

John 12:23-27 If One dies, it produces life for many! Lent Evening 6 March 25, 2015

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God's grace and peace are yours from Jesus Christ who died and rose so you may live! Amen.

We read from John 12:23-27

These are Your Words heavenly Father. Give us a growing faith in Christ through Your Word... Amen.

Dear Christian Friends,

It was what we call Holy Week in Jerusalem. The annual tourists were standing in line with their families to see the usual events. But there was one person getting more attention that year: Jesus. Beginning on Sunday, people had lined the streets by the 1,000's waving palm branches. With so many people, not everyone could get close to Jesus. It was not surprising that some Greeks got the attention of one of Jesus' disciples a few days later requesting, "We would like to see Jesus." (v. 21)

It seemed like a good request. Yet the way Jesus responded is intriguing. We don't know if they saw Him or not. For Jesus, it wasn't so important that they get a good look at Him. They were to focus on what Jesus wanted them to see! Jesus didn't give a direct answer to the Greeks. Some people think Jesus changed the subject. Greeks wanted to see Him and Jesus answers by talking about farming! Yet, a closer look at Jesus' illustration shows a beautiful summary of what He wants all people to see in Him.

I Tell You the Truth: If One Dies, It Produces Life for Many

1. He is describing that out of death comes life. *"I tell you the truth, 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."* (v. 24) Jesus was talking about wheat, but it's the same with corn. Weather and soil conditions will play a factor, but any guesses as to how many kernels of corn can be found on a cob? I've read that an average ear of corn has about 16 rows, with 40 kernels per row. Over 600 kernels of corn come from one seed of corn that is placed in the ground. It germinates, decays, and then a new life sprouts. In a sense, out of death comes life! Jesus compared that wheat to Him. The very reason He was born so that He might die to bring life to us.

How completely opposite it is for us! God created us for the purpose of living with Him forever. On the sixth day of creation, God breathed into Adam "the breath of life," not the "breath of death." But as a result of sin we die. God still wants us to live! So He sent Jesus to be human, to take in the breath of life so He could go to the cross and exhale His last breath in death.

Jesus told us why He would die. *"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."*(v.24) Jesus didn't want to be alone for eternity. He wanted us to be with Him like kernels in a row on a cob. We may not feel that we deserve to have a place next to Him, especially considering how many times we have not always wanted Christ to be so close to us. We want to have Christ on Sunday morning in church, but so often forget about Him the rest of the week. We want fellowship with God at a wedding, but don't want Him at the reception. We want fellowship with God as we bring babies to be baptized, but later we don't always take time to for devotions or to pray to God to benefit our family. We want God standing beside us after we're in trouble, but don't call on Him to keep us from falling in the first place.

Despite our sins, Jesus' desire to unite us with God led Him to give His life. He knew that our sin needed to be paid for by death. We couldn't pay the penalty for sin if we suffered for all eternity. But, the innocent death of the Son of God was enough to pay for sin in full, resulting in life for all who believe in Him. That doesn't mean that death was easy for Jesus. As he looked ahead to the scourges on his back, the thorns pressing into His head, and the nails piercing His hands, He prayed, *"Now my heart 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."*(v.27) He was determined to die since he knew that out of death life would come for us!

2. Jesus also wants us to know that out of life comes death. After his illustration of the wheat, Jesus continued the “I tell you the truth” paragraph, *“The man who loves his life will lose it, while the man who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life.”*(v.25) Don’t we love our lives? We may not like everything that happens in life. We may not like a certain job or school work or illness. But by nature, we love ourselves, as imperfect as we may be. Instead of seeing ourselves as kernels, k-e-r-n-e-l-s, produced by Jesus, by nature we like to see ourselves as colonels or maybe generals, wishing to control our lives. We give the orders. Whatever is done is in our best interests. That’s who we are by nature. We were born with that selfish nature. As babies we demanded with a cry: “feed me! Change me! Hold me!” And time has not changed our sinful nature. We still think, “What do we get out of this relationship? What are we going to get out of work? When do we get the attention we deserve? And so often we think, It’s all about how we look!

It’s easy to think of ourselves. But Jesus tells us to look at life in an opposite way. By God’s grace, as believers when we realize that through Jesus’ death we have eternal life, then the self-serving attitude that we loved doesn’t look as appealing anymore. In fact, it begins to die. That’s why I can say not only out of death comes life, but also out of life comes death. The life we get from our Savior means death to our old self. Paul wrote, *“I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.”* (Galatians 2:20)

At first look, that does not sound appealing, but that’s because we’re listening with our wrong ears, the ones connected to our old natures. Disconnect those ears for a second and listen with your new ears. Can you imagine what it will be like to fully be able to live for Jesus, a life where we have power to say “no” to all temptations and where we never do anything to shame ourselves or our God? Think of being able to chase away the devil like he’s a fly instead of a lion. Think of a view where a grave looks like the entrance door to a grand palace instead of a dark hole. Wouldn’t that be amazing! That’s what it’s like when the old self is dying. Instead of being trapped by sin, we’re free to serve our loving Savior who was willing to die for us. We’re free to serve a Savior who will honor us by grace before our heavenly Father.

The old self doesn’t die easily. It remains on life support all our years on earth. But the life we have from Jesus and the power of His Word will give us power to withstand the old self with all its gasping for sin. And one day, when Jesus calls us home to His side, He will pull the plug on our old natures. They can’t go with us into paradise. Our eternal life will mean death to our old sinful nature forever.

We’re coming up quickly on Holy Week. Like the Greeks, we want to see Jesus. And through His Word we will see Him as He wants us to see Him: humble, yet a saving King, handing us the cup of salvation while He drinks the bitter cup of suffering. We’ll see Him put on trial and crucified. Finally, we’ll see Him triumphant over the grave! Remember, life is not about what we want to see in Jesus, it’s about what Jesus reveals to us in His Word. He wants us to be confident that His death means life for us, and our new life in Christ means death to our old self. This is the truth He tells us! Amen.