

Pilgrimage to Faith

by G.B. Duncan

The sermon emphasizes the importance of seeking God with sincerity and finding Christ through submission and possession.

Duration: 34:06

Scripture: Jeremiah 29:13, Matthew 6:33, John 12:21, John 14:6, Romans 6:4, 2 Corinthians 12:9, Ephesians 2:8-9

Topics: "Calling"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of young people in the church and how they can be assisted in their faith journey. The speaker introduces a hymn that describes the church as a mighty army and encourages the congregation to follow in the footsteps of the saints who have gone before them. The speaker challenges the belief that there are more people attending church in Scotland than football matches, highlighting the need for a genuine commitment to church programs and Christian programs. The sermon concludes with a focus on Jesus Christ as the central figure in the church, emphasizing the need for submission and following him, as well as the assurance of eternal life through him.

Transcript

Our gracious God and our loving Father, we've come with so many different needs, and yet we come to one who has said, my grace is sufficient. We pray that each one of us coming may be burdened and needing rest may find it. Needing liberty and freedom, we may be set free.

Longing for pardon and cleansing, that we may know it in Christ. So we pray that in thy mercy and thy love, by the ministry of thy Spirit, thou wilt take the spoken word and make it to become the living word. The living word of the living God, finding lodging in our hearts, bearing fruit in our lives, to thy praise for Christ's sake.

Amen. The verse on which I want to base our thinking tonight came in the passage we read. Strange when you're preaching in a church for a long time, you begin to wonder if there's anything left to preach about that you haven't preached about before.

I have a habit of marking the text that I preach on with a P, and that means preached on. My wife always keeps me right, although one time she was wrong. She told me after I'd preached at a service that I'd preached on that before, and that she'd got it marked down in her Bible.

What she failed to remember was that she'd marked it down when I announced the text that same evening, and that I'd only just preached it that night. But I'm told that there is a text that every preacher should see when he comes into the pulpit, and this is the theme of our message tonight. It's the words of the Greeks that came to Jerusalem, and the request they expressed in verse 21 of chapter 12.

Sir, we would see Jesus. And that is the text that it has been said should be in every pulpit, that the minister and the preacher alone can see. And another text that he should look at as he goes out.

They saw no man save Jesus only. But I want to look at what I would like to call tonight the pilgrimage to faith. The pilgrimage, the road that these certain Greeks took, that finally brought them to the place where faith was possible.

And I believe it's the kind of pilgrimage that we need to take too, if we too are going to come to the place of a personal and a real and vital faith that is far, far more practical than a vague kind of feeling. The pilgrimage to faith. I wonder if there's some folks here tonight, and you're looking, you're seeking, you're trying to find some reality, some solution, some answer, some help in this desperate world in which we live.

Maybe their pilgrimage will be like yours, and maybe you will be able to identify yourself with them and follow them until your pilgrimage too brings you face to face with Jesus Christ. For that's where faith is born, and only there. I want to begin by noting in the first place what I've called the purpose that brought them there.

We're told very little about these people, these Greek Jews. We're told however two things, and they're quite simple. First of all, we're told what they did.

In verse 20, we're told that they came up to Jerusalem to worship at the feast. So they did something. What do we read into this? One thing at least, that they were ready to go to a considerable amount of trouble and give a considerable amount of time to finding out the truth about God, to satisfy a hunger in their hearts that somehow rather nothing else could fill.

Someone has said that there is a God-shaped blank in every heart that only God can fill. They had turned, as they were Greeks, from the emptiness of the pagan philosophies in which no doubt they had been reared, at least to a faith in one true and living God. They had become Jews, adopting the Jewish faith.

And that had no doubt cost them much in time and thought and maybe in other ways too. And now here we see them taking the long road up to Jerusalem to share in the great annual event, the great religious festival of the Passover. Although this simple statement tells us only a very little, it tells us enough to help us to understand that God has little, if any, time for those who are not in earnest.

I believe there are some who never find Christ because they don't really want to. Jesus said it's the pure in heart that see God, not the pure in life, the pure in heart those that have utter sincerity in their minds. Jesus said that it's those who hunger and thirst after righteousness that shall be filled.

And both those words suggest an intensity of desire. Jesus said those who come to him will not be cast away. If ever we find Christ, it will not be by accident.

It will not just happen to us like an apple falling off a tree and landing on our head. Ask, said Jesus, and it shall be given. Seek, says Jesus, and you shall find.

Knock, and it shall be opened. So this they did. They went up to worship at the feast, rather like folk who are seeking, who at least make the effort to come to church.

Note that they wanted to know God so that they could give him his worth in their lives. That's what worship is all about. Worth-ship is the old Anglo-Saxon from which that word worship is derived.

