

A DYING KERNEL OF WHEAT

John 12:12-50

Key verse 12:24

"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."

Thanks be to the Lord for our study of John's Gospel, through which we may know who Jesus is. In verses 1 to 11 we learned about the beautiful devotion of Mary, who poured out her precious nard oil out of gratitude for the new life and out of love for Jesus, to anoint Jesus' feet with it. Judas could not understand her devotion at all, because he only thought of money. But Jesus graciously accepted her devotion and said that it would apply to the day of his burial. Jesus will precious use our nard oil, which we bring to him, for the spiritual revival in Europe.

Today's text is about the entry of Jesus into Jerusalem on a donkey's back. Here we get to know Jesus as the true King, worthy of all worship, and learn about the character of His Kingdom. We also get to know the universal life principle of the kernel of wheat. Through this, Jesus teaches us how to live a truly fruitful life. Let us follow Jesus' example so that we do not try to keep our life for ourselves, but give it as a dying kernel of wheat in obedience of faith for God's mission, so that God can bring forth many fruits through our lives.

1. Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem (12-19)

According to verse 12, it was the day after the anointing in Bethany when Jesus came to Jerusalem. It was 5 days before the Passover. When the crowd heard that Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem, they joyfully set out to meet him. They had heard about the raising of Lazarus. They loved Jesus and wanted to welcome him as their

good shepherd. They believed that Jesus is the promised Messiah, who was announced in the Old Testament. So they took palm branches and covered the street where Jesus was going to walk. They cried out loudly: "Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the King of Israel!" It was a glorious, triumphant entry, worthy for a king.

Let us read verse 13 together: „They took palm branches and went out to meet him, shouting, Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the King of Israel!" Their words are a quotation from Psalm 118 and show how much people longed for the help and salvation of the Messiah. Isaiah had already spoken of the Savior who would save people from darkness, despair, disorientation and all enemies. How happy they were that the long time of waiting had come to an end and now the promised Messiah would enter Jerusalem. The entry of Jesus into Jerusalem shows us Jesus as the King of Salvation. He is God's King, who came into the world to save his people.

Let us look at verses 14 and 15: "Jesus found a young donkey and sat upon it, as it is written, Do not be afraid, O Daughter of Zion; see, your king is coming, seated on a donkey's colt." The entry of Jesus into Jerusalem reveals the character of his kingdom.

1st Jesus is the humble king

Usually the rulers come on a big white horse, showing their power and their own glory. Can you imagine Napoleon riding a

donkey? Or a statue of Kaiser Wilhelm on a donkey? But Jesus came to Jerusalem so humbly on a donkey. He did not show his power or his pride. Anyone could come to him for help. Jesus humbled himself to save us, proud sinners, from our sins and to open the way to eternal life.

2nd Jesus is the King of Peace

Normally it is part of a king's obligation to present himself as a strong and confident conqueror. As we know, rulers have always oppressed their peoples by force, no matter how they came to power. But our Lord Jesus was different. Jesus did not behave like a worldly ruler who claims a position of power. Instead, Jesus came as the spiritual king who rules the hearts of his people with humility, love and peace. Because Jesus came so humbly, He can truly rule our hearts with His peace.

In Zechariah 9:9,10 it says, "Rejoice greatly, O Daughter of Zion! Shout, Daughter of Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you, righteous and having salvation, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey. I will take away the chariots from Ephraim and the war-horses from Jerusalem, and the battle bow will be broken. He will proclaim peace to the nations. His rule will extend from sea to sea and from the River to the ends of the earth." Without Jesus the hearts of men are always full of envy, strife, competition and discontent, so they tear each other to pieces. Everyone thinks first of himself and his own advantage. But when Jesus reigns in our hearts, we have joy and peace through the forgiving grace of Jesus. When Jesus' peace reigns in our hearts, we can also have peace with others, even serve them.

Let us look at verse 16. At first the disciples of Jesus could not understand His actions. They were still waiting for an earthly kingdom. But after Jesus' death and resurrection they remembered Zechariah 9:9 and were able to understand who Jesus is. But the Pharisees were full of envy and resent-

ment and were very much afraid that the whole world would follow Jesus.

