

## 69 – A Grain of Wheat

John 12: 12-26

The greatest decision you or I will ever make is to repent and receive by faith the righteousness of Jesus Christ. That decision changes where we will spend eternity. But there is another decision each person must make which determines the outcome of our life. It's one of those decisions where to not make a decision is to make a decision. If we make the right choice our life will be "fruitful," meaning it will be full of people who are, in one way or another, being drawn closer to Jesus. If we make the wrong choice we will, essentially, live alone focused on ourselves.

Jesus compares this decision to a grain of wheat which must be planted in the earth in order to produce more wheat. He says, "Unless the grain of wheat which falls into the earth dies, it remains alone; but if it dies it bears much fruit" (Jn 12:24) (literal). And He's not talking about self-neglect or having a sour attitude toward the good things this world provides when He adds, "The one who loves His soul (natural life) loses it, and the one who hates his life in this world will save (guard, preserve) it into eternal life" (Jn 12:25) (literal).

Most humans are born with the instinct to care for themselves. God places that desire to stay alive in us, and it's healthy and necessary. When someone begins to neglect those needs people recognize it as a warning signal that something is wrong. Jesus lived a rugged life (Mt 8:20) but not a life of self-neglect or withdrawal from others (Mt 11:18-19).

For Jesus Himself to choose to be a grain of wheat that falls into the earth and dies meant that He chose to die on the cross as a sacrifice for our sins. But Jesus was unique. He alone is the eternal Son of God who came from heaven to rescue us by His physical death and resurrection. You and I aren't called to die like that. Our physical death would have no power to atone the sins of others. We're simply not good enough, and our death is not needed because His death was more than sufficient to pay for the sins of every human who ever has or will live. Yes, serving Him can lead us into danger, and many have suffered and died for their faith. But that suffering is a by-product of their obedience, not a goal that God desired for them. It was the price they had to pay but not the prize.

Yet He makes it clear that we too must become like a grain of wheat that falls into the earth and dies. So what type of death is He talking about? If it's not physical death and it's not being grumpy at the world around us, then what is it? Let's try to answer that question today because the decision we make will determine whether or not we produce fruit for God.

### Riding into Jerusalem (Jn 12:12-16)

• DBS (Thur-Sat)

### The hour has come (vs20-23)

Jesus actually made three different visits to the temple during that final week which led up to the cross. The first one, which we just read about, took place on Sunday. On that day He triumphantly rode into the city, went into the temple, looked around and then returned to Bethany (Mk 11:1-11). Apparently while He was in the temple a group of Greek-speaking people came up to Philip, who likely spoke Greek, and asked him to introduce them to Jesus. That request, for some reason, must have been awkward because Philip went to Andrew to discuss what to do. They decided to go together and present it to Jesus. He responded by saying that His time of ministering to people the way He had been doing had ended. He said His "hour" of suffering had already begun, and He was now focused on the cross. But even then, He said all these things with a crowd standing nearby and listening (v29).

### A grain of wheat

When a grain of wheat falls into the earth, it dies in the sense that it ceases to be a single seed. But it doesn't cease to exist. It actually explodes with life. It germinates, and a whole new function comes forth from within it. A plant emerges which can produce 30, 60, even 100 times as many seeds than the single grain that went into the soil. By giving up its right to preserve itself, it reproduces itself.

Now, a grain of wheat has no choice in the matter. A farmer takes that seed and plunges it into a field. But we do. Jesus makes that clear when He says, "If anyone serves Me, he must follow Me, and where I am there My servant will be also" (v26). He invites us to follow Him as He serves others. He doesn't seize us and plunge us into the ground. He Himself freely gave His life to save us, and He calls us to follow His example, not with a martyr's death, though that could happen, but by choosing to die to self (putting aside our own ambitions, safety, comfort and goals) and living instead for the salvation and healing of others.

### Choosing it

Jesus didn't say He was the only one who had to die in order to bear fruit. He said everyone who chose to follow Him must do the same thing. What does He mean? I think the death you and I have to die is simply this: We must decide to live for others rather than for ourselves. When we make that choice we focus outward rather than inward. Success becomes what happens to someone else rather than what happens to us. We choose to serve rather than be served, to love rather than be loved, to give rather than to get.



# LIFE LESSONS WITH DR. STEVE SCHELL

Teaching the Bible  
practically & understandably  
and seeing lives changed by  
the truth of the Gospel

When I look back on my own life I realize that this choice was a process, not a single event. It's something I had to grow into, in fact, I think it's something I'm still growing into. I started out by praying that I would have such a heart, but not really understanding what I was saying. I would sing songs which declared that I had selflessly given everything to God. The words sounded beautiful, and I wanted to mean them. But it was all just a distant concept, an ideal that I was choosing but had yet to experience.

