of a great transition from Israel being the *'light'* of God to this lost world—to the Gentiles who would soon become the new instrument of God, chosen by God to be a *'light'*—His new Witness to the world:

Philippians 2:14-16 (NKJV)

¹⁴ Do all things without complaining and disputing, ¹⁵ that you may become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, ¹⁶ holding fast the word of life...

Here in John 12, this group of Greeks (Gentiles) who are seeking Jesus become a type of *'firstfruits'* of a great Gentile harvest of souls which would be called *"The Church."*

The Church was commissioned by Jesus to go into all the world and be a light, preaching the gospel and picking up where Jesus left off when He ascended back to His Father after His resurrection.

Acts 1:1-2 (NKJV)

¹ The former account I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach, ² until the day in which He was taken up, after He through the Holy Spirit had given commandments to the apostles whom He had chosen...

John 12:20-21 (NKJV)

²⁰ Now there were certain Greeks among those who came up to worship at the feast.
²¹ Then they came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida of Galilee, and asked him, saying, "Sir, we wish to see Jesus."

These Greeks are what the New Testament refers to as *"God-fearers"*—a group of Gentiles who loved the God of Israel and were sympathetic to and supportive of the Jewish faith; yet they stopped short of becoming full Jews in lifestyle and in circumcision.

The Roman centurion Cornelius fit into this category:

Acts 10:1-2 (NKJV)

¹ There was a certain man in Caesarea called Cornelius, a centurion of what was called the Italian Regiment, ² a devout *man* and one who feared God with all his household, who gave alms generously to the people, and prayed to God always.

It is interesting to see how religious a person can be and still not be saved.

Certainly, Cornelius was sincere in his obedience to God's Law, in his fasting, and in his generosity to the Jewish people.

As a Gentile, he was not permitted to offer sacrifices in the Temple—so he presented his prayers to God as his sacrifices (Ps. 141:1–2).

In every way, he was a model of religious respectability—and yet he was not a saved man. (John 3:1-16)

My view is that Cornelius is an example of someone who lived up to the light which God gave him.

While this light was not sufficient to save him—God made sure that he (and every other person on earth who lives up to the light God has given to them), God made sure that he was given more light (God's truth)—enough to save him.

I believe there are a lot of people in this world who are like Cornelius—they are not atheists or agnostics and they are not overtly wicked or immoral.

They are loving people, good parents, faithful spouses, law abiding citizens who believe in God and yet really don't understand what it means to be born of the Spirit (saved) and heaven bound.

In the Great Commission, Jesus commanded that we go to them with the gospel—but sometimes they come to us (as right here in John 12)—are we ready?

1 Peter 3:15 (NKJV)

¹⁵ But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always *be ready* to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear;

John 12:21 (NKJV)

²¹ Then they came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida of Galilee, and asked him, saying, "Sir, we wish to see Jesus."

One commentator—

"In L.A. there is a church called the 'Church of the Open Door.' On the back wall where only the pastor/preacher/speaker standing at the pulpit could see it was a sign that read, "Sir, we would see Jesus." (John 12:21—KJV)

J. Vernon McGee who pastored there at one time said he would have liked to put a sign on the pulpit that only the congregation could see that read, "Have I therefore become your enemy because I tell you the truth?" (Gal. 4:16)

We can commend these Greeks for wanting to see Jesus. The Jews would say, "We would see a sign!" (Matt. 12:38; 1 Cor. 1:22) but these men said, "We would see Jesus." There is no record that Jesus did talk with these men, but the message that He gave in response contains truths that all of us need."

Now, during the last week of Jesus' life, He spent each day in the Temple teaching and probably spent the nights at the home of Mary, Martha, and Lazarus.

These Greeks came to Philip probably because they knew he was one of Jesus' disciples who was from Bethsaida (up in Galilee—a Gentile area) and because he had a Greek name.

And yet, Philip didn't take them directly to Jesus but instead took them to Andrew (who along with Philip)—then took them to Jesus.

Without reading too much into this—the simplest explanation is that Philip was unsure how to handle these Gentiles and hesitated to take them directly to Jesus because he remembered the Lord's admonition to the Twelve: *"Do not go in the way of the Gentiles, and do not enter any*

city of the Samaritans.” (Matt. 10:5); and His declaration that He “*was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel*” (Matt. 15:24).

Therefore, Philip sought counsel of Andrew (Peter’s brother) who then brought them to Jesus.

I think there is a spiritual application to this incident—one that Arthur W. Pink puts his finger on: “*They supplicated Philip, making known their wish, and asking if it were possible to have it granted; saying, “Sir, we would see Jesus,” or more literally, “Jesus, we desire to see.” At the very time the leaders of Israel sought to kill Him, the Greeks desired to see Him. This was the first voice from the outside world which gave a hint of the awakening consciousness that Jesus was about to be the Savior of the Gentiles as well as the Jews.*”

John 12:23 (NKJV)

²³ But Jesus answered them, saying, "The hour has come that the Son of Man should be glorified.

Now this is a very important passage for us to understand—and it all hinges on the request of these Gentiles to see Jesus.

First, Jesus talks about His crucifixion which he strangely refers to as His *glorification*.

We would have expected Him to say, “*The hour has come that the Son of Man should be crucified*”—but Jesus saw beyond the cross to the glory that would follow.

Luke 24:26 (NKJV)

²⁶ Ought not the Christ to have suffered these things and to enter into His glory?"

Hebrews 12:2 (NKJV)

² looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of *our* faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

Many times, during His public ministry Jesus made the statement, “*My hour has not yet come*”—but now in John 12:23 He says, “**The hour has come...**”

To explain the necessity of His death in producing *much* life ('souls' for the Kingdom)—He uses an illustration from something they were all very familiar with—farming:

John 12:24 (NKJV)

²⁴ Most assuredly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it produces much grain. (Explain)

Then the Lord Jesus went on to apply this illustration to Himself—

John 12:32-33 (NKJV)

³² And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all *peoples* to Myself." ³³ This He said, signifying by what death He would die.

One author—

"Most assuredly I say to you..." (v.24) introduces a solemn affirmation. The analogy of a kernel of wheat "dying" in the ground and producing many seeds teaches that death is necessary for a harvest.

Seed never produces grain until first it falls into the ground and dies. The Lord Jesus here referred to Himself as a grain of wheat. If He did not die, He would abide alone. He would enjoy the glories of heaven by Himself; there would be no saved sinners there to share His glory. But if He died, He would provide a way of salvation by which many might be saved.

Listen, Jesus didn't come to save people by *instruction*. He didn't come to save people by *example*.

He didn't say, "*If you try to live the life I lived and follow in my steps you'll be saved.*"

You get saved and *then* you receive the power of the Holy Spirit to follow Jesus.

We can't begin to follow Jesus until He first comes into our hearts by faith and gives us the power to live for Him.

Jesus had to suffer and die *before* people could be saved.

If Jesus hadn't died, He would have remained *alone* as the only member of the human race worthy of heaven—the only member of the family of God.

Through His death He was buried like a seed, through His resurrection He produced much fruit (1Cor.15:20).

To believe salvation is possible any other way apart from the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ means that Christ died in vain—

Galatians 2:21 (NKJV)

²¹ I do not set aside the grace of God; for if righteousness *comes* through the law, then Christ died in vain." (Elaborate)