3rd Jesus entered Jerusalem to give his life

In the history of God's redemption Jesus' entry into Jerusalem has a deep spiritual meaning. Probably many people expected that Jesus would soon ascend the throne. But Jesus did not enter Jerusalem to gain power and glory, but to lay down his life as an atoning sacrifice for the sins of the world. Isaiah 53:4,5 say, "Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed." Jesus entered Jerusalem to fulfill God's plan of salvation through his death on the cross and his resurrection. His death looked like a defeat. But his death on the cross and his resurrection are the victory over the power of sin and Satan. In this way, he became the true spiritual king, who gives us true love and true peace.

It was a great challenge for the first Christians to witness Jesus as their king, because the emperor claimed this place, even wanted to be worshipped as God. In this hostile world they could have been very restless or fearful. But because they had accepted Jesus as their king, they had true peace. Like Jesus, they could serve humbly and exercise good influence. Even when they were persecuted or were to die as martyrs, they had peace in their hearts by looking to the glorious kingdom of Jesus. It is said that Emperor Nero was very desperate because Christians often went to their death singing.

Let us accept Jesus as our Savior and King in our hearts, so that we can be filled with true peace and be used as witnesses for Jesus in our generation and for the spiritual revival in Europe.

2. The life giving principle of the kernel of wheat (20-50)

In verses 20 to 22 we learn that some Greeks who had come to Jerusalem to worship asked about Jesus and wanted to see him. They remind us of the vision from Isaiah 2:3: "Many peoples will come and say, Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob. He will teach us his ways, so that we may walk in his paths. The law will go out from Zion, the word of the Lord from Jerusalem." Had the time now come that even the Gentiles would worship Jesus? Philip and Andrew were somewhat helpless if and how they could lead the Greeks to Jesus. Let us look at verse 23, "Jesus replied, The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified." The glorification here refers to Jesus' imminent death on the cross and his resurrection. Jesus' death and resurrection were the prerequisites for the time of world mission to dawn. When Jesus died like a grain of wheat, giving his life for sinners, the doors of the Kingdom of God was opened for all nations. When the disciples followed the example of Jesus, they were able to do world mission work to the ends of the earth.

Let us look at verse 24, "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." Here Jesus teaches the universal principle of life through the example of the kernel of wheat. A single kernel of wheat without devotion will always remain alone and cannot bear fruit. But if the kernel of wheat falls into the earth, it will lose its own form. Ultimately it will become a wonderful wheat plant, which will bear fruit a hundredfold. The kernel of wheat has an enormous growth potential. A kernel of wheat that hides in a box is useless. But a kernel of wheat that is sown produces fruit boundlessly.

We find the same principle everywhere in nature and in practical life. If someone does not study diligently, he cannot progress in his studies. But the one who denies himself, overcomes his desire for sleep, comfort and

pleasure, and studies diligently, can be successful and even become a doctor.

Jesus himself was such a dying kernel of wheat. He denied himself by accepting the counsel of God, namely to give up his life on the cross completely. It was neither easy nor self-evident, but meant a hard struggle for him to deny his desire to live and to walk the way of suffering and dying. This kernel of wheat has produced countless fruits of life all over the world. We are all its fruits.

We know the story of Jim Elliot who, together with 4 friends, wanted to bring the Gospel to the Waorani Indians. To reach this unreached and very feared tribe, they risked their own lives. They wanted to give their lives as a dying kernel of wheat to preach the good news. At one of the meetings all five missionaries were killed by the Indians. After this shocking incident, his widow Elizabeth Eliot could have drawnd. But she continued her husband's work by living together with the Indians. Her love and devotion moved the hearts of the Indians and brought forth a great fruit, so that today almost half of the tribe are Christians who live a changed life in Christ. Thus, many good fruits came forth from the dying kernels of wheat.

Mother Sarah Barry denied her pride and comfort as an American, humbly served the students in Korea, even imitating their lifestyle and sleeping on the floor. She denied her own wishes, even the desire to marry. Through her humble devotion, she became an example for many young people in Korea and to this day, more than 3000 devoted tentmaker missionaries have been sent all over the world.

