

"Sir, We Would See Jesus"

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Preacher: Rev Andrew Coghill

[0 : 00] In St. John chapter 12, we read in verses 20 and 21, there were certain Greeks among them that came up to worship at the feast. The same came therefore to Philip, which was at Bethsaida of Galilee, and desired him, saying, Sir, we would see Jesus.

Now there are some commentators who take the line that these Greeks were simply, you know, traveling, kind of wandering, tourists sort of thing. The Greeks were apparently well known for their wanderlust, and they went all over the world, traveling and seeking to acquire knowledge.

I don't think we should necessarily take it in that sense. In the New Testament, the term Greek is used of those who are not Palestinian Jews, those who are not Jews of the Holy Land.

If somebody is a Greek, they are a Gentile. It doesn't mean that they necessarily come from Greece. In that sense. But rather, Greek culture had spread right over the ancient world from the time of Alexander the Great.

Everywhere his armies went, they built Greek-style cities. They introduced Greek culture and customs and dress, and the worship of Greek gods and so on.

[1 : 18] In an awful lot of places, you find cities called Alexandria, not just in Egypt, but a lot of places too. And the spread of Greek names also pervaded a lot of the world at the time.

So if somebody was described as Greek in the New Testament, it meant they were a Gentile. It meant that they were not Jewish. For example, in Mark chapter 7, verse 26, we've got the Syrophenician woman pleading for her daughter.

We read, the woman was a Greek, a Syrophenician by nation, and she'd be certain that he would cast forth the devil out of her daughter. Now, of course, Syrophenicia, the area of Tyre and Sidon, that's Phoenicia there, a sort of Syrian of that area, but she's described as a Greek because she's a Gentile.

Now, of course, throughout the ancient world as well, many Jews had been dispersed. And those Jews in the different countries where they traveled and where they settled inevitably imbibed and came to reflect a certain amount of the culture where they lived.

Just as nowadays, for example, if a Jewish person lived in Israel, they would have quite a difference in a culture and background and language to a Jewish person living in New York or in Poland or in North Africa or wherever it might be because they came to reflect the culture of where they were.

[2 : 43] Now, such Jewish people dispersed throughout the Greek world. In the authorised version, there's a sort of helpful distinction because they're referred to not as Greeks but rather as Grecians.

And that means a Jewish person who is of Greek culture or from other parts of the Roman Empire. If you think of Acts chapter 6, for example, where there's the dispute between the Grecians and the Hebrews.

Now, at this stage, the gospel has not spread out to the Gentiles. So this dispute in Acts 6 is between Jews who are of the dispersed throughout the empire kind of culture of a Greek culture but they're still Jewish people against the Hebrews, that is against the Palestinians that are Jews because their widows were neglected in the daily administration.

And then what does the church do about that? They pray about it. They fast about it. They tell the church, well, you choose out seven men to administer this distribution of the help to the widows and so on. And we read it, verse 5.

They say, saying, please, the whole multitude and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Ghost, and Philip, and Procorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicholas, a proselyte of Antioch.

[3 : 59] We'll come back to the proselyte of Antioch in a minute. But you notice that all of these are Greek names. They're not sort of Matthias and Simeon and Elias and sort of Macanah or whatever.

They're not Jewish names. They're not Hebrew names. These are Greek names. They chose Greek Jews to administer this in that sense. Now, further on, of course, the same thing, the same term is applied throughout the Acts of the Apostles.

After Paul is converted, chapter 9, verse 29, he spoke boldly in the name of the Lord Jesus and disputed against the Grecians, but they went about to slay him.

Likewise, again, in chapter 11, at verse 20, when the gospel spreads to Antioch, some of them were men of Cyprus and Cyrene, which, when they were come to Antioch, spoke unto the Grecians, preaching the Lord Jesus.

By contrast, when Paul takes Timothy as his follower, Timothy's mother is Jewish, but his father, chapter 16, verse 1, was a Greek. He's a Gentile.

[5 : 00] Him would Paul have to go forth with him, and he took him and circumcised him because of the Jews, which were in those quarters. For they knew all that his father was a Greek. Now, remember what we said a minute ago about this Nicholas, who was a proselyte of Antioch.

