

The Twelve | Enrolled in the School of Jesus (B)

Here Come the Greeks!

John 12.19-36 and First Corinthians 1.25

March 29, 2020

So the people, who were with Him when He called Lazarus out of the tomb and raised him from the dead, continued to testify about Him. ¹⁸ For this reason also the people went and met Him, because they heard that He had performed this sign. ¹⁹ So the Pharisees said to one another, "You see that you are not doing any good; look, the world has gone after Him."

²⁰ Now there were some Greeks among those who were going up to worship at the feast; ²¹ these then came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida of Galilee, and began to ask him, saying, "Sir, we wish to see Jesus." ²² Philip came and told Andrew; Andrew and Philip came and told Jesus. ²³ And Jesus answered them, saying, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. ²⁴ "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. ²⁵ "He who loves his life loses it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it to life eternal. ²⁶ "If anyone serves Me, he must follow Me; and where I am, there My servant will be also; if anyone serves Me, the Father will honor him.

²⁷ "Now My soul has become troubled; and what shall I say, 'Father, save Me from this hour '? But for this purpose I came to this hour. ²⁸ "Father, glorify Your name." Then a voice came out of heaven: "I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again." ²⁹ So the crowd of people who stood by and heard it were saying that it had thundered; others were saying, "An angel has spoken to Him." ³⁰ Jesus answered and said, "This voice has not come for My sake, but for your sakes. ³¹ "Now judgment is upon this world; now the ruler of this world will be cast out. ³² "And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to Myself." ³³ But He was saying this to indicate the kind of death by which He was to die.

³⁶ "While you have the Light, believe in the Light, so that you may become sons of Light." These things Jesus spoke, and He went away and hid Himself from them.

1st Corinthians 1.25 *Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.*

We've been looking at how Jesus Christ prepared His disciples to carry on His work. They were being educated and actually transformed by the Greatest Educator the world has ever seen. He was changing their very selves, their hearts/motives/desires.

And now their training is coming to a close. So much of it will only make sense after what they're about to see in Jerusalem and when God's Spirit ignites it.

Today's passage (John 12) begins the final week of Jesus Christ's earthly work. It begins with The Triumphal Entry (we'll celebrate Palm Sunday two weeks in a row!) It's the presentation to Jerusalem of their true King ...BUT a King like they and the world has never seen.

And if you want to understand Christianity and what Jesus Christ is all about, THIS is a nexus or a connection... like a junction box where all the wires come together. The repeated themes/ideas of His life converge in this Triumphal Entry... And at this CRUCIAL intersection we can't help see a gathering of ironies and paradoxes. Christianity is full of paradox – apparent contradictions that tell a deeper truth.

He's a King and riding a donkey. He'll be enthroned NOT on a royal chair but on a Cross...the brilliant experts wrongly reject Him but the ignorant crowds rightly embrace Him... He conquers by being defeated.

John is the writer who tells HOW the fuse was lit i.e. when Jesus Christ raised Lazarus from the dead ...it's another paradox: He raises the dead and for that HE MUST DIE.

3 BIG THEMES that connect/clarify what Jesus is all about:

#1: The Weakness of ~~Human~~ Strength

#2: The Strength of ~~God's~~ Weakness

#3: The Announcement of the Great Reversal

First, The Weakness of Strength: one big theme in the four Gospels is the unbelief/insecurity of the religious leaders in Israel. And today Jesus Christ marches right into the middle of it. They welcomed Him into Jerusalem like a spider welcomes a fly. And, OF COURSE, He knows exactly what awaits Him.

It's an overcrowded international festival; buzz about a Man who raises the dead... The spiritual leaders are nervous that they'll lose their place (John 11.48) ... They have to hold on to their power... and into all that web Jesus enters humble and riding a donkey... like a Jester.

And it all comes together. The Jewish clergymen afraid to lose credibility...afraid of losing control and status, the clergymen have begun to plot the death of Jesus... AND... (it says earlier in v.10; not printed) they ALSO plotted the death of Lazarus, "But the chief priests planned to put Lazarus to death also..."

The people had seen Lazarus dead for FOUR days ...and then alive. Now (at Passover!) the crowds were believing in Jesus because Lazarus was alive.

As readers, we have to wonder about the tangled scheme of the religious leaders to combat this. We want to ask these priests, "What next...kill Jesus Christ rather than admit your need ...kill Lazarus because he's a living advertisement that Jesus Christ is true...kill the eyewitnesses because they'll tell others what they saw...then you have to kill the ones who listened to the eyewitnesses...where does it end?"

