

John 12:24

“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. “

INTRODUCTION

A Kingdom harvest

Thinking of our harvest celebration at Bromley today, I felt drawn towards this text. Here Jesus employs an agricultural metaphor, fitting for a Harvest Sunday. He helps us understand the natural law of life about sowing and reaping, which is not only true of any physical harvest, but equally spiritually true. Our concern as Christian believers and witnesses is first and foremost about the Kingdom harvest. And there are two questions which this text raises for me.

- ❖ First, if Jesus Christ has brought God’s Kingdom into this world through his death and resurrection, then what might you and I actually harvest from his giving of himself to us?
- ❖ Second, if we as Christian believers belong to God’s Kingdom here and now, then what might people be harvesting from our lives?

These are two big questions, and I don’t know the complete answers to any of them, but these questions have been on my mind and in preparation for this evening. So if you would think about these questions prayerfully with me this evening, then God might speak to our hearts in this fellowship of Christian believers.

Life as sowing and reaping

This text reminds us that life is about sowing and reaping, or giving and taking. Everything we do has an outcome. You sow a thought and reap a decision. You speak a word, and somebody hears and reacts. You lead a life that leaves its unique mark in a certain space for a certain time. Every single person leaves a legacy, or harvest, of some sort. We all are strongly influenced by the marks other people have left. Our personal world is shaped by our environment and circumstances. So we take, and we give. It’s a natural law. We understand and accept that inner dynamic.

Equally, this text alerts us to another dimension of giving and taking, which might not sit so well with us. A grain of wheat is productive only when it dies. Through losing itself, paradoxically, it multiplies itself into many other grains of seed. And so, according to Jesus, it is when one life is being given that others may have life.

In Psalm 103, 15-16 we are reminded that not every human life achieve a long lasting or wide-reaching legacy.

“As for man, his days are like grass, he flourishes like a flower of the field, the wind blows over it, and it is gone, and its place remembers it no more. “

So, we may after all, not be as important as we would have liked to be. Many of us will relatively soon be forgotten. Ultimately only one life has left an everlasting legacy, namely Jesus Christ. From his death and resurrection the whole world has received a plentiful harvest of life.

“Whoever believes in him shall not perish, but have eternal life” (John 3:16).

CONTEXT

One life – that of Jesus

When Jesus in John 12 speaks about a grain of wheat falling to the ground to die, he speaks about his own death. He does it at a point in time when he in a worldly sense was reaching the top of his career. He was only 33, but had already made a remarkable impact on his surroundings. Time and time again he had impressed and challenged the religious scholars by his wisdom, and unlike most people whose “place remembers” them “no more” (Psalm 103, 16) as the psalmist had suggested, Jesus’ “place” could simply not pretend he was not there.

Jesus had gathered his own team of disciples around him, and crowds were often drawn to him because of his teaching and the miracles he performed, one of which was the incredible raising of Lazarus from the dead. Because of that Jesus had been welcomed into Jerusalem as the King of the Jews. So, in one sense, he had achieved far more than one could dream about, and done so by the giving of himself to his own people. The harvest they could reap by having him around was absolutely plentiful. They must have felt blessed beyond comprehension! One can only imagine what he would be able to achieve as their King!

The whole world – its beneficiaries.

Yet, Jesus’ life was going to be given for the whole world, without exclusion of any people, nation or individual at any time in history. One for all and once for all was the scope of this all-giving sacrifice.

So Jesus was facing an enormous risk. By dying like a grain of wheat he would lose everything he had achieved. Humanly speaking, a grain of seed becomes nothing when it falls to the ground and dies. Also, not every grain of seed is necessarily fruitful. You need plenty to get a harvest. So how might this one life guarantee what God had in mind? Moreover, if his life in this world could be the prototype by which God’s people of promise might be transformed, then he had actually already established the Kingdom of God on earth, as first intended, hadn’t he really? So why die?