If we go back, then, to our Greeks in John 12, these Greeks, then, clearly are Gentiles completely and totally. They're not Grecians.

They're not Jewish. They're not Jewish of Greek background, nor are they converts to the Jewish faith, because if that were the case, they would be called proselytes, like that Nicholas, the proselyte in Antioch, in Acts chapter 6 and verse 5.

That means a complete, total convert, not just a God-fearer, not just one who worshipped in the synagogue, separate from the Jewish congregation, as a lot of people did. The Jewish faith was very attractive to a lot of the Gentiles, and many of them worshipped in the synagogues with the Jews, but they stopped short of complete conversion.

A proselyte was one who had converted completely and totally. He'd undergone circumcision. He'd become completely Jewish-ified in every sense.

[6 : 14] He had converted lock, stop, and battle. Now, these men are not described as proselytes. So it means that they're not just Grecian Jews. They're not Jewish at all.

They're not converts. They're not in the temple, because they've converted to the Jewish faith. But they are complete, total Gentiles, who nonetheless clearly have an interest in worshipping the God of Israel.

This is why they have come at this time. There were certain Greeks among them that came up to worship at the feast. Now, you could take that two ways. You could say they would come to worship, or they simply happened to be among those who would come up to worship at the feast. Clearly, they are men of a devout character, and their desire is to see Jesus. Gentiles seeking Jesus in the temple itself.

Now, obviously, some of your Bibles might have wee diagrams in them or whatever. The temple had various courts. The biggest outer court was called the court of the Gentiles, and into this anybody could go.

[7 : 19] So these Gentiles, they can go into the outer court of the Gentiles, no bother. Then you have the court of the women, into which Jewish women could go. They could go further than the Gentiles. Then you have the court of Israel, into which only Jewish men could go.

And then you have the court of the priests, into which, self-explanatory, only priests could go. And then there was the holy place, and the holy of holies, and so on. Sort of hierarchy of courts. But in the big outer court, anybody can mill about. And one reason why some people have suggested that perhaps they, why are they going to the disciples instead of just sort of latching onto the crowd and listening to Jesus from the outside of the crowd themselves?

One reason may be, they don't know what he looks like. They don't know who he is. They've heard about him, but they don't know who he is. Another might be that maybe Jesus is a bit deeper into the temple.

Maybe he's into the court of the women, or the court of Israel, or whatever, into one of these Jewish courts that Gentiles can't go. And so they want them to bring out to them. All of that, that's speculation.

[8 : 20] We could go on speculating about that forever. They want somebody else to introduce them to Jesus. And again, we mention in Acts 6 and at verse 5, all the deacons that were chosen at that time all had Greek names.

And likewise, these Greeks come to Philip, a Greek name, and they say, so we would see Jesus. Philip cometh and telleth Andrew. Philip is of Bethsaida.

Now remember in chapter 1, we read in John chapter 1, at verse 44, Philip was of Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. So the likelihood is that Andrew and Philip are in the friends from way back, because you find them a lot named together in John's account of the Gospel.

So he goes and finds his friend Andrew, another Greek name. And they come and they tell Jesus together. They introduce these men to Jesus. Oh, we assume that they do. We assume that when Jesus then begins to speak from verse 23 onwards, he is speaking to his audience, which now includes these Greeks.

If they were just coming to sort of gaze or to see as a sort of a tourist attraction, they're going to be disappointed. They can see him physically, but what good does that do?

[9 : 37] What they really mean is, we want to be introduced to them. We want to get to know him. And you might think, okay, well that's fair enough, but Jesus was physically alive then in those days.

They could see Jesus with their eyes. We can't do that. What relevance does this have to us? I would suggest to you, in all reverence, that when the Bible talks about being able to see, it's not just talking about physical sight.

I don't know about you, but one of the things I wasn't very good at in school was maths. And sometimes, you know, you have a maths problem, and you'd be sitting, you know, really looking at the question, and looking at it and looking at it, it just wasn't clicking at all.

And everybody around you was busy, scribbling away, and they can all do it, and they can all see it. And finally, you'd have to put your hand up and ask the teacher, and she'd explain it, and say, well, I can't quite get it. And then she'd say it again, and then she'd show you it a different way.

