

Sir, we would see Jesus **John 12 v 20 – 36**
St Andrews, 17th March 2013, morning

Intro

I really enjoy preparing talks because I always learn something new. I also get challenged about my faith and the way I live it out, which isn't necessarily very enjoyable!

I learned two new things about this disciple, Philip:

1. There are two different Philips in the NT: Philip the Apostle (this one) and Philip the Evangelist, who was one of the deacons in Acts 6 and who witnessed to the Ethiopian Official in Acts 8. He was not the same as this Philip.
2. Some sections of the church honour Philip as the patron saint of hatters and pastry chefs!

More info about Philip the apostle: He came from Bethsaida in Galilee, as did Peter and Andrew, and may have been a disciple of John the Baptist before Jesus came along and called him. Jesus was about to leave the Galilee, so for Philip, Simon Peter and Andrew following Jesus had a very immediate effect. They were literally leaving everything and hitting the road with Jesus.

Philip went and found his friend Nathanael and told him that Jesus was the promised One from God. Nathaniel met with Jesus and also became a disciple.

Context

So, John 12: where have we got to in the life of Jesus on earth?

He and the disciples have come up to Jerusalem for the Passover Feast. Not long before this, Lazarus had been raised from the dead.

The Sanhedrin, the Jewish governing body, was out for Jesus' blood and He and His disciples had gone off to a country village to lay low for a while.

Six days before Passover they returned to Bethany, just outside Jerusalem, and Mary anointed Jesus' feet with expensive perfume.

The next day He made His triumphal entry into Jerusalem – Palm Sunday, which we will celebrate next Sunday. Entering the Temple, he went into the court of the Gentiles – **the only part of the Temple where Gentiles could go to worship God**. It had become more like a market place and thoroughfare than a place for people to pray, so He turned over the stalls and drove the traders out.

All these things were very fresh in people's minds – it was all the gossip. The raising of Lazarus was obviously a sensation, so much so that the chief priests planned to kill Lazarus as well because so many people were following Jesus because of that miracle (verse 10).

So, that's the background to the incident we're considering, today.

The Greeks

Obviously these Greeks were proselytes to the Jewish religion. Had they travelled from Greece or some other part of the Middle East, or were they already living in Israel? Were they, perhaps from the Galilee, maybe even from Bethsaida? Did they know Philip? Philip is a Greek name, was there some connection or did they just think they would get a sympathetic response from someone with a Greek name?

Were they impressed that Jesus had cleared the Gentile Court of the Temple for people like them to worship? Perhaps they were there, in the Court of the Gentiles, when Jesus came in and angrily shouted that this was intended by God to be a house of prayer for all nations (Mk 11: 17), but it had become a den of thieves. Maybe they were curious to meet someone who could raise the dead? I have no idea!

We would like to see Jesus

Whatever their motivation, they were clearly people who were looking for more than the Jewish faith they had. 'We would like to see Jesus' – obviously more than just to see Him – they could see Him from where they were standing, no doubt. Did they want to have a discussion with Him – the Greeks were really into philosophy and hearing about new things?

We, in the west, also tend to have a Greek mind-set; we lead with the intellect, we depend on what we can see and what can be proved, mankind is the 'pinnacle of evolution' and the 'centre of our universe'. The Western, Greek-influenced mind struggles with the concept of the transcendent, creator God. We are suspicious of the unseen, of stuff we cannot prove or test by experimentation.

There is no shortage of people who will discuss religion, philosophy and so on. They will happily talk about the concept of god, but they most definitely do not want to get up-close and personal with the Son of God, Jesus Christ.

However, these Greeks did want to get closer to Jesus for whatever reason. Maybe they had found that religion wasn't meeting their needs. Maybe, being Greek, they were hungry for truth.

The Truth

A word about truth from Pastor David Pawson, well-known Bible teacher: 'There is some truth and some error in all religions; Christianity is not **the Truth** – Christ is **the Truth**. Christianity has developed with traditions and errors, but Jesus remains The Truth. Salvation is found in Him alone. No other name is given whereby people can be saved'.

So, if the Greeks were seeking Truth, they came to the right place. Perhaps they were hungry for the reality of the miracle-working God. So they wanted to meet the one who seemed to be in touch with that God: the One who could raise the dead.

People are drawn to Jesus in all sorts of ways.

Some are drawn by a miracle in their lives or the life of someone they know – a healing perhaps. Others are drawn by intellectual argument – Paul had converts in Athens when he debated with the Greeks at the Areopagus.; modern philosopher and author, Anthony Flew, was convinced of the existence of God by the sheer complexity of life and life-supporting systems. Others are drawn to Jesus, because they realise that He is interested in *them* and cares for *them* – Nathaniel was one of those; they will find out that God cares for them through us being interested in them and caring about them!

Something that astonishes me about Jesus is the way he doesn't do or say what you would expect. Here are these Gentile proselytes – they already believe in the true God, His Father, wouldn't you expect that he'd introduce himself to them as the Son of God and explain that He'd come to save all nationalities, not just the Jews? Then, He could call them to join His disciples and follow Him.

Well, in a way, He does, but not quite as you'd expect.

Let's look at His reply:

The hour has come v.23 Why does He say this? Does the arrival of these Greeks have a significance to Jesus? Does he somehow realise that he is moving into the final Act of His Drama. For us, it tells us that God has His perfect timing.

There have been previous attempts on Jesus' life, but it wasn't the right time. His death was carefully planned and the timing was crucial – it had to link with the slaughter of the Passover lambs because He was the fulfilment of the whole Passover feast. The annual remembrance of the

Passover pointed to this moment in history when the perfect Lamb of God, Jesus, would shed His blood on the cross for the salvation of all.