But God had entrusted his only Son with the greatest sacrifice ever to be given, that of redeeming the whole world. His life must be given! Not symbolically, but literally! Not rhetorically, but actually! Not partly, but completely. And nothing less than his own life given for us could pay our debt of sin before God in order for us to be reconciled with him.

Only Jesus owned quite naturally the righteousness of God which leads to a life in perfect harmony, so he was the only one who could reconcile us with God. Jesus had lived not for himself, but for others, in this world. Should he then refuse to die for others when that was his Father’s will?

And, should Jesus doubt his Father's intention of creating "many seeds" (John 12:24), through the dying of the only one? No! He surrendered all his life's potential to his Father's disposition, and included us all in that surrender.

"For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." (Mark 10:45)

[Christ]"Who , being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing...he humbled himself and became obedient to death – even death on a cross." (Philippians 2:6-8)

RESPONSE

Understanding the meaning of Jesus' death and resurrection

Theoretically we will never be able to grasp the depths of meaning in the cross of Christ. Only by living with him we may begin to know for a fact that Jesus actually took our place, and covered us completely, when God by the cross of Jesus called the whole world to account.

Jesus willingly stepped in where we should have been, in such a way that the Bible says, we are "in" Christ. Any better harvest from his sacrifice than this, I cannot imagine. We may reap what Jesus has sown, namely his righteousness, by which we can face God.

"It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God – that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption." (1.Co.1:30)

"Therefore, there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death. " (Romans 8:1)

Our text from John 12:24 points towards Jesus' sacrifice for our redemption, but equally toward the consequences of his resurrection. Christian proclamation may emphasise these two sides differently, but they are of course intrinsically linked. One has no meaning without the other.

Again, the meaning of the resurrection is beyond our comprehension. Because Jesus was raised from the dead, He is alive, and the power of his resurrection is transformational. The marks of his presence can be seen in the world today, through all those who believe and follow him as his witnesses. What a multiplication is that! They are the harvest of the Kingdom. They are personally involved in the ongoing sowing and reaping for God's Kingdom. They are called not to live for themselves, but take the risk of surrendering all their potential to Christ's disposition.

"I give you all"

David Wickberg, who became a great leader in the Salvation Army, wrote a song a hundred years ago, about surrendering all to Christ's service. Wickberg was leading a Spiritual Day at The Training College in Stockholm, when about hundred Cadets were getting ready to leave for their first appointments. He was moved by the prospect of all these young people giving their all to follow

Jesus. What might be the results of their commitments to service for God's Kingdom? The song is called: "I give you all and I'll go the way you have called me to go". It is known in Scandinavia, and possibly beyond and has been called "All Christians' Dedication Song". What came to mind in my preparation for this meeting was a statement in one of the verses regarding the anticipated results of ministry. Wickberg says: *"Harvest is eventually coming, filled with an abundance of fruit, a hundred fold of the seed sown in the name of Jesus."* Whether Wickberg had in mind the ultimate harvest when God's Kingdom comes in power, or simply the natural law of reaping after sowing, I don't know. Anyhow, we should anticipate a harvest for the Kingdom, because Jesus is our living Lord.

"I have nothing to offer but Christ"

I was interested to hear the sessional song of the new session of Cadets last weekend. The Messengers of Compassion, with their hands stretched out, brought this message in words and music by Major Len Ballantine:

I have nothing to give, no silver or gold; I have nothing to offer but Christ.
I have nothing to say, no words of my own, I have nothing to offer but Christ.
But such as I have, such as I know, I give to you.
Such as I am, because I'm loved, I have love for you.
Though I am broken, Though I have fallen, Though I have nothing,
I give Jesus to you.

I feel that song expressed the attitude and intention of a Kingdom people, willing to become nothing in themselves, and only fulfilled in being servants of Christ. Such lives have an impact. They make way for God's kingdom by their lives and spoken witness. They leave their marks of a new humanity. Some-one has been nourished and helped on life's journey because of them.

As people of a living Christian faith we are part of the great legacy Jesus left. With him we share the anticipation and concern of a Kingdom harvest.