It means coming to know him so that we can give him intelligently and willingly and absolutely his rightful place in our lives. This is what they did. Are you doing that? Are you in earnest enough at least to make the effort? Do you really want to know? The other thing we're told concerns what they said.

Verse 21, The same came to Philip and desired him, saying, Sir, we would see Jesus. Here we can sense now that a definition, a precision, a limitation has come into their thinking. They're not just vaguely now coming up to worship at the feast.

They are now wanting to see Jesus. That's different. Two factors might well have led to this sharpening and narrowing of the focus of their thought.

I wonder if there was an element of disillusionment about what they had found at Jerusalem. Was it their first time up? I don't know. Was there so much going on that they found off-putting? The commercialism? Jesus hated it.

Do you remember how he went into the temple and he made a whip of cords and drove the commercial interests out? Was it just the sheer crowds who seemed to be there just because it was a big day in the religious calendar, just as when on a Christmas Eve watch night you find the churches thronged with people? What they saw and heard as they looked at and listened to the religious leaders? Did they find that off-putting? Jesus did. The scribes and the Pharisees and the priests, those supposed leaders who'd so often come under the lash of the tongue of Jesus Christ, who couldn't bear to see his Father's name, dishonored and misrepresented. Was there an element of disillusionment about what they'd found? All I know is that it is so when people looking for God come to some churches, listen to some preachers, look at some of the people, there's a phony feel about the whole thing.

It's not real. I remember some time ago reading in the Evening Citizen, which was in existence then. It's out now, isn't it? For a few years.

The times now, I think. Am I right? I'm getting old and forgetful. Can't even remember that.

That's maybe a confession I very seldom buy. Sorry about that. But I remember reading in one of the daily or evening papers a testimony to some by somebody.

She'd been looking, she'd been hunting, she'd been seeking, she dropped into this church years ago. And she said it was such a relief to hear somebody telling about things in her jargon as it is. Was there an element of redirection, of reassessment they'd come to share in a great religious gathering and suddenly they had begun to sense that the whole issue was narrowing down to one thing.

The scenes that had marked the triumphant entry of Christ had somehow rather brought his name before them. But maybe learning alongside that the stories they'd heard about him, the sense of authority that he seemed to have, the adequacy about him that seemed to meet any need, the miracles he'd done, and maybe confirming it, the hostility of the religious establishment. Everyone was talking about that and about him.

And so they suddenly found their search narrowing down to Christ. As your search began to narrow down to the person of Jesus Christ, the desire to find God and worship God had become more explicit now. So they said, we would see Jesus.

Do you want to see him? Do you? What they did, well they did something. What they said revealed the purpose that brought them there on their pilgrimage. There's a great verse in the Old Testament which has been put to great music.

Comes in the book of the Prophet Jeremiah. Don't suppose many of us know much of what Jeremiah said, but this is what God said through him. And ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your hearts, and I will be found of you, saith the Lord.

And put to mattress music the words round, if with all your heart ye truly seek me, ye shall surely find me. Thus saith your God. The purpose that brought them there.

Have you got a purpose in your heart that you really want somehow or other to get there? I want to note, secondly, the people who helped them there. It's fascinating to me to note how while sometimes some people can hinder those who are looking for God and seeking Christ, in most cases, while there may be those who hinder, there are always those who help. And so we find the pattern and pathway of two other lives crossing the pathway of these Greeks who'd come up to worship.

Two other lives involved in the developing series of events. One was Philip, and the other was Andrew. And two things call for comment.

First of all, I note how they were attracted to Philip. The reason may have been twofold. Maybe his name.

That is almost probable because his name was Greek, and they were Greeks. And if you were in India and heard that somebody's name was McDonald, you would most likely want to say hello. I remember when I was in England, we had new bells in our church tower, and one of the men had an accident, and I went in to see him in hospital, and he just said two words to me.

I said, where do you come from? Glasgow. He said, no, Kilmarnock. On the way out in South Africa, I remember meeting somebody who very kindly was in the car while I was very kindly being given a lift into some services.

She just said, good evening. And I said, where do you come from? Attracted because of a Scottish voice and a Scottish accent, these people were attracted to Philip because he was Greek. A Greek like them.

The name was that anyway. And this made a bond that would make their approach somehow rather easier. Sometimes God can use a very simple and natural bond.

We live in the same street, we go to the same school, we work in the same office. Just because of some simple link like that, we feel it would be easier to approach a person like that, and we do. But in addition to his name, I think possibly his fame, that of course would be an overstatement to say that Philip was famous, but Jesus was.

And the person and presence of Jesus Christ was something everyone was talking about. He was famous, and his followers, his disciples, were as it were, basking in the sunshine of his fame. This man Philip knew Jesus, and I found again and again that when people have found Christ, it has almost always been that in

their pilgrimage to faith, they have been attracted by someone.

