**The Cross & Fruitfulness**

**Series #2 - At The Cross**

Jeremiah 26:7-15; Philippians 3:17-4:1; John 12:20-26; Ps. 4 3.17.19

Summary: Death comes before resurrection. In John 12, Jesus is telling us death comes before ministry.

Intro: Having lived for 3 years in Illinois and Indiana I have at least a bit of understanding for the rivalry of I.U., Notre Dame and Purdue Universities.

 Two engineers, one from I.U. and the other from Notre Dame, were out in a yard standing by a flagpole, vigorously discussing something. A student from Purdue happened by and asked what they were arguing about. "Oh," replied the student from I.U., "we were discussing how best to determine the height of this flagpole and what equation to use."

 "That’s easy enough," declared the Purdue student, and he took the pole out of the ground, laid it down on the grass, pulled out his tape measure and declared: "It’s 10’ 6" long."

 As the student from Purdue walked away, the engineer from I.U. turned to the one from Notre Dame and declared: "Isn’t that just like a guy from Purdue. You ask him for the height and he gives you the length." ☺

 The college boys were CONFUSED between LENGTH and HEIGHTH.

 We live in a world where HEAVENLY things CONFUSE our EARTHLY minds. The fact is, there are many of these in the Bible:

We find rest under a yoke - Matt. 11:28-30

We are exalted by being humble - Matt. 23:12

We reign by serving - Mark 10:42-44

We are made great by becoming little - Luke 9:48

We are made free by becoming His slaves - Rom. 6:18

We conquer by yielding - Rom. 8:37

We become wise by being fools for Christ’s sake - 1 Cor. 1:20, 21

We see unseen things - 2 Cor. 4:18

We triumph by defeat - 2 Cor. 12:7-9

We wax strong by being weak - 2 Cor. 12:10

We find victory by glorying in our infirmities - 2 Cor. 12:5

But perhaps most difficult of all for us:

We live by dying - John 12:24,25; 2 Cor. 4:10,11

Here are some Difficult, Blessed & Glorious Truths in the Kingdom of God:

**I. Death Comes Before MINISTRY/SERVICE to God.**

John 12:23-25 is a hard saying: *"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."*

 Jesus is basically telling His disciples that TO LIVE they need TO DIE. That’s not a comfortable teaching. Why not? Because most of us are not in a big hurry to die.

 As much as our hymns may talk about going home to heaven. "When the roll is called up yonder..," "When we all get to heaven," etc.. When the time comes to cross the great divide, even the most spiritual tend not to be too homesick. We’ve grown accustomed to this world. We’ve trained ourselves to defend our lives, our loved ones, our possessions. We’ve trained ourselves to survive, here on planet earth.

ILLUS: When the Apollo project was beginning, there arose an argument between the engineers and scientists over how to make the best use of the space on board the rocket.

 The scientists wanted as much space as possible for lab work, the engineers wanted it for backup systems in case something failed. They were at a stalemate until they asked the astronauts. What would you have decided for - lab space, or backup units? What do you think they opted for? That’s right - survival. They wanted backup units for their safety and assurance to be able to complete the mission and return home.

 So Jesus is telling us that if we want to experience the ABUNDANT LIFE that He promised in John 10:10 that we will have to DIE to self, because we can’t let our SELF get in the way if we WANT TO find fullness through SERVICE TO God an others.

 And so, Jesus tells us our very usefulness - our FRUITFULNESS for God - is tied to our willingness to SURRENDER our lives, even to die for Him.

**II. Dying Produces Fruitfulness in Our Lives.**

 One Commentator noted that there are 6 instances where Jesus mentions BEARING FRUIT as a Christian - and 5 of those are tied to the cross or dying.

 In Short - it is in dying... not in doing... that we bear FRUIT for God. OR, to put it another way: Placed in the position of obeying God when it might be very costly to you… . WHAT WILL YOU CHOOSE?

 The Bible gives examples of those who chose to avoid obedience when the price was too high:

1. 10 spies who went into Canaan (we looked like grasshoppers)

2. Rich Young Ruler (Jesus looked on him and loved him - sell all that you have)

3. Peter denying knowing Christ (3 times)

 They all regretted their decisions.

 In Contrast, the Bible gives amazing episodes where people were willing to DIE SPIRITUALLY and perhaps physically for God.

