

Encountering Jesus

The Encounter that Wasn't?

April 2, 2023

Overarching Theme: 2023 – Living the Dream

Instructions:

When using this material as teacher, feel free to pick and choose the point you want to emphasis in the lesson. The format of the curriculum is designed to have an abundance of information in which to refer as desired.

Core Point: 2023 can be a year of living the dream of faithful discipleship as we take a next step forward in following Jesus Christ.

Reflect on this Scripture: *John 12:20-33*

Now among those who went up to worship at the festival were some Greeks. They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and said to him, "Sir, we wish to see Jesus." Philip went and told Andrew; then Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus. Jesus answered them, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also. Whoever serves me, the Father will honor.

"Now my soul is troubled. And what should I say--' Father, save me from this hour'? No, it is for this reason that I have come to this hour. Father, glorify your name." Then a voice came from heaven, "I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again." The crowd standing there heard it and said that it was thunder. Others said, "An angel has spoken to him." Jesus answered, "This voice has come for your sake, not for mine. Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be driven out. And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself." He said this to indicate the kind of death he was to die.

Commentary: "Sir, we would see Jesus." It was some Greeks who first said this line. Probably they said it *in* Greek, too, which is why they approached

a disciple who had a Greek name (Philip) and who had grown up in a town, Bethsaida, that had a mixed population of Jews and Greeks.

Philip and his friend Andrew then went to tell Jesus that there are some Greeks in town for Passover who were obviously attracted to Israel's God and the Jewish festivals, and they wanted an audience with the Jesus that they apparently had heard so much about. But instead of welcoming them, Jesus goes off into a meditative comment about seeds and plants, about life and death, about servants and masters. What does he mean by this?

The fullest answer to that question comes in verse 32. At that point Jesus declares that, if he is lifted up from the earth, he will draw all people to himself. In other words, if the Greeks really want to see him and to benefit fully from what he's been sent into the world to do, his proper response is to complete the work the Father has given him. Only by this strange vocation will the non-Jewish world, the world of 'Greeks' come to gain the truest and deepest access to him that God intended. They wouldn't just see him, they would come to him in the sense of being drawn by the powerful love of God, drawn into fellowship and new life.

So Jesus' strange talk about the seeds falling into the ground and dying is in fact the beginning of his answer. Here we see, more clearly than John has showed us up to now, how it is that God will save the world through the death of Jesus which has been hinted at in so many ways since the beginning of the Gospel. Jesus's death will be like sowing a seed into the ground. It will look like a tragedy, but in fact it will be a triumph - the triumph of God's self-giving love, the love that looks death itself in the face and defeats it by meeting it voluntarily, on behalf not just of Israel but of the whole world (represented by these 'Greeks').

Verse 23, which ties this passage together, shows that we have arrived at last at the moment the whole gospel has been moving towards. 'My time hasn't come', Jesus says to Mary in 2.4. Nobody arrested him, says John 7:30, because his time hadn't yet come. Now Jesus realizes that his time has come: the time when the preparation has been completed, and the great event, final moment of love and liberation, has to take place.

The fact that foreigners are asking to see him, here in Jerusalem, functions as a sign that shows where we are in God's plan timetable. Now there will be no holding back Jesus will go forward to meet the moment when he would be lifted up from the earth, and "draw all people to" himself (12:32). As he does so, we are aware that he isn't just talking about himself. Although Jesus does what only he can do in a unique way, he is also pioneering a route along which his 'servants' or 'followers' must go after him. Perhaps this too is part of his challenge both to his followers and to the Greeks. If they really

want to encounter him (for more than a selfie moment with a famous person), they must be willing to risk all and follow him in service.

Adapted from John for Everyone, part 2, pp 29-31. NT Wright

Questions to Ponder for Accountability in the Group:

1. These "Greeks" had traveled to Jerusalem for Passover and had likely heard the buzz about Jesus raising Lazarus. Why do you think the Greeks wanted to see Jesus? Do you think this was a 'fan' moment or a potential follower moment?
2. Why do you think this request made by people from the "outside world" signaled to Jesus that "the hour had come?"
3. When Philip and Andrew approach Jesus with this request, Jesus changes the subject and apparently didn't meet with the Greeks. What do you make of this non-encounter?
4. Jesus' glorification in the gospel of John is connected with his being 'lifted up' in crucifixion. No one at that time would have remotely understood crucifixion in that way. How could this excruciating, horrific, degrading form of capital punishment possibly be used for God's glory?
5. Jesus says "whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am there my servant will be also". How could this be an invitation for the Greeks to become followers? Is this an invitation for us as well? What is one way you can be Jesus' servant this week?

Activity for the Life of a Disciple:

1. Remember to find encouragement for the day by reading the daily devotional from FUMCC.
2. Ponder and pray on this scripture this week: "*Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.*" (John 12:24).