

Don't Remain Alone

I've attended 3 funerals so far this calendar year. Two of them were for men who lived into their late 80's, one being George Sandru, and the third funeral for little Guidance who had a very short life. There is quite a contrast between a funeral for a child and someone who has lived a long life, but both are difficult. But as I attended these recent funerals I was struck by the idea that these individuals were now more alive than they ever had been. Now for little Guidance, he had a rough time because of health issues and family issues that lead to him being placed into foster care with the Larson's. His life was much improved going from his initial situation to being with the Larson's, but then improved again as he went to be with Jesus. George Sandru's life was very full, and hearing stories of the people he had impacted was very inspiring. The other gentleman was my nephew-in-law's grandfather. He had been a minor league baseball pitcher and was a good college basketball player and was in the hall of fame at the college he attended (which also happens to be the college my wife attended). He was an avid sportsman, he trained dogs, taught high school, sold insurance. The man packed much into his life. Yet, as he enters into eternity, I believe in Christ, he now starts to finally truly live.

In one sense it is true that death is an enemy, an invader into God's good creation. But in another sense God has established a principle that true life comes through death. And so in the natural when a believer dies we look to the fact that they will rise again to eternal life, and one greater than the life lived here on this earth.

This applies while we live on this earth as well. So too when we die to our ways and our selves we rise to live a life greater than that which we live on our own. So today we're going to talk about seeds and life through death.

John 12:24-25

"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. 25 " He who loves his life loses it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it to life eternal.

God ingeniously designed fruit and vegetables to reproduce by putting their seeds inside something that is tasty. So that when an animal or a person takes that fruit they disperse that seed elsewhere, reproducing the crop. Some plants produce many seeds, whereas there are only a handful of seeds in an apple or just one big one in an avocado. In the case of wheat, the seed actually is the fruit. That is the part we grind up to make bread or cakes or whatever. So let's look at this passage together.

1. Fall to the ground

"Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth...

My first point is that the seed must fall to the ground. Obviously if you plant a seed you are the one putting it into the soil. But Jesus uses this picture, and gives the kernel of wheat a choice. The first part of this is critical – we must first fall into the ground. This idea of falling to ground is seen in some different respects in scripture.

For example, Mary fell to Jesus feet when her brother Lazarus died.

John 11:32 Therefore, when Mary came where Jesus was, she saw Him, and fell at His feet, saying to Him, " Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died."

In this case she was falling before Jesus in desperation and grief. She was wishing Jesus had been there, but perhaps deep down still had hope in what Jesus could do.

Another example was the Samaritan leper who was the 1 thankful one out of the 10 lepers cleansed, who upon realizing he had been cleansed ran back to Jesus and fell at his feet and worshipped Him.

But a key one I want to talk about was the example of the rich young ruler, because I think that it is relevant to many of us in this day and age. You may not think of yourself as rich (or young), but relatively speaking compared to historical standards we are rich in many ways.

It says that he fell to the ground to worship Jesus, and then asked him what he must do to inherit eternal life. Now this shows good intention doesn't it? He wants to know how to live beyond the present time. But it says upon receive Jesus instructions he got up, and went away sad.

So even though he fell to the ground, he did not stay there. He was not willing to die to his own desires.

2. The way of life comes through death.

"Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, ... The key point of this passage is that the way of life comes through death.

1 Cor 15:36 How foolish! What you sow does not come to life unless it dies.

So this principle applies to us as well. We do not truly come to life until we die.

How does a kernel of wheat die?

Biologically speaking, the kernel, or wheat berry, is the seed from which a wheat plant grows. The wheat germ is a small part of the kernel, about 3% of it. It is the embryo of the wheat plant, and actually feeds off the endosperm when the seed falls into the ground

and dies. That main white part is where white flour comes from. The wheat bran is the insoluble part of the wheat, which goes into bran flakes and compost toasties and stuff like that.

