

12. Dying like a Seed

Biblical material: 1 Sam. 2:12–3:18; 13:1-14; Zech. 4:1-14; Rom. 12:1, 2; Phil. 2:5-9.

Quotes

- God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pains: it is His megaphone to rouse a deaf world. *C.S. Lewis*
- Nothing begins, and nothing ends, That is not paid with moan; For we are born in other's pain, And perish in our own. *Francis Thompson*
- Pain hardens, and great pain hardens greatly, whatever the comforters say, and suffering does not ennoble... *A. S. Byatt*
- To live is to suffer, to survive is to find some meaning in the suffering. *Roberta Flack*
- It would be a great thing to understand pain in all its meanings. *Peter Mere Latham*
- We must all suffer one of two things: the pain of discipline or the pain of regret or disappointment. *Jim Rohn*

Questions

Does our dying speak more than our living? In what way does God want us to die? In our submission to God, what is He looking for? Does this mean asking no questions? In his comment on the dying seed, is Jesus stressing death or life? What is a “living sacrifice”? How do we avoid falling into “sullen submission”? How do we reveal God to the universe in what we think/do?

Discussion

We need to “submit,” the lesson suggests. It’s interesting to note that the very word “Islam” means “submission” (to God). We need to ask in what way does God “require” us to submit...

Romans 12:1, 2 gives us some insights here. We are not just “dead meat,” but “living sacrifices.” God still wants conscious thought, for he values our freedom and individuality. He wants us to have wonderful lives, but knows that with our bent towards evil we need the healing only he can provide. He does not want the “sullen submission of a rebel,” but the loving agreement of a friend. Only then, with our gladly given permission, can he help and heal.

Additionally, the lesson (Wednesday) states, “When we rely on our own judgment as opposed to trusting God’s Word, we open ourselves up to all sorts of problems.” The question is, how do we make decisions? While human judgments may be defective, how else are we to decide except by using our brains? The answer is in combining the evidence of God’s word together with logic to make sure we make well-informed and reasoned decisions.

What of our individuality—is this what’s supposed to die? When Jesus spoke of the seed dying, he was stressing the transformation that needs to happen, not the death. In fact, the seed is really “becoming alive” far more than dying! Yet without that change from a dry seed to a living plant, there can be no growth...

When Jesus spoke of the seed dying, to whom was he referring? 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. 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.” John 12:23-26 NIV. This is the meaning of having the

mind of Christ, as noted in Philippians 2. The selfless self-giving of God is at the center of the whole framework of the universe, the core concept that gives each of us the freedom to decide and to choose. God does not demand, but freely shares with us, inviting our love and agreement that all he made was good, very good.

Our real life-decisions are on issues of what is right and true, who is truly good and trustworthy. Only as we see that this dry seed of a life, with its lack of growth and apparent lifelessness, must be planted, get wet, and lie in the mud for a while—only then can new life come to us, and we can sprout and grow into a productive “plant” full of living vigor. The image from the natural world is a telling one. It tells us that we need to be concerned for those around us over ourselves, that the greater good is more important than our little selves, and that most of all, the way of God is the only way we can truly live and become all we should be.

Comment

“The pious sectarian is proud because he is confident of his right of possession in God. The man of devotion is meek because he is conscious of God’s right of love over his life and soul. The object of our possession becomes smaller than ourselves, and without acknowledging it in so many words the bigoted sectarian has an implicit belief that God can be kept secured for certain individuals in a cage which is of their own make. In a similar manner the primitive races of men believe that their ceremonials have a magic influence upon their deities. Sectarianism is a perverse form of worldliness in the disguise of religion; it breeds a narrowness of heart in a greater measure than the cult of the world based upon material interest can ever do. For undisguised pursuit of self has its safety in openness, like filth exposed to the sun and air. But the self-magnification with its consequent lessening of God that goes on unchecked under the cover of sectarianism loses its chance of salvation because it defiles the very source of purity.”

Rabinranath Tagore

Ellen White Comments

And all who would bring forth fruit as workers together with Christ must first fall into the ground and die. The life must be cast into the furrow of the world’s need. Self-love, self-interest, must perish. But the law of self-sacrifice is the law of self-preservation. The seed buried in the ground produces fruit, and in turn this is planted. Thus the harvest is multiplied. The husbandman preserves his grain by casting it away. So in human life, to give is to live. The life that will be preserved is the life that is freely given in service to God and man. Those who for Christ’s sake sacrifice their life in this world, will keep it unto life eternal.

The seed dies to spring forth into new life, and in this we are taught the lesson of the resurrection. All who love God will live again in the Eden above. Of the human body laid away to molder in the grave God has said, “It is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption: it is sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory: it is sown in weakness; it is raised in power.” 1 Cor. 15:42, 43. {COL 86-7}

A sullen submission to the will of the Father will develop the character of a rebel. By such a one service is looked upon as drudgery. It is not rendered cheerfully, and in the love of God. It is a mere mechanical performance. If he dared, such a one would disobey. His rebellion is smothered, ready to break out at any time in bitter murmurings and complaints. Such service brings no peace or quietude to the soul. {ST, July 22, 1897}