**Series: What Jesus Would Say**

*VBC*

*Pastor John Johnson*

*John 12:20-26*

*October 5-6, 2013 Missions Conference*

**“The Life God Honors”**

Sometime in 1913-14, it may be that one of the world’s most famous ads was placed in a London newspaper:

*"MEN WANTED: FOR HAZARDOUS JOURNEY. SMALL WAGES, BITTER COLD, LONG MONTHS OF COMPLETE DARKNESS, CONSTANT DANGER, SAFE RETURN DOUBTFUL. HONOUR AND RECOGNITION IN CASE OF SUCCESS. SIR ERNEST SHACKLETON"*

Some of you know the story of Shackleton, a polar explorer who led three expeditions to the Antarctic—with the aim of being the *first to cross the continent from sea to s*ea

-judging by the ad, he was not interested in sightseers, tourists, weekenders—short termers happy to voyage as long as they could disembark and remain in Buenos Aires

-history recounts that many showed up—though some probably came just to get a brochure

*Maybe it was something like this for Jesus*

-it’s not that there was an ad in the Jerusalem Post—the raising of Lazarus generated its own publicity

-Jesus’ popularity was at its height—much to the chagrin of His detractors-*read verse 19*

-among those interested in gaining a glimpse were some Greek pilgrims—*read verses 20-22*

-John does not give any description of these Greeks—their number, their hometown

-just that they were God-fearers on their way to worship

-and somewhere, somehow, they heard about Jesus—and they were curious

-they wanted a closer look—so they inquired—

a. maybe it came out of a sincere desire to know Jesus

-Roy Hession wrote a nice devotional years ago based on this story—entitled *We Would See Jesus*

-in which he wrote—“these are words which ultimately express the longing of every heart”

*-but are they the right longing—is it enough to see?*

b. could it be they were simply curious—having heard about Jesus’ exploits

-Jesus was a hot ticket item in Jerusalem

 -He raised dead people, told demons where to go, and preached amazing sermons

-who wouldn’t want to see Him—get an interview, an autograph, a photo

-and so they checked with Jesus’ agent—Philip

-maybe ethnic categories mattered to Jesus

-maybe the crowds made one on one meetings difficult

-it all led to a conversation (more a monologue)—one that has a bearing on us especially today—*read verses 23-26*

-so what is it we notice?

1. Jesus did NOT RESPOND directly to their question

a. He did not check His schedule—but He did talk about time—as if the time was now—“My hour has come”—verse 23

b. He did not inquire about their intent—but He did talk about what matters—life, death, love, hate, eternity

-on the surface—Jesus comes off as distant—aloof to public appeal, speaking words that seem to have no relevancy to the context

(like earlier conversations—think Nicodemus)

-it’s hard to know if Jesus is even addressing the Greeks—as He makes no reference to them

2. and yet—the text tells us “And Jesus RESPONDED *to them”*

-like He did to the man who wanted to bury his father first

-the man who first wanted to say good by to his family

-and these who simply wanted to have an interview

-there’s an urgency here—I’m after followers

a. I’m not an attraction listed in the “Things to Do in Jerusalem” brochure that one picks up at the Chamber of Commerce

 -not just another option in the cafeteria line of world religions

 -not an exhibit for onlookers, people interested in a visit

b. I am on a mission—and there is a cost

ILLUSTRATION—Columbia Gorge restaurant—early in marriage, rather poor

-the host looked at my shoes—and said—“You do realize the breakfast is ten dollars”

-something said to him—*I don’t think these people realize the cost—I don’t think they would be willing to pay the price*—and he was right

-we made our way to the 99 cent breakfast at “Bridge of the gods”

-something in this request—“we would like to see Jesus”—said to Jesus—*I don’t think these people realize the cost*

*-I don’t think they would be willing to pay the price*

-there is a huge difference between vacationers and crewmembers, tourists and followers

*-I’m not the Pope one might get a glimpse of in the public square*

*-I am the God of the universe on a mission—looking for hard core followers—“Are you in?”*

-but what does this mean? Jesus defines—

*a. FOLLOW MEANS A CERTAIN RENOUNCEMENT OF SELF*

 -means you have worked through who you are in love with

 -“the one loving his life” (i.e. his psyche, his identity, personality, selfhood[[1]](#endnote-1)) must set aside his obsession

 -he must be willing to even hate one’s life

 -which is not to be confused with self-condemnation

 -not a license for self-destructive behaviors

 -but it is a statement that those who follow Jesus must be willing to see their own *self-interests as secondary*

 -to follow Jesus means that *all other attachments look like hate by comparison*

-I want more than your eyes that see Me—I want—

-*“every molecule, every breath, every ounce of energy, every interest, every passion, every thought, every action, every love”[[2]](#endnote-2)—Galli* (Are you in?)