Insecurity and paranoia go hand-in-hand with religion and morality based on human attainment

and rightness. In other words when people base their identity on being in power or being right and THEN their status is challenged... faced with the prospect of admitting they're WRONG AND THEY'RE NOT WHAT PEOPLE THOUGHT THEY WERE – faced with the prospect of shame and loss of position, people will violently lash out in order to protect their standing. That's why cover-ups are so common.

We saw a few weeks ago when we looked at the topic of fundamentalism and anger – whenever people get invested in a cause or ideology or a moral campaign or any partisan views with an “us vs. them” component there's the risk of self-righteousness leading to arrogance...leading to violence.

When religion or ideology or causes (based on human effort) become ways of proving our worth and demonstrating that we're right ... we will become fiercely defensive of our rightness...and sometimes ...we will exaggerate and lie and even become murderously defensive of our achievements because our worth/significance depend on US...

The clergymen/spiritual teachers in this episode had generations of practice in becoming strong morally, spiritually, academically, politically; they were right.

But God is demonstrating that human strength –based on independence from Him is an illusion. Human achievement and “enoughness” that doesn't rely on God, His promises and His grace will eventually lead to arrogance, suspicion, insecurity, paranoia and all the worst things people associate with bad-religion. And eventually, like the Tower of Babel, it'll all fall down like a tragic house of cards.

These priests even recognized that their strength is pitifully weak and silly. They look at one another and say, “Ya' SEE! We're not doing any good...the whole world is going after Him!”

A thousand years before this event, in the 2nd Psalm, God puts a question in poetic form: (listen)

“Why do the nations rage and the people devise an absurd thing?... They take their stand against the LORD and against His Messiah”

And as the poem unfolds, God confronts our insane resistance and He answers,

“But as for Me – I have installed MY King.”

It's as if God is saying, “Believe it or not – I'm NOT asking YOUR advice or YOUR consent... I HAVE INSTALLED MY KING...and here He comes sitting on a ridiculous donkey colt...walking on silly palm fronds (not a red carpet)...and YOU and your power religion and your self-righteousness and insecurity - YOU CAN'T stop Him. Even death will not stop Him.”

If I, the Living God get as weak as I possibly can get, still: “the weakness of God is stronger than men”. (1Corinthians 1.25)

And we can't miss the irony, "Look! The whole world is going after Him..." and then IN THE VERY NEXT verse, the world actually goes after Him! "And there were certain Greeks in the crowd... saying, 'Sir, we wish to see Jesus.'" The WORLD is going after Him!

These certain Greeks are recognizing what these arrogant/paranoid experts WILL NOT... The Gentiles are voicing the anxious longing of all creation, "We want to see Jesus..."

The clergymen admit "Look the whole world has gone after Him..." and they have NO IDEA how right they are...and how really weak their strength and religious power really IS.

Next, look at the Strength of Weakness. Jesus hears that these Greek pilgrims (probably Gentiles who believe in Abraham and the Prophets – "God-fearers") Jesus hears that these Greeks want to see Him.

They approach Philip who's Jewish but has a Greek name...and is from a Greek town...where they speak the Greek language (maybe he had an accent). They say, "Philip, Sir, we wish to see Jesus."

Philip turns to another disciple from the same town, (Andrew) for advice, "Andrew, YOU speak Greek... listen – these Gentiles want to see the Rabbi...Andrew, I think this means...we're GOING international!! First a parade...now international inquiries...we're blowin' up!"

But...should Philip report this to Jesus...because He's clearly focused on the Jews and THEY are God's chosen people...God has chosen them and worked exclusively through them...for literally thousands of years! I'm NOT sure He'll like this request...

And it's tense...in fact John records it using a rarely used VERB TENSE in order to heighten the tension. It literally reads, "Philip COMES and TELLS Andrew and Andrew and Philip COME and they TELL Jesus and Jesus ANSWERS..." (present tense to describe past action).

"Will He say 'good job, bring them to Me...this is the break we've been waiting for!'" OR "Will He say, 'I TOLD you – I've come only for the Jewish people – NO GENTILES!'"

How will Jesus Christ respond?... Well, expect the unexpected. He doesn't say YES...doesn't say NO; instead He says, "NOW the hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified!"

"Yeah! But what about these Greeks?"

"That's what I'm saying: the Greeks are a signal... their coming to Me at this Passover at this moment is the marker that it is NOW TIME FOR ME TO DO WHAT I HAVE COME TO DO."

