

Lent 5
March 22, 2015

"Jesus Compares His Death to Seed in the Ground"

JOHN 2:20-33

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. 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!" Then a voice came from heaven, "I have glorified it, and will glorify it again." ²⁹ The crowd that was there and heard it said it had thundered; others said an angel had spoken to him. ³⁰ Jesus said, "This voice was for your benefit, not mine. ³¹ Now is the time for judgment on this world; now the prince of this world will be driven out. ³² But I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself." ³³ He said this to show the kind of death he was going to die.

It happened on a cold day in January 1982. An airplane bound for Florida took off from Dulles International Airport in Washington, DC and crashed into a bridge going over the Potomac River. Most of the people died instantly except for five people who clung for life aboard a piece of the airplane's tail. The people who were on shore had no way of getting out into the river with its broken up chunks of ice. But then a police helicopter came and lowered down a rope to those who were clinging to life. One man grabbed the rope and tied it, not to himself, but to one of the other passengers. The helicopter came again and the man did the same thing again until all four were rescued. When it came back a fifth time to rescue him he had slipped into the icy cold water and was gone. This man, Arland Williams, sacrificed his life for total strangers he did not know.

As much as we are moved by stories of people giving their lives to save others, we are more deeply moved by Jesus, our Lord and God from all eternity, setting aside his glory as God to give his life for us. Jesus gave his life for hell bound sinners like you and me.

Today we want to take a closer look at Jesus sacrificial love for us as he compares his upcoming death and resurrection to seed being placed into the ground. First we will look at how much Jesus wanted to give his life for us. Then we look at how much his heavenly Father wanted him to give his life for us.

Jesus wanted to give his life for us

Before we see how determined Jesus was to give his life for us let's take a closer look at these Greeks who wanted to see Jesus. "Now there were some Greeks among those who

went up to worship at the Feast. They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, with a request. "Sir," they said, "we would like to see Jesus." What are Greeks doing in the temple of Jerusalem during the Passover? Were they tourists who were fascinated by the stories they heard about the beauty of the temple, and its sacrifices and its renowned singing? No, these Greeks came to worship the Lord. When Solomon dedicated the first temple he prayed that all nations might come and know about the true God. These Greeks come to Phillip and politely ask him, "Sir, we would like to see Jesus."

And what does our Lord Jesus do when Philip and Andrew bring these Greeks to him? Jesus talks about his upcoming suffering death with the illustration of seed being planted into the ground. "Jesus replied, 'The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. 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.'" You don't have to be a highly educated Greek to know what happens to a seed when it is placed into the ground. The little children in school plant seeds into cups filled with dirt. Every day they come to class to see how much their seed has grown. Only when the seed dies is it able to produce a plant that bears more seeds.

Every spring I watched my dad plant corn and oats and wheat and soybeans in the fields. We watched the plants grow. Each kernel of corn produced a plant with ears of corn that had many seeds, perhaps as many as 800 seeds of corn on each ear. The seed that was planted into the ground died and produced many more seeds. God's Son gave his life for us so that we might become sons and daughters of our heavenly Father in large numbers.

Imagine for a moment that you have been chosen to take the diseases of the world on yourself, die for them, rise from the dead and eliminate all disease forever. Every form of cancer, every virus, heart disease, diabetes, everything placed is placed on you. What a privilege that would be to go through terrible pain and suffering and death and then rise again. Jesus did not take the diseases of the world on himself when he died. He took the sin of the world upon himself. Isaiah 53 says, "The Lord laid on him the iniquity of us all." He died and was buried, gave his life and was raised up again that he might bring forth the seeds of new people who have eternal life through him and are free from eternal death and suffering.

Notice now how Jesus applies this concept of dying to live to our lives. "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. Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honor the one who serves me." I am born into this world with something bad that needs to die. I am born believing it is all about me. I can do what I want to do and I have the power within me to work at living a good enough life to save myself. Faith or believing is setting aside this bad life. Faith means we hate and kill our thoughts, our plans, our desires, our dreams and our hopes for salvation. Faith is accepting the death and burial and resurrection of Jesus. Faith results in following and serving Jesus even to the point of dying for him. The ultimate service we can give Jesus is to cling to his cross for salvation and live new lives out of love for him.