The kernel of wheat, when it goes into the ground, becomes something new and different. The outer husk, the bran part is lost. Think of that as our outward life, our appearance and projected self. Part of the seed, the meat of the seed is consumed. That is like our inner self, our thoughts and imaginations. These parts go away so that wheat germ can grow and become a plant. So we have to let our outer guard down and let it be penetrated by the life giving water of God's word. Then the new life of God put into us by the Holy Spirit can grow as it consumes our inner life, our thoughts, our desires, our motivations.

How did Jesus die?

Jesus said this verse in reference to his soon coming crucifixion, but in fact, Jesus demonstrated this principle in multiple ways.

1) He became a man:

Phil 2:5 Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus:

6 Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, 7 but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.

So it started there – emptying himself. He left his throne in heaven. He left his glory and the continuous worship of angels. He left the constant communion with his Father. And he took on the nature of humanity. Important theological point here, Jesus didn't cease being God, but in addition to being fully God, he became also fully man.

What an incredible inconvenience. How about us? **Are we willing to leave our comfortable places to go where we are needed?** To the place where we are of service to our Father's work?

2) He resisted the temptation to take a short cut

When Jesus was tempted by Satan, he was being tempted to get worship and adoration without the hardship of the cross.

Matt 4:8 Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. ⁹ "All this I will give you," he said, "if you will bow down and worship me."

¹⁰ Jesus said to him, "Away from me, Satan! For it is written: 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.'"

3) He became obedient

Phil 2:8a And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient

Now look at this a bit deeper. It was evident even when he was yet a child. Remember when his family went to Jerusalem, and on the way home his parents couldn't find him. They eventually found him asking the teachers at the temple questions.

Luke 2:49 "Why were you searching for me?" he asked. "Didn't you know I had to be in my Father's house?" 50 But they did not understand what he was saying to them.

51 Then he went down to Nazareth with them and was obedient to them. But his mother treasured all these things in her heart. 52 And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men.

Then later, he is pressed into doing a miracle by his mother at the wedding feast in Cana when they had run out of wine. But ultimately, it was his Father's work that he came to do.

John 9:4-5

4 As long as it is day, we must do the work of him who sent me. Night is coming, when no one can work. 5 While I am in the world, I am the light of the world."

While Jesus walked the earth he did the work His Father gave him to do. And notice the "we" in John 9:4. This really stood out to me when I was reading this verse because Jesus is showing us how we ought to be. Remember too that Jesus also told us that we are the light of the world.

4) He became obedient to death on the cross

I didn't include this earlier, but here is another example of someone falling to the ground. It is Jesus in the garden before his crucifixion.

Matt 26:39

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."

Jesus expressed the reality of his humanity here, acknowledging that he was not wanting to go through with the Father's plan. He went to the ground asking if there was another way. But yet he submitted to it.

Go back with me now to the garden of Gethsemane, and imagine an alternate ending to that familiar scene. Now, I do believe that Jesus was making a real choice at that moment. When he said, let this cup pass from me...Jesus was a willful being who had a choice to make. So let's imagine what might have transpired had Jesus not died. What if he could have skipped the cross and lived on forever as an earthly man. He could still be here, preaching and teaching and healing the sick. Crowds of thousand could see him in person, and certainly billions could join in to live webcasts. Would that have been a better plan?

No. He could not have made atonement for sin if he had not died. He would not have ascended into heaven to be glorified by the Father. The Holy Spirit would not have been sent which is the power of new life within every believer. We would be left trying to imitate Christ with our unregenerate flesh and failing miserably as opposed to being made new creations being changed from the inside out.

If Jesus never died that physical death, the multiplication that has come because of the giving of the Holy Spirit would not have happened either. George Hill brought this up in his exhortation last week. Because Jesus died and rose, and the Holy Spirit was sent into the hearts of believers, the body of Christ grew from 120 on the day of Pentecost to 3000, and from then till now to billions of believers. Jesus fell to the ground, and submitted himself and fell into the hands of his Father. And those hands first had to crush his son before glorifying him.

*Isa 53:10 Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise Him;
He has put Him to grief.
When You make His soul an offering for sin,
He shall see His seed, He shall prolong His days,
And the pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in His hand.
11 He shall see the labor of His soul, and be satisfied.
By His knowledge My righteous Servant shall justify many,
For He shall bear their iniquities.*

It says it pleased the Lord to bruise Him...But to what end? That by his death he would see life. That his days would be prospered and prolonged. That he would see the labor of his hands and be satisfied. And justify many!

