

THE SEED OF REDEMPTION IN THE SOIL OF SACRIFICE

John 12:23-25

A little girl was terribly ill. She needed a blood transfusion to live. Because she had such a rare blood type and the need was so urgent, the only other person they could turn to was her twin brother. The doctor tried to explain to the little boy how sick his sister was. The only thing that would make her better was for him to give his blood. The little boy was visibly shaken. He was scared, but he bravely said, "I'll do it." He lay on a table opposite his sister with the tubes and medical equipment all around them. His sister looked over at him and weakly smiled at him. He tried to smile, as a tear trickled down the corner of his eye. When the transfusion was over, the boy didn't seem very relieved, but a little concerned. The doctor asked him what was the matter, and the boy replied, "Doctor, when do I die?" The little boy thought by giving his blood to save his sister's life, that he would be dying and giving his life for her. That's sacrifice!

Sacrifice is when you are willing to give up something of value to yourself to benefit someone else. A sacrifice might be taking the money you were saving for a new boat, car, motorcycle, living room furniture and giving it to someone who just lost everything they had in an uninsured, house fire. A sacrifice could be your money, your time, your possessions, your health, even your very life.

It seems like the very definition of sacrifice often includes the idea of redemption. Sacrifice without redemption is a terrible tragedy. The Wikipedia says, "The English word *redemption* means 'repurchase' or 'buy back', and in the Old Testament referred to the ransom of slaves (Exodus 21:8)" So if there is a purchase, then something of value must be given first – some sacrifice must be made. During Lent, some people give up eating one meal a day, then using the money they would have spent on that meal to give as an offering to feed the hungry. Sacrifice and redemption are meant to go together hand in hand.

During the season of Lent, when we meditate on the sacrifice of Jesus on the Cross, we also are aware of how through that sacrifice, He redeemed us – He paid the price that bought us out of slavery to sin, He bought our salvation our redemption that we celebrate on Good Friday and especially Easter Sunday. Our sermon series is: "The Seeds of Easter in the Soil of Lent." This Sunday, we're looking at how sacrifice (with it's suffering, cost, and agony) is the soil that germinates the seed of our redemption (our rescue, forgiveness, freedom and new life).

In our text in John 12, Jesus knew that He would have to give His life as a sacrifice so that we all might gain eternal life. It was at the height of His ministry. In John 11, He had just raised Lazarus from the dead. In the beginning of chapter 12, Jesus entered Jerusalem and a huge crowd cheered Him as He came into town. Even Greek Gentiles are seeking Him out now. And this is when He says in John 12:24 –"Listen carefully: Unless a grain of wheat is buried in the ground, dead to the world, it is never any more than a grain of wheat. But if it is buried, it sprouts and reproduces itself many times over." Jesus knows He only has one more thing left to do. Even if they all follow Him, the problem of sin still had to be addressed. He knows that the seeds of the Kingdom of God

have been sown, but unless they are planted in the soil of His sacrificial death, those seeds would never grow. Sin must be dealt with or humanity would never be free.

Jesus used the life cycle of wheat to illustrate what must happen. He lived in an agricultural society. Everyone from the big city of Jerusalem to the little town of Nazareth knew how to make bread from wheat. The tiny grain of wheat was planted, buried in prepared soil and then you wait. For all intents and purposes, the seed is dead and buried. But something stirs inside of the tiny grain and a sprout begins to emerge. As the grain stalk begins to grow, it produces heads with hundreds of grains of wheat. When these are harvested, they can be used to grow even more. But first the grain must be buried and die.

Another thing that might happen is that the grain is harvested, separated from the husk, then taken and ground into powder – flour. The flour is then made into dough, that's shaped into a loaf and baked in an oven to make bread. Bread is called the staff of life. It comes from dead grain. Jesus is called the Bread of Life. He sacrificed His life for our redemption. He died to give us life. And He was the only One Who could do it.