And finally, the penny would drop, and it would click, and they would say, ah, right, I see that now. Now I can see it. Now it's not that anything has changed physically in front of me.

[10 : 41] It's not that the numbers or the formulas are there that weren't there before. It's just I couldn't understand it. I couldn't make head nor tail of what was in front of my very eyes.

But then I was able to see it. Now by then, of course, everybody was halfway finished the exercise, but the point is, I could see it then. And it doesn't mean, oh, my eyes were opened in a way that they were shut before.

Now I can understand. Now I can get it. And this is the sense in which, although these Greeks wanted to see Jesus physically, and we don't know whether they went on with the Lord or not, but they desired to be introduced to him in a way that we ourselves each have an opportunity to be introduced to Jesus.

Not in the sense of seeing with the eyes of flesh, but rather of meeting, encountering, and understanding. Say, I get it. That's what happens when a soul is converted.

Remember when God is converted, it says that something like scales fell from his eyes. Now that was a physical sensation. And for us, it's like a spiritual sensation.

[11 : 50] When the Lord opens our eyes to the reality of his son, Jesus, it's like suddenly a penny drops. Suddenly, click, we get it. And we don't understand why we couldn't get it before, because everything that is enabling us to get it, was there before.

It was all in front of our eyes, just like me on the maths problem, or the algebra, or whatever it might be. It was all written there. I just didn't get it. Didn't understand it. I couldn't see it.

But then, when it's finally explained for the unpainted time, something clicks, the penny drops, and you can see it. These Greeks, they come to Philip, and they come down, they're saying, sir, we would see Jesus.

Now, they don't walk up to Jesus and say, hello, how do you do? We're Greeks. We come from wherever it was. We'd like to meet you. We'd like to hear you. You know, they come to somebody who already knows him.

And nowadays, in the present time, of course, that is how the vast majority of us encounter Christ, isn't it? Now, in some countries, of course, the Lord uses dreams, or visions, or perhaps, if there isn't a missionary that can get into a country, uses the airwaves, radio, internet, or whatever, and people hear something on the radio, the internet, or they read something, and yes, it makes an impact.

[13 : 09] The Lord uses it in their heart. Most of us have our first encounter with the knowledge of Jesus through somebody who already knows him.

We encounter somebody who is already a Christian. Might be a member of our family. Might be a parent, grandparent, uncle, aunt. Might be a friend. Might be a colleague at work, whatever.

But we encounter somebody who already knows Jesus. And when we have something we want to ask, or we want to be able to understand something better, who do we go to?

Yes, we might go straight on our knees and pray to the Lord right away, and that will be perfectly acceptable and good and right, but as well, in all likelihood, we will go to somebody who is already a disciple.

Somebody perhaps with whom we have some affinity, maybe who speaks our language, maybe their own age group, something that they connect with us. In the case of these Greeks, maybe it's pure coincidence, but I don't believe it's coincidence.

[14:11] These Greek seekers after Jesus, jump out, they come, they speak to one of the guys with the most Greek name, and he goes and gets his pardon, also happens to have a Greek name, who also happens to come from the same village, and together they go and tell Jesus.

We must understand, I think, they bring these Greeks to Jesus. What does Jesus then say to them? He says, the hour has come, the Son of Man should be glorified.

What's he, what's he meaning there? Wow, the Greeks have come, hey, I'm being glorified. No, I don't think it's that, it's the other, but because the time is now drawing near, he has already entered into Jerusalem with a triumphal procession, sometimes called by some parts of the church, Palm Sunday, riding on a donkey, the people all shouting, Hosanna, and so everybody is, he's greeting Jesus, he's a big celebrity, the knowledge of Jesus has spread, not only to different parts of Judea, but clearly it has spread already throughout a certain amount of the Roman Empire, because as we said, these men, they're not Jewish Greeks or Greek Jews or whatever, people have come from different synagogues or other places, they are complete and total Gentiles.

Gentiles who are not at this point converts to Judaism, to the Jewish religion, and they're not converted to the God of Israel, but they are inquiring, they are seeking.

It means that wherever they live, wherever it is that they have come from, however far they have come, they have heard about this Jesus. News of him has spread out already.

[15:53] Jesus has not yet done the thing that he was born for. He has not yet done physically the office, the function for which he was brought into the world.

