

John 12:23-27

Lent 5; March 22, 2015

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

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. ²⁷ "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. ²⁸ Father, glorify your name!"

You ever walk into McDonald's with every intention on buying the small Shamrock shake? You walk up to the counter, and before you know it, you are ordering a large one because it really isn't all that much different in price. Your expectation of a small one satisfying you isn't going to happen. You stop at the grocery store on the way home from work. You had every intention of only picking up a few things. Your expectation of this being a quick trip doesn't happen. Before you know it, you have half a cart full. You want more, right? You had planned the party. The invitations had gone out. The food is ready. You expected a great turnout, but only a few people showed up. You expected more, right?

Expectations. We have them all the time, don't we? Sometimes, our expectations are met. Sometimes, our expectations and reality can be so far apart. What are your expectations of God? Think of Job in the Old Testament. After he had lost his health, his wife had this advice for him: **"Curse God and die!"** (Job 2:9) Not too high of an expectation from God? Yet, right after that Job also **"cursed the day of his birth. He said: 'May the day of my birth perish.'"** (Job 3:1-3) After Jesus had fed the 5,000, John tells us that: **"Jesus, knowing that they intended to come and make him king by force, withdrew again to a mountain by himself."** (Jn. 6:15) Their expectations of Jesus were much different than his.

Sometimes there is a different between what we want to see in Jesus, and what Jesus wants us to see in Him. Today in our last, **"I tell you the truth"** statement he wants us to see that out of *death comes life* and out of *life comes death*.

"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." This week I read that there are about 50 kernels in one head of wheat and up to 17,000 kernels in just 1 pound of seed. If each of those 17,000 kernels can produce a plant that has another 50 kernels, you can see how fast you get to some really, really, really BIG numbers. Yet, each of those seeds must "die" before they can produce "life." After they die, there is a lot more life that will come from them.

Jesus is applying this picture to himself. He was born to die. Jesus' whole purpose in coming to this world is to die. That is the complete opposite of what God has made us to do. God made us to live, not to die. When God created Adam, he breathed into Adam **"the breath of life,"** not *"the breath of death."* But for Jesus, flip it around. He took on human life, so that He could die.

Why would Jesus die? **"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."** Jesus doesn't want to be the single seed of eternal life. He wants his death to bring life to all the seeds in this world. He wants us to have life with him. That's why we bring our children to the waters of baptism. Through that water and the Word, he gives life! We come to the Lord table, so that we might eat of his Supper to give us life. That's we come here on a Sunday (Monday). We come to hear how Jesus' death gives us life.

This wasn't going to be easy for Jesus. **"Now my heart is troubled, and what shall I say? 'Father, save me from this hour'?"** That little baby that was born in the manger and wrapped with cloths is going to have nails driven through his hands and feet on a cross. His flesh would be torn by whips and thorns. Any other human being would be trying to find any way to get out of what was about to happen to Jesus. But not Jesus. This is his mission. This is why he came. He has come so that death might give life.

That death of Jesus changes everything for us. It gives us life, so that out of life comes death. **“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.”** (Try saying those sentences a few times without getting tongue tied.)

We love our lives. I’m not saying that we may always love everything about our lives. We may not always like our jobs, our health, our cars, etc. We may not always like our looks or weight. We might not always like our hair or lack of hair. But we love our lives, right? Let me rephrase that: *By nature, we love ourselves.* We like to think that we are in control over everything in our lives. By nature, we can be so selfish and so self-centered. Last week I was outside by the house showing one of our students here how to jump on a pogo stick. I think he was surprised that I could even do it. Then, having confidence in myself, I did it again. Except that time, after a few bounces, I found myself doing not too graceful of a fall on my backside. (I guess I can’t do it like I used to.)

Jesus came to change our focus and give us new life. When we realize what Jesus went through to give us eternal life, the unselfish sacrifice he made for us; our selfishness and focus on ourselves doesn’t look so good. Then we see that the life, that Jesus gives us, puts to death that sinful nature. We find joy in living for Christ and not for ourselves.

This isn’t going to be easy in our lives. We can’t do that 100% of the time here on earth. This life-death struggle will go on every day of our lives. Yet, through the death of Jesus we will have eternal life. That life helps us to put to death our sinful nature.

What’s your expectations from God? We have a God wants us to see that out of Jesus’ death we get life. That life puts to death that sinful life in us. As we approach so much more closer to Good Friday, may we take comfort in the words of Jesus: **“I Tell You the Truth... If One Dies, It Produces Life for Many”** Amen.