Jesus A Kernel of Wheat

John 12:20-36

Key Verse 12:24 “Very truly I tell you, 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.”

John 12 is known as a transitional chapter from Jesus’ ministry of healing and teaching to his ministry of passion and glorification. In fact, Jesus was anointed by a woman at Bethany as the preparation for his burial. Jesus entered into Jerusalem riding on a donkey in order to fulfill his redemptive mission as a Savior King. In today’s passage Jesus compares himself to a kernel of wheat and predicts his death and resurrection directly and indirectly. In the parable of a kernel of wheat Jesus teaches us also what kind of life we must live as a man or woman in Christ.

Look at verses 20-22. “***Now there were some Greeks among those who went up to worship at the festival. They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, with a request. “Sir,” they said, “we would like to see Jesus.” Philip went to tell Andrew; Andrew and Philip in turn told Jesus***.” It was not clear whether the mentioned Greeks were native Greeks or the Greek- speaking Jews who came from Greeks resident towns such as Decapolis. They also might have been the converted Greeks who came to Jerusalem to worship at Passover. Either way they were gentiles to the Jews. The Jews provided a space for the gentile pilgrims to worship in the temple court during the festival. The Greeks came to Philip, whose name sounds Greek, and requested to see Jesus. Philip didn’t go to Jesus directly, but went to Andrew to consult. Philip and Andrew wondered why the Greeks were looking for Jesus.

How did Jesus respond to them when he heard about the visit of the Greeks? Look at verse 23. “***Jesus replied, “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified***.” The hour indicates Jesus’ crucifixion and glorification through his resurrection. In John’s gospel Jesus often mentioned ‘the hour.’ (2:4,7:6,12:23, 17:2) This shows that Jesus always followed God’s time schedule for his messianic ministry. When Jesus heard the Greeks wanted to meet him, he came to realize that the hour of his death and resurrection had come. Jesus believed that the Greeks represented the whole world. Jesus was waiting for the hour for him to be crucified and glorified for the whole world.

Jesus explained how he would glorify the Father and the whole world through the parable of a kernel of wheat. Look at verse 24. “***Very truly I tell you, 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 parable is the lifecycle of a seed according to the law of nature. After a seed or a kernel falls to the ground and is buried, it germinates to bring forth new life. For the germination for new life, the hard shell which covers the seed must be rotten and opened. If it is not rotten and opened, the seed remains only a single seed, and there will be no product. But if it is rotten and opened, the seed begins to sprout a new bud which grows to become a productive plant or tree. We call this process of seed decomposition ‘death.’

Jesus compared himself to a seed. He fell to the ground and died to produce many seeds. He was sent into this world and born as a baby in a manger like a mustard seed. He suffered and died for the sins of the world. He was buried like a seed and rose again from the dead with a new resurrection body. Jesus went through the process of ‘death.’ In 1 Corinthian 15, Paul said that Jesus became the firstfruits of all resurrection. All those who follow him will be raised like him. (1 Co 15:20-22) Through his death and resurrection, people of all nations for all generations in past and present and future will live as he lived. In this parable Jesus foretold how he would die in the future. He would be nailed to the cross and be buried in the tomb. But God would raise him from the dead and make him the firstfruits of all resurrection.

Jesus’ sacrificial life as a kernel of wheat looks beautiful and admirable. Still, it was not easy for him to become a kernel of wheat. It was not easy for him to die. It is not easy for us to die, either. What does ‘die’ mean to us? Paul said in 1 Corinthians 15:31, “*I die every day*.” ‘To die’ means to die to sin and to live for Christ according to Paul in the book of Romans (Ro 6:11). To die means to proclaim a death sentence to our sinful desire and to make a daily commitment to Jesus for new life. In other words, I no longer live in me, but let Christ live in my heart for my life as Lord and King. Paul said in Galatians 2:20. “*I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me*.” According to Paul, when we die, we accept Jesus’ lordship over our lives and obey him.

How can we follow Jesus? What does “follow Jesus” mean? Jesus said, “*Whoever wants to be my disciple (to follow me) must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me.*” (Mt 16:24, Mk 8:34, Lk 9:23) Denying ourselves often makes us feel like dying. Denying our pride, selfishness, jealousy, hatred, and anger often leads to a fierce spiritual battle within us to overcome these desires. Paul said in Galatians 5:24, “*Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.*” When we said ‘No’ to sin, and ‘yes’ to Jesus, our inner self is changed and grows into the beautiful image and mature character of Jesus Christ. Through the process of decomposition of our sinful nature we grow as fruitful and productive servants of Christ.

There have been many Christ- like- seeds in church history. Paul lived as a kernel of wheat like Jesus. Through his death and life, the gospel was preached to all nations. Peter lived like Jesus as well as other disciples. Jim Elliot’s life reminds us of the life of Jesus as a kernel of wheat. Right after he married, he went to Ecuador as a missionary. He chose God’s calling rather than his honeymoon trip. In the jungle of Ecuador he was killed with his four other missionaries. His death did not end with a sad story. The blood which he shed in the jungle was not in vain. It fertilized for a rich harvest. Among the Indians the one who had witnessed his death became a convert and later a pastor for the whole town. Not only the town, but also his neighboring towns were evangelized a decade later.