In other words, he's not yet died on the cross and risen again the third day, but he has entered the last week of his life on earth. Because if we take, again to use the term, Palm Sunday's triumphal entry into Jerusalem, this is either the same day or it is later on early in that week.

The last week of his life has begun. Now if you look at any of the Gospel accounts and if you sort of put the pages together and look at them in your hands and you see the proportion of any one of the Gospel accounts which is devoted to the last week of Jesus' life, you will see that it is considered in terms of volume that's given to it far more significant than all the rest that's gone before.

The last week of his life is key. And it's in this final week these Greeks come saying, Sir, you will see Jesus. We can meet you apostles anytime. We can rub shoulders with the chief priests and the other Jews.

We can be in the temple. We can see the buildings. But no, we want to see Jesus. We want to know this person, this individual. What is the fuss about? What is the thing that's going to change people's lives?

[17:12] And he says, the hour has come, the Son of Man should be glorified. And what does he mean by that? Well, he starts talking about his death. By his death, he is glorified.

You might think, well, that's a strange thing. How can Jesus really be glorified when he's nailed up on the cross? He says, except the corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone. But if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit.

He that loveth his life shall lose it. He that hated his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal. Now, what he means, you can all think of a seed, a kernel, or if you had a barley harvest or whatever, you take two or three of the little seeds, you put them in your hand, you put them in a glass jar, you stick them on the shelf, and two or three others, you stick them in the ground come the spring.

Now, when it comes to the autumn, the ones in the glass jar, the shelf, you'll still have two or three little seeds there. But the ones you've planted in the ground, you'll have sheaves of corn and each one bringing forth umpty more new seeds because you're prepared to let them go, because you're prepared to bury them on the ground, let them die.

And when he says die, it doesn't just mean, oh, they've been put underground. If you could make a sort of cut-off glass case with the seed down in it and you could see a sort of cut-away version with the soil around about it and watch what's happening, you would see it sort of begin to sprout out little rooty bits and germinating little bits down and out and then beginning to shoot upwards.

[18 : 35] What's happening to that seed? It is breaking apart. It is breaking open as its little roots go out and more and more little strands and roots come out of it and it begins to shoot up.

There is nothing left of the original seed you stuck into that soil. You'd be able to observe that. There's a sort of glass cut-away demonstration there that you could see.

You watch what was happening because it breaks apart. It explodes slowly in a sense. It is wrecked by the experience. It dies. But because it's prepared to die, it's able to bring forth umpteen more new ones eventually with the harvest and stock that it brings out.

The ones on the shelf and the glass jar are still there and nothing's happened to them. And because they haven't been invested into the ground, because they haven't died, hey, you've got them still alive, but no, that's all you've got.

And like this life we have here, it stays on the glass jar on the shelf and it may be protected and it may be in some sense, oh, nothing bad happened to us, although bad things always happen to you.

[19 : 42] But at the end of the day, you have to say, well, when we all have to die eventually, we don't want to know what have I done with my life? What have I used it for? What has that seed been used for that's been planted into the ground?

It has been used for exactly the purpose it was designed. It has done what it came to do and it has brought forth more fruit abundantly.

Except the corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone, but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit. He that loveth his life shall lose it.

He that hated this life and this world, if he's prepared to let it go, he will keep it to life eternal. If any man serve me, let him follow me. Where I'm going, he's going to be prepared to go to and that means the cross as well.

And where I am, there shall also my servant be. So if I'm on the cross, he's going to have to face a cross too. If I'm going to die, he's going to have to be prepared to die. If I'm going to suffer, he's going to be prepared to suffer.

[20 : 42] But if I'm going to be glorified, he or she is going to be up there glorified with me. Where I am, there shall also my servant be. If any man serve me, him will my father honor.

And again, Jesus is using this illustration. Now, servant is the one who is down low. The servant is the one who is subservient. The one who is diminished, as it were.

Like John the Baptist says, he must increase, but I must decrease. I must become the servant. But Jesus says, of all those born of women, there's none greater than John the Baptist. Him will my father honor.

If we are his servant, God will honor those who are the servants of Jesus. What is your life for? What is it that you sit in a glass jar on the shelf? Still be there, rattling around in six months' time and a year's time when the harvest has been and gone.