1. Abraham sacrificing Isaac - "*God will provide*…"

2. Job - "*though He slay me, I will serve Him*"

3. Joshua - "*Choose you this day whom you will serve..."*

4. Shadrach, Mesach, Abednego - *"Our God is able to rescue us...but even if...we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold…."*

5. John the Baptist - *"He must increase, and I must decrease"*

 Each of these people made HARD DECISIONS and SUCCEEDED where lesser men would have failed. Why was that? Because of a PRINCIPLE found in John 12:26 "*The Father honors those who serve..."*

 And so, in the ecomony of God . . .

**III. Death Comes Before Resurrection.**

 Certain seeds must die in our lives:

**1. The Seed of your Priorities**

 I like to share with people that it’s great to believe in Jesus as your Savior, that gets you to heaven. But it is more right to also ask Jesus to be the Lord in your life. It means giving Jesus complete LORDSHIP, or ownership of your life.

 John Maxwell correctly taught in one of his seminars I was in some years ago that when some church member is struggling with LORDSHIP, perhaps wondering if he/she has DONE enough for Jesus, Maxwell says, “Show me two things, show me your daily calendar and your checkbook.” He said “Then I can tell if you are really living in LORDSHIP. I point to a calendar. Every day of the week belongs to God. Lordship means my work time and my free time belongs to God. It is no longer my own. Your salary, or income belongs to God, so, are you giving the tithe, or just leftovers?”

 Luke 9:59-62 *He said to another man, "Follow me." But the man replied, "Lord, FIRST let me go and bury my father." Jesus said to him, "Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and proclaim the kingdom of God." Still another said, "I will follow you, Lord; BUT FIRST let me go back and say good-by to my family."*

 *Jesus replied, "No one who puts his hand to the plow and LOOKS BACK is fit for service in the kingdom of God."*

 That verse…v.62…was spoken to me the summer of 1975, I had just made the decision to enter seminary that fall, I was still on the family ranch, this statement spoken by a business associate in the cattle business that I had never met before I recognized as a voice of confirmation from God that I was going the right way. It wasn’t the first time I had been told I should study for the pastoral ministry, but I hadn’t listened before then.

 Another seed that must die is….

**2. The Seed of your Possessions**

 John Maxwell, who is a prominent voice in teaching leadership in the church, as I just stated, emphasized that for those who want to become Christians that all we own belongs to God. Our finances, our savings, our job, our family, our home, our cars, etc. - they all must be His if He is to be Lord of my life.

 Rev. 3:15-17 (Laodicea) *I know your deeds, that you are NEITHER COLD NOR HOT. I wish you were either one or the other! So, because you are LUKEWARM-- neither hot nor cold-- I am about to spit you out of my mouth. YOU SAY, ’I am RICH; I have acquired WEALTH and do not need a thing.’*

 Wealth means nothing when it comes to opening heavens doors, but wealth can be put to use in the kingdom of God here on earth.

 Another seed that must die is….

**3. The Seed of your Personality**

 In Philippians 2:5-8 we’re told: *"Your ATTITUDE should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he HUMBLED himself and became obedient to death-- even death on a cross!"*

 Jesus in answering Satan’s bread temptation basically told him: "I don’t have to survive. I’m willing to die." When Jesus was in the garden before crucifixion He prayed: "*If it be possible, take this cup from me yet, not as I will, but YOUR WILL be done."* He was willing to die to fulfill His purpose. And because He was willing to die, He gave us life through His resurrection.

 Death, to self, must come before we are effective in service to the Lord.

 Death, to self, must come for our service to be fruitful.

 Just as our death, physically, will come before our bodily resurrection.

CLOSE: That which appears to be death to us is often that which gives life. In his book, "Written in Blood," Robert Coleman tells the story of a little boy whose sister needed a blood transfusion. The doctor explained that she had the same disease the boy had recovered from 2 years earlier. Her only chance for recovery was a transfusion from someone who had previously conquered the disease. Since the two children had the same rare blood type, the boy was the ideal donor.

 "Would you give your blood to Mary?" the doctor asked.

 Johnny hesitated. His lower lip started to tremble. Then he smiled and said, "Sure, for my sister."

 Soon the two children were wheeled into the hospital room, Mary, pale and thin; Johnny, robust and healthy. Neither spoke, but when their eyes met, Johnny grinned.

 As the nurse inserted the needle into his arm, Johnny’s smile faded. He watched the blood flow through the tube.

 With the ordeal almost over, his voice, slightly shaky, broke the silence, "Doctor, when do I die?"

 That’s our BIG QUESTION for today, “When do I die, so I can be fruitful?”

**Prayer:** Lord God, help us to define our faith and to understand that Jesus desires to be more than a Savior in our lives and to understand that when we die to self and live for Jesus as our Lord, then will we realize the abundant life you promised to us, now and forever. In Jesus name. Amen.