

16. A GRAIN OF WHEAT

"The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. I tell you the truth, unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds. " John 12v23,24.

This text has followed me for a while now.

- It has helped me understand some of the ways of God in my life.
- It has given me insight into some key Kingdom principles.
- And best of all - it has deepened my appreciation of Jesus.

But I met a man once for whom this text was the big stumbling block to faith.

As a student at Spurgeons College I once went on a few days evangelistic mission to Exeter. I stayed with a family where the wife was a believer but the husband wasn't. He nailed his colours on the first evening. *"I will not believe in Jesus, because he said something that I know is not true. He said that a grain of what "dies" in the ground. It doesn't!"* Nothing I could say made any difference. He had made his mind up.

Who is Jesus talking about?

Jesus is talking about Himself. He is the fragile grain of wheat. Jesus, the Lord of Glory, became a mortal man. He who was rich for our sakes became poor. The eternal Word who was with God in the beginning became flesh and lived among us. He took a frail human body.

What is Jesus talking about?

Jesus is talking about His death. He is the grain of wheat that must "die" - to fulfil his destiny. A grain of wheat must break up in the soil so that germination can take place. If it doesn't it won't produce anything. There will be no new life. No harvest. It will not fulfil its destiny. Everything in Jesus life pointed to His death. We see this in two expressions Jesus uses here.

His Hour. Jesus talks of His dying as His life's mission. He refers to his death as His "hour". As soon as he started his public ministry the clock started ticking. On one occasion in Jerusalem a hostile crowd tried to seize him, but John comments in his Gospel *"but no one laid a hand on him, because his hour had not yet come."* (Jn.7v30)

But now the hour is coming near. **v23.** *"The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified."* See what he says in **vv27,28.** *"Now my heart is troubled, and what shall I say? "Father, save me from this hour? No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour. Father, glorify your name!"* On the eve of his death, at the Last Supper, Jesus began to pray, *"Father, the hour has come. Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you."* (Jn.17v1) Jesus is a grain of wheat that must die.

His Glory. Jesus also consistently talks about this dying as his being “glorified”. Imagine that! Death on a cross and He speaks of glory. Yet we know that the cross was the most degrading, humiliating & disgusting way to die. It was reserved for the lowest of the low. Roman citizens could not be crucified. Greeks regarded it with such disgust that to even mention the cross was a breach of etiquette. And for Jews the cross signalled God and man’s rejection of the one who hung there, suspended between heaven & earth - accursed!

Yet the cross is Christ’s glory! It is not simply that Jesus’ glory would follow the shame of the cross. Rather, the shame of the cross was, *in itself*, His glory. This is the glory of the most spectacular obedience of self-sacrifice. This is the glory of the perfect God man, becoming a curse, taking on Himself the sins of the world.

How is this relevant to you and me?

1. The grain of wheat has produced a harvest & you are part of it.

You and I are part of God’s world-wide harvest. Because Jesus died, we are part of the harvest resulting from his death and resurrection. “If the grain of wheat dies it produces many seeds.” This includes everyone here who has surrendered their life to Christ. We are part of the harvest of multiplied seed resulting from Christ’s death.

Around the world there is a vast harvest still being reaped. Those who enjoy statistics tell us that there are more believers alive today than in every generation before us added together. All this has sprung up from a single grain of wheat dying in the ground! Only the end of history will reveal the extent of Christ’s harvest. What glory He deserves!

This means we are of his “seed”. We have the same DNA built in to us. We have the same capacity. His life is in us. We too can produce a harvest! Just one person can change a nation. Big things can come from small beginnings.

2. The grain of wheat contains a vital Kingdom principle.

There is a vital Kingdom principle enshrined here. This dying like a grain of wheat is the very opposite of the way of the world.

- You gain life by dying to yourself.
- You find yourself by losing yourself.
- You are rich when you give yourself away.
- You become strong through weakness.
- When you choose to be last you end up first.
- The path of true greatness is by being a servant.

Welcome to God's topsy turvey kingdom! We can see this principle worked out in two practical areas as Christians. e.g. being a Christian husband. (Ephesians 5.22-33.) and in church leadership. (Mark 10.35-45. 1 Peter 5.1-4)

3. The grain of wheat illustrates God's hidden work in your life.

God works in us most effectively under the surface - out of sight; in the darkness; when we feel at our most helpless. We feel like a fragile grain of wheat. God is at work on us.

This text popped up again in 'The Heavenly Man', the story of Chinese Brother Yun. (Quote page 338.) In Brother Yun's case it was in a Burmese prison.

Many of us have experienced God working on us in this way, though thankfully not in a Burmese jail. In my own case it was through a painful season of emotional "burn out" in the 1980'. During this time God was at work on me in two areas – my marriage and my ministry. I look back on that time now as one of the most significant and positive of my life..

Here then is a secret of fruitfulness. Let God do His hidden work in you. Like a grain of wheat buried in the ground. That way, the smallest seed can produce a great harvest.

John Wilthew. June 2005.

Questions for Discussion

1. What did Jesus mean by talking of His "hour"? And how could He refer to His coming death on the cross as His "glory"?
2. If we are of the same "seed" as Jesus, what implications does this have for us?
3. What "topsy turvey" kingdom principle is contained in Jesus words about a grain of wheat dying in the ground? John gave two examples from the New Testament (Husbands in marriage & Christian leadership). Can you think of any others?
4. A secret of fruitfulness is to let God do His hidden work in you, especially through times which seem dark. John gave a very personal example of this. Is this something you have experienced, and if so, what was it that God was working on in your life? Are going through such a time now? If so, rather than guess at what God is doing, it might be better to pray for each other.