

Sermon- Dying to Give Life

Scripture: John 12:20-26

Sunday, April 28, 2019

We are back in the Gospel of John narrative. Because we have just celebrated Resurrection Sunday last week we are in a sense going back in time to the point where Jesus was still preparing for his death. I have skipped verse 12 -19 which dealt with his triumphant entry into Jerusalem because Abraham dealt with that part of the story on Palm Sunday. God willing I will preach on those verses at some point in the future. But for today we are going to be in the section just ahead of that from verses 20-26. In today's section we see two very interesting things. The first is that Jesus talks about his dying as a necessary step that would give life to others. But Jesus explains his future act here not in terms of his unique mission but as something of a universal principle that everyone who wants to follow him must also do. The Second we see is how Jesus sensed the time for him to die had come. Today we are going to look at both these aspects in this sequence.

First, the Necessary Death Principle. In verse 23 Jesus says *"Now the time has come for the Son of Man^[1] to enter into his glory."* In John, "his glory" we know is a specific reference to Jesus' death on the cross. But instead of talking about his own death, he talks about why all his followers also need to be ready to do the same. Jesus does know how to make people squirm doesn't he? 😊 Anyway to make his point he uses a parable from the world of farming his audience knew well. The parable or mini parable in this case talks about a kernel of wheat. Now Jesus explains that the kernel of wheat when it is put into the soil, in that place where it is dark and alone, something happens. It dies. Not literally of course. But a seed dies in the sense that it gives up its shape and form. But when a seed gives up its shape and form, it turns into a new form. It becomes a plant. And that plant has a new function. It is to produce more seeds and those seeds

become a source of life to many people. Then in verse 25 he Jesus breaks out of the world of the parable and applies the seed analogy to people, *“those people who love their life in this world will lose it, but those who care nothing for their life in this world will keep it for eternity”*. In other words, those people who never want to give up their old ways of thinking, old habits and goals for their life in exchange for the new way of life will die a dangerous death, because it will be an eternal death. I want us to think about this principle in life for a minute. I want to give you two examples from our world for your consideration. The first example is this missionary called Sadhu Sundhar Singh. Now Sadu Sundhar Singh was one of the most remarkable Indian Christ followers born in India in 1889. He came to Christ at a young age on 14, was baptized at 16 at which age he became a missionary who wore the traditional saffron robes of Indian holy men. One of the things he became famous for was walking across the Himalayas into Tibet during the summer to preach the Gospel. Even though it was summer this route involved a trek through the mountains above the Perpetual Snow Line. Which means it this place was so cold that there was snow throughout the year. Now our missionary was always in his simple yellow robe and bare feet wherever he went. As you can imagine this is one of the most treacherous treks you can undertake. The mountain passes are extremely narrow in places. Every now and then white-out conditions and blizzards erupted out of the blue. It was not uncommon on that route to see both people and Yaks adapted to that environment fall off those dangerous ledges to their death. Now as Sadhu Sundar Singh and a Tibetan companion were trekking this path, they saw a man who had fallen down a steep ledge. Sadhu Sundar Singh offered to carry his companion on his back and climb down the ledge to check on this man who had fallen down. His companion however would have none of it. He told Sadu Sundar Singh that if he, the Christian was foolish enough and holy enough to risk his life on that dangerous escarpment, he could go ahead, but that for he was going to “save himself”. Sadhu Sundar Singh then proceeded to climb down himself and when he reached the

man who was fallen discovered that he was alive. So he put him on his back and climbed back up to the path and resumed his journey with this man on his back now. It was no doubt a difficult journey walking on a treacherous mountainside path with blizzards blinding you and pushing you in all directions. Now imagine doing it, carrying someone on your back the whole way. But by the power of the Holy Spirit they managed to reach the village of Ranget in Tibet. But a few feet before they reached, Sadhu Sundar Singh found someone lying prostrate half buried in the snow. It was his former companion frozen to death on the side of the street. What had happened is that even though carrying someone on your back makes a difficult mountainous trek even more difficult, their body heat warmed and sustained each other. While his former companion who was going to save himself without the burdens of anyone else ironically frozen to death. When he saw his former companion the words that came to his mind was, *“he that saves his life shall lose it and he who loses his life for my sake shall find it”*. Sadu Sundar Singh then shared the story of Jesus with his companion who was revived by now about this person called Jesus who also gave up his life to save others. He that loses his life will save it and he that saves his life will lose it.

