

LESSON #19 CHAPTER 12: 20–50
Jesus, the Saviour of Humanity

Divine Attribute: Light, Life

Theological concept: Saviour for humanity

Geographical location: Jerusalem

Chapter Structure

12: 20–36 The Gentiles Seek to Meet Jesus

12: 37–50 Jesus' Revelation: I am the Saviour of All Mankind

Spiritual Principles:

P1 Lord, Glorify Your Name!

P2 God's children respond to the Truth and Holy Spirit

P3 When we seek God's glory, God will glorify us.

Today's lesson...

In the last lesson, we entered the final week of the Lord's walk on earth (before his crucifixion). He was anointed as the Messiah and received into the holy city as her king. Today, we come to an epilogue summarising the Lord's revelation of himself to the world (which began in ch. 2). Hereforth, He spent most of his time with 'his own people' (which begins in ch. 13).

A.12: 20–36 The Gentiles Seek to Meet Jesus

According to Matthew 21, Mark 11 and Luke 19 After Jesus entered Jerusalem, he cleansed the temple for a second time. (Note that what is recorded in John chapter 2 was a separate occasion.) John did not record it. Instead, he recorded a seemingly insignificant observation:

²⁰ Now among those who went up to worship at the feast were some Greeks. ²¹ So these came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and asked him, "Sir, we wish to see Jesus."

This is because the main theme of the gospel of John is that Jesus is not merely the Messiah of the Jews but also the Saviour of the world. (3:16; 4:42; 6:33; 8:12; 10:16...)

These Greeks are not curious tourists nor investigators. They are God-fearing Gentiles, like Cornelius of Caesarea (Acts 10) or the centurion of Capernaum, who loved the Jewish people and built them a synagogue (Luke 7:5). They belong to a class of Gentiles who attached themselves to the Jewish way of life and synagogue worship without becoming full converts to Judaism. They occasionally went to Jerusalem to worship at the festivals (like the Ethiopian Eunuch in Acts 8:27); they were admitted to the "court of the Gentiles", which was the outer courts of the temple. Penetration into the inner courts will result in a death penalty. Note that the outer court was cluttered with trade and traffic during the festive time!

Side-note: Is it not amazing that when Jesus was born into the world, gentile magi came to seek his face, and now before his departure from the world, gentile seekers came to seek his face again!

According to F.F. Bruce, the NT professor, the Greeks' curiosity about Jesus may have been stirred because he had expelled the traders and money changers from the outer court in order that the place might fulfil its divinely ordained purpose of being '*a house of prayer for all the nations*' (Mark 11:17, Isa 56:7).

They approached Philip (like the name 'Andrew', 'Philip' is a Greek name) and asked if they might be granted an interview with Jesus. They might likely have approached Philip because he spoke Greek or because they came from the region of Bethsaida to which Philip himself belonged; this is because the Greek word "*erótaó*" which is translated to 'asked' in verse 21 means make an earnest request, especially by someone in a 'preferred position'. Such requests receive special consideration because of the special relationship involved.

We do not know whether they got the interview with Jesus. But Jesus' reply emerges as a teaching regarding the truth of life. The essence of the teaching is that the time is fast approaching when not only these Greeks but many others will come to enjoy the new life he imparts, but first, he must die.

We recalled that on earlier occasions the Lord repeatedly said that his 'hour' or the 'appointed time' had not yet come. (2:4, 7:30, 8:20, 7:6,8) Now, with his arrival in Jerusalem for the last Passover, it has come.

The Lord did not say: "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be **crucified**"; he said, "²³ **The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.**" Jesus' death is also referred to as his being "³² **lifted up from the earth**"; We have learned that the word 'lifted' is the same word as 'glory' in Greek (3:14). Jesus' death is not a failure nor is it an accident; it is the way God redeems His own, it is full obedience of the Son to the Father, it is a time when the Son glorifies the Father and the Father glorifies the Son. The Lord's earlier triumphal entry was the latent image of the glory of the cross!

The Lord has described himself as the 'bread of life' earlier. It depicts the image of sacrificing oneself to provide life for many. Now, he used another metaphor to depict the sacrificial nature of his death: a seed is not able to release his life unless it is planted in the ground. The only way for the seed to blossom into a tree is to 'die'. So only through 'death' is the purpose of a seed's existence fulfilled. The Lord knows the purpose of his incarnation: to die to redeem the children of God.

