

The Seed That Must Die

John 12:20-36

Warm-up Question: If you could be introduced and spend time with anyone alive on planet earth today, whom would you pick?

²⁰Now there were some Greeks among those who went up to worship at the festival. ²¹They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, with a request. "Sir," they said, "we would like to see Jesus." ²²Philip went to tell Andrew; Andrew and Philip in turn told Jesus. ²³Jesus replied, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. ²⁴Very truly I tell you, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds. ²⁵Anyone who loves their life will lose it, while anyone who hates their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. ²⁶Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honor the one who serves me. ²⁷"Now my soul is troubled, and what shall I say? 'Father, save me from this hour'? No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour. ²⁸Father, glorify your name!" Then a voice came from heaven, "I have glorified it, and will glorify it again." ²⁹The crowd that was there and heard it said it had thundered; others said an angel had spoken to him. ³⁰Jesus said, "This voice was for your benefit, not mine. ³¹Now is the time for judgment on this world; now the prince of this world will be driven out. ³²And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself." ³³He said this to show the kind of death he was going to die. ³⁴The crowd spoke up, "We have heard from the Law that the Messiah will remain forever, so how can you say, 'The Son of Man must be lifted up'? Who is this 'Son of Man'?" ³⁵Then Jesus told them, "You are going to have the light just a little while longer. Walk while you have the light, before darkness overtakes you. Whoever walks in the dark does not know where they are going. ³⁶Believe in the light while you have the light, so that you may become children of light." When he had finished speaking, Jesus left and hid himself from them (John 12:20-36).

The Seeking Heart

What was it about Jesus that made Him so attractive? What made people want to follow Him wherever He went and leave everything to be with Him? Think about it. He was not like the faith healers or self-help gurus that we have in abundance today. He did not promise prosperity, happiness or self-actualization, in fact, quite the opposite. Rather, He spoke about the emptying of self. And yet, people of all nationalities and social classes were drawn to Him and hung on His words. When people were around Jesus, they knew they were accepted. We each have a universal need for acceptance and a universal hunger for truth. We are instinctively drawn to those who mirror this image.

George Washington was once accompanied by a number of other men on horseback when they came to a fast flowing river with no bridge. It could be crossed, however, on horseback at a certain ford in the river. Just as they were about to enter the water, a man

came up who had no horse asking George Washington if he could ride with him across. When all the men came safely to the other side the man was asked why he had asked the president for a ride. His reply was that he did not know it was the president, but he had looked upon all the faces of the men as they approached the river and Washington's face was the only one that had an accepting look on it.

When we think of the first time people met Jesus, what do you think they noticed about Him first? The scriptures are silent on his physical attributes, except to indicate that He was, in fact, unremarkable in His appearance. His beauty was not physical. We are not told anything about His looks in the four gospels, but the Israelite nation was told not to expect someone who would knock them out with His good looks. The prophet Isaiah spoke ahead of time about Christ, saying:

²He grew up before him like a tender shoot, and like a root out of dry ground. He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him. (Isaiah 53:2).

As one reads through the testimony of those that were with Him, it seems evident that it was the warm accepting look that He had for everyone that made Him an attractive individual, as well as the wonderful teaching that issued from His heart. He had time for everyone and was totally giving of Himself to the needs of all men. No matter if it was babies, children, the poor, the crippled, the paralyzed, leprous, prostitutes or tax collectors, He had a warm accepting face that drew people to Him. Jesus is the face of God to mankind. If grace has a face, it is Jesus. No wonder people thronged to Him and wanted to be near Him.

In the passage that we are studying, we are told of some Greek people that came to the Passover Feast. These were not Grecian Jews, but Greek gentiles that had travelled across the Mediterranean Sea for the annual Feast of the Jews. They came to the disciple named Phillip asking to see Jesus. Why did they ask Phillip? Could it be that they thought that Phillip, having a Greek name (same name as Phillip of Macedon, the father of Alexander the Great) would give them a special favor and introduce them to Jesus. Wouldn't you love to spend an hour with the Lord Jesus and look into His wonderful eyes and accepting face? How wonderful that would be! How had they been attracted to Him? Was it because His fame over the last three and a half years had reached even to Greece? I think so, because even the Pharisees had testified just a few verses before, "See, this is getting us nowhere. Look how the whole world has gone after him!" (John 12:19). The Pharisees would not have said that without some knowledge of people from other nations searching for Christ. The Greeks had probably gone to the priests and Pharisees asking about Jesus.