Missionary Sarah Barry came to Korea in 1957 as a missionary. Through her sacrificial and kernel like life of missionary, God had started UBF ministry and used her so preciously for the whole world. Let us pray for our sacrificial life of mission to be a kernel of wheat. Let us die to our sins and live for Christ. Let us pray for God’s work to raise many sacrificial and spiritual leaders, missionaries, Bible teachers, and history makers through the coming ISBC. Amen. Jesus taught us the principle of life. “No cross, no crown”. “No death, no resurrection.” “No pain, no gain.” Amen.

Jesus explained the meaning of the kernel of wheat in verses 25-26. “***Anyone who loves their life will lose it, while anyone who hates their 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.***” In these verses ‘hate their life’ does not mean suicidal or self-torturing ascetic, but sacrifice and self-denial for eternal life. In verse 25 there are two kinds of life. The first ‘their life’ is *psyche* in Greek which means “temporary and physical life’ and the second life is *zoe* in Greek, which means ‘eternal, spiritual, fulfilling, and blessed life.” Jesus meant that we need to sacrifice *psyche* to gain *zoe.* There is the problem that people are ignorant of *zoe*, and even though they realize the value and importance of *zoe,* they prefer *psyche* to *zoe*. They desire and pursue visible, tangible and materialistic benefits more than spiritual and eternal blessing from God. Jesus urged his disciples to follow him. “*Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honor the one who serves me*.” Missionary Jim Elliot hated his life in this world to gain eternal life. So he said, “*He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain that which he cannot lose.”*

Jesus said, “*Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. For on him God the Father has placed his seal of approval.*” (Jn 6:27) Jesus’ words give us a direction for our lives: For what purpose and with what hope we should live on this earth. Jesus did not save his life for himself, but gave it for the world. We follow his way. Jesus put his hope in heaven. We put our hope in heaven, too. Dr. James Dobson, the founder of ‘Focus on the Family’ used to be a good tennis player when he was in his high school. He won many championships, and his trophies and medals were displayed in the hall of fame at his school. A long time later he had a chance to visit his high school, expecting to see his old glory. But, when he visited there, they were all gone. When the school was renovated, all his old trophies and medals were dumped into trash cans. At that time, Dr. Jim came to realize that all the glory in this world was like the old and tarnished trophies and medals which had been thrown into trash cans. The prophet Isaiah said in Isaiah 40:6,7, “*A voice says, “Cry out.” And I said, “What shall I cry?” “All people are like grass, and all their glory (faithfulness) is like the flowers of the field. The grass withers and the flowers fall*…” In last days those who do not have the name of Jesus in their life will be thrown into the fiery lake of burning sulfur. (Rev 21:8)

In verses 27-34 Jesus explains how he glorified God the Father through his death and resurrection. Look at verses 27-28a. “***Now my soul 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. Father, glorify your name!***” Here we learn that Jesus’ heart was troubled not because of his upcoming death, but because of something else; his disciples. Jesus was ready to follow God’s will by obeying the cross. He was prepared to glorify the Father through his death on the cross. So, he said, “*Father, glorify your name*!” But his disciples were not ready.

What was God’s response to Jesus’ request? “***Then a voice came from heaven, “I have glorified it, and will glorify it again.***” God the Father accepted Jesus’ submission and glorified him. God is glorified through those who obey him and is going to glorify them. When we live by faith, God’s name is glorified through our obedience. He will glorify us because his name is glorified through us. Look at verse 29. “***The crowd that was there and heard it said it had thundered; others said an angel had spoken to him***.”

Jesus continued, “***This voice was for your benefit, not mine. Now is the time for judgment on this world; now the prince of this world will be driven out. And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself***.” (30-32) Here, Jesus predicted his death on the cross and glorification through resurrection. Jesus would be lifted up and nailed to the cross. He would also be exalted highly and glorified as the Lord of resurrection. All people of all nations would come to him and prostrate him.

But the crowd did not understand Jesus’ words. According to the law they thought that if Jesus were the Messiah, he should not die, but live forever on this earth. (34,35) They did not know that the Messiah should be an atoning sacrifice for the sins of the world. Jesus urged them to live as children of light. Those who have Jesus in their hearts walk in the light as children of light. (35,36)

In today’s passage Jesus taught us the parable of a kernel of wheat. Jesus urged us to live for the glory of God, not for our physical life in this world. We must die to produces many fruits. We must die to our sins and live for Christ. We are like kernels of wheat, which were blown from Springfield, the Philippines, and Korea. When we die for Christ, we will produce many seeds of life in this land. When we do not die, we will remain only a single seed. Let us read verse 24 together.