

His Final Steps Led to Some Greeks¹

✠ To bring life to us all. (vv.20-26)

✠ To bring glory to his Father. (vv.27-33)

In the name of Jesus, our determined Savior of Jews and Gentiles, dearly redeemed:

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 all night Holy Thursday, Annas asked about 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 EHV) Are you shocked by the guard hitting Jesus! Our Savior suffered atrocities for us in **His Final Steps** to Golgotha.

But tonight, focus on Jesus this: ***"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."*** (18:20) So much public teaching during Holy Week! Monday after he cleansed the temple, again Tuesday in the temple courts, He did not shy away from conflict with the high priests and experts in the law plotting to kill him. Nor did Jesus hide from lost sinners yearning to hear him teach. Instead **His Final Steps Led to Some Greeks...**

✠ To bring life to us all. (vv.20-26)

Tuesday of Holy Week, some ***Greeks... worship[ing] at the Festival . . . came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and asked him, "Sir, we want to see Jesus."*** (21) Who were these ***Greeks***? Non-Jews who converted to Judaism, *proselytes of the gate*. They could join Jewish worship in the outer courtyard of the temple, the *court of the Gentiles*. That's what Jesus had cleansed on Monday of money changers, merchants with animals so the Gentiles would have a quiet place for meditation and prayer.

These ***Greeks*** converts to the Jewish faith heard about Old Testament prophecies fulfilled: ***"The eyes of the blind will be opened...the ears of the deaf...unplugged. The crippled will leap like a deer... the tongue of the mute...sing for joy."*** (Isaiah 35:5f) Miracle reports spreading like wildfire, raising of Lazarus from the dead, these Greeks must have wondered, "Could Jesus be the Promised One?"

So they came ***to see Jesus***. But why ask Philip and not Jesus directly? Philip had a Greek name, came from Bethsaida in Galilee. Maybe more fluent in Greek than the other disciples. Maybe his name sounded more inviting, more likely to help. Recall Philip's early mission spirit found Nathaniel and said, ***"Come and see!"*** (John 1:46) Now Philip got Andrew. Again, why delay? Were they confused by their missionary training when Jesus said, ***"Do not go among the Gentiles...instead to the lost sheep of the house of Israel"*** (Matthew 10:5f)? Yet our Savior had also talked about his ***"other sheep . . . not of this sheep pen."*** (John 10:16) Some questions we can't answer, but finally Andrew and Philip told Jesus.

Jesus' response seems pensive. He saw why **His Final Steps Led to Some Greeks**. This was another sign along his path to Golgotha, part of God big picture plan of grace. Jesus replied, ***"The time has come,"*** the set time, appointed by the Lord from all of eternity. So, our Lord continued, ***"Amen, Amen, I tell you."*** (24) It's as if our Savior placed his hand on a Bible and was taking an oath: "I swear, I'm telling the truth. Listen up! This is important."

¹ Based on NPH Lenten Series 2023, by Glenn Schwanke: *His Final Steps*. (NPH 1-800-662-6022)

This tears your heart apart because this proves 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.”*** (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 mentioned in his victory chant: ***“In fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.”*** (1 Corinthians 15:20)

And here’s why you and I don’t have to be afraid of war or pandemics, or sickness and death itself. Jesus said if that ***kernel*** dies, ***“it produces much grain.”*** That, dear friends, is the harvest of the Gentiles and the Jews who trust in Jesus as the Savior of the world, our universal Messiah. God’s gracious gift of eternal life is ours all because of Jesus, that ***kernel*** of wheat laid in the ground on Good Friday and raised to life again on Easter Sunday! That powers trust that ***“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.”*** (25f) Served by such a Savior, buried like seed to raise us up, we gladly serve as salt and light – like the ***Greeks*** who came to see Jesus as ***His Final Steps Led Him...***

✦ To bring glory to his Father. (vv.27-33)

Pensive Jesus was, as 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!”*** (27f)

