

**Mar. 29, 2015 – John 12:23-27**

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

- *He wants us to see that out of death comes life*
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Wouldn't it have been great to have been one of Jesus' disciples? To be there when Jesus healed all the sick and cast out all those demons. To see Jesus walk on water, and cause Peter, or even you, to walk on the water as well. Wouldn't it have been great to see Jesus feed the five thousand and calm the storm? This Sunday is Psalm Sunday. Imagine what it was like when Jesus came riding into Jerusalem. Sure, He was riding on lowly donkey, but all the people were waving palm branches and throwing their cloaks and branches on the road in front of Him and shouting: "Hosanna! 'Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!' The King of Israel!" (John 12:13). What an exhilarating scene that must have been!

After Jesus rode into Jerusalem, some Greeks came to Philip and asked for an audience with Jesus. They had come up to celebrate the Passover and wanted to see Him. Philip told Andrew and then they both brought the request to Jesus. In John 12:23-27 we read Jesus' reply.

We are not told exactly why these Greeks wished to see Jesus. Most likely they wished to meet this famous celebrity and see His glory first-hand. In answer to their request, Jesus said that the hour had come for Him to be glorified, but that He would not be glorified in the way they expected. The Son of Man would be glorified by His death.

This may seem strange, as there is nothing glorious about death. In our modern age with antiseptic hospital rooms, we are sheltered from the realities of dying. Modern embalming and cosmetics cover over the appearance and stench of decaying flesh. Fancy caskets and ornate funeral homes dress up the lifeless corpse that will only just decompose and return to dust.

But here Jesus points to His death as the thing that glorifies Him, because He wants us to see that out of His death comes life. Jesus illustrated this by His "I tell you the truth" statement about a grain of wheat. He said: "*Most assuredly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it produces much grain.*"

Jesus used this commonly known fact about wheat to show what His death would accomplish – it would bring life to many. At the end of this passage, Jesus said that came for this very purpose. He was born to die. He was born to give up His life as a ransom for you and for me so that we might have eternal life (1 Timothy 2:6).

By nature we are all dead in our trespasses and sins. Our sinful nature and the sins we have committed separate us from God. And there is nothing we can do to pay for or make up for our sins. We cannot make ourselves alive to God. But God loved the world so much that He sent His only begotten Son to take the punishment of death our sins deserve upon Himself.

If Jesus had not died, He would have remained alone, like the unplanted seed, for we would still be in our sins and eternally separated from Him. But Jesus did die to bring you life. He voluntarily went to cross to suffer and die to take away the sins of the whole world. He died out of love for you and for me so that we can have eternal life with Him in glory.

During Lent we consider how great Jesus' love for us really is as we contemplate His suffering and death. But we cannot fully comprehend what Jesus endured for us. We face death with the knowledge that because of Jesus' death and resurrection all our sins are forgiven. Death has lost its sting. We need no longer fear death, because we have a home in heaven. Unbelievers face death in ignorance of the horrors of hell that await them. But Jesus faced His death with the full

knowledge of what He would experience. That is why Jesus here said: *“Now My soul is troubled, and what shall I say? ‘Father, save Me from this hour’?”*

Think about that for a minute. What could trouble God? We often talk about the agony of the whipping that Jesus received at Pontius Pilot’s command – a scourging that He probably just barely survived. We think of the pain of the nails being driven through His hands and feet as He was put on the cross. But all these physical torments were nothing compared to having our iniquity laid on the pure, holy and sinless Son of God and Him being forsaken by God because of our sins.

But Jesus, *“for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame”* (Hebrews 12:2). You are the joy that was set before Him! He willingly suffered and died to forgive your sins and give you eternal life.

From the death of Jesus comes life, but Jesus also wants us see that out of this new life comes death – death to self, death to sin, and death to this world. Jesus said, *“He who loves his life will lose it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life”* (v. 25).

A friend of mine occasionally sends me a text that says: “I hate my life!” What she means is that she hates some of the things that are happening in her life – perhaps something with her husband or with one of her children. We can often feel the same way. It is natural for us to “hate our life” when things go wrong – when things do not go the way we want them to go.

But that is not what Jesus is talking about here when He speaks of loving or hating your life. He is talking about clinging to the things of this world instead of letting them go and clinging to Jesus instead. Earlier in His ministry, Jesus put it this way: *“He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for My sake will find it”* (Matthew 10:39). Jesus also described hating one’s life as “denying oneself” (Matthew 16:24, Mark 8:34, Luke 9:23).

The grain of wheat is a picture of Jesus’ death, but it also illustrates what it means to love one’s life in the world. A farmer can sell or use his grain or plant it the next year to grow another crop. If a farmer is not willing to let his grain die in the ground but instead holds on to it, he will have nothing when the harvest comes. In the same way if we cling to this fleeting life, we will be left with nothing on the last day. *“What will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul?”* (Mark 8:36).

Jesus explains what it means to hate one’s life when He says, *“If anyone serves Me, let him follow Me”* (v. 26). To hate one’s life means to serve Christ rather than serving oneself. It means to follow Christ rather than to follow your own sinful desires. It means to put to death the deeds of the body by the Holy Spirit so that you do not gratify the desires of your sinful flesh (Romans 8:13).

When we talk about following Jesus, it is easy to focus on these “negatives” – to focus on the things that we give up and the cross that we take up. By nature we want to love our life in the world and hold on to the things we enjoy, even the sinful things that God tells us we should not do. And Satan wants us to think that following Jesus means giving up too much and that it isn’t really worth it.

But hating one’s life in this world means you *“will keep it for eternal life.”* God wants us to have something far better than our life here on this earth. He tells us that *“the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us”* (Romans 8:18).

Peter once pointed out to Jesus that he and the other disciples had left everything to follow Him. Jesus replied: *“Assuredly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or parents or brothers or wife or children, for the sake of the kingdom of God, who shall not receive many times more in*

*this present time, and in the age to come eternal life*” (Luke 18:28-30). The point is, Jesus’ death and following Jesus produces much gain.

And contrary to what the world thinks, following Jesus is not burdensome. Following Jesus means to be near Him, to be with Him. As Jesus here says: “*where I am, there My servant will be also*” (v. 26). Following Jesus means hearing His voice, the voice of the Good Shepherd, who leads us to green pastures. We don’t have to try to find our own way, as if we could, but Jesus is the Way. And following Jesus means to be under His guidance, protection and care. Jesus leads you to eternal life, and as Jesus says here: “*If anyone serves Me, him My Father will honor*” (v. 26). Image that: receiving honor from God the Father Himself!

Jesus did do a lot of amazing things during His days on earth. At times we may wish that we had been there see them – that we had been there on that first Palm Sunday. But Jesus points us to His most glorious act: His death on the cross to take away the sins of the world – His death that took away your sins and brought you new life. This new life, however, means death to our old one in this world. But dying to sin leads to a great harvest of praise, honor and glory when Jesus Christ is revealed (see 1 Peter 1:7). So may God grant that you always follow and serve Jesus, for where Jesus is, there His servant will be also. Amen.

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