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The Power of a Seed

John 12:20-26

Now among those who went up to worship at the feast were some Greeks. So these came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and asked him, "Sir, we wish to see Jesus." Philip went and told Andrew; Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus. And Jesus answered them, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. If anyone serves me, he must follow me; and where I am, there will my servant be also. If anyone serves me, the Father will honor him."

So today we're talking about the power, then, of a seed. You and I are planted here as seeds.

Seeds are pretty nondescript items in the biological world. There are seeds all around us. Every living thing produces some kind of seed. We have seed corn right here, and we have some seed beans. And there are so many seeds in the world, it's mind-boggling. When you look at a seed, you don't think too much about it. But there are a lot of characteristics of a seed that teach us about God's work in us as His seeds here on the earth, His spiritual work.

First of all, a seed can sit dormant and have all kinds of potential bound up in it, and it can sit that way for many years. About 15 years ago, I went to the store and bought a big bag of grass seed, because what happens on our acreage now and then is some guys who move snow, namely myself, will end up taking part of the grass with the snow in certain places. And so every spring, I have to go out and take some seed out of that bag that I hang up in a dry place in a shed, and then I scatter that seed in those bare areas on the grass. And lo and behold, after a little while, grass starts to grow there again.

I had that same bag for 15 years, and I hung it up in a dry place. And last year, I went out and sowed some of the last seeds in that bag. Now, they didn't germinate like they did in the first year that I bought it, but I can tell you this: after 15 years, some of those dormant seeds still sprouted grass and bore the fruit that I was hoping they would bear.

Seeds can be dormant and hold all kinds of signs of potential inside themselves for many, many years, and so can you and I. In the spiritual sense, God put us here as seeds, and we're biologically alive, but the spiritual potential inside of us is not yet born. The Bible says we can be dormant spiritually for

many, many years, and the spiritual potential of our lives maybe can sit there and not be released—one year, two years, three years, four years, five years.

A few years ago, I was leading a worship service here in the community entitled Fresh Wind Worship, and we opened it to the community. It was in the Western Home Communities, and a gentleman came in and sat just on the aisle right down here, and I hadn't seen him before. And I noticed that during the music, and then as I was teaching about the life that God has for us, tears were running down his eyes.

I didn't get a chance to visit with him after the service, but lo and behold, the next Sunday, he came back and sat right there on the aisle. And the same thing happened. Tears started to roll down his eyes as he was sitting there in the music, and the worship was happening, and the teaching of the Word of God was going forth. And I didn't catch him that week, but on the third week, he sat in the same spot. And afterwards, he came down and visited with me, and he said, "Tim, I want to tell you something." And I said, "Well, what is it?" He said, "I'm 85 years old, and I've been in the church my whole life. I raised seven kids in the church. I was a deacon and I was an elder, and I was doing religious things. And yes, there's some fruit from my life from doing all these things, but I've never really heard about spiritual life and the infusion of God's life in me coming alive."

And he had tears in his eyes. And at 85 years old, he started into this transformation out of sort of a biological, doing-what's-right life into this sort of spiritual transformation in his life, out of a sense of religious obligation into being what Jesus would call born again into the family of God, where he started to come alive spiritually. It was a joy to watch.

You and I, as biological seeds made alive here by God, can live in a spiritual deadness for many years, just like seeds can live with great potential housed in them for many years.

Let's talk about a seed for a moment. What needs to happen for you and I to come to life spiritually?

A seed's potential is only released when the right forces from outside of it act upon it. A seed has basically three parts. There's more than that if you study it, but basically there are three. Seeds have an outer coat, an outer shell that's hard and protective. Inside of each seed, there's a certain amount of starchy-type food that can be activated. And then there is this mystery inside of each seed. We might refer to it as an embryo, a spark of life, the potential of great life.

And what happens for a seed to be activated and for its potential to be released is that it needs to come in touch with three different things. It needs to experience the presence of moisture, of water, and that water will soften up the outer shell of the seed. And then, if oxygen is present, this process will continue and it'll be respired, and this reaction will happen, and the outer shell of the seed will soften. If it's warm enough, if the sun has warmed the earth enough, this will all take place with the energy of the sun, and germination will occur, and the power of the seed, the potential of the seed, will be released.

This is why Jesus said, when He was using agricultural illustration of spiritual things, He said, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth, it remains alone." What He was saying here is, unless it gets in touch with what it needs for that spark of life to come out of it—it needs water, moisture, oxygen, and sunlight and heat for this miracle of life to occur.

I don't know exactly how it happens, but God made it so. When all these things come together, a seed unleashes its potential, and new life starts to grow.

It's the same with you and I—spiritual life. We're planted here as dormant seeds with great potential in our spiritual life, but it needs to be released by something outside of us. It needs a touch so it can be freed and set forth to grow.

We confess this every Sunday, and here we are, three-part beings. We have an outer shell, an outer body that's temporary that God has given us. We have an inner being, a soul that says, "I want, I feel, I think"—the mind, the will, and the emotions. And the Bible says these two parts of our being are enslaved with sin. But tucked deep within us, God has placed a spirit within us that can come alive spiritually. In the recesses, in the secret place of the center of each one of us, there's a spiritual sort of embryo that God has placed there.

And if our spiritual life is going to come alive, and the entanglement of sin in our soul and our body is going to be done away with, something outside of us needs to act upon us. We are in bondage to this sin, and we cannot free ourselves.