Greeks came to see him, fulfilling more of God’s plan that was all coming together at the cross. He would keep his eternal appointment from eternity because no one else could redeem himself from sin, much less another sinner. How that must have weighed on Jesus’ innocent soul! We think of the torments and mockery of the trials, but far worse than all was the guilt. You and I can lose sleep over some angry word or momentary weakness that shames us deep inside. But we’re only looking at one tiny grain of sand in a sea of sinful thoughts and attitudes from conception, even before the cradle to the grave. We’re more used to the stench of sin; we’ve been in this barnyard so long. After the second or third child, most diapers aren’t nearly as shocking as the first ones. But Jesus never sinned, never experienced its sorrow and harm in the halls of glorious heaven. Now He must suffer for sinners who feel sin is okay “as long as no one get hurt.” Knowing full well that He was hurt for every sin, all the way to the lowest hell.

Hell for us? To suffer for the sins of the entire human race, like 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? Yes, our Savior and Lord, God’s innocent, holy Son from heaven paid for all sins of all time as crushing guilt on his innocent soul. Even recent sins of pandemic, panic, war, abortion, fearful silence when we should be speaking up for those who cannot speak for themselves. Fighting for justice in the most Biblical sense against prejudice in neighborhoods in abortion clinics that target minorities. Huge sins like murder, child molestation, serial killing, plowing your vehicle into pedestrians, assault with words or weapons. Our Savior died for all the so-called little sins too. Every time a husband zones out, not paying attention to what his bride is saying; every time his wife turns to contempt in answer.

Recall his agony in the Garden of Gethsemane, sweating great drops of blood. ***“My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will.”*** (Matthew 26:39) Jesus saw it, felt it all coming. Knew there was no turning away.

Jesus had resolutely set out for Jerusalem (Luke 9:51) in ***His Final Steps***, fulfilling Isaiah’s prophecy that the Messiah would set his ***face like flint***. (50:7) The Father’s plan to save you and me thundered a third time with that voice came from heaven: ***“I have glorified my name, and I will glorify it again.”*** Jesus said, ***“This voice was not for my sake but for yours.”*** (28-30) The Father’s delight in his

Son's perfect devotion the first time? At Jesus' baptism, "***This is my Son, whom I love. I am well pleased with him.***" (Matthew 3:17) The second time? Jesus' transfiguration in glory on the mountain, shining as bright as the sun. As Moses and Elijah talked with about his "***departure . . . in Jerusalem.***" (Luke 9:31), his death on the cross, the Father said again, "***This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him.***" (Matthew 17:5)

In the Father's third endorsement. "***I have glorified my name, and I will glorify it again***" (28) is all the glory of our salvation from sin, death, and hell. For three years, Jesus' perfect ministry brought his Father glory. And so would Jesus' **Final Steps**: his crucifixion and his resurrection.

In his moment of reflection, Jesus saw clearly the cross just ahead and 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) Being "***lifted up from the earth***" was the same figure of speech for crucifixion that he had used three years earlier. A member of the Jewish ruling council, Nicodemus, came at 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. There is no forgiveness any other way, no other life that be sacrificed for all, no other holy, precious blood that could wash away all sin for time and eternity. And in that same moment, the "***ruler of this world***" was thrown out! The devil's power over us was crushed. (Genesis 3:15; Ephesians 2:2-5) And the Father was glorified yet again!

His final steps led to some Greeks who brought this request: "***Sir, we want to see Jesus.***" Can you think of a more fitting prayer for a preacher stepping into the pulpit? Or for God's people to pray for him as he sets up to sound forth this Good News of sins-forgiven and heaven won? Whether we're gathering together in the Lord's house at times of crisis or of calm, times of blessing or seasons of loss - through twists and turns of life together and with families far away...can there be anything more important than seeing Jesus above it all?

The writer to the Hebrews didn't think so. His encouragement keeps us centered tonight and all the way through our footsteps following Christ, "***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.