

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

The words from Jesus in today's gospel passage from St. John are from the period immediately after the raising of Lazarus and the triumphal entry into Jerusalem by Jesus. Thus, it concerns the Passion of Our Lord very directly which is very much to the point in these final weeks of Lent. Although throughout his ministry Jesus had been opposed by powerful people, that conflict comes into plainer view in this portion of John's account. The raising of Lazarus had its champions, of course, but it also enraged a good portion of the Jewish leadership. Although initially victorious, the entry into Jerusalem was soon followed by a full-out assault on Jesus and his followers, and the whole scenario descended into betrayal, arrest, trial, execution and ignominious defeat. This chapter stands as a "bridge between Jesus' ministry and his *hour*" or Passion. Thus, it is quite separate from the description of his public ministry and the story of the cross and resurrection. Yet, the reaction of "the world" to Jesus as originally laid out in the prologue to John's gospel, now enters center stage and receives its proper role as central to the narrative.

The raising of Lazarus is only recounted in the fourth gospel. It does not appear in the Synoptics. However, its absence in three of the four gospels in the canon need not be of much concern in itself. What we know is that John viewed it as critical. Like the other evangelists, he "had a large amount of material from which to choose" so that it could be of little consequence that one episode appeared more critical to one of the writers than it did to the others. And John himself tells us that "Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of His disciples that (were) not written" in his book; one had to be discerning and decisive in crafting such an account. But what *is* interesting here is John's perspective. He tells us that "although he had performed so many signs in their presence, (the crowd) did not believe in him." What is significant about this is that in John's gospel, "seeing" is not believing. "The place to see Jesus in all his glory is not just the miraculous, which may not produce faith; but also seeing his glory on the cross." More on that in a moment.

In our lesson for Lent V, we have a rather curious story concerning some Greeks who are present at the Passover with Jesus. They may not be Gentiles, because Gentiles would have been under no obligation to go to Jerusalem for the celebration of Passover. More likely, they are Diaspora Jews (those who over many years of oppression had fled to other parts of the Mediterranean basin). Nevertheless, "this incident still makes the testimony about Jesus of worldwide importance, not just for Palestine." It is possible that this episode points to the intention of Jesus to take his message to Diaspora Jews in general.

The Greeks ask to see Jesus, so Philip takes them to Andrew. He and Philip are the first two who brought Jews to Jesus. Andrew brings his brother Peter, and Philip brings his friend Nathaniel. Their presence in this passage shows the widening influence of Jesus and adds credence to Jesus' statement "when I am lifted up, I will draw all people to myself." It is interesting that the visitors actually never meet Jesus. He

appears to be avoiding contact with the general public. Why would this be so? Perhaps because he knew that his hour had come and that the public phase of his ministry had passed.

In response to the request of the Greeks to see Jesus, he instead announces that “the Passion is upon them.” Throughout John’s gospel, the word “hour” is used to refer to the crucifixion. Here the announcement is made that his time has come to be betrayed, tried, and executed. In referring to that dramatic series of events, Jesus uses the term “glorify” which without explanation can be baffling but is nonetheless critical to understanding John’s outlook.

As I mentioned earlier, in this gospel, “to glorify” is an important theological concept. It is the means by which John explains the meaning of the crucifixion and resurrection. First, of course, glorification of Jesus always means glorification of God the Father. The prayer of Jesus to God to glorify God’s name through his death offers a contrast with the other gospel accounts. Here, Jesus clearly knows his own fate and faces it with resolve. Further, John announced as much in his prologue when he described the image of Jesus as the Word of God coming into the world and remaining intimately involved in God’s purpose. The fact that his death is imminent is clear from the rest of the discourse here. Jesus uses two images to convey his meaning: that of the seed falling to the earth and that of being lifted up. In John, being “lifted up” refers directly to crucifixion. And John uses the metaphor to link it with Moses lifting up the bronze snake on his staff in order to provide healing for the people. This, of course, gives added significance to the means of execution employed by the Romans and provides an important connection between the Old and New Testaments.

John also has his own particular view of atonement theology, which concerns the reconciliation of God with humankind through Jesus Christ. John makes no mention of the death of Jesus being a ransom that buys the world its freedom from sin and death. Partly, this is because John has a theology similar to that of Abelard, the 12th century French philosopher: Jesus’ death on the cross is a demonstration of God’s love for humanity, not a sacrifice required to release us from sin. In John, Jesus’ death offers reconciliation to all people, but one must decide to accept this offer.” John also sees Jesus’ death and resurrection as “a judgment against the imperial powers and ultimately ---- a victory over them”

A bit of geography here can be illuminating. The Greek visitors are from the larger Mediterranean world. They are “out of place...sojourners, foreigners,” not from Palestine. Philip and Andrew are on their home turf, Galilee. Jesus may be from Nazareth, but in a larger sense he is not from either Greece or Israel. He is from God. The Greeks don’t think they are worthy to approach Jesus on their own. In approaching his followers, they regard them as “lords.” But, of course, Philip and Andrew are not lords. Jesus reminds them that those who serve him (the one who clearly is the Lord) ---- these must follow him. But the power wielded by Jesus does not stop with him. There is one Lord, who is from God the

Father Almighty. When the divine voice is heard as thunder, all is made abundantly clear as to who the real Lord is and where ultimate power resides.

But the request of the Greeks is also simpler than this. What they are really saying is that they don't want to be told about Jesus. They want to encounter him. They wish to see him, not gather more information *about* him. And that word "see" is critical to understanding John's perspective. To repeat an earlier point, "in John's gospel, 'seeing' is not believing. "The place to see Jesus in all his glory is not just the miraculous, which may not produce faith; but also seeing his glory on the cross" --- that is, to understand the fullness of the glory of God and of his Son our Lord.

Sources

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