John makes no mention of it, but the other three gospel writers each testify that when Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a donkey announcing His kingship to all of Jerusalem, He had entered the Temple area and overturned the money changers tables, and the benches of those who sold doves in the Court of the Gentiles, saying, "My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations, but you have made it into a house of thieves" (Mark

11:17). It is possible that these men seeking Jesus saw and heard His zeal to restore the Temple to be a house where all men could worship the Lord and not just Jews. God has a heart for all nations to seek after Him.

What attracted you to the Lord Jesus? Was there a need in your life or was it the loveliness of His character revealed in the scriptures? Share with one another how you have become interested in Him.

Whatever you think it was that drew you to the Lord Jesus, it was God at work in you, for no one could come to Christ unless God Himself has first drawn him:

⁴⁴“**No one can come to me unless** the Father who sent me draws them, and I will raise them up at the last day (John 6:44).

God has used all kinds of things in your life and mine to draw us to the Lord Jesus Christ, just as He did the Greeks in the passage we are looking at. When Andrew and Phillip brought their request to the Lord Jesus, He sees it as a sign that He has been waiting for, that the hour has finally come—the hour of His glorification through suffering on the cross. ²³Jesus replied, “**The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.**” In at least two instances in the past three and a half years of ministry, Jesus had spoken of a specific time that He had been waiting for when He would glorify the Father. It wasn’t a literal hour of time, but a short time span when in one act He would bring great glory to the Father. When his mother Mary had asked him to intervene at the wedding at Cana in Galilee, he talked about His hour:

⁴“Woman, why do you involve me?” Jesus replied. “**My hour has not yet come**” (John 2:4).

Again when Jesus was teaching in the Temple area, the priests and Pharisees sought to grab Him after He had told them the truth that He had been sent by the Father, but for some reason known only to the Lord, no one was able to lay a hand on Him:

²⁸Then Jesus, still teaching in the temple courts, cried out, “Yes, you know me, and you know where I am from. I am not here on my own authority, but he who sent me is true. You do not know him, ²⁹but I know him because I am from him and he sent me.” ³⁰At this they tried to seize him, but no one laid a hand on him, **because his hour** had not yet come (John 7:28-30).

It is most likely that Jesus did meet with the Greeks, but John does not tell us. What he does tell us is that the Gentiles seeking after Him as well as the Jews was a sign that the time was now come—the hour was at last at hand where Jesus, by one final act of obedience, would glorify the Lord. Jesus goes on to say:

²⁴Very truly I tell you, unless a kernel of wheat **falls to the ground and dies**, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds (John 12:24).

Is Jesus talking about only Himself in verse 24, or about everyone? What does He mean with the imagery that the seed must first fall to the ground and then die?

Everything that Jesus did was as a model for those who would follow Him. In the thought of a seed falling to the ground, it is possible that Jesus was speaking of the life of humility, that the "way up" is the "way down." His example to us was that when the enemy was in a position of power over us, that God's way was not to retaliate, but to submit ourselves to the Father and die to self. The life of God given to the Church came in seed form in the Lord Jesus. His seed being put into the ground speaks of the Lord Jesus carrying your sin and mine, having it nailed to the cross and putting our sin to death. If Jesus had not died on the cross, His life would have affected no one but Himself. But the question could be asked, "Why was it so necessary for Christ to die such a brutal and violent death? Surely God could have planned an easier death for His Son?" The answer, I believe, is this: only a violent death could have exposed sin in the way it so sorely needed revealing. One preacher said, "Could Jesus have exposed in all of its foul horror if He had died in His bed, or by accident, or by disease?" It is one of the tragedies of human life that we fail to recognize the sinfulness of sin. God's plan was for Christ to die as a substitute for all those who would put their faith in Christ's death as their own death. Another example of this kind of substitutionary legality is found in history:

During a war between Britain and France, men were conscripted into the French Army by a kind of lottery system. When someone's name was drawn, he had to go off to battle. On one occasion, the authorities came to a certain man and told him he was among those who had been chosen. He refused to go, saying, "I was shot and killed two years ago." At first the officials question his sanity, but he insisted that was indeed the case. He claimed that the military records would show that he had been killed in action. "How can that be?" they questioned. "You are alive now!" He explained that when his name first came up, a close friend said to him, "you have a large family, but I am not married and nobody is dependent on me. I'll take your name and address and go in your place." And that is indeed what the record showed. This rather unusual case was referred to Napoleon Bonaparte, who decided that the country had no legal claim on that man. He was free. He had died in the person of another.¹

In the viewpoint of God, when Christ died, He died as a substitute to release you from the legal claims that Satan had against you because of your sin. Christ died for you and as you. God sees Christ as taking your place just as the one man went to war in another's place. When Christ died, God sees you as having died too:

²⁰Since **you died with Christ** to the elemental spiritual forces of this world, why, as though you still belonged to the world, do you submit to its rules (Colossians 2:20).