The harvest has passed as someone has ended and we are not saved. We're still here in our little glass jar. We haven't done anything with our lives. We certainly may not have used them for what they were intended if we're not prepared to die to self and put down the roots and let the fruit shoot upwards and yes, it will break apart our cozy little preservation of ourselves.

[21 : 54] But that's what we're intended for. To expend this life in investing in and pursuing a greater life.

Sir, we would see Jesus. You won't encounter that new life, that greater life just by coming to church or even by just reading a Bible or just doing something outwardly religious.

We must encounter Jesus. Sir, we would see Jesus. You won't see him now with the eyes of flesh, but insofar as the Lord will open it to you it will come the day and clunk.

I get it. I see it. I understand. He that loveth his life shall lose it. He that hateth his life in this world shall keep it to life eternal.

This is what Jesus puts before them. He says, if you want to be my servant, that's fine, follow me. Follow me, but this is going to be the cost and this is going to be the prize. If you go for a new job somewhere, then one of the things you would think if you're getting an interview, whatever, they'll say, well, these are the terms and conditions.

[23 : 01] These are what's expected of you. This is the terms of your contract. This is what the scale of pay is. So they'll tell you what's expected of you. They'll tell you the conditions. They'll tell you this is what you have to do and this is what we'll do for you.

This is how you'll be compensated, remunerated. This will be the pay at the end of the day, the costs and the benefits and any pensions or anything. They'll set it all before you and say, right now, I would like to offer you the job.

Do you want to take the job? Or else you say, no, thanks. I'm out the door. No, I don't like those terming conditions. Jesus isn't trying to pull the wool over anybody's eyes. He says, this is the costs.

This is the conditions. These are the rewards and the benefits. This is how it all is going to pan out if you follow me. Whatever I am, whatever I'm going through, you'll go through.

Whatever I endure, you will be called upon to endure. Whatever I suffer, you'll be called upon to suffer. But, the extent that I am glorified, you'll be right up there with me, that where I am, there shall also my servant be.

[24 : 05] This is what is called for in those who would follow Christ, those who would seek him.

Now, when the Lord makes himself known, when the Lord makes himself known to these Greeks, he wants people to understand the conditions of following him.

Now, this is an offer that is made to all the world. This is one reason why Jesus says, you know, the hour has come, the Son of Man should be glorified. It's not about to be crucified that minute.

The part of his glorification is not just, he's put to death, he rises again. But, why does he do that? Why does he go through all that? It's not just so that a handful of Jews in Jerusalem can believe in him as the Messiah.

Remember the promise to Abraham. He says, in you shall all the families of the earth be blessed. It was always intended that the Messiah when he came would be one who would bring in a kingdom of which Gentiles would be a part.

The whole world would be affected. Remember in Matthew chapter 12 and verse 18 it says, that it might be fulfilled which is spoken by his eyes to the prophet, saying, behold my servant whom I have chosen, my beloved in whom my soul is well pleased.

[25 : 25] I will put my spirit upon him, he shall show judgment to the Gentiles. He shall not strive nor cry, neither shall any man hear his voice from the streets. A bruised reed shall he not break, a smoking plaque shall he not quench, till he send forth judgment of the victory and in his name shall the Gentiles trust.

Now we think, okay, well put up, but remember that the gospel at the time when Jesus is there in the flesh, his ministry is only to Jews. They think that they are the only people that God is going to deal with and yes, he is coming to them first, it is to the Jew first, but then after the primary opportunity has been given to them, this gospel goes out then throughout the whole world and as Isaiah 42 which Matthew has just quoted there then goes on to say in verse 6, Now I the Lord have called thee in righteousness and will hold thine hand and will keep thee, will give thee for a covenant of the people, the way the Old Testament says people, it means Israel, and for a light of the Gentiles.

So both hands are there to open the blind eyes so that we can see, I get it, I see, to bring out the prisoners from the prison and this wife without Christ it can be a fearful dark prison.

Them that sit in darkness out of the prison house, I am the Lord, that is my name, my glory will I not give to another, neither my crates to graven images. Behold the former things are come to pass, new things do I declare, before they spring forth I tell you of it.

