

We want to see Jesus

John 12:20-33

Rev Dr Jos M Strengholt

We are slowly crawling through the season of Lent towards Good Friday. In our Gospel readings we move, along with Jesus, closer and closer to the day when he will be crucified.

His disciples may have had dark forebodings, but outsiders at that time did not see the cross at the end of Jesus' journey to Jerusalem; they saw Jesus in power and they were excited. Jesus had just raised Lazarus from the dead, and everyone was talking about it.

1. We love to see Jesus!

And even some Greeks become so excited, they want to meet with Jesus. 'Sir, we would like to see Jesus', some Greeks asked of Philip, one of the disciples of Jesus.

Greeks coming to Jesus, this was exciting for the followers of Jesus. Now, in the days before the Great Feast of Passover, when the expectations were running high of Jesus revealing himself as the great savior of Israel, even outsiders came knocking on the door of Jesus.

The disciples were excited, but the Pharisees were upset. Just before our story, we see how angry the Pharisees were that even non-Jewish people began to follow Jesus. The Jewish leaders of those days saw this as proof that something must be very wrong about Jesus. They looked with contempt at those unclean outsiders.

The question: 'We want to see Jesus' is truly the heart of the Christian faith, and the most important question to ask. Important because knowing him makes all the difference! Knowing Jesus means knowing God.

Who were these Greeks who came to see Jesus? We read that these men went specifically to Philip who was from Bethsaida in Galilee. The suggestion is of course: they went to him *because he was from Bethsaida in Galilee.*

Philip was a disciple of Jesus with a Greek name and he came from a city in Galilee that was known for being Greek-speaking. Did these Greeks maybe know Philip from Galilee? Did they know he could speak Greek?

These Greeks, I assume from Galilee, had come to worship the God of Israel in his temple; they were allowed to do this in the Court of the Gentiles.

Why did these Greeks want to see Jesus? They had maybe heard how Jesus had recently cleansed the Court of the Gentiles in the temple, and how he defended the rights of the nations to know and worship God. And, of course, the week before, Lazarus was raised from the dead and Jesus was the talk of town.

The disciples were probably enthusiastic – ‘you see, Jesus, even the nations want to follow you!’ Revival time! And Jesus says: ‘The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified!’ ‘Yes Lord, we want to see you glorified. Show the whole world that you are the Lord.’

The disciples must have been so excited. The Jews and the nations were gathering in Jerusalem for the great feast of Passover, the celebration of the Liberation of Israel from Egypt. And now Jesus had also come to Jerusalem. Would he now reveal himself in all his glory? Think of the heated excitement in the air! “He comes to give us what we want!”

2. Revival and growth comes at a price

‘The hour has come’ Jesus told his followers. Now is the time! Earlier in his ministry he had to regularly tell his followers that this hour had not yet come. But now it is time. With this, Jesus fed the excitement, I guess.

So the anticlimax must have been great. ‘You will see me glorified. Yes indeed. I will die...’

Jesus then speaks of death and dying. Jesus compares his own death with the death of a kernel of wheat. You will not see any great glorious harvest, no new life, no revival, no progress if the grain does not first go into the ground. And die. No pain, no gain.

This is true in so many areas of life – of our own life as well. All great things cost something. The best things in life come at a price.

Only through the door of his own death, salvation – new life- can come to the Jews and the Greeks.

Why does Jesus compare his own death with the dying of a seed? The death of the one seed leads to life for many. In this way, Jesus would multiply salvation to many.

It was extra suitable for him to use this example, because the Feast of Passover was a harvest feast. The wheat was brought into the barns of the Jewish farmers, and as sacrifices into the temple.

Maybe Jesus also thought of Isaiah 53:10:

Yet it was the LORD’s will to crush him and cause him to suffer, and though the LORD makes his life an offering for sin, he will see his offspring and prolong his days. [...] The Lord makes his life a guilt offering and he will see his offspring – literally: his seed – and prolong his days...’

Apart from the pain of death the cross there is no spiritual life, but through the cross, Jesus says: I will draw all men to himself. He waits for them with open arms.

