

**Midweek 5**  
**His Final Steps Led to Some Greeks**  
**Sermon Text: John 12:20-33**

When our Savior stood before Annas, father-in-law of the high priest, during the first of those mockeries of justice he had to endure throughout the night on Holy Thursday, Annas asked our Lord about his disciples and his teaching. Our Savior's response? "*I have spoken openly to the world. I always taught in a synagogue or at the temple, where all the Jews gather. I said nothing in secret. Why are you questioning me? Ask those who heard what I told them. Look, they know what I said.*" When he said this, one of the guards standing there hit Jesus in the face. "*Is that how you answer the high priest?*" he demanded" (John 18:20-22). What strikes you about that record? The guard who hit Jesus! Yet another of the atrocities our Savior suffered for us as he took **his final steps** to Golgotha.

But tonight, focus instead on what Jesus said: "*I have spoken openly to the world. I always taught in a synagogue or at the temple, where all the Jews gather. I said nothing in secret*" (John 18:20). Do we realize how much of that public teaching Jesus did during Holy Week? After he cleansed the temple on Monday and again on Tuesday when he returned to the temple courts? Despite the obvious danger, he didn't shy away from those final confrontations with the high priests and experts in the law. Nor did Jesus hide himself from lost sinners who still yearned to hear him teach. Instead . . .

**His Final Steps Led to Some Greeks.**

These were just a few more steps in the Savior's mission . . .

- I. To bring life to us all.**
- II. To bring glory to his Father.**

**I. To bring life to us all.**

The event we are studying this evening likely took place on Tuesday of Holy Week. That's when some "*Greeks . . . who went up to worship at the Festival . . . came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and asked him, 'Sir, we want to see Jesus'*" (John 12:21). Who were these "*Greeks*"? They were non-Jews who were converts to Judaism. Jews often gave them the title proselytes of the gate. They could join in Jewish worship, but they had to remain in the outer courtyard of the temple, the so-called court of the Gentiles. That, by the way, was the same courtyard Jesus had cleansed on Monday, throwing out the money changers and the merchants with their sacrificial animals, doing all this so the Gentiles would have a quiet place for meditation and prayer.

These Greeks, converts to the Jewish faith, would know the Old Testament. So they'd know prophecies about the Messiah, prophecies like Isaiah 35:5,6: "*Then the eyes of the blind will be opened, and the ears of the deaf will be unplugged. The crippled will leap like a deer, and the tongue of the mute will sing for joy.*" Since word about Jesus' miracles was spreading like wildfire—including the raising of Lazarus from the dead—these Greeks must have wondered, "Could Jesus be the Promised One?"

So they came "*to see Jesus.*" But they didn't approach our Savior directly. Rather, they went to Philip. Why? Well, Philip had a Greek name, and he was from Bethsaida of Galilee. So maybe Philip was more fluent in the Greek language than the other disciples, or maybe his name

made these Greeks feel like he'd be more likely to bring them to Jesus. Whatever the reason, Philip, in turn, decided to get a second opinion. He went to Andrew. Why the delay? Maybe because more than once during Jesus' public ministry, he had made it clear that he had come first of all for God's chosen people, the chosen nation. For example, when Jesus sent out the Twelve for their first missionary training exercise, he instructed them, *"Do not go among the Gentiles, and do not enter any town of the Samaritans. Go instead to the lost sheep of the house of Israel"* (Matthew 10:5,6). However, this same Savior had also talked about his *"other sheep . . . not of this sheep pen"* (John 10:16). And more than once, Jesus had reached out to non-Jews during his ministry. So after their little consultation, Andrew and Philip told Jesus.

How did Jesus respond? Did he say, "Hello, my friends, Greek converts! It's good to see you"? Not exactly. Instead, it strikes me that Jesus grew pensive. He saw why **his final steps led to some Greeks**. He saw this as another sign along his path to Golgotha and part of the big picture of God's plan of grace. *"The time has come,"* the set time, the appointed time the Lord had chosen from all of eternity. That's why our Lord continued, *"Amen, Amen, I tell you"* (John 12:24). It's as if our Savior had placed his hand on a Bible and was taking an oath: "I swear, I'm telling the truth. Listen up! This is important."

Then come words that tear apart my soul whenever I read them, because they prove Jesus knew what lay ahead: The betrayal. The trials. The mockery. The scourging. The spitting. The hitting. The hate. The cross. *"Unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it continues to be one kernel. But if it dies, it produces much grain"* (John 12:24). Jesus is that kernel of wheat, the single seed that would go to the cross to die for all of us. Jesus is that kernel of wheat that would be laid to rest in the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea late Good Friday afternoon. Jesus is that kernel of wheat that would be raised again on Easter Sunday to prove he has brought life to us all! Jesus is that kernel of wheat Paul was thinking about when he wrote this victory chant: *"In fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep"* (1 Corinthians 15:20).

*"If it dies, it produces much grain."* These words help explain why you and I don't have to be afraid even during worldwide pandemics, not that we have a crystal ball telling us we won't ever get sick. We might, and I can't quote a Bible verse that guarantees we won't die from any potentially fatal disease. But that won't take away from us God's gracious gift of eternal life—a gift that is ours all because of Jesus, that kernel of wheat who went into the ground on Good Friday and came out again on Easter Sunday!

