

John Lesson 14 Articles

An example of this growing global popularity occurs in the next passage when some Greeks appear and enquire of Philip if they might ‘see Jesus’. We have already seen how important the theme of seeking Jesus is in this Gospel. The fact that gentiles are now engaged in this religious quest initiates a new development in the story, and Jesus responds by declaring that his long-awaited ‘hour’ has at last come (v. 23). The coming of the Greeks is the signal that in order for Jesus to achieve his purposes of making God known he, like a grain of wheat, must fall to the ground and die (v. 24). This is the only way his work can bear fruit. Indeed this is the only course of action for any who would follow him. The passage is very reminiscent of the passion predictions in the other Gospels, which is another example of John drawing out what is implicit in the tradition. In this case, John’s language parallels that used in the other Gospels when they describe Jesus’ agony in the garden. In both cases Jesus prays for deliverance from this ‘hour’ (v. 27 and Mark 14:35), and his human distress is emphasized as he contemplates his fate. However distressed Jesus is, he is able to master his emotions and focuses on the importance of his vocation to face this hour. The passage ends with a voice from heaven verifying what Jesus is doing and Jesus indicating what sort of death he will die (v. 33). In being ‘lifted up’ on a cross as a public spectacle he will be an obvious sign to those who seek him as a source of salvation. However, the darkness is approaching. The time for decision and discernment is fast disappearing and, as if to emphasize the point, Jesus withdraws from the scene (v. 36).¹

12:24 The little parable in this verse, as Dodd has reminded us, is reminiscent of the agricultural parables of Jesus in the Synoptic Gospels.⁴⁴ Jesus knew and understood the mind-set of the common people who labored with their hands, and he chose his illustrations to fit their experiences. They worked with seeds, and so Jesus spoke about seeds and harvest (cf. Mark 4:1–30; John 4:35–38). They understood that the new harvest was the result of dying seeds. Thus, in another double *amēn* (“truly”) saying here he directed their attention to the important fact that the phenomenon of seeds and harvest illustrated a reality far beyond the experience of farming and gardening.⁴⁵ It was aptly related to the death of Jesus and the reality of their lives. Moreover, the statement that if the seed does not die but “remains alone” or by itself as unplanted, such a condition implies the tragic notion that the harvest would be frustrated. The implication for Jesus was obvious: he had no choice but to accept his coming glorification (death-resurrection) even though it would be traumatic.²

¹ McFadyen, P. (1998). *Open Door on John: a gospel for our time* (pp. 81–82). London: Triangle.

⁴⁴ See Dodd, *Historical Tradition*, 366–69.

⁴⁵ The idea that the concept of seed dying here is related to parallels in the fertility worship of some ancient religions and particularly of Demeter and Persephone in the Greek religion of Eleusis, as sometimes thought, is remote at best. For a helpful comment see C. Dodd, *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel* (Cambridge: University Press, 1958), 372–73.

² Borchert, G. L. (2002). *John 12–21* (Vol. 25B, pp. 50–51). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.