“A tide of GRACE is about to flood the whole world. I’ve been holding it back until My people have heard about it... I’m standing...as it were with My back against a “dividing wall” ...a dam...and the WATERS of grace are pushing/pressing...and as I’m waiting for My people to respond...restraining the OUTBREAK of grace (Ezekiel 47)...and as the Messiah waits...the Greeks cut into the line and “the wait of the world” will WAIT NO LONGER ...as if a crack appears in the levee...and a jet of water shoots out... and Jesus Christ is saying, “It can’t be confined to Israel any longer...I can’t hold it back...HERE COME THE GREEKS!...the HOUR HAS COME!”

He is saying that while He has shown His people what the Kingdom of God looks like (teaching, healing, liberating, revealing the love of God) and much good has resulted... but now the Gentiles are coming to see Him and follow Him...

BUT MY REAL REASON FOR COMING is not to give an example or a teaching so people can have a better life by following better instructions ... I HAVE COME TO SAVE THE WORLD BY FOLLOWING THE INSTRUCTIONS YOU FAILED TO FOLLOW.

The hour has come for Me to save the world...you can admire a seed...study a seed...even eat a seed... but the real PURPOSE of a seed isn’t realized until it falls into the ground and dies...and bears fruit! The Greeks are coming – the whole world is crying for grace and salvation...IT’S TIME FOR THE SEED TO FALL INTO THE EARTH and die...time for Me to fulfill My purpose...”

AND if I be lifted up...be crucified...then I will draw ALL men to Myself... I’ll draw Jews and Greeks... Indians and Ethiopians... Portuguese and Chinese; Nigerians and Scandinavians...Malawians and Brazilians: IF I AM LIFTED UP ON A CROSS I WILL ATTRACT ALL NATIONALITIES TO MYSELF, break down the dividing wall... by weakness (by death like a seed) I’ll save the world...people from every tribe tongue and nation.

And that brings up the final point: the ANNOUNCEMENT OF THE GREAT REVERSAL... Because Jesus Christ announces this hour and the irresistible flood of grace and the PURPOSE for His coming (to be lifted up on the Cursed Tree) and buried with MY GUILT...when He declares His intentions, there comes a LOUD AMEN from Heaven.

Facing His death, He goes into Jerusalem...to be cut off and separated from his Father...to be accursed, naked, and ashamed. (Deut. 21.23)And in that moment when Jesus looks into the HORROR that awaits Him and He resolutely agrees and says, “Father, glorify YOUR Name”

Then the Father speaks...as if to recognize and affirm His Beloved Son and to commend Him to the CROWD one last time, “‘Father, glorify Your name.’ Then a voice came out of heaven: ‘I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again.’” (28)

The Father Himself is announcing to the whole world that the basic arrangement that ALL people believe, the basic code by which all sinners live is hereby rendered UPSIDE DOWN AND

BACKWARD. That universal way of life embraced by all sinners, the way that says, "To be really fulfilled, YOU have to look out for #1, to protect and promote YOURSELF" – THAT WAY IS EXPOSED AS FALSE and it's reversed!

The way of the Serpent in the Garden is judged, the Ruler of the World is cast out...and this revelation is left in its wake: God Himself is a Servant. He has come in the Person of Jesus Christ NOT on a war-horse, not to be served but to SERVE and lay down His life a Ransom for many.

He comes on a donkey...a HUMBLE King with arms outstretched to give life through death. His way is the Great Paradox, i.e. the way that leads to True fulfillment and to WILD increase and growth and LIFE is to die...to let go self-dependency, self-fulfillment and self-assertion and clinging to power and instead to fall into the hands of the Father who loves us.

And what this means is #1: the real meaning of Jesus Christ is NOT so much His teaching us a better way to live or even giving us a better example to follow.

His real purpose for coming is to live the life we failed to live and die the death we deserved to die – "but for THIS purpose I came to this HOUR..."

His UNIQUE way is not His advice to us or His example but His death... if you don't get that, you don't get Christianity. He died for me so that I don't have to fear death...or the little deaths that find me denying my desires...saying NO to selfishness...

#2 - We don't have to fear serving others, investing in others.

To waste ourselves in serving God and serving others is NO WASTE: in His Kingdom it makes perfect sense. Jesus Christ says, follow Me in My way of self sacrifice and YOUR little life will mean MORE THAN YOU COULD POSSIBLY imagine. Like a seed!

LAST, this also turns religion upside down. Religion says "keep the rules and commands and God will like you, will bless you" so in the end you obey God in order to protect yourself...but the Gospel says, "First God blesses you, saves you, accepts, adopts you and THEN, out of that radical security you can obey from a new motive...You start to join Him in this upside down way of the GREAT REVERSAL.

"Sir, we would like to see Jesus..." What a great prayer to pray. Let's bow our heads and pray it now.

"Father, we would like to see Jesus... know His love, experience His forgiveness...let me see Him, the King exalted over my life and over the whole world today, everyday. Amen."