¹Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. ²Set your minds on things above,

not on earthly things. ³**For you died**, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. ⁴When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory (Colossians 3:1-3).

Let's think more deeply as to what happens when a seed is buried in the ground. The darkness of its tomb, time and the elements in the soil work on the seed until the outer husk cracks open and the life that is inside the seed puts forth roots and grows to become a plant that reproduces itself into many seeds. The Lord Jesus, through His death, burial and resurrection came to give us His life. We received physical life from our forefather, Adam, but Christ came to give us the life of God, and this life is imparted to us when we wholeheartedly put our faith and trust in Him. When we believe, our sins are washed away and the Spirit of God baptizes us into the spiritual organism of the Body of Christ. The life of God flows into each of us that are connected to Him by faith.

In a different analogy, Jesus spoke of this connection as Him being the Vine and we who are Christians being the branches. As long as this life of God flows in us and through us by our faith, the life sap of the Vine reaches others and bears fruit (John 15:4). Connection to Him is the key. Paul talks about this mystery being kept hidden from the Jewish people for generations, but now, through the apostles and early church, the new seeds of the first plants that received the life of God on the Day of Pentecost, God had chosen them to reveal that Christ wants to live in the temple of all men, even Gentiles that would seek after Him with all their hearts. ¹⁹**Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own (1 Corinthians 6:19).** This was the passion of the early disciples, to convey the revelation that God no longer lives in temples of stone made by men (Acts 7:48), but within the heart of those who will willingly bow the knee to the Lord Jesus and follow Him with all their hearts:

²⁶the mystery that has been kept hidden for ages and generations, but is now disclosed to the Lord's people. ²⁷To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which **is Christ in you, the hope of glory** (Colossians 1:26-27).

Paul calls the mystery of Christ in us "glorious riches" and the confident expectation (hope) of glory. How can we experience more of the reality of this truth?

The Call to Take Up Our Cross

This thought of Jesus being the seed that brings new life to everyone that receives Him, is the predominant analogy that John is seeking to convey, but in a similar sense, all those that are in Christ Jesus, must also die to themselves so that Christ may live in us and through us. As a seed or kernel of wheat is put into the ground, the seed must crack open its shell and die to itself, that the life that is deposited within, Christ in us, may be given to others.

We always carry around in our body **the death of Jesus**, so that the **life of Jesus**

may also be revealed in our body (2 Corinthians 4:10).

While we hold on to the self-life and live our lives only for our own pleasure, happiness and comfort, we will at best, be minimally fruitful for Christ. For this life to be modeled and passed on to the younger generation, it requires the voluntary taking up of our own cross, that the life of Jesus may be manifested through us. You cannot take up the cross for your family or even for your spouse. Every one of us must decide for ourselves the degree to which we would like to bear fruit with our lives. Those of you that have a spouse and even children must decide along with them, the degree of sacrifice you wish to make with your life. Before I married Sandy, my wife, I sat down with her and told her the things that were on my heart to do. We agreed together on the kind of life that we have lived together since our wedding in 1980. I promised her hardship and difficulty, but I also promised her my fidelity and faithfulness. The call to take up the cross and be fruitful for Christ's sake is not an easy one, but it is what we have been called to as disciples of the Lord Jesus. He clarified this for us in the Gospel of Mark:

³⁴Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: “Whoever wants to be my disciple **must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me** (Mark 8:34).

The cross that Jesus calls His church to take up is a call to die to self. The writer, Grant Osborne says:

“Taking up the cross was a very specific metaphor; when the Romans made Jesus or anyone else bear their cross to the place of execution, they were giving them a message: “You are already dead!” To take up the cross is to count your self-life dead to the things of this world. That person will “keep (his life) for eternity” (John 12:25). The disciples must become like their master; death is the path to life.”²

Coming back to our passage in the Book of John, Jesus carries on His thought by saying to his disciples:

²⁵Anyone who loves their **life** will lose it, while anyone who hates their **life** in this world will keep it for eternal life. ²⁶Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honor the one who serves me (John 12:25-26).

