

Like It or Love It?
John 12: 20-43

You have to love Philip. Even though he was with Jesus for almost three years, it's obvious from what we've just seen and heard that he was still a bit confused. Can you relate to him? Have you ever had someone ask you about Jesus and not know what to do next? If so, you are in good company as I would guess (perhaps hope is a better word!) that many of us have found ourselves in a similar position a time or two.

The fact that "some Greeks" sought Philip out said something about his faith as well as their own. Perhaps without even realizing it they had discovered a basic biblical principle: **people meet Jesus through someone who already knows Him**. Networking was important then as it is today. That old saying comes to mind: "It's not so much what you know that's important but who you know". They must have known that Philip was a follower of Jesus or they wouldn't have asked him to arrange for a meeting. He didn't have a cross dangling from his neck, or have a WWJD bracelet on, or have an I Love Jesus bumper sticker on his camel, so it was something Philip did or said that had an influence on them. The question is why did he hesitate to bring them to Jesus when he had the chance?

The Scriptures do not give us a clear answer, but there are several reasons why Philip may have had reservations about it. First, some cultural differences might have been involved. Even though Greeks and Jews were both at the Passover to worship, they came from different backgrounds and had different customs and traditions. Unless they were circumcised, they were not considered true converts and would not have been permitted to eat the Passover meal. Maybe Philip thought they wanted an audience with Jesus for the wrong reasons. Or maybe he just wasn't sure what to do, so he bought some time and told them "let me see what Jesus says and I'll get back to you". Whatever his reasons, instead of immediately taking them to meet Jesus, he leaves them behind and seeks counsel from his fellow disciple Andrew. At least he didn't forget about them altogether.

Which brings us to another biblical principle: **if we are not sure about a thing we perceive God is calling us to do, it is wise to seek advice from another brother or sister in the faith.** The fact that Philip sought advice from Andrew says a lot about his faith. He knew that two heads are better than one, and a three stranded cord is not easily broken. He knew Proverbs 27:17, and perhaps he even remembered the words of Jesus in Mathew 18:20- "For where 2 or 3 are gathered in my name I am there in the midst of them".

We don't know what was said between them, but Andrew and Philip decide to tell Jesus about the request. It was not something out of the ordinary. These events took place just a few days before Jesus' crucifixion, and by then Jesus had become so popular that great crowds of people wanted to meet Him, including the Greeks who had come to Philip. The problem was that they were seeking Jesus for the wrong reason. Verses 17-19 tell us why. How ironic. The crowds were seeking Jesus and at the very same time the high and holy Jewish leaders, the elite of the day, were plotting to kill Him. It seems that the cancel culture was prevalent in those days is not a new phenomenon. It remains to be seen whether it will be as deadly today as it was two thousand years ago.

We don't know for certain whether the Greeks got their wish. Philip and Andrew approach Jesus to let Him know that some Greeks want to meet with Him, and Jesus responds with a metaphor about His impending death and resurrection. Perhaps there was some additional dialogue between Jesus and his two disciples that was not recorded for us. Regardless, what they heard next may have added to their confusion. **Whoever loves his life loses it and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life.**

That is not only a basic biblical truth but a divine warning. But what does it mean? Are we not supposed to enjoy the things God has given us? Of course, we are. Are we supposed to hate ourselves and our existence? The answer is no. We are created in the image of God and each life is a divine gift. Much like Luke 14:26, Jesus is exaggerating for the sake of emphasis. A clue to understand what Jesus meant by that and why He said it is found earlier in verse 18. The crowds were not flocking to Jesus because He was the Son of God and His promise of eternal life, but because He raised Lazarus from the dead. The crowds longed for more life on earth, rather than eternal life in heaven. It's one thing to like the earthly life, but loving that life more than Jesus is quite another.

Jesus gets to the heart of the matter in verse 26. It is worth memorizing. To love Jesus is to serve Jesus, to serve Jesus is to follow Jesus, and to follow Jesus is to glorify Jesus. The good news is that no matter where that might take us, Jesus will always be there with us, even in times of persecution, pain, and suffering.

Jesus sums all of that up by saying “anyone who serves me, (implying even an uncircumcised Greek), my Father will honor. Perhaps that was meant to chastise Philip for not glorifying Jesus by bringing those Greeks with him, but it also has great relevance to you and I. Because we have the Scriptures available at our fingertips, we may have a better opportunity to glorify Jesus than Philip and the other disciples did. That is a humbling and yet exciting thought. Yet unlike the earliest disciples we also have many things to distract us. Philip or Andrew never had to decide whether to buy a new BMW or a used Ford or choose whether to go to a ball game or Sunday worship.

So, how will we glorify the name of Jesus today? We glorify Jesus by choosing to walk in the light, to live our lives in accordance with the Scriptures. We glorify Jesus by introducing Him to those who don't know the difference or perhaps those who might need a reminder. Who might “some Greeks” be today? We need not be concerned about what neighborhood they might come from. Just moments later in verse 32 Jesus says that He will “draw all peoples to Himself” when He is lifted up from the earth. It wasn't until the disciples witnessed Jesus being crucified that they would recognize what He truly meant. It wasn't until they walked with the risen Christ that they would believe them and apply them to their own lives.

As we saw last week, similar words are found John 3:14- it means crucified and lifted up on the cross. To paraphrase the hymn writer, His old, rugged cross has a wondrous attraction for sinners of all persuasions. And in context with His entire earthly ministry, it seems certain Jesus would have emphasized that tiny but ever so important word “all”. As with those words “whoever believes” in John 3:16, Jesus makes no cultural, social, or racial distinctions. Let us never forget that Jesus is more concerned with people walking in the light rather than darkness than identifying them with labels or letters.

We glorify Jesus by introducing Him to those who don't know Him. As with Philip, it will likely be someone within our own sphere of influence. When that happens, we will need to walk in the light and share our faith in Jesus with them. Let us be prepared to eagerly respond when those opportunities arise. If you are not sure about what to say or how to do it, come along with those who do and make the journey together. Let us glorify God's name and lead others to Jesus, and remember this: *where He is you will be also*. Amen.