

ESF, Lord's day message  
7/24/2016

## **Dying for Fruit**

John 12:20-26

*Now there were some Greeks among those who went up to worship at the Feast. [21] They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, with a request. "Sir," they said, "we would like to see Jesus." [22] Philip went to tell Andrew; Andrew and Philip in turn told Jesus. [23] Jesus replied, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. [24] 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. [25] 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. [26] Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honor the one who serves me.*

When we sow **seed** into soil we expect fruit from the seed. What should happen to a seed to produce fruit? The seed must die in the soil. Without dying no seed would produce fruit. That's what Jesus is talking about in this text. To give us **the** fruit of life, Jesus died. By His death on the cross Jesus has saved all men and give them eternal life who believe in Him. Also with this truth, Jesus teaches us that we have to die to ourselves to live fruitful lives.

### **The message of the cross**

Jesus said this word to some **Greeks** who came to Jerusalem and wanted to see Him. Why did they want to see Jesus? When they arrived at Judea and Jerusalem, lots of people were talking about Jesus. Many people spoke highly of Him. Some of them even believed and said that He could be the Savior of the world. So in such **an** atmosphere, some might **be curious** to see Him. Others might want to see Him to **find** truth through Him. **In any case**, Jesus told them the truth of the seed and its fruit. *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.*

Why did Jesus tell that truth to them at that time? Because that was the key truth **to** which they had to listen to **understand** Jesus. In those days, the Greeks were proud of their famous philosophers and their strong influences on culture. They were familiar with all kinds of philosophical ideas. They liked to reason **about** everything philosophically. According to their ideas, saving all men by death on the cross was something foolish (1 Cor. 1:22-23). Because, in those days, only **the** worst criminals were crucified on the cross. **Death** on a cross was the most painful and shameful **of all deaths**. They could not understand how the almighty God should save all men through **the shameful** death of **just** one man.

However, Jesus saw the future. Whether they **believed** the truth of the cross or not, they could be the first people **to** talk about Jesus when they went back to their **own** country. **So** Jesus wanted to give them the key truth of His life and death. His message to them was simple and direct: Without death on the cross, there would be no salvation. Man's **philosophy, reason** and wisdom cannot save man from sin and death. The cross is the wisdom of God for salvation **of** all men.

Proclaiming the truth of the cross should be the main theme **of** our mission. Our mission statement should be "Let **the** people hear the message of the cross of Christ for salvation" Whether people understand or not, whether people accept or not, we have to proclaim Jesus death on the cross.

At that time the Greeks **were not expecting** to hear such truth. Most of them **probably did** not accept what Jesus said, but a few of them might **have believed** the truth and could **have been** the first missionaries **to** the Gentile world.

We cannot win souls **with** philosophical **arguments**. We can win souls only by preaching the cross of Christ. Paul was always focused on this

point in his mission: 1 Corinthians 1:17-18 *“For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel not with words of human wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power. For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.*

1 Cor. 2:12

*When I came to you, brothers, I did not come with eloquence or superior wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God. For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.*

### **Dying to Self**

By **explaining** the death of a **seed to produce** fruit, Jesus meant not only His **own** sacrificial death for all men, but also man’s death **in bearing** fruit. Paul said; “I die every day” (1 Corinthians 15:31). What does he mean by dying every day? Physically speaking we cannot die as Jesus died. We can save no one by our physical death. We do not need to die just as Jesus died, because through His death, the fruit of salvation has already been given to us. We cannot save any single soul even if we sacrifice our **own** lives. So what Paul means by dying every day is not physical death. He means **a different** kind of death. It is death to himself. Jesus means several things by dying to ourselves.

### **1. Putting our sinful nature and selfishness to death**

#### **a). Dying to self means putting our sinful nature to death**

Col. 3:58 says: *Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry.*

If we live according to the desire of our sinful nature, we do not need to struggle. But if we go against our sinful nature there is struggle. When our sinful nature goes without limit, when it wants to go **into** wild

territory where the Devil is controlling, we need to fight. **But if** we fight by our own will and strength we cannot win **this** war. We have to fight with the power of Jesus' blood, and with the power of **the** Holy Spirit. Moment by moment, we have to pray to receive the power of Jesus' blood and the Holy Spirit.

When we put sinful desire in our flesh to death, the Holy spirit works fully in us and the Spirit produces good fruit in us. Romans 8:13-14 says, *for if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live, because those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.*

b). Dying to self means dying to selfishness.

It means breaking our selfishness and self-centered pride. Only when our selfishness and self-centered pride is put to death, **can we** produce the fruit of life. This truth is diametrically opposed to the spirit of this world. The world is driven by one thing: self-interest. As a general rule, employees work hard because they want a raise. Corporations invest resources because they want a profit. It is the most natural thing in the world for a person to ask, "What's in it for me?" But Jesus teaches that such **a life** cannot produce fruit. *"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."* Jesus is not saying a person should hate living, or a person should not pursue personal gains. He is saying that if a person lives only for his own advantage, own comfort, own prosperity, own pleasure **he** will ultimately lose everything that matters. When a life is lived only for self-satisfaction and self-exaltation it actually brings a person shame and humiliation. When a life is lived in humility and obedience to God the result will be honor and exaltation.