Sing unto the Lord a new song and his praise from the end of the earth, ye that go down to the sea and all that is therein, the isles, and the inhabitants that are.

[27 : 09] You see, Matthew's not just being clever and twisting and turning an old text to suit his purposes. This has always been the case. It's way back in the depths of the Old Testament that the Lord intended to bring this message to Greeks and Jews and all the work of the Gentiles to those who go down to the sea and ships to the isles.

You see, oh, when he wasn't talking about us isles here, why does it not apply to us isles here?

Why does it not apply to us to go down to the sea and all that is therein, the isles and the inhabitants thereof?

When we sing a new song, it's not just, oh, nobody's ever sung before, but it's new in the sense it's new to us. It is new because it is in our mouth.

It is new because we sing it now. It is new to us. It's a new thing, a new life in our life. This is what the Lord desires to bring to all who will receive it, to open the blind eyes so that we would see Jesus, to bring prisoners out from the prison then that's sitting in darkness out of the prison house. You might think, okay, well, okay, we're talking about Greeks and we're talking about, you know, Gentiles in general and the Holy Land. You know, we are miles away from that. Let's just take, you could say it's legend, you could say it's speculation or even mythology.

[28 : 33] There's a verse in Colossians chapter 3 that says, lie not one to another seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds, the old unconverted man, and have put on the new man or the new person which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him.

In other words, it doesn't matter what you were before, now you're a new person in Christ and that's the most important thing. Where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free, but Christ is all and all.

All these different nationalities, all these different cultures, it doesn't matter. See what's listed there, barbarian, Scythian. Now we say it's Scythian when we read it in English, some people in the original Greek was probably more like Scythian.

And not only would the C be a hard K, but also the T-H, the S, is more like a T, so it's more like Scythian.

And some people speculate, and there's a certain amount of historical documentation that would suggest it, that these people originally lived in Asia Minor, Galicia, what is now part of Turkey.

[29 : 44] And from that, you know, they say that the Galatians were likewise those who settled in Gaul, as another sort of taking of it, and those who were the ancestors of the Gallic people.

That the Scythians are those who migrated from Asia Minor all through the Mediterranean and settled eventually in Ireland, where they became the Scoti, from whom, of course, the Scots moved into Scotland, what is now Scotland, settling in Eregale, the land of the Gaels, Argyle, Dalrida, and so on, and from which our mission eventually takes.

The Scythians as an ancient people were barbaric, they were bloodthirsty, they were known as being practically savages, barbarian, Scythian, bond, or free. It's not mentioned beside barbarian out of coincidence, but eventually these people migrate or sold it.

legends, you might say, have it. They come to Ireland. From Ireland, they come to Scotland. They become our ancestors, the Scythians, the Scots. The Isles shall wait for his law.

This is a message which applies to all nations. You could even suggest, as I would suggest tentatively today, that we have the roots of our own ancestors, they are named in Colossians.

[31 : 08] Those who eventually come and travel into Ireland, into Scotland, our own ancestors, our own genealogical route is there, but in a sense, it doesn't really matter, because whatever it is that is our nationality or genealogical route, whether we are Jew, whether we are Greek, whether we are barbarian, Scythian, bond, or free, the old person is meant to be sloughed off, and we are meant to grow up into the new person in Christ, this new identity, this new fulfillment.

Yes, we have to die to self if we are going to live to Christ. Yes, the kernel, it has to be buried, it has to die, it has to break apart if its roots are going to spread out and its fruit is going to be born upward.

That is what we are designed for. That is what we are intended for. And as long as we continue in the dark, we may be in a sense safe. We can be in our little glass jar shut away in the cupboard and the seeds will still be there in five years' time.

What have you done with them? Why did you bother putting them there? We could put our life in a little glass jar and shake it about in ten years' time, but we are still the same, only older and weaker. What have we done with it? Have we done with this life, like this brief span of years upon us, or what was intended? That we would grow up into what we were intended to be.

[32 : 40] That our eyes would be opened. That like these Greeks of old, whether we are Greeks, whether we are Scudians, whether we are Scots, or Irish, or English, or whatever we may be, their perceived need is our real need.

So, we would see Jesus. Jesus.