

The Requirement and the Reward of Death

John 12:24, 25: “Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a 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; and he that hateth his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal.”

Within one week from our Lord saying these words, He was destined to die. In this twelfth chapter of John, Jesus was anointed by Mary to die. He had made the triumphant entry into Jerusalem, not to come to David’s throne, but rather to come to His chosen cross. He had not come to a coronation as many had hoped, but rather to His crucifixion.

Christ entered the Temple and cleared it of the moneychangers. No sooner had our Lord situated Himself in the Father’s House, when certain Greeks came to the Temple to worship. They came as far as they could into the Temple, because the Gentiles were restricted from coming deeper into the Temple due to the “...middle wall of partition...” (Ephesians 2:14b) which separated them from the Jewish Messiah. Andrew and Philip take this message from the “outsiders” to Christ: “...Sir, we would see Jesus” (John 12:21b). Our Lord then gives the message of the necessity of the corn of wheat that must fall to the ground and die and then and only then can there come forth an abundant life that will be so fruitful that even the Gentiles can be included into the Kingdom of God. What do we learn from this metaphor? What is our Lord saying?

1. THE INTRINSIC POWER OF ONE CORN OF WHEAT

John 12:24a: “Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a corn of wheat....” Dr. H. Macmillan wrote concerning this singular corn of wheat, “The original word is not *sperma*, a seed, but *kokkos*, a berry, a fruit. It shows the extreme, even scientific, accuracy of our Saviour’s language; for the corn of wheat, and other cereal grains, consist of seeds incorporated with seed vessels, and are in reality fruits, though they appear like seeds. It is not the bare seed that falls into the ground, and, by dying, yields much fruit, but the corn of wheat — the whole fruit with its husk-like coverings. A corn of wheat is beautiful and complete in itself. It is full of latent life; it contains the germ of boundless harvests. But it is hard and narrow and isolated.”

All that was needed for a plentiful harvest and multiple harvests was housed within this corn of wheat. The corn of wheat was isolated. Even so, our Lord was isolated from all others in the earth by His sinless life. All that was needed to provide over two millennia of harvests was wrapped up in that one Corn of Wheat. Romans 3:22a: “Even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe....”

2. THE INEVITABLE PROVIDENCE OF A SPECIFIC DEATH

John 12:24b: “Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die....” The death of Christ was the only way life can come to others. The corn of wheat falls into the ground, and that which destroys it becomes the birthplace of life. The

surrounding husk breaks apart and the nourishing rains and quickening sunshine allow the radicle to go downwards into the earth as the plumule ascends heavenward. The corn of wheat dies alone--but it does not stay alone. The harvest of life is as certain as the death of the corn.

I Peter 3:18: "For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit."

3. THE INCREASING BENEFIT OF CHRIST'S DEATH

John 12:24c: "...but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit." I Corinthians 3:6, 7: "I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase. So then neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase." Mere mortal man cannot take credit for the salvation of even one soul. It is all of God's grace! It should be noted that after the Greeks had asked to be included in the company of Christ, that our Lord gave this analogy. Romans 1:16: "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek." Galatians 3:28: "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus." Romans 5:19: "For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of One shall many be made righteous." Revelation 22:17: "And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely."

4. THE INVITATION TO COME AND DIE.

John 12:25: "He that loveth his life shall lose it; and he that hateth his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal."

In all the other religions of the world the message is from the strong to the strong. Be strong, buck up, be the best you can be. In Christianity the message is from the weak to the weak. Our Leader says in essence, I will die; follow Me, but you too must die. Matthew 16:24: "Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me." Even the methodology of the Apostle Paul reflects his identification with Christ's death and, in turn, taking the Gospel to the world in the humility of the weak to weak. Galatians 2:20: "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me." I Corinthians 9:22: "To the weak became I as weak, that I might gain the weak: I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some."

Conclusion:

I cannot put into words the importance that mentors have been to me throughout my life. As it stands now, most all my mentors are in Heaven. One of the most influential men in my early years was Dr. Lee Roberson, pastor of Highland Park Baptist Church and founder of Tennessee Temple University in Chattanooga, TN. One statement that he made repeatedly through the years in

and out of the pulpit was, "Die to self!" Our Lord knew the tendency to resign from the crucified life and this is no doubt why our Lord said in Luke 9:23: "And He said to them all, If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me." Paul adhered to this principle as well, because we read that he said in I Corinthians 15:31b: "...I die daily." Only Christ's death on the cross can redeem us. Our death to self is the "thank you" we give to Christ for saving us. Therefore, we look at the remainder of our life as a living sacrifice to our Lord (Romans 12:1).

There is a very touching story of John Leonard Dober and David Nitschman.

They were men who left the security of their jobs and families in Copenhagen to become the first Moravian missionaries in 1732. Three thousand slaves from the jungles of Africa were brought to an island in the Atlantic, there to live and die without hearing of Christ. These missionaries said, "We shall work as slaves among the slaves." As they left the comforts of home to reach these thousands of people in human bondage, they were heard to have said, "May the Lamb that was slain receive the reward of His suffering!" It was said of the early Christians in Acts 17:6b: "...These that have turned the world upside down are come hither also." When we live for Jesus and die to self, we actually turn the world "right-side up" rather than the world's description of "upside down."

-Pastor Pope-