And so it is my Savior's words that I will seek to follow right now. I pray you will too. *"Anyone who loves his life destroys it. And the one who hates his life in this world will hold on to it for eternal life. If anyone serves me, let him follow me. And where I am, there my servant will be also. If anyone serves me, the Father will honor him"* (John 12:25,26). On another day, Jesus said the same thing using slightly different words. *"If anyone wants to follow me, let him deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me. In fact whoever wants to save his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it"* (Matthew 16:24,25).

We believers are in this world to serve. We are called to be light and salt. That doesn't change when there's a pandemic. It doesn't change when there is a stay-at-home order or other restrictions. Although, perhaps the ways we serve will change. For the same Lord who tells us to be willing to give up our earthly life for him also reminds us not to put the Lord to the test (Matthew 4:7)! So I'm not going to jump in my Chevy Traverse, get on the highway, put on a blindfold, and barrel down the road at 90 miles-per-hour. God forbid! And so also during a pandemic, I won't be reckless. I won't disregard health practices recommended by reputable

agencies like the Mayo Clinic. Not just for my sake, but also because I don't want to become a carrier who could endanger others!

Jesus' audience with the Greeks is mighty important for you and me, isn't it! For you and I are also "*Greeks*." Our Savior wanted us to know he came to bring life to us all! That's why **his final steps led him to some Greeks**. But there was also another reason.

## II. To bring glory to his Father.

I said a few moments ago that Jesus grew pensive when these Greeks came to see him. That's because he saw how all of God's plan was coming together. His appointment with the cross was at hand. Can you imagine how that must have weighed on him? To know that he was going to take our place on the cross to suffer the torments of hell for us? To suffer for the sins of the entire human race, whether that be the sins of Adolf Hitler, Joseph Stalin, Pol Pot, Ivan the Terrible, the apostle Paul as the chief of sinners, or you and me, Paul's close rivals?

Our Lord paid for all sins of all time—including all the sins being committed during the course of the recent pandemic: people panicking, fighting in store aisles over the last package of toilet paper. Jesus paid for all the so-called big sins like murder, child molestation, serial killing, purposefully plowing your vehicle into a group of pedestrians, or pulling out an assault rifle to mow down dozens. Our Savior died for all the so-called little sins too. Every time a husband zones out and really doesn't pay attention to what his wife is saying; every time his wife picks up on this and gives him the look.

Jesus was going to shoulder the crushing weight of all our sin, all our guilt, all our selfishness. Because of us, he was going to be separated from his Father, enduring the agony of hell. And he knew it! That's why he said, "*Now my soul is troubled. And what shall I say? 'Father, save me from this hour'? No, this is the reason I came to this hour. Father, glorify your name!*" (John 12:27,28).

Two days later, in the Garden of Gethsemane, when the cross loomed even larger, our Savior prayed again. Sweating drops of blood under the intense pressure, he muttered these words from the very depths of his soul: "*My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will*" (Matthew 26:39). Moments later, he roused his disciples from their sleep and said, "*Look, the hour is near, and the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. Rise. Let us go. Look, my betrayer is near*" (Matthew 26:45,46). Jesus set his face like flint (Luke 9:51). He never wavered, never turned away from the Father's plan to save you and me. Jesus gave glory to his Father with a devotion that was 100 percent faithful and pure!

And the Father knew it! That's why "*a voice came from heaven: 'I have glorified my name, and I will glorify it again.'* The crowd standing there heard it and said it thundered. Others said an angel talked to him. Jesus answered, '*This voice was not for my sake but for yours.*'" (John 12:28-30). This is the third time the Father spoke from the clouds, each time because he was delighted by his Son's perfect devotion. The first time? At Jesus' baptism, when the Father said, "*This is my Son, whom I love. I am well pleased with him*" (Matthew 3:17). The second time? At Jesus' transfiguration on the mountain, when his glory beamed as bright as the sun; when Moses and Elijah stood with our Savior and talked about his "*departure . . . in Jerusalem*" (Luke 9:31), his death on the cross; and when the Father said again, "*This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him*" (Matthew 17:5).

Now the Father spoke a third time. *“I have glorified my name, and I will glorify it again”* (John 12:28). For three years, Jesus’ perfect ministry brought his Father glory. So would Jesus’ final steps: his crucifixion and his resurrection.

In his moment of reflection, Jesus saw clearly the cross just ahead. That’s why he said, *“Now is the judgment of this world. Now the ruler of this world will be thrown out. And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.”* He said this to indicate what kind of death he was going to die” (John 12:31-33). When Jesus talked about being *“lifted up from the earth,”* he used the same figure of speech for crucifixion that he had used three years earlier, when a member of the Jewish ruling council, Nicodemus, came in the middle of the night to learn how to be saved (John 3:14). Through a Savior *“lifted up”!* For when our Lord hung on that cross, that was the time for *“the judgment of this world.”* All sins of all people of all time hung there with him. Your sins and mine. And in that same moment, the *“ruler of this world”* was thrown out! The devil’s power over us was crushed (Ephesians 2:2), and the Father was glorified yet again!

**His final steps led to some Greeks** who brought this request: *“Sir, we want to see Jesus.”* I often use those words for the silent prayer I offer right before I come out of the sacristy to lead our worship. I can’t think of a more important reason for gathering together in the Lord’s house. At a time of crisis or a time of calm, at a time of blessing or a time of loss—through all the twists and turns of life, can there be anything more important than seeing Jesus above it all? The writer to the Hebrews didn’t think so. That’s why he wrote, *“Let us keep our eyes fixed on Jesus, who is the author of our faith and the one who brings it to its goal”* (Hebrews 12:2). Amen.