Not a preacher, just someone. I remember so clearly calling on a young man who joined this church, and by transference of his church membership from another church, and I remember asking him how long he'd been a Christian, and I think if my memory's right, he said six weeks. It was either six weeks or six months.

And I said to him, that's not very old, is it? He was a teacher, and I asked him how he'd become a Christian, and he said, well, there was a teacher on our staff, and there was something about that teacher that seemed different. She seemed somehow rather to have found an answer to things that I had never resolved, and I was attracted. How often I've heard people say that, when they've been bearing their witness, I met so-and-so, and they seem to have something I didn't have.

Attracted. But not only were these Greeks attracted, they were assisted by Philip. Philip himself was able to help, because he knew himself where Jesus could be found, and he knew Jesus himself.

He'd lived with him, he knew him. But he took them, first of all, with him to Andrew, and then they all went together to find Christ. How important this reminds us, how important it is to go to the right people for help.

The only person that really can help you and me, in what I've called the pilgrimage of faith, is someone who knows Christ, and knows where he can be found. That doesn't mean necessarily that they're religious. That doesn't mean necessarily even that it's a minister.

It means somebody who knows Jesus Christ for himself, and you can tell it. And I love the little touch we get when having been attracted to one person, before they found Christ, they found that there were others who knew Christ as well. Maybe that there's somebody even you've been coming to this church, you were drawn, curiously drawn to one person, that person brought you here tonight, not simply to introduce you to one other person, but to hundreds.

I wonder if there's a young person in church tonight, and you imagine a church is just empty and dull and drab, no young people ever go. But Christ is not for young people at all. Well, all I can say is look around you, see whether it is.

I remember how when Lindsay Glegg came here to preach, Sunday after our daughter's wedding, I told him, he was nearly 90 then, but he'd find when he came into the church at night, and got up into the pulpit to preach, he'd find all the young people sitting in the gallery. So when he got up here, he looked around and said, I wonder why it is that the young people are all sitting upstairs. Said, I think it must be because the cream always rises to the top.

Now, I used that when I was in Japan. It didn't produce a flicker, not a flicker. I was speaking in a church where there are masses of young people, and I wanted just to sort of introduce myself in a light-hearted way.

Then I discovered that Japan never sees cream. They mix it all up before it goes on the market. So they never see cream rising to the top at all.

Shows how culture can sometimes spoil sermons and illustrations. But I want to say that if there's somebody here maybe part of the pathway and the pilgrimage to faith is that you should be introduced and see that there are hundreds of others who know Jesus Christ. Do you think nobody is interested? They are.

Do the young people have no room for him? They do. So they were assisted by Philip who introduced them to Andrew. There's a hymn that speaks of the church, the truly Christian community as being like a mighty army.

Moves the church of God. Brothers, sisters, we are treading where the saints have trod. Someone has said that there are more people in church over the weekend in Scotland than there are attending football matches.

Do you believe that? If numbers gave you the right for time on the media, we wouldn't be watching sports special for hours on Sunday, on Saturday, Saturday night. We'd have the time filled up with church programs and religious programs, Christian programs. If we went by numbers, it's worth thinking over.

The purpose that brought them there, the people that helped them there, and then lastly and just briefly the person that faced them there. And that person was of course Jesus Christ. And how desperately we need to face him.

This was their request. Sir, we would see Jesus. And here it was granted.

Philip brought them and in effect said well there he is, there he is, and we need to face who he was. We need to listen to what he says. We need to find out how he saves and how he helps.

Again and again I said from this pulpit, it's not the church we preach. It's not the creeds we preach. It's the Christ.

The church comes in, of course it does. The creeds matter, of course they do, but nothing compares to him. And it is with Christ we have to do.

What did he say to them? Well what he said to them was quite simply this, if you really want to see me, if you really want to know me, then you can only see me truly and fully if you see me in the light of the death that I must die. Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die. It abideth alone, but if it die it bringeth forth much fruit.

Verse 32, and I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me. The amazing thing about the person of Christ is the passion of Christ. Central in his mind, central in the message of the church.

Here we have in verse 23 the tremendous words of Christ, the hour is come. How often he'd said the hour is not yet, mine hour has not yet come. But now the hour, he says, has come.

What hour? The hour, the hour, the hour of destiny for all humanity, for time, for eternity, the hour. What is it? When I die you will never know Christ, never see him, unless you see him in the light of the fact that he, the son of God, died for your sins. Strange, isn't it? But the very symbol of the Christian faith is a symbol that speaks of his death, not of his life, not of his teaching, but of his death, his dying.

