

John 12:2-50: Biblical Reading and Reflections

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- [0 : 0 0] John chapter 12 verses 20 to 50. Now among those who went up to worship at the feast were some Greeks. So these came to Philip who was from Bethsaida in Galilee and asked him, Sir, we wish to see Jesus.
- Philip went and told Andrew. Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus. And Jesus answered them, The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. 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. Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. If anyone serves me, he must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also.
- If anyone serves me, the Father will honour him. 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. Then a voice came from heaven, I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again. The crowd that stood there and heard it said that it had thundered.
- [1 : 1 1] Others said, An angel has spoken to him. Jesus answered, This voice has come for your sake, not mine. Now is the judgment of this world. Now will the ruler of this world be cast out.
- And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself. He said this to show by what kind of death he was going to die. So the crowd answered him, We have heard from the law that the Christ remains forever.
- How can you say that the Son of Man must be lifted up? Who is this Son of Man? So Jesus said to them, The light is among you for a little while longer. Walk while you have the light, lest darkness overtake you.
- The one who walks in the darkness does not know where he is going. While you have the light, believe in the light, that you may become sons of light. When Jesus had said these things, he departed and hid himself from them.
- Though he had done so many signs before them, they still did not believe in him. So that the word spoken by the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled. Lord, who has believed what he has heard from us?
- [2 : 1 8] And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed? Therefore they could not believe. For again Isaiah said, 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.
- Isaiah said these things because he saw his glory and spoke of him. 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.
- For they loved the glory that comes from man more than the glory that comes from God. And Jesus cried out and said, Whoever believes in me, believes not in me, but in him who sent me.

And whoever sees me, sees him who sent me. I have come into this world as light, so that whoever believes in me may not remain in darkness. If anyone hears my words and does not keep them, I do not judge him.

For I did not come to judge the world, but to save the world. The one who rejects me and does not receive my words has a judge. The word that I have spoken will judge him on the last day.

[3 : 25] For I have not spoken on my own authority. But the Father who sent me has himself given me a commandment, what to say and what to speak. And I know that his commandment is eternal life.

What I say, therefore, I say as the Father has told me. John chapter 12 verse 20 tells us of some Greeks who had come to worship at the feast of Passover. The exact identity of these Greeks is not entirely clear.

Perhaps they were part of the diaspora. Or perhaps they were actual Gentiles. I think it's most likely that they were actual Gentiles. These men come to Philip from Bethsaida in Galilee and tell him that they want to see Jesus.

Why do they come to Philip? Philip has a Greek name. He comes from a region, Bethsaida in Galilee, where there is a lot more interaction between Jews and Gentiles. Someone who perhaps was more distant from the elites and as a result would be more approachable.

Philip then goes and tells Andrew and Andrew and Philip go and tell Jesus. And this movement, when they're going, spreading news, going from one to another and moving towards Jesus, is reminiscent perhaps of what we see at the end of chapter 1, although working in a different direction.

[4 : 36] The movement here is towards Jesus rather than going out to tell others about him. Greeks are being drawn to Jesus. And this is a sign that the hour has come that Jesus should be glorified.

Jesus' death is presented in almost natural terms here, as a grain dying and rising to produce much fruit. The way that the death and resurrection of Christ are connected within the Gospel of John is often interesting and surprising.

It's presented as a sort of birth event, following after pangs. It's presented as a grain of wheat falling into the ground and then coming up to new life with fruit.

It's presented as Christ laying down his life as he has authority to take it back up again. So the death is in order for the resurrection. And here the arrival of the Greeks seems to serve as a sign that Christ's hour has come.

When the nations start to arrive, he must be lifted up. And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all peoples to myself. This is a fulfilment of prophecies typically related to the temple or to the mountain of God.

[5 : 42] For instance, in Isaiah chapter 2 verses 1 to 4. The word that Isaiah the son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem. It shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the house of the Lord shall be established as the highest of the mountains and shall be lifted up above the hills and all the nations shall flow to it.

