

## Discipleship in the Lectionary – 03/17/2024



A look at the week's lectionary through the lens of discipleship and disciple-making.

**Fifth Sunday in Lent**

Revised Common Lectionary Year B

Sunday, March 17th

**John 12:20-33**

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### We wish to see Jesus

Prior to this text, there are three references that Jesus' hour had not yet come. The first is 2:4 when Jesus' mother asks Him to intervene during the wedding at Cana and Jesus replies, "...my hour has not yet come." The second is 7:30 where Jesus' teaching astonished Jerusalem and the leaders sought to arrest Him but could not because "his hour had not yet come." The third is 8:20 when Jesus taught openly in the temple, but nobody arrested Him because "his hour had not yet come." This situation changes in 12:23 where Jesus states, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to become glorified." What prompts this announcement? Some argue it is the level of opposition that has now arisen from the Jewish authorities because of Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead. Others point to the arrival of some Greeks seeking to meet with Jesus.

### John 12:20-33 Commentary

Important context for this text is the raising of Lazarus (11:38-44) resulted in many Jews believing in Jesus (11:45). This led to a plot to not only kill Jesus (11:45-57) but Lazarus as well (12:9-11).

*<sup>20</sup> Now among those who went up to worship at the feast were some Greeks. <sup>21</sup> So these came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and asked him, "Sir, we wish to see Jesus." <sup>22</sup> Philip went and told Andrew; Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus. <sup>23</sup> And Jesus answered them, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.*

At the triumphal entry, one of the Pharisees notes how the world had gone after Jesus (12:19). This statement concludes Jesus' ministry to the Jews. The next section opens with a group of Greeks seeking out Jesus. This confirms the Pharisee's statement of how the world had gone after Jesus. The fact that Greeks (Gentiles) were present in Jerusalem at the time of Passover suggests they were Jewish Proselytes or perhaps Diasporic Jews. Clearly, word of Jesus' deeds had spread far and wide. The connection with the Greeks (the world) seeking out Jesus appears to be the catalyst which results in Jesus' statement: "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified" (v.23). Others also point to the level of opposition resulting from the raising of Lazarus could also have been a factor.

*<sup>24</sup> 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. <sup>25</sup> Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. <sup>26</sup> If anyone serves me, he must follow me; and where I am, there will my servant be also. If anyone serves me, the Father will honor him.*

Verse 24 explains (albeit using a metaphor) the implication of the hour of the glorification. Jesus' death will result in a great harvest – like a seed of wheat. The Greeks give an indication that this great harvest goes beyond Israel and the Jews. Jesus giving His life is the model for His disciples. Those who love worldly life and want to hang onto it will not receive the gift of eternal life. Abundant life can only be achieved by giving one's life, not by hoarding it.

*27 "Now is my soul troubled. And what shall I say? 'Father, save me from this hour'? But for this purpose I have come to this hour. 28 Father, glorify your name." Then a voice came from heaven: "I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again." 29 The crowd that stood there and heard it said that it had thundered. Others said, "An angel has spoken to him." 30 Jesus answered, "This voice has come for your sake, not mine. 31 Now is the judgment of this world; now will the ruler of this world be cast out. 32 And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself." 33 He said this to show by what kind of death he was going to die.*

With no Gethsemane prayer in John's Gospel, perhaps this passage serves as its counterpart. Jesus is unsettled by what He must face but resolutely commits to serve the will of the Father. Heaven responds to Jesus' prayer – the third time in John a voice from Heaven attests to Jesus' identity. Jesus will be exalted; God will be glorified.

### Reflections

The inclusion of the Greeks in this passage in many ways is a parallel to the role that Nicodemus plays in chapter 3. The Greeks simply serve to set up a discourse by Jesus about his approaching death and its meaning. We cannot be sure who the Greeks were (whether Diasporic Jews, Greek Proselytes, or simply Gentiles). While the Greeks came to see Jesus, the text does not indicate if they ever actually got to meet Him! In verse 23, it is not clear if Jesus is addressing Philip and Andrew and/or the Greeks. Some have argued that we are the Greeks in the passage. The discourse is set up for our benefit as the reader.

One thing the text indicates about the Greeks is that they first approach Philip. Why? Many have speculated that Philip is a Greek name and thus Philip would have been an obvious choice for the Greek to first connect with. Philip takes them to Andrew. Andrew is also a Greek name. Galilee was a place where Greek culture was present and thus reflects some level of openness to the Greek culture in Simon-Peter and Andrew's family. Andrew was a disciple of John the Baptist and recognized Jesus as the Messiah. He brought his own brother to meet Jesus. Andrew was present with Jesus on some important occasions. He was also the apostle who approached Jesus about the boy with the loaves and fishes (John 6:8). Andrew would have been the ideal person for Philip to introduce the Greeks to in order to broker a meeting with Jesus.

What appears to be an almost incidental point in the text against the backdrop of all the deep theological implications actually provides some remarkably relevant insight into the biblical model for introducing diverse seekers to an established Christian community. When people who are different than the prevailing church socio-cultural norms come to the door asking to meet Jesus, how is this handled? Who are the Greeks? Who is the Philip? Who is the Andrew?