-it’s more than renunciation—

*b. FOLLOW MEANS A TOTAL DEATH TO SELF*

-Jesus summoned these sightseers to lose their lives

-to be like a seed falling into the ground and dying

*-you must be willing to lay aside your own life as a necessary precondition to finding life*

*-risk everything for the sake of serving Him*

*-give up life as it is—lay down all personal agendas*

-move from being of this world to being of another—8:23; 17:14[[3]](#endnote-3)

-like Shackleton’s ad—hazardous, small wages—but there is a reward

*c. FOLLOW MEANS A MASSIVE GAIN TO LIFE*

-following Jesus is not about how we diminish—but how we increase—*not about what we lose, but what we gain*

-to follow Jesus—live for Jesus—die for Jesus means—

1. a life of GREATER PURPOSE—verse 24

-life that is not merely standing on the sidelines

-a life that matters, that yields

-a life where the fruit of the Spirit rises to the surface

-where your gifts connect to God’s purposes

-(as opposed to life unplanted, “alone”, empty, isolated—in a word—*barren*)

2. a life PROTECTED FOR ETERNITY—verse 25

 -under guard, kept from running loose, escaping God’s purposes, becoming less than what God intended

ILLUSTRATION—meeting a man who made poor choices—he could not renounce himself—he was too in love with his desires

-and so—his life was no longer protected—what he could have been was sacrificed—*it wasn’t life any longer*

-*CS Lewis describes it this way —“The more we get what we now call ‘ourselves’ out of the way and let Him take us over, the more truly ourselves we become…our real selves are all waiting for us in Him”[[4]](#endnote-4)*

3. a life that WILL BE HONORED—verse 26

-(which is everything in a shame/honor culture)

APPLICATION

Every year we take a couple of weeks to focus on missions

-think globally

-and at the heart of a global mission is a recognition that all of us have been *called of God—not just once, but twice*

-first to respond to Christ’s call for *repentance*

-and second to respond to Christ’s call to *follow*, to mission

-Matthew 8 and Luke 9 and John 12 affirm this

-to follow Christ is to make everything else secondary to the will of God

-even if it means leaving for places I would never choose

-or reaching out to people no one else wants to touch—think John 4

-it is a dare to be stretched to the point of inadequacy—get in way over our heads

 -climb Mt Herman—and as John 12 underscores—Golgotha

A. it may be short term missions—mean abandoning a career—or at least a course one has been on

-leaving behind things that possess you—when you sense He is calling

*-following Jesus will require the heart of an exile and the spirit of an alien—going wherever He is going*

-we partner with a number of people like this (*MAP*)

B. it may also mean intensifying a career—staying right where you are at and changing the way you do what you do

 -Jesus did not tell Zacchaeus to quit his job—but following Him meant changing the way he lived life

 -He didn’t tell the demoniac to get in the boat for distant shores—but told him to go back home a different man

CONCLUSION

John 12 places a number of questions before me that I have to answer—

-am I a sightseer or a follower?

-am I content with safely pursuing Him—or am I willing to let Him pursue me—with all of His demands

-and overtake me

*-and call me to whatever He wills?*

-am I awakening each day to simply observe Jesus?

-or am I a follower who awakens to die a little more each day?

-am I willing to risk death to find a fruitful life?

-go wherever He calls—even if it is hard?

Christine Broby (who settled these questions some time ago and ended up in Lebanon—sent an email this week—that reflects the language of verses 24-26

-unsettling—this is what happens when you are uprooted

-unhappy—I'm not really enjoying it here at the moment. But I'm also willing to bide my time until I like it here

-alone—I don't like being adventurous by myself

-fun? Not really

-patient It is really hard

-evil—I've talked to people whose neighbors have found their family member's severed head put on their doorstep as a last warning to leave town

-hate—Each group of people hates the other for their cruelty. I've prayed with both sides. I've touched people on both sides. I've sat on lousy cushions on both sides. I've been served bitter coffee and strange snacks on both sides. I've held hands on both sides. And I get why both sides hate each other.

-God—Yes, I have given Him an earful. And even though I might wish I were somewhere else I wouldn't dream of being any place but here right now. God and I are in agreement on this. I'm doing this thing with Him. And my relationship with Him is growing because I often don't have anyone else to whom I can easily turn. And He's been right here with me.

Am I ready, willing to write a similar letter?

Would you do this—if not next to the passage—maybe on a card in this text—write—I’m Yours—I’m in.

1. Keller, King’s Cross, 104 [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Galli, Jesus Mean and Wild, 135 [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Longenecker, Patterns of Discipleship, 82 [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. Lewis, CS Mere Christianity, 174 [↑](#endnote-ref-4)