St Athanasius of Alexandria, in his book *On the Incarnation*, 25:3-4, wrote:

For it is only on the cross that a man dies with his hands spread out. And so it was fitting for the Lord to bear this also and to spread out his hands, that with the one he might draw the

ancient people [the Jews] and with the other those from the gentiles and unite both in himself. For this is what he himself has said, signifying by what manner of death he was to ransom all. 'When I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw all men to myself'.

On the day of Pentecost we have seen the beginning of the gathering in of the harvest. It is as if Jesus said to those Greeks who wanted to be with him: Just wait, I need to die first, and then you can truly be with me.

First the cross. 'Now is the time for judgment of this world; now the prince of the world will be driven out, but I will be lifted up.'

Why was the death of Jesus on the cross the judgment of the world? I think because it showed in all its naked horror, that this world is rotten to the core. This world prefers a criminal like Barabbas to live, and the perfect Man and Son of God, Jesus, to die.

By crucifying Jesus, this world made clear: "We are sinners to the core, we cannot stand this Perfect Man. Each day we look at him we realize how incomplete and sinful we are. We do not want Jesus and others first, we want ourselves first."

By being prepared to die as the result of his unselfish obedience to the Father, Jesus glorified God. Now God had someone who was prepared to serve, and love, and obey, even when killed by humankind.

So at that evil cross, the Son of God brought glory to his Father and judgment on the world.

In order to encourage Jesus in his last days before the cross, God spoke from heaven, after Jesus had prayed that Jesus would glorify the name of God.

Now here we have an important verbal exchange between God the Father and God the Son.

First, in verse 23, Jesus says that the time has come for the Son of Man to be glorified, that is, on the cross.

Then, in verse 28, Jesus prays: "Father, glorify your name"

The in verse 28, a voice sounds from heaven: 'I have glorified, and I will glorify again'.

Jesus prays that he might glorify, or honor, the name of God.

The Father's response is, that He will glorify the Son.

Father and Son both desire to glorify each other.

The ultimate moment when this happens, is when Jesus is crucified.

God is glorified - honored - when Jesus dies on the cross, as finally God has found a Man who obeyed him 100%, in the midst of the worst of circumstances.

And Jesus is glorified - honored - by God for his obedience.

Real glory does not consist of majesty and splendor; it consists of lowly service and obedience to God. That is how God is honored. By deeds of service.

3. Following him

Being a Christian, means obeying, serving, until it hurts.

That is, living as Jesus lived, for the sake of God and for each other.

Anyone who loves their life will lose it, while anyone who hates their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honor the one who serves me. (John 12:25-26)

Those last words are so encouraging. 'My Father will honor the one who serves me.' We will be honored by the Father for the simple reason that we serve his Son. Not only Jesus will receive glory, but also those who follow Him.

But this serving, this following, in other words, is to die like that kernel of wheat. That is what serving him means. We have to lose our life. This sounds pretty big and it is.

It has everything to do with our priorities in life. The person who loves his or her life – who is absorbed in his own life, in himself, who puts other people last, he or she encounters ruin.

If we concentrate on our own aims, our own life, we cut ourselves off from all that is beyond us. The selfish person, simply because he is a selfish person, cuts himself off from all the joys of unselfishness. A man wrapped up in himself makes a very small parcel.

Miserable people are nearly always selfish and there is an important truth there. Happiness in this life and the best preparation for eternity, is to be focused on serving Jesus Christ and other people. Jesus first, yourself last and others in between...

But if we focus on loving God and others, God honors us. He lifts us up, now, and in eternity.

Conclusion

'We want to see Jesus', was the desire of the Greeks who came to Jesus. 'Seeing him' is what we need to do as well. And when we look, when we accept, when we embrace the Lord who died for us and for the world, we follow Him.

We use our lives for serving Him and for being a blessing to other people. And in doing so, we gain so much.

God – He will honor you for serving our Lord Jesus Christ. Just as he glorified his Son, He will honor those who are with His Son in obedience and servitude to the people around us.

With arms wide open, Jesus accepted us to be His children. Let us open our arms wide as well for the people that we meet today, tomorrow, this week. And we can be assured of God's pleasure in us.

Amen