And many people shall come and say, Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob, that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths.

For out of Zion shall go forth the law and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. He shall judge between the nations and he shall decide disputes for many peoples. And they shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks.

Nations shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more. The Greeks are then an anticipation of what's to come, a fulfilment of Old Testament prophecy.

There's no mention of a voice from heaven at Jesus' baptism or on the Mount of Transfiguration in John. But there is a voice from heaven here. The voice declares that the Father will glorify his name and has already glorified it.

[6 : 51] The theme of glory, again, is an important one within this chapter. Jesus speaks of his death and resurrection as his glorification. And there is a sort of double entendre in the statement that he is going to be lifted up.

He is lifted up on the cross, but he is also lifted up in authority and rule. And that connection between the death of Christ and his exaltation is particularly distinct within the Gospel of John.

You do not see that to quite the same extent in the other Gospels, where there is a movement down and then up. Whereas in John, the lifting up occurs at the cross itself.

Christ speaks about himself also as the light, a light that will be among them for just a little while longer. And they should walk while they have the light, rather than in darkness.

Having Jesus with them at this point, it's important that they believe in response to him. And Jesus goes on to speak about the failure of people to respond in reflecting upon the prophecy of Isaiah.

[7 : 52] Lord, who has believed what he has heard from us and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed? This is a verse from the great chapter 53, a chapter which is often used to reflect upon Christ from the Old Testament.

He then brings them back to perhaps one of the most classic texts within Jesus' ministry, within Isaiah, referring to Isaiah's prophecy in chapter 6 and the fact that people have their eyes blinded, hearts hardened, they cannot see with their eyes or understand with their heart.

The Gospel of John tells us that Isaiah said these things because he saw his glory and spoke of him. Now, whose glory? Spoke of whom?

It's referring to Christ. What is the glory that he saw? Well, in chapter 6, it's the Lord high and lifted up. It's the Lord whose glory fills the temple. Even in this chapter where the theme of glory is quite prominent, to connect the glory of Christ with that glorious theophany is a remarkable thing.

What is being said here is that Jesus is the one that Isaiah saw high and lifted up. In some ways, in the Old Testament, we see Christ as a silhouette, a figure who is presented in these great theophanies.

[9 : 11] We can see Ezekiel's vision in chapter 1 or the vision of Moses in chapter 33 and 34 of Exodus, or this event that John recalls in Isaiah chapter 6.

What John and the other Gospel writers are saying then is that Jesus is this one, the one whom you did not necessarily know in the Old Testament, the one in whom the glory of God was seen, now has come in person.

We know his name. We have interacted with him directly. And this is the one whose glory is declared. But the authorities fail to believe in him.

And even when they do believe, as some do here, they do not confess it because they're afraid of the Pharisees and being cast out of the synagogue. And again, the theme of glory comes up.

They love the glory that comes from man more than the glory that comes from God. Perhaps there's some double entendre here as well. The glory that comes from God is Jesus Christ.

[10 : 11] And it's also the honour that comes from God. Jesus challenges people at this point and shows them the way that he is the dividing line by which things will be judged.

He has come into the world as light so that people can be freed from the darkness and enter into the light. But yet, if people do not obey his word, he's not going to be the one that judges them.

Rather, he occasions the judgment. He is the one whose word will judge them on the last day. They have seen the light. They have been exposed to the truth. And yet, if they have rejected that, they have no excuse left.

The fact that some would prefer not being excluded from the synagogues by the Pharisees over being honoured by Christ on the last day is a terrifying and sobering exposure of just how misplaced our priorities often are.

A question to reflect upon. In chapter 12, John continues to explore key themes that pervade his gospel. Light, glory, judgment, authority, witness, commandment, and other such themes that can be found throughout the book.

[11 : 25] Now would be a good time to reflect upon some of the ways in which these themes have been developed to this point. To try and draw together some of the threads from the various chapters that we have read.

And to think about some of the deeper thrust of these themes as they've been played out.