So, Paul says in Phil 2:5-7 *"Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing..."* The man in Luke 12 who foolishly lived to build bigger and better barns **only** for himself was confronted by God about his love of the self-life: *You*

*fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?*” (Luke 12:20). The key to understanding this verse is the words “*for yourself.*” There are two ways to live life—for yourself, or for God and others. Both cannot happen at the same time.

A store owner put an advertisement of a big sale in the local newspaper. It was the biggest sale ever. On **the day of the sale**, before the store was open, lots of people came out to the store and **there was a** long line. Then **as the** opening time was approaching, a small man pushed his way to the front of the line. All the people in the line pushed him back with loud and colorful curses. On the man’s second attempt, people punched him and knocked him down, then threw him to the end of the line again. As he got up the second time, he said to the person at the end of the line: "That does it! If they hit me one more time, I don’t open the store!"

Those who are asserting their own rights, so often lose them. Eventually they can’t get in the place where they need to get in. But those who give up their rights for God and others get in by God’s help.

## **2. Surrendering our will to God’s will**

Dying means surrendering our will to God’s will. God’s will in Jesus’ life was that He should die on the cross. But Jesus did not want to be crucified. He did not want to die **a shameful** and painful death on the cross. His will was going against it. But He surrendered His will to God’s will by saying; *Yet not my will but your will be done* (Luke 22:42). This was dying to His own will to obey God’s will.

This could not be done without lots of struggle and **prayer**. In fact, to surrender His will to God’s will, Jesus prayed so earnestly that his sweat became like drops of blood: "*Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done.*" *An angel from heaven appeared to him and strengthened him. And being in anguish, he prayed*

*more earnestly, and his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground (Luke 22: 42-44).*

Sometimes it is hard to surrender our will to God's will. Especially when God's will for us is to do something painful, it is hard to surrender our will to His will. But we can do it if we believe what God says through **the** prophet Isaiah "*For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, ... As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts*" (Isaiah 55:89).

**In addition** if we believe that God is the creator and we are His **creation**, we can do it. As His **creation**, our duty is just **in** obeying His will. He will never tell us **to do** what is wrong, or what is not good **for** us. If we surrender our will to His will, although we may not understand God's will now, later we will understand.

When Joseph in the book of Genesis was sold by his own brothers, when he was falsely accused by his master's wife, when the prisoners whom he helped forgot him and he **remained in** the prison two more years, he could not understand what God's will for him was. But later he realized that God had the best plan for his life. He realized that although many people had wronged him, and although so many things had gone so badly, God had turned everything into good.

Often, we want to **get** good fruit without dying. We want to receive the power and peace and joy from God. We want to live in the power of **the** resurrection. But we do not want to die to our own plans and desires. We want a resurrection but not a cross. But unless we take up the way of **the** cross, we will never gain **the** resurrection. Have you ever had to make a decision that was not what you wanted but you knew was God's will? If you have done **so**, you might find that it turned out to be the best result.

### **3. Enduring sufferings with faith in the cross**

Dying to self means enduring suffering with faith **because of** Christ's suffering on the cross. There are times when we have to endure sufferings. Enduring suffering does not mean that we passively wait without doing anything to overcome the suffering. We have to do everything we can do to overcome pain. But there may be times when we have to endure pain. When we have to endure pain and suffering, we have to endure them with faith in the suffering of Christ on the cross.

When Joseph Ton was a pastor in Romania he was arrested by the secret police for publishing a sermon calling for the churches to refuse to submit to the communist government's demand for control over their ministries. When an official told him he must renounce his sermon he replied, "No sir, I won't do that" The official, surprised that anyone would respond so forcefully to the secret police, said, "Aren't you aware that I can use force against you?" "Sir, let me explain that to you," Ton said. "You see; your supreme weapon is killing. My supreme weapon is dying . . . You know that my sermons are spread all over the country on tapes. When you kill me, **you** only sprinkle them with my blood. They will speak 10 times louder after that, because everybody will say, 'That preacher meant it because he sealed it with his blood.' So go on, sir, kill me. When you kill me, I win the supreme victory." The secret police released him, knowing his martyrdom would be far more of a problem than his sermon.

If we think about **the** suffering of Christ while we face pain, **we share** Christ's pain on the cross. Without Jesus's pain on the cross, **our** pain **creates** bitter scars. But with faith in Jesus's suffering on the cross, our pain brings power to produce new life.

Romans 8:17 says, "*Now if we are children, then we are heirs of God and coheirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.*"