Among these tentmaker missionaries were the nurse missionaries who came to Germany since the 1970s. They renounced the accustomed life in their beloved homeland. They did not adapt to the pleasure-seeking lifestyle of the Germans, but rather gave their lives as a kernel of wheat to serve the young people in Germany with prayer and the Word of God. Despite their hard work

schedule, they diligently served the students and had many one-to-one bible studies. They did so not for one year, not even for 10 years, but for 40 years. Through their dedication they laid the foundation for the work of God, so that many determined disciples of Jesus could be raised among the students. We still see many women missionaries giving themselves in the background to serve the work of God. Even if they experience many misunderstandings or rejection because of this, God himself works through their dedication and brings many good fruits of life.

In order to serve the work of raising up disciples in this humanistic environment, M. Peter not only gave up his profession and his doctorate. He also decided to renounce recognition, bear many misunderstandings, persecution, even being cast out, in order to establish spiritual leaders among the students and to mobilize the next generation. In this way God could bring forth much fruit through him.

Let us look at verse 25: "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." There are two kinds of life. He who wants to preserve his life in the world, thinking only of himself, and wants to find security, will remain alone and in the end lose his life altogether. It remains without fruit. But the one who hates his life in this world, who dies to sin and to his own desires and rather accepts God's will for his life, who struggles daily to obey God's calling and to be used by Him, will attain eternal life and through him God can bring forth many fruits of life.

M. Jose Ahn reported that participating in the daily discipleship training during his studies for him was like dying daily. Every day he thought that he might fail in his studies. But in the end it produced many fruits. He passed the exam, which only 2% of students passed, and was able to enter the diplomatic career. Above all, through his life for the Lord, God has brought forth many fruits of life in many countries. He testified

that his life is much more blessed than that of his fellow student, Ban Ki-Moon, who after all rose to the position of Secretary General of the UN.

I know a young woman for whom it is sometimes difficult to get up in the morning or give her time for fellowship or for bible study. But by dying to her own will, she will experience the wonderful fruit of obedience in her life and also through her life. As verse 26 says, "Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honor the one who serves me."

Look at verses 27 and 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!" And there came a voice from heaven, saying, I have glorified him, and will glorify him again." These verses are about the spiritual struggle of Jesus to choose the way of suffering. Jesus knew that the time of his suffering and death was near. He was tempted to ask God to save him from suffering. Finally he prayed, "Father, glorify your name!" He decided to fulfill God's will and glorify God. God confirmed by a voice from heaven that he would also glorify him.

Jesus regarded his suffering and death as judgment on Satan, who would be defeated and cast out: "Now is the time for judgment on this world; now the prince of this world will be driven out." (31) Jesus was full of confidence in victory. Verse 32 says, "But I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself."

Until now, the Jews were unsure who Jesus is. But Jesus urged them to decide for the light of the world. Verse 36a says, "Put your trust in the light while you have it, so that you may become sons of light." The opportunity is not always given. Now Jesus, the Son of God stood before them and invited them. They should use this chance.

It is amazing that despite the many signs of Jesus, people did not believe in him (37).

The author John considers this reaction based on the Word of God from the prophet Isaiah: "Lord, who believes our preaching? And to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed?" God told Isaiah already at his calling that the eyes, ears and hearts of the people were closed to his message. At all times the message of the gospel was misunderstood and ignored. We should not despair when we experience persistent unbelief, but invite the students all the more urgently to Jesus.

Jesus invited everyone to the end to come to him, believe in him and receive the light of life. Verse 46 says: "I have come into the world as a light, so that no one who believes in me should stay in darkness." Jesus did not come to judge men, but he came to save them. But those who despise him and his words are judged by the Word (48).

Today we have learned that Jesus is the spiritual King of salvation, who rules with his humility and peace. Jesus entered Jerusalem to defeat Satan through his death on the cross and his resurrection and to open the way to eternal life for all people. We have also learned the principle of fruitful life through the kernel of wheat. Without dying there is no resurrection, without the cross there is no crown. Let us master the principle of the kernel of wheat by dying to our sinful ego, self-love, fear of man and comfort, following the example of Jesus in obedience of faith, so that God may bring forth many good fruits of life through us.