²⁵ **Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life.**

"To love one's life" here means to give it priority over the interests of God's kingdom; similarly, to hate one's life is to give priority over it to the interests of God's kingdom. The Lord Jesus is telling us that as children of God, we are like seeds. Though small and insignificant, we have the power of God's life in us. If what we desire is a comfortable life, then we will secure for ourselves things like health, wealth, popularity...etc. We will not be willing to let go of our dreams and let God 'plant' us. However, if we are to follow Jesus and let God plant us, we will seek God's kingdom and righteousness first (Mat 6:33) and care not what 'I' have or do not have. Then, one day, we will suddenly realise that our life has unexpected significance and become a bright and beautiful life. As Paul said, we must die to 'self' and live to God. If we

are to follow Christ, we ought to die with him and be buried with him, and then we will resurrect with him. As our lives are planted in Him, we shall grow with him into an everlasting and abundant life!

Life application

A team of Christians visited a faraway mission field. When they saw how the missionaries laboured in a 'backward' community, they sighed in amazement, "Your lives are buried here!" The Missionary replied, "No, we did not bury ourselves. We are planted."

27-28a "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. Father, glorify your name."

These two verses reveal our Lord's humanity. They show that our Lord experienced the struggles between suffering and glorification even before the Garden of Gethsemane. Observe that he did not ask, "What shall I do?" But "What shall I say?" The Son of Man knows it involves arrest, binding, striking on the face, scourging, mocking, crucifixion, and death, hence his inward disquiet. What, then shall he pray?

"Father, save me from this hour?" We can almost hear the Lord's inner dialogue, "didn't I come for this hour? How can I ask to be delivered from it?"

All that must be endured. He must go through it, and he knows that the Father will see to it. His final prayer is: *Father, glorify your name.*

His prayer was acknowledged by a heavenly audible voice. To the Lord, it is intelligible; the others heard the sound but could not distinguish the sense.

"28 Then a voice came from heaven: "I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again."

Side-note: The rabbis had a term for this phenomenon: *bath qol* which means 'daughter of voice' or 'echo of the voice of God'.

God has glorified Jesus by empowering him in his public ministry; He will glorify Himself through the cross and the empty tomb, revealing to the world that God is the Lord of Life. Indeed, everything that Jesus did on earth was to glorify the Father, for he gave full obedience to the Father in whatever he did and said.

Dear brothers and sisters, so often, we know what is the right thing to do, but we flinch from it either due to a lack of courage or willingness to let go of our own will. In such moments, we ought to ask ourselves, "What shall I ask?" This question often leads us to a God-pleasing prayer, "Lord, glory Your name!". This is a prayer that hates one's life, a prayer that glorifies God, a prayer that God would surely acknowledge! May this prayer be the prayer of our soul that runs from the time we anticipate suffering while suffering, as well as when suffering finally ends.

P1 Lord, Glorify Your Name!

God will surely finish what He has begun in our lives for the praise of His glory. This is the purpose of creation. In the same way that He glorifies Himself in the past, He will glorify Himself again, only if we let Him, i.e. we are willing to give Him our full obedience. It will be so until we return to him in paradise; even the way we depart from this world is included in His glorious plan for us. Dear brothers and sisters, will you let your life glorify God from the beginning to the end?

“³⁰ Jesus answered, “This voice has come for your sake, not mine.”

God the Son does not need an audible sound to communicate with God the Father. The heavenly voice was to validate Jesus’ intimate relationship with God - His Father. They had witnessed his miracles (v.37); now that they had heard the Father’s answering him, it will be without excuse for them not to believe in him. They will be condemned for their unbelief.

For a person to receive God’s saving grace, he must respond to God’s call. This is God’s basic expectation. Therefore, once again, Jesus used the metaphor of light and darkness to urge them to seriously consider who He is—come to the light, believe in the light (12:35, 36; 3:20). Putting our trust in Jesus is not a matter of icing on the cake; it is a matter of life and death in eternity.

Therefore, brothers and sisters, the matter of faith is not something we should delay. And we ought to pray earnestly for the people we evangelise to, ask the Lord to open their hearts to respond to the truth they hear.

Christians will be judged for ignoring God, taking His personal teaching for us lightly, or quenching the Holy Spirit without repentance because the new heart of a regenerated man will respond to the truth heard and the moving of the Holy Spirit.

P2 God’s children respond to the Truth and Holy Spirit

B. 12: 37–50 Jesus’ Revelation: I am the Saviour of All Mankind

“³⁷ Though he had done so many signs before them, they still did not believe in him,”

From this point onward, Jesus withdrew from his public view and devoted his short time left before his passion to the inner circle of those who did believe in him. But Jesus did not go far, probably no farther than the slopes of Olivet (Matthew ch. 24, 25 the Olivet Sermon). Therefore, verses 37-50 are an epilogue in which John summarises the main theme of Jesus’ public ministry recorded in ch.2-12 and reflects on the lack of positive response with which it met.