The very symbol of the Christian faith is a symbol that speaks of his death, not of his life, not of his teaching, but of his death, his dying. Whether it be the cross or the crucifix. Jesus died for me, sums it all up, the person that faces me in my pilgrimage, when I reach the end of it, the goal of it, the pilgrimage of faith, is simply Jesus Christ, the son of God, the savior of the world, the one who died, the one raised, the one who's alive, dying to reconcile us to God, to draw us to himself, so that in and through his death and by his risen life he can be to us all that we need.

We're not wise enough, we need wisdom, he'll give it. We're not good enough, we need forgiveness, he makes it possible. We're not strong enough, we need strength, and he will give it.

We're not free, although we talk about it. He said, if I, the son of man, make you free, you shall be free indeed. When it comes to the end of the road of what we call death, draws near.

What we want the assurance of when we face death is the assurance of life beyond, and he gives it. All that I need as an old hymn is in Jesus. What did he say to them? What did he seek from them? An answer, a response, a decision.

He said, if, if, if, if any man serve me, let him follow me. Where I am there shall my servant be. Two things he was asking for.

First of all, our submission, we had to follow him. The other thing was our possession of him. A little girl, we're told, who grew up to be a very wonderful Christian, got hold of a New Testament when she was fairly young, and began to read it, and read on and on, and suddenly she rushed through to her mother, crying out, oh mummy, look what I found, isn't it lovely, now we can all live like this.

There's only one word I would change. Isn't it lovely, now we can all live like him. Sir, we would see Jesus.

Have you seen him? In his deity? Have you seen him in his mercy? Have you seen him in his sovereignty? Have you seen him in his sufficiency? Have you seen him to be in his death and risen life? All that you can possibly need. Not to impoverish, but to enrich. And it's all yours, for the taking.

Now, there must be the taking. There's a strange concept of the sovereignty of God, which leaves it all to him, nothing to us. That would destroy and violate the integrity of human personality, and God will never destroy what he created.

The death of Christ indicated that there was something in the character of God that demanded a death like that, in a mystery beyond our understanding. But when it comes to our acceptance of him, that respects something not in God so much as in us that God respects. So he says, the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ.

But you can only do one of two things with a gift, but something you must do to make that gift yours. You must do it. It's not yours until you do it.

You can either take it, or you can leave it. And one you must do with Christ, the gift of God, Christ. You've got to take him, or if you don't want him, leave him.

The pilgrimage to faith, the purpose by which they were brought there, the people by which they were helped there, the person by whom they were faced there. Sir, we would see Jesus. Have you seen him? If you have, what are you doing with him? What are you doing with him? Taking him? Turning him down? What are you doing? I don't know how folk live without him.

I really don't. I really don't. Oh, you say that I know folk that are quite happy without him.

Dr. Leslie Weatherhead's comment on that is significantly true to me. Their happiness, he says, is the happiness of a blind man who has never seen. They don't know what they're missing.

If you're not a Christian, you don't know what you're missing. A pilgrimage to faith, if you come there to face things out simply with him, forgetting about the church, the creeds, the lot, they'll come in. Dealing with him.

And God saying to you, the gift of my love, the gift of God, is eternal life through Jesus Christ. Do you want the eternal life? If you want that quality of life with the forgiveness, the resources, everything that's in, wrapped up in, if you want that, then take it. Take him.

If you take him tonight, you'll go out of this church a Christian. If you don't, you'll go out lost. I have some envelopes we like to have available for folk.

If you're looking, wondering, maybe if you're finding tonight and understanding tonight in a way you've never understood before, that it's Jesus Christ, the center of it all. Ask for one of these as you leave. It'll be given to you.

There's no charge. A booklet's there that'll be a help to you. I wonder if this has been your prayer tonight.

Sir, we would see Jesus. And oh, may the Holy Spirit, whose task it is to testify to Christ, may he have opened your eyes to see him. Take him.

Jesus put it in picture language just as simply as he possibly could when he said that the way we receive him is the way we would receive a friend into our home. And the knock comes, the bell rings, and we go to the door, and we find the friend standing there. We want them to come, and we just simply say, come away in, and the friend will come.

Jesus put it like this. He says, behold, I stand at the door and knock. If any man hear my voice and open the door, I will come in.

How do I know he will? Simply because he said he would, and he doesn't break his word. So if I want him, and I ask him to come into my life just as it is, and he comes in bringing all of the grace and goodness of God with him to enrich my life, so that I can then go out and share what he has given to me with others. If you want him, ask him to come into your life just right now, in your own heart, silently.

Just a simple cry, come in to my life, Lord Jesus. And if you say that and mean it, his word is true. I will come in.

Dear Lord, we thank thee that it's really basically so simple. We pray that some who've been on the pilgrimage, maybe for a long time, may suddenly have discovered that it all ends. The pilgrimage is ended, and the goal is reached, when we come face to face with Jesus Christ.

May some have come face to face with him tonight, and received him into heart and life of Savior and Lord. We ask it for thy mercy's sake. Amen.

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