

A Planted Seed

Just a few days before Jesus is to be crucified, He has demonstrated His power over death by the resurrection of Lazarus, He has entered Jerusalem to a welcoming crowd, and now He prepares His disciples for the coming events surrounding His death. John records a conversation that may help us as we prepare for the coming celebration of Easter.

Let's open our Bibles to the 12th chapter of John and begin reading with verse 20.

Now there were some Greeks among those who were going up to worship at the feast; these then came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida of Galilee, and began to ask him, saying, "Sir, we wish to see Jesus." Philip came and told Andrew; Andrew and Philip came and told Jesus. (John 12:20-22 NASB)

Some Greeks were in the city of Jerusalem for the coming Passover feast. We are not told that they were proselytes but they were interested in the Jewish faith enough to be in Jerusalem during this time of celebration of the Passover. They may have been there on the Sunday when Jesus was welcomed as king. We are not certain how they knew of Jesus but we find that they want to meet with Jesus. They approached Philip to request an audience. It may be that Philip had a Greek name so they felt more at ease to speak with him rather than one of the other disciples. All of this is conjecture for the Bible does not reveal anything more than the request to see Jesus.

As we move to the next section of scripture, we are left with the unanswered question of whether Jesus met with them. It seems that this request by the Greeks served as a catalyst for Jesus to address His coming death.

And Jesus answered them, saying, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. (John 12:23-24 NASB)

As we mentioned earlier, we are not told if Jesus spoke with the Greeks who requested an audience. However, John recorded the words of Jesus just a few pages back that speak of "other sheep."

I am the good shepherd, and I know My own and My own know Me, even as the Father knows Me and I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep. I have other sheep, which are not of this fold; I must bring them also, and they will hear My voice; and they will become one flock *with* one shepherd. (John 10:14-16 NASB)

This appears to be a reference to the Gentile world. They are the sheep that are not of the fold of Israel. The fact that the Greeks came to Jesus would indicate that those outside of the nation of Israel knew of Jesus and were ready to come and learn more from Him. The time is near when Jesus must lay down His life for the sheep. The timing is right for all of the sheep to be merged into one body under one shepherd.

In order for Jesus to be glorified, He must be planted. This is a direct reference to His burial which will occur in just a few days. He is telling His disciples that His burial is like planting a seed. Some translations call this seed a grain of wheat while some call it "corn of wheat." The word that is translated as "corn" is the word that means "a kernel of seed." Regardless of the word, it is clear that the planting of a seed results in a productive plant. The analogy is clear. Until Jesus dies and is buried (planted) His kingdom cannot grow and produce the fruit that will replicate more "Jesus-fruit" to spread beyond the limited few disciples who followed Jesus. At this point, Jesus turns from His sacrifice to address the sacrifice required of His disciples.

He who loves his life loses it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it to life eternal. If anyone serves Me, he must follow Me; and where I am, there My servant will be also; if anyone serves Me, the Father will honor him. (John 12:25-26 NASB)

Just as Jesus obeyed God to the point of death, Jesus tells us that if we live in such a way as to spare our life, we will end up losing that very thing we seek to save. If we seek to save our earthly life, we will end up losing our eternal life.

As we read this passage, it is good to note that Jesus is using two different words that are translated as life. The first is generally rendered "soul" and denotes the individual personality, with all its related experiences and achievements. We think of this when we hear someone say they have had a good life or life has been good. The second is usually coupled with the adjective "eternal" in John and means the spiritual vitality that is the experience of God. When Jesus was in the garden awaiting the arrival of the soldiers to arrest Him, He prayed to God and in that prayer, Jesus gives us the essence of the life that is the experience of God. **This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent (John 17:3 NASB)**

When Jesus tells us that we must hate our life in this world, He is using hyperbole and not suggesting that we must literally hate our life. Rather, as His disciple, we will follow Him even to the point of being planted. If we want to be with Jesus, we may need to go through the same journey He made on this earth. If we live in this manner, we will view our life (earthly) through a different lens than we would if we don't follow Jesus.

Will this be easy? No! Was it easy for Jesus? No! We see this as we read on into the next portion of the 12th chapter of John. Jesus is reflecting on His coming death. He knows that it will be a torturous cruel death and He is troubled.

“Now My soul has become troubled; and what shall I say, ‘Father, save Me from this hour’? But for this purpose, I came to this hour. Father, glorify Your name.” (John 12:27-28a NASB)

We all need to understand that Jesus did not want to die. He faced death as anyone else might face their death on the cross. The three synoptic gospels tell of the painful prayers Jesus lifted to God while in the Garden of Gethsemane.

Then Jesus came with them to a place called Gethsemane, and said to His disciples, “Sit here while I go over there and pray.” And He took with Him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and began to be grieved and distressed. Then He said to them, “My soul is deeply grieved, to the point of death; remain here and keep watch with Me.”

And He went a little beyond *them*, and fell on His face and prayed, saying, “My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; yet not as I will, but as You will.” (Matthew 26:36-39 NASB)

Mark's gospel shares that Jesus tells God, in His prayer, all things are possible with God let this cup pass (Mark 14:36). At least three times Jesus asked God to spare His life. Yet in each case, Jesus submitted to the will of God.

Jesus knew that His purpose for coming to earth involved His death. He tells us this when He says: **But for this purpose, I came to this hour.**

Jesus was not only submissive to the will of God, He wanted God to be glorified through His death. Glorified, is one of those “churchy” words that I have been told is unfamiliar to non-church folk. So, let's look at the definition of the word.

According to Merriam Webster Dictionary. Glorify means 1a) to make glorious by bestowing honor, praise, or admiration; 1b) to elevate to celestial glory.

Jesus is asking that His death will make others honor, praise, and or admire God. In this time when many of us would be lost in self-pity, Jesus had turned it around to place God first and keep God above all other concerns.

As we return to John the 12th chapter, we know Jesus did not want to die yet He has told His disciples that is the purpose for Him being on earth. As He faces death in the next few days, He directs the disciples toward the aim of Jesus. That aim is to bring glory to God. When Jesus said: **Father, glorify Your name**, John records the answer from heaven.

Then a voice came out of heaven: “I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again.” So, the crowd of people who stood by and heard it were saying that it had thundered; others were saying, “An angel has spoken to Him.” Jesus answered and said, “This voice has not come for My sake, but for your sakes. (John 12:28b-30 NASB)

On three occasions, God speaks from heaven for those around Jesus to hear. First, when Jesus is baptized, God expresses that Jesus is God’s son and that God is pleased with Jesus. Then, on the mountain of transfiguration, God tells the Peter, James, and John, that Jesus is God’s son and they are to listen to Him. Now, as Jesus is ready to be planted in death, He calls for this act to glorify God. God once more tells those listening that His name is glorified in Jesus but will be glorified again.

Each time God spoke from heaven He points toward Jesus and expresses His approval of Jesus and His mission on earth. God is pleased and wants us to see that Jesus acted solely on behalf of God.

Jesus knew that He must lose His life and symbolically be planted as a seed in order to achieve the will of God. God’s will and plan was to bring salvation to mankind through Jesus.

Jesus then calls on us to be planted to the degree that we lose our life to this world and gain our life in Him.

Are we ready to become the seed that is planted in the rich soil of Jesus? Are we ready to bear much fruit in God’s kingdom?