The ‘they’ in verse 37 refers not only to the people in Jesus’ times; Isaiah and other prophets in the Old Testament had been lamenting, *“Who has believed what he has heard from us? And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed?”* (Isa 53:1)

In fact, when Isaiah was called, he was warned that this would be the effect of his ministry, but not its purpose (Isa 6:10). People would not believe and could not believe, for their hearts were as hard as stone, and the eyes of their hearts were blind. They could not see light nor delight in light. But it is not God who caused the blindness nor hardness, let alone their disbelief. Not one of them was fated to be incapable of belief. The OT and NT consistently revealed to us, *“I spread out my hands all the day to a rebellious*

people, who walk in a way that is not good, following their own devices;" (Isa 65:2) and "God (who) desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth." (1Ti 2:4)

Verse 40, which was quoted from Isaiah 6:10, is a Hebraic fashion of expressing result as though it were the purpose.⁴⁰ "He has blinded their eyes and hardened their heart, lest they see with their eyes, and understand with their heart, and turn, and I would heal them." The purpose was that they might 'turn and be healed'; but the result was persistent resistance.

John said in verse 41 that these things that Isaiah said was referring specially to Jesus "because he saw his glory". One way to understand this is that Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Isaiah was given the vision of Christ's Messianic suffering, smitten, afflicted, pierced and crushed, in order to that many would be justified as righteous (Isa 53). Indeed, how could one believe in a king who has no palace, no throne, no army and bled to die on the humiliating and brutal cross?

⁴² "Nevertheless, many even of the authorities believed in him, but for fear of the Pharisees they did not confess it, so that they would not be put out of the synagogue; "

Some did believe, under God's intervention. They became Jesus' secret disciples, including leaders like Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathaea. Their secret belief manifested itself in words and deeds of goodwill but not in open confession. Therefore, we would not expect to see them at Mount Olive receiving Jesus' teaching in the last days. They feared being banned from the worship and fellowship of the synagogue, where the Pharisees were dominant (9:22). It was well known that the man whom Jesus cured of his blindness was excommunicated from the synagogue because of his open confession that "If this man were not from God, he could do nothing" (9:33). Compared to the blind man, these leaders had much to lose: the respect and praise which others gave them for their piety and learning. As John pointed out in v.43, "for they loved the glory that comes from man more than the glory that comes from God."

Human praise has been the cost for Jesus' followers throughout history. It is still one of the main temptations for many of us today. We unknowingly long for human praise and seek it constantly: Our boss' recognition, colleagues' acceptance, 'likes' and 'followers' on multi-media, trendy lifestyle...etc. The seeking of glory from man can easily infiltrate into every aspect of our lives, from our marriage engagement to wedding, from work to leisure, housing renovation, children's nurturing...etc. let us vigilantly inspect the motive. If we seek God's glory, God will fulfil us for His own glory, and when we will be glorified through His glory!

P3 When we seek God's glory, God will glorify us.

Reflection

O Lord, I realised that I am no difference from these secret disciples of Jesus, for I am not able to trust your good and pleasing will for me. I am reluctant to offer to you my whole person and life, and am running away from being planted by you. Lord, I am willing now. I'm willing. Help me to resist all the temptations of the glory of man and follow you wholeheartedly.

Closing

⁴⁴ Then Jesus cried out, “Whoever believes in me does not believe in me only, but in the one who sent me. ⁴⁵ The one who looks at me is seeing the one who sent me. ⁴⁶ I have come into the world as a light, so that no one who believes in me should stay in darkness. ⁴⁷ If anyone hears my words but does not keep them, I do not judge that person. For I did not come to judge the world, but to save the world. ⁴⁸ There is a judge for the one who rejects me and does not accept my words; the very words I have spoken will condemn them at the last day. ⁴⁹ For I did not speak on my own, but the Father who sent me commanded me to say all that I have spoken. ⁵⁰ I know that his command leads to eternal life. So whatever I say is just what the Father has told me to say.”

Let us take note of three essential points in this epilogue:

1. Jesus was sent by God, and he acted and spoke according to God’s command;
2. Whoever sees Jesus sees God, whoever hears Jesus hears God, and whoever believes in Jesus believes in God.
3. Jesus came into the world to save, not to judge. But because of this, his words and miracles became the judge for the world: the ending of those who believe him is rewritten; it is no longer condemnation but eternal life; those who disbelieve remain condemned. On the last day, the ending of every man will be shown and shall remain so forever.

Our faith is not a religion, philosophy, or spiritual opium. Jesus, a real historical man, is God. When we believe in Him, we trust Him and follow Him all our lives. He plants us in our homes, workplaces, and schools like a light shining from the lampstand. He also gathers us like a city on the hill for the world to see. One day, He will usher us into the city of light to dwell with Him forevermore! This is the promise of the eternal God, and Jesus’s crucifixion and resurrection is the assurance of this promise!