For the Son of Man to be glorified We think of glory in terms of pomp and praise and being lifted up. Jesus says, 'I will be lifted up' v.32, but He is speaking of being nailed to a cross of execution in pain and degradation. And yet, this very act will draw all people to Him. We will return to this later.

I tell you the truth, unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But, if it dies, it produces many seeds. He has just said the time has come for Him to be glorified and immediately, He speaks about dying. Well, I guess He would need to prepare the Greeks, and His disciples, that this was what was going to happen *to Him*, very soon. But look at the next bit:

The man who loves his life will lose it, while the man who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. He's not talking about Himself anymore; this is about those who will follow Him. This is no soft gospel; this is not, 'come to Jesus and be happy.'

Jesus is using the Love/hate construct which crops up in scripture from time to time, using these opposites of love and hate to make a point. It is not that we should hate our lives or ourselves, but that there is a choice – are we going to look after 'number one' and feather our own nest, concentrating our efforts on what we think will make us happy here on earth, or are we going to make following Jesus our priority, whatever the cost in this life? It's a choice between self-determination, me on the throne of my life, or submitting to Jesus as Lord.

It's a stark challenge for some Greeks who wanted to see Jesus. We don't know how they reacted to such an uncompromising challenge.

Whole-hearted surrender

It is a challenge we all face and I don't suppose many of us whole-heartedly surrender the moment we meet the Saviour. In my experience, it has been a series of stops and starts and lurches. I want to surrender, but I don't want the cost. I want to surrender, but I am still fearful of what it will mean.

Have you seen the Horse Whisperer at work? He walks along apparently ignoring the horse, which is not on any rein. The horse is drawn to walk with him, but it approaches and then takes fright and backs off. Eventually, it will keep step with him and then he will try touching the horse, rubbing its withers with something – not a hand. It needs a patient, long-term approach before the horse will allow him to lie across its back and finally to sit astride.

God sees our hearts, that we are drawn to Him and yet are still somewhat jumpy, and he is very patient with us.

The apostle Paul came to a place where he could say, 'I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus, my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in Him.'(Phil.3:8)

That's what the parable of the buried treasure was all about. The man in the story found something so valuable, that he was prepared to give up everything in order to have it. Jesus was talking about the Kingdom of God. Philip knew the value of what he had found in Jesus and left the security and comfort of his home in order to follow Him.

Jim Eliot, who was a pilot with MAF in the 1950s, said, 'He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep, in order to gain what he cannot lose.'

He was killed at the age of 28 by the people he had gone to, to tell about Jesus. Those people later came to Christ.

Treasure

Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant will also be. My Father will honour the one who serves me. Here is the upside – the reward is to be with Jesus in His Kingdom, honoured by the Father. Here is the treasure that is worth losing everything else for.

So many people forfeit an eternity of blessing for the ephemeral, unsatisfying pleasures of this world.

X marks the spot Returning to v 31 and 32 as I said I would.

The cross of Christ is the crucial place in history.

X – the cross – marks the spot where the treasure of the Kingdom of heaven is found, but it also is the place of judgment. People will be judged not on how nice they are, or who they know, or how much they helped people, or how much they gave to charity or on how they never did anyone any harm, but on their response to the crucified Christ. However wonderful we are in this life, we still fall short of sinless perfection – Jesus is our only salvation.

Lifted up

Jesus has used this expression about being lifted up, before. *John 3:14 Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes in Him may have eternal life.*

The reference is to an incident when the Israelites were on the wilderness journey, (Numbers 21). The people rebelled against God and He sent venomous snakes among them. Many died. The people came to Moses acknowledging their sin and asking him to intercede for them. God heard his prayer and told Moses to make a bronze snake on a rod and lift it up before the people. Anyone who looked at the bronze snake did not die from the snake venom. If they chose not to look, they died.

Jesus is saying that all people are dying of sin, but he will be lifted up on the cross and anyone can be saved by believing in Him.

So X – the Cross – is the only place of salvation; it is the place where we find that treasure without price – the Kingdom of God.

The cross of Christ is also the place of Jesus' victory over Satan.

Final thoughts

Philip seems to have been the right person at the right place and time for these Greeks to meet Jesus.

Philip was *there*, he was close to Jesus, he was approachable and he introduced them to Jesus. We don't know how they responded. Perhaps they believed and followed Jesus; perhaps they turned away, unwilling to let Jesus be Lord in their lives. Or perhaps this was just one step on the way for them to accept Jesus as Saviour and Lord. Maybe we have witnessed to people and not seen a positive response, but we may have been a vital step on the way. As I look back over my life I can identify seven distinct steps before I was born again. Different people, very different occasions, and situations and so on; none of them knows the part he or she played in bringing me to Christ, but all played their part.

Philip wasn't Peter or John or James – they each had *their* unique personalities and gifts, Philip was uniquely Philip, not trying to be anyone else, but he was close to Jesus, approachable and available. We may not be gifted evangelists – not many are – but we can all stay close to Jesus, we can all be available and approachable and we can all be ready to introduce people to Jesus. Not to churchianity or Christianity, but to Jesus.

We need to know who we are in Christ. We need to know that He lives in us. We need to live as what we are – saints, servants of the Living God, people with a calling on our lives. Eph.4:1
We need to recognise that we are uniquely placed to bring the knowledge of Christ to the people in our lives. No one can prevent us staying close to Jesus and being the person He wants us to be in our little corner of the world – except ourselves.

Philip was close to Jesus, he was approachable and willing to introduce people to the Saviour.
Are you? Am I?