“ 18-21 Your life is a journey you must travel with a deep consciousness of God. It cost God plenty to get you out of that dead-end, empty-headed life you grew up in. He paid with Christ's sacred blood, you know. He died like an unblemished, sacrificial lamb. And this was no afterthought. Even though it has only lately—at the end of the ages—become public knowledge, God always knew he was going to do this for you. It's because of this sacrificed Messiah, whom God then raised from the dead and glorified, that you trust God, that you know you have a future in God.” 1 Peter 1:18-21

But then, what about us? Jesus' remarks in John 12 were also directed at us. Maybe some of you have seen the old 1960 movie called, Spartacus. The movie starred Kirk Douglas as the gladiator-slave, Spartacus, who rebels against the Roman empire for freedom. At the end of the movie, the Roman army has finally beaten down the rebellion and captures what is left of the slave army. However, they don't know which one is Spartacus. The Romans are willing to put aside the punishment of crucifixion for all the others, if they would just give them Spartacus. Before Spartacus can identify himself, each of his soldiers begin to shout out, “I am Spartacus.” The end of the film shows a Roman road where they were all crucified.

It made me think of when the soldiers came to arrest Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane. Jesus asked them, “Who do you want?” They responded, “Jesus of Nazareth.” Notice not one of them stood up before Jesus could say anything and shouted, “I'm Jesus!” and another, “No, I'm Jesus!” “No, it's me! I'm Jesus!” to where they were all led off to be crucified. They ran. The only one who didn't run was Judas Iscariot, the one who betrayed Jesus and identified Him to the soldiers with a brotherly kiss. Shame! Shame!

But then, I probably would have run, too. You, too. How do I know? We do it now. Whenever we're called to sacrifice something for Jesus, we run. We value our own lives, our own time, our own possessions more. We're not willing to sacrifice what we have,

because we are under the deception that what we have is more valuable than what we would gain. We want to hold onto our life – and by doing so we lose it. Verse 25 says, “In the same way, anyone who holds on to life just as it destroys that life. But if you let it go, reckless in your love, you'll have it forever, real and eternal.”

What if in the time of sacrifice, we would cry out, “Take me! I’m Jesus!” The word Christian actually means “little Christ.” We are called to be crucified with Christ, aren’t we? “Take up our cross and follow Me,” Jesus said, didn’t He? Our sacrifice might not be for the eternal salvation of anyone, but maybe our sacrifice might redeem one person from hunger, despair, hardship, even death and maybe at least point them to Jesus. If you were able to see the seed of redemption that grows and blossoms because of your sacrifice, it wouldn’t be much of a sacrifice at all. We would do it again a thousand times over because of the value of what our sacrifice bought. We would even wish we could do more, or have more to give.

Schindler's List is a 1993 American war-drama film about the true story of Oskar Schindler, a German businessman, who originally went to Krakow, Poland in 1939 to profit from the war. He was able to buy a factory that produced mess kits, but he didn’t know how to run it, so he hired Itzak Stern (Ben Kingsley) to run the factory and hire Jewish workers, from the Krakow ghetto created by the Nazis. As the war progressed, so did the Holocaust as the Nazis began putting the Jews to death in concentration camps. Schindler was horrified and with the help of Stern, spent all that he had made to save the lives of more than a thousand of Polish Jewish refugees by employing them in his factories. By the end of the war, and many close calls, his workers are freed, but he must flee, as a war profiteer who prospered under the Nazis. This scene is where Schindler is about to leave with all that he has left packed in his car. He realizes if he had given one more piece of gold, he could have saved one more life. He cries out, “I could have done more; I could have done more!” Would this be you or me?

Jesus held nothing back in His sacrifice for our redemption. Jesus gave His life – it was not taken from Him. There was only one way to set us free from the penalty and oppression of sin – that would be to die in our place – to give His own life – to shed His own blood. The One must die for the many. Only the sacrifice of the eternal Son of God could redeem us – no one else.

What are you hanging on to in this dead soil? Let it go, before it rots you out. Die to this life, and rise up to live for Christ. Through giving your life away, you will gain it. Imagine if you were to love your life less, and love others more, how would you live differently? By dying to self and living for others – you will discover your purpose. What will happen is that you will not only redeem others through your sacrifice – that love will spread like seeds in fertile soil. And you will see 10, 50 a hundred fold of those whose lives are changed.