So by falling to ground in surrender and falling into the hands of his Father, from complete obedience on earth to his physical death on the cross and being put in a grave, the fruit of all believers, the life of all believers belongs to Jesus.

Ways to die

So what about us? Are we willing to die? Again? Daily? There is a letting of go of everything, a dying to everything, but a coming alive to the person of Jesus and the eternal life that Jesus gives. When was the last time you truly asked God – am I doing what you want me to be doing? Or are you calling me to something else? How do we walk out dying to ourselves?

In marriage

Eph 5:25 Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her

Men – do you consider what God is calling you to be in your wife’s life that she can become everything God wants her to be? You are called to love her sacrificially.

In friendships

John 15:13 Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends.

1 John 3:16 This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers.

Loyal friends. Ones that are there for you when you need them. Who sacrifice of themselves to serve you. That should be evident in the life of the church. Do you think about what you are doing to serve your friends?

For the mission

Phil 2:17 But even if I am being poured out like a drink offering on the sacrifice and service coming from your faith, I am glad and rejoice with all of you.

Acts 20:24

4 However, I consider my life worth nothing to me, if only I may finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me—the task of testifying to the gospel of God's grace.

Are we giving our lives to complete this task of testifying to the gospel of God’s grace? Are we willing to give up our comfort, our time, our resources, our reputations, for this one great overarching mission?

Note that in all of these things, whenever we die to ourselves there is a time of being alone. We may sense great loss for a time – just as Jesus had to endure being rejected by his closest friends and losing all of his earth-bound support systems. But he endured it so the fruit might come.

3. The consequences – remain alone, or bear much fruit

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We have a choice to either remain alone, or bear much fruit. Are you looking to find your life? Like this quote? “I’ve gone to find myself. If I get back before I return, please keep me here.”

Sin is self-consuming. You may think you are in control, but you really aren’t. Drug addiction. Sex addiction. Greed. Thirst for power. You become a black hole within yourself that cannot be satisfied. You become empty, and miserable, and you bring

darkness into everyone else's life around you. Sin ultimately and inevitably leads to intense loneliness that leaves you longing but unfilled and unfillable. (Briar bush)

Are you still a seed? Are you still alone in yourself seeking for yourself your joy and your kingdom? Think about that seed. If it falls on hard or stony ground and stays on top, it will either get eaten up or it won't change. But if it goes into the ground, and goes deep in the soil, it is transformed into something different than it was before.

If you choose your own way, you will end up alone. Now you may not be without friends in this life, but after this life, there will be no hope. No one to bring joy or comfort to your soul.

Or have you chosen to not only fall to the ground, but to fall into the ground. To die to who you wanted to be or who you think you should become, and live for only Christ and His Kingdom. We are called to lose our lives that we might gain his.

To lose is to gain, to die is to live.

Jesus endured everything because he could see beyond what lay immediately in front of him to what lay ahead further down the road.

Heb 12:2

Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. 3 Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.

So Jesus saw what was ahead – he clearly wasn't focused on just the cross. He knew he had to go there, and he did so willingly, but he set his eyes forward on the joy that lie after the cross. Like it said in the Isaiah passage Jesus looked ahead to the justification of many, and the satisfaction his soul would receive in that labor.

Charles Spurgeon said "It is on the cross, it is from the cross, it is through the cross that Jesus mounts to his throne."

So he endured the cross. He didn't enjoy it, he endured it. And we are called to die to ourselves and we will not enjoy it, but we know there is joy in completion of the labor.

Our choice really, is between death and death. No matter who you are, one day you will lose everything. One death though, that of our own way for God's way leads to life. The other way, which is to live for ourselves leads to death that lasts forever.

My challenge for all of us today is to once again ask Jesus what he desires of us. It is real easy to just go along and believe we're doing what Christ wants from us...ask him again. Be willing to die to your own ideas of what you think you should be doing and be willing to die to your ideas to listen to what he might say.