What a privilege it was for these Greeks to see how determined Jesus was to die for them as he compared his suffering and death to seed planted in the ground. Now another privilege is given to them. With their own ears they are able to hear the heavenly Father

Speak from heaven and confirm his support for Jesus.

Our heavenly Father wanted Jesus to give his life for us

Jesus does not hide his emotions and feelings from these Greeks who have come to him. "Now my heart is troubled, and what shall I say, 'Father, save me from this hour'? No it was for this very reason that I came to this hour. Father, glorify your name." Jesus saw what was coming. Just as the soldier who fought in wars has flashbacks to the past, Jesus had flash forwards to the future. This happened in the Garden of Gethsemane when he told his disciples he was overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death as he thought of the bitter cup of suffering he had to drink.

Our second lesson for today said of Jesus, "He offered up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears to the one who could save him from death." How often Jesus went off alone by himself to pray and ask his heavenly Father for strength. Here he prays in front of these Greeks for the Father to save him from the dreadful hours that were ahead. He prays that he might glorify his Father's name in all that he does.

The heavenly Father heard the anguishing cry of his Son. "Then a voice came from heaven, 'I have glorified it and will glorify it again.'" Some people thought the loud voice was thunder. Others said it was an angel speaking. Jesus knew it was the voice of the Father giving him the assurance that when he gave his life like seed in the ground, the Father would glorify him by raising him back to life again. The night before his death in that upper room with his beloved disciples Jesus prayed for this glory to come to him. "Father, the time has come. Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you....And now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began."

Jesus needed this voice of his heavenly Father but he also wanted the Greeks and us to hear that voice speaking to us. He says, "This voice was for your benefit, not for mine." Jesus benefited from the voice of his Father speaking from heaven. He already heard the Father speak at his baptism and at the transfiguration with the words, "This is my Son in whom I am well pleased." Now the Father speaks again. We benefit from hearing our heavenly Father pronounce his clear approval of what Jesus has done. When the work of saving us is completed Jesus will cry out "It is finished." Then the Father will raise him to life again and pronounce his approval on the work Jesus would complete of saving us.

Survivors from the plane crash had to trust the helicopter would take them to safety. How can I be 100% certain and sure that what Jesus did on the cross is good for me? I can be sure because my heavenly Father glorified Jesus by raising him from the dead.

Oh how much Jesus was looking forward to destroying the power of Satan. Once again it is these Greeks who have come to worship in Jerusalem are privileged to hear Jesus say, "Now is the time for judgment on this world; now the prince of this world will be driven out. But I, when I am lifted up from the earth will draw all men to myself." Oh, how Satan chortled with delight and danced his little gig beneath the cross of Jesus as he watched Jesus suffer. But then the victory shout came "Father into your hands I commit my spirit." It is the death and resurrection that drives Satan out of lives and keeps him from accusing us day and night before the Lord's throne. As we sing in our Easter hymn: "The Foe was

triumphant when on Calvary The Lord of creation was nailed to the tree. In Satan's domain did the hosts shout and jeer, For Jesus was slain, whom the evil ones fear. But short was their triumph; The Savior arose, And death, hell, and Satan he vanquished, his foes. The conquering Lord lifts his banner on high; He lives, yes, he lives, and will nevermore die."

These Greeks heard Jesus speaking about giving his life for us with the comparison of the seed planted into the ground. These Greeks heard the Father speak from heaven like thunder that he would glorify his Son when the work was done. This morning your ears have been privileged to hear what they heard that day. They asked Phillip "Sir, we want to see Jesus." What a blessing they received in their lives. What a blessing is also ours.

The story is told of a young pastor who came to a small struggling congregation determined to build it up and see it grow. Oh, how he preached powerful sermons that challenged people to live better lives and also to bring more people to church to hear his sermons. Then one Monday morning he found this little note on the pulpit where he preached, "Sir, we want to see Jesus." He was stunned, shocked and shaken. He reread his sermons and found them lacking in talking about Jesus. He vowed with God's help to never preach without letting his people see Jesus. A few months later he found another message: "Sir, we have seen Jesus. Today we have seen Jesus compare his death to seed placed into the ground. Amen.