Then came the real-life choices and the sense that God was leading me to go one way while everything inside me wanted to go another. I had to choose whether or not to take a selfless path rather than pursue things that made more money or impressed others. It seemed that at every "Y" in the road God would require me to go in a direction I didn't want to go. He pointed toward paths that were too hard, or too lowly, or too...." And to be honest, I went through some seasons of real sorrow as my dreams of grandeur died. I wish I could say I gladly chose God's way, but I was often a reluctant disciple who did what I was asked to do but felt very sorry for myself at the time.

## **Becoming a leader**

I recently heard a leader in the business world say this, "Leaders are made, not born." Now that is exactly the opposite of what I thought. I had realized that leadership arose out of an attitude in the heart, so I thought leaders were born, not made. But then she said this, "A leader is someone who chooses to make a positive difference. Leadership has nothing to do with position or title" (Carly Fiorina, "700 Club," CBN).

That choice, to make a positive difference, is what turns a bystander into a leader. It's the commitment to live for something beyond oneself, something bigger, something better. At its root, it's an attitude about who I am and why I'm here. Even the business world realizes the power of that choice. But when a person changes their attitude about who they are and why they're here and decides to live in such a way that their life will bring the love and truth of Jesus to others, the results are much more than financial; they are eternal.

## **Meaning it**

At some point along the way we're confronted by the reality that if we keep following Jesus, it will be too late to turn back. We will be hopelessly committed to a life of service, and at least in me, there was a fierce impulse to hold on to my options to a safer more comfortable life. I was willing to live selflessly for awhile, but I sensed I had come to the point of no return. That was when I really struggled with the question of whether or not to totally let go and follow wherever He led. I now had walked with Him long enough to know what He meant when He said a grain of wheat must fall into the earth and die. I knew how serious those words were. I had already tasted some of that "death," and it took a deep encounter with God for me to choose it again, and mean it.

## **Living it**

It's not one choice; it's many. As we read the gospels we watch Jesus Himself choosing the cross numerous times over those years. And as our years pass we discover new levels of meaning, new depths of service, new areas within our own heart that we didn't realize were there. By now we fully understand that Jesus' call is no joke. It really is a dying to things we care about. We have given up things we can never get back. The distance between us and those who didn't choose this path gets wider and wider. In tired, lonely moments we may be assaulted with feelings of envy.

But as time passes something else happens as well. The seed begins to reproduce. The selfless path has drawn more and more people into our lives. If we lack riches or prestige, we are rich in people, people we love and people who love us. And we also discover that His promise to never leave us and be with us always becomes very real. We survive on His presence. We regularly run into His arms to find the comfort and strength to go on. And we do go on because God is with us. He's an everyday fact, not a distant theology. We talk to Him; we don't debate His existence. And somewhere along the selfless path there comes a deep awareness that we wouldn't turn back even if we could. We're aware that our life has really made a difference.

## **The other side of the cross**

Jesus didn't say, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be crucified." He said, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified." To be glorified means to be made glorious. Waiting on the other side of the cross was His resurrection and His ascension into heaven. He focused His attention on the prize not the price. He set His gaze on salvation not sacrifice. The cross was simply the doorway through which He must pass in order to enter into His glory, in order to become the "firstborn among many brethren" (Ro 8:29), in order to present the Father with billions of children who love Him and will rejoice in His presence forever. He was not unaware of the horrible realities He was about to endure. As He stood in the temple courtyard that day, He had already begun to experience mental torment. He said, "Now My soul has become troubled, and what shall I say, 'Father, save Me from this hour?' But for this purpose I came to this hour" (v27). Yet He deliberately set His mind on the reward that His suffering would bring.

We must do the same. A selfless life is very costly. It involves daily choices to live for God and others. But if we'll fix our gaze on the other side of the cross, all we will see is glory.



# LIFE LESSONS

WITH DR. STEVE SCHELL

Teaching the Bible  
practically & understandably  
and seeing lives changed by  
the truth of the Gospel

## Questions

- 1) Have you chosen to become “a grain of wheat that falls into the earth and dies”? If so, where are you in the process? Are you choosing it, meaning it, or living it?
- 2) Think of someone you know who is making a “positive difference.” What is the “positive difference” that he or she has made?
- 3) Think of a time when you put someone else’s needs ahead of your own. What did you do? Would you do it again? Why or why not?