King David understood this after sin ruled in his life. Even though he wanted to live a right, great life, he committed a grave sin before God. And then he acknowledged, "Surely I was sinful from birth, enslaved in this from my mother's womb."

The Apostle Paul acknowledged this in the book of Romans when he said, "Surely there is no one righteous, no one who seeks God." The sin inside of us takes us away from the spiritual life, away from the faith and the hope and the peace and the joy and the power that God wants us to have. There's no one who pursues this on our own.

And so then, how does a person come alive spiritually?

Paul wrote to the believers in Ephesus, and he said it this way. He said, "We've all come into this world spiritually enslaved to sin, dead—spiritually dead—in our trespasses and sins." I remember one time listening to a minister who was just observing that everywhere he went, there were people who were biologically alive, but their spirits are so downcast, they're just spiritually dead.

And our world is filled with this spiritual deadness. The Bible acknowledges this. We're born enslaved in spiritual deadness.

And then it says this: "But God"—but God, who is rich in mercy, looked upon humanity in its sinful state, enslaved by its own flesh and its own soul, entrenched in sin. God, who is rich in mercy because of His great love for us, when we were yet dead in our trespasses and sins, sent His Son into the world to be sown as a seed Himself into the grave, to deal with the power of sin in our lives and cancel the debt of sin and do away with the power of sin in our lives.

And then He resurrected from there in a new way so that His Spirit could be poured out upon us, and His Spirit could come now, and the seed of His Word could come and touch us where we need to be touched and bring us to life spiritually.

It's not religion, friends. This is the power of God and the spoken Word reaching into the hearts of people and not creating good people, but whole new people, transforming them from the inside out, helping the flesh and the sin in them be done away with, and the new life of the Spirit come alive, just like a seed transforms.

How does this happen? It's by God's grace. It's a mystery where God, in His mercy, looks on the earth and draws people to Himself. And at some point, He breathes faith into them. And through the miracle of faith, when we say we believe, our eyes are opened to the truth about Jesus, and we confess that He is who He said He is, and all of a sudden His Spirit comes in and is given to us as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come. And we're alive spiritually now, born again into the family of God.

It's not our own doing. It's the gift of God, not on the basis of any religious works or good behavior. It doesn't actually matter what your past is. When God comes to show you mercy and gives you faith, all of our sins can be washed away, and we're made alive in Him.

And how does this specifically happen?

Paul said it this way: "This faith, even if it's very little, comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God."

And now we're back to the original parable, the parable that helps us understand all the others—the seed that the sower was sowing. It's not a temporary seed, but it's the ever-living, never-dying Word of God that's embodied in the person of Jesus. And when Jesus is proclaimed and lifted up and people see Him for who He is and they start to believe, then all of a sudden the transformation of new life starts to happen through the living Word of God.

And this is why here we remain faithful to teaching this Word, and we want this Word scattered more and more in the world around us, because not only are we born into the family of God through the mystery of God's Word going forth and bearing fruit in people's hearts, but we mature and grow, and we're cleansed through the washing of the water by the Word.

So we can be made alive spiritually by God acting upon us through the proclaimed Word and coming to faith and belief.

But then there's something else about the seed.

Jesus said, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and gets in touch with what it needs to and dies, it remains alone. But if it dies, it will bear much fruit."

The process of spiritual growth and spiritual transformation is a process of continually dying and rising again. A seed's full potential can only be released when it experiences the death of one part of its nature and the birthing and bringing to life of another.

The process of germination is pictured on the screen there, where a seed is sown into the ground, and as the moisture hits the seed, it opens up. And this spark of life is infused with the warmth, the oxygen, and the moisture, and it starts to send down a root into the soil, alive now in a new way.

But then eventually, as it starts to grow upward and grow stronger and more stable, it has to cast off and burn up the old part of itself if it's going to really thrive. And so it is the same for you and I. To really grow and flourish spiritually, you and I have to allow the crucifixion of our old nature to happen. We have to be submitted to God and surrendering the things that we want, we feel, we think, and the power of our flesh. And as we surrender that to the cross, we start to get in our spirits the things that God wants, that God feels, and that God thinks. And then, miraculously, somehow, our life comes alive more.

Here is how the Apostle Paul described this process. He said, "The death Jesus died, He died to sin once and for all, but the life He lives now, He lives not for Himself, but to God." And so, in the same way, if we're going to grow spiritually after we've been born into the family of God, we have to count ourselves as dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ.

We should not let sin reign in our bodies anymore or obey its evil desires. We should surrender to God and allow those things to be dealt with on the cross. We should offer every part of ourselves as instruments of righteousness to Him, for sin should no longer be our master, but the Spirit of God in us should lead us and guide us.

And we can grow into maturity, into this, over the course of our lifetime. And how far it goes really is how far we really want it to go. But then eventually, when we step out of these bodies and we cast off the old body for good and we step into eternity, the spirit will soar, and the soul will soar even more, completely free from the old nature.

Jesus said, "Truly, truly, I say to you, speaking of us, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone. But if it dies, it bears much fruit. Whoever loves their life loses it, but whoever, in a sense, gives their life away, they'll keep their life forever."

Let's pray together.

Father, thank You for this opportunity to gather here in worship today. Thank You for this remembrance celebration that You've given us of Your Son coming here and Him being like a seed on our behalf, and that in His death and then His resurrection, we can now know the fruit of Your life in ours. Minister to each of us, encourage us, and strengthen us in our faith journeys with You. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.