This dying to self can take many forms. In fact it is embedded into our bodies even at a cellular level. Let me explain. I am sure you have heard that in your DNA there are a number of genes. Genes have the code for every single aspect of our body from the color of your eyes and skin even to things like our tendency to gain weight etc. But among the millions of aspects of our bodies that genes code for, one is particularly interesting. There is a gene called P53. And one of the things P53 is responsible for is something called “Programmed Cell Death”. It literally tells the cells in your body when to die. Sometimes this gene does not function properly and is unable to do its job. When that happens cells that are supposed to die don’t die and instead they keep dividing and growing without limit. This results in a disease that everyone of you I am sure has heard of. It is called cancer. And in cancer you know that because the tumor

refuses to die, one day and it keeps growing and growing, then one day the whole body dies including that tumor that was too stubborn to die. Jesus said, *“Those who love their life in this world will lose it. Those who care nothing for their life in this world will keep it for eternity”*

Now this dying for you and me does not involve going on a physical cross. But it does involve letting go of our old ways of thinking, our old drives and habits that were formed out of our self-will and not something that was God driven. Dying to self can take many forms. Sometimes this means putting your finances on the line, sometimes it might be putting our physical safety on the line in the example I gave you, sometimes it could be risking your career or maybe your reputation. If you are willing to give up that thing which is central to your life, and this part is very important, so that you can do what God wants you to do, that is the kind of “give up your life” that Jesus is talking about. When you give up your life, for God’s purpose, then you will have eternal life. That is what Jesus is talking about.

Now, in life and death, timing is everything. The writer of the book of Ecclesiastes notes in chp 3:1 *For everything there is a season,*

a time for every activity under heaven. ² A time to be born and a time to die, a time to plant and a time to reap.

When you look at Jesus’ life he was very clear about how his life played out. There were different phases to his life. The first phase of Jesus’ life was pure preparation. And he took 30 years to prepare for 3 years of ministry. Think about that one. Then when he started his ministry he established himself by doing miracles and teaching about who he is. He took three years to do this. By the end, large crowds started following him. If he was on social media you could say he had more “Likes” on his channel than anyone in the country at the time 😊 But not only that the people following Jesus would have done anything for him. You know why? Because they knew about his power and as long

as Jesus used his power to give them what they wanted, the people would do what Jesus wanted. This is the one sentence summary of what was happening on Palm Sunday. Now while Jesus did not care for the praises of the people, He did want them to pay attention to him. And on Palm Sunday the whole Jewish nation was paying attention. And how did Jesus manage this? By focusing his efforts on that one people group. Jesus knew his earthly mission very well. In Matt 15:24 he writes, I was not sent to anyone except to the **lost sheep of the house of Israel**. While Jesus lived and died for the whole world, in his finite human form he had a very clear and finite mission. In his entire earthly ministry Jesus only travelled within the nation of Israel. Some have calculated Jesus' total travel distance to be just 2400 miles. For an average American who puts 10,000 miles on their car a year, that does not sound like much. But here is the deal folks. Jesus was very narrowly focused on reaching the Jews and that is all he did. But when you accomplish your God given mission in your field so well, even people outside that field hear about you. For example, none of us in this room are astronauts, right? Yet, how many of us have heard of Neil Armstrong? I am guessing everyone. In the same way, in Jesus' case, he was so well known in the Jewish people that even non Jewish people started hearing about him. So our scripture says that Greeks who had come up for the Passover were so impressed by what they heard about Jesus that they wanted to meet Jesus. These people could have been proselytes, meaning Greeks who converted to Judaism or they could be God fearing Greeks, that means people who had heard about Yahweh, and something inside of them made them wanted to find out more. Whatever they were, news about Jesus had spilt over even into their world and they came to meet Jesus.

When this happened, it was a signal to Jesus that his teaching phase was completed. And this helped him see that he could move to the next part of his ministry. The part where he dies and rising again. Because Jesus was so keenly aware of what his life mission was, he could see when it was time to move on. Now here is where it gets

difficult for most of us. You see, Jesus recognized that it was time to die, not when the walls were closing in on him and he had no choice. Jesus recognized that it was time to die, when he got so famous that even non Jews who he was not focused on wanted to meet him. To be able to give up all that fame and power for the cross, would mean not in the least bit being affected by the fame and admiration of this world. It would mean, being so mindful of the benefits of eternal life that you are not going to hold on to any of the perks that this world can give you. There is a big dying right there in side of you to be able to walk away from that Palm Sunday moment. When we think of the days just after Palm Sunday, we tend to focus just on the fact that the people turned on Jesus. But you have to remember that the people turned on Jesus because Jesus deliberately did things that he knew would lead to the crowds deserting him. Jesus knew that if he did not overthrow the Romans everybody would leave him. Jesus had the power to over through the Romans. Yet he did not. And the crowds left him. But in the big picture, everything worked Jesus Jesus got the timing of every move right. There was a time to build the crowd and their was a time to let it go. God can ask you to build and God can ask you to tear down. God uses those people for him mission who will not let themselves come in the way of his tasks. But God also needs people to pay attention to God's signals of when to move and when to stay like the Israelites in the wilderness. There is a time to be born and a time to die. But it is God whose timing we must follow, not our own.

So here is the take away. When you follow Christ, he will call you to what you need to do. Be razor focused on this mission. Be willing to do anything for God. Don't let yourself come in the way of anything God asks you to do. But know also that all work is to be executed in seasons. And if we are paying attention, God will tell us what season it is. Pay attention to God's timing. That is how God uses his servants to birth new life. I hope that that is how God will use each one of us. Let us pray.