The first two instances of the word, “life” (highlighted) in the above verse is the Greek word *psyche*, which means physical life or one's self-life. Jesus is saying that if you love your self-life in this world, and you are oriented around just pleasing yourself, self-fulfillment, self-actualization or self-enjoyment, that is selfishness. That kind of heart attitude is what should have been broken when you came to the cross of Christ at your conversion. When we see and follow the example of Christ it will lead us to triumph over

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the world system that our Lord Jesus and His followers are at war with:

It was late in the summer of 1977 and Romania was under communist rule when the Baptist minister put all his worldly concerns in order after the manner of a dying man. Buoyed by the courage of his wife, Elizabeth, Pastor Tson prepared himself for certain martyrdom. He was to meet an officer from the secret police in the restaurant of a nondescript Romanian hotel. The communist officer had pledged to do what previous secret police officials had failed to do: silence Tson's ministry by offering him a secular job in exchange for a promise that he never again preach the Gospel. Turning down the job spelled at least hard time in a prison camp. It might very well mean execution. Tson met with the man and without flinching turned down the job.

"I told the man, 'Now I am ready to die,'" Tson said. "You said you were going to finish me as a preacher. I asked my God and he wants me to continue to be a preacher. Now I have to make one of you two angry and I decided [it is] better [to] make you angry than God. But I know you, sir; you cannot stand this kind of opposition and you will kill me in one way or another. But I accepted that and you should know that I have even put everything in order and made ready to die. But as long as I am free, I will preach the Gospel."

The communist officer was equally unflinching in his response: He told Tson to go and preach the Gospel. "He [the officer] made up his mind that if I was ready to die for it, then I should have it," Tson said. "And for another four years until they exiled me, I continued to preach with nobody disturbing me because that man, a key man in the secret police, decided I should be free to preach because I was ready to die for it." He was arrested and imprisoned several times in Romania during the 1970s and charged with being a Christian minister. Each time he underwent several weeks of intense interrogation, beatings and mind games before finally being exiled from the country in 1981.

"When the secret police officer threatened to kill me, to shoot me, I smiled and I said, 'Sir, don't you understand that when you kill me you send me to glory? You cannot threaten me with glory.' The more suffering, the more troubles, the greater the glory. So, why say, 'Stop this trouble'? Because the more [suffering], the greater the glory up there." During one particularly harrowing session of interrogation, Tson told his inquisitors that spilling his blood would only serve to water the growth of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Part of the theology of suffering, he learned, was that tribulation is never an accident but is part of God's sovereign plan for building His church.

"I told the interrogator, 'You should know your supreme weapon is killing. My supreme weapon is dying,'" Tson said. "Now here is how it works, sir: You know that my sermons are on tape all over the country. When you shoot me or crush me, whichever way you choose, [you] only sprinkle my sermons with my blood. Everybody who has a tape of one of my sermons will pick it up and say, 'I had better listen again. This man died for what he preached.' Sir, my sermons will speak 10 times louder after you kill me and because you kill me. In fact, I will conquer this country for God because you killed

me. Go on and do it.’ “Dying for the Lord is not an accident. It’s not a tragedy. It’s part of the job. It’s part of the ministry. And it’s the greatest way of preaching.”

Tson said he has learned that Christians suffer for two primary reasons: as witnesses to the Gospel and to perfect the church of Christ. He recalled being encouraged by a valuable truth that a British theologian taught him: The cross of Christ was for the propitiation of sins, but the cross each Christian is called to bear is for the propagation of the Gospel.

Tson has been president of the Romanian Missionary Society since 1982 and is pastor of the Baptist Church in Brasov, Romania. Romania is now open to the Gospel since 1989. To learn more about the uprising and the reformation in Romania visit this link:

<http://www.persecution.com/public/40years.aspx>

Jesus then spoke about what He was inwardly going through as the cross drew near:

²⁷“Now my soul is troubled, and what shall I say? ‘Father, save me from this hour’? No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour. ²⁸Father, glorify your name!” Then a voice came from heaven, “I have glorified it, and will glorify it again” (John 12:27-28).

Imagine what this would have been like, to hear a voice from heaven as Jesus is speaking. Jesus says to the crowd, that this was for their benefit. The Father was making it clear that He was about to glorify His Son. The time was drawing near. Jesus then makes it clear that they should believe in the light while they had the light among them, knowing that He would soon be departing. He wanted them to become “children of the light.” Jesus was already thinking of leaving them, and the band of followers He would be leaving behind. He knew that His time was near, and that is why He wanted to ready Himself for what was ahead and spend time with the twelve and His Father. He did leave behind children of light when He surrendered His body. Now, He is glorified, just as the Father had said. And we, His children of light, will share in His glory, as we will also share in His suffering while we are here. Some have a heavier weight of suffering, but will also have a heavier weight of glory.

Prayer: Father, I pray that we will be children of light to shine in the darkness. Let others see your face more clearly when they see your grace at work in our lives. Give us the attitude of Christ so that we will embody His nature and glorify you in all that we do. Amen!

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