

## INTRODUCTION

Consider the question that the title of this message asks: Are you a person who is just marking time, going through the motions, just living to die one day? Or have you discovered that when you die to self is when you really begin to live?

One of my favorite songs from the 1960s was "Monday, Monday" by the Mommas and the Papas. You may be able to relate to some of the lyrics: "Monday, Monday, can't trust that day. Monday, Monday, sometimes it just turns out that way. Oh Monday, Monday, you gave me no warnin' of what was to be. Oh, Monday Monday, how could you leave and not take me? Every other day of the week is fine, yeah, but whenever Monday comes you can find me crying all of the time."

In over forty years of being a pastor I've met a few sad people who thought that they would never find happiness or joy. The glass wasn't just half-empty—it was totally empty. They lived with a negative attitude and seemed to enjoy playing the role of a martyr. That's a terrible way to live. Years ago, I actually had someone describe a typical week to me. They said it starts on Monday, then there's Monday #2, then Monday #3, and Monday #4, then Friday, Saturday, and Pre-Monday." That's a sad outlook for sure.

Some people just seem to get into a rut of repetitive living. They get up go to work or school then come home, eat supper, watch a little television and go to bed. Then they get up and do it all over again. The sad thing about living in a rut is that a rut is nothing but a grave with both ends kicked out.

In our passage of scripture, Jesus gives us the liberating truth that the best way to live is to die to self.

John 12:20-32. Now some Greeks were among those who went up to worship at the festival. So they came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and requested of him, "Sir, we want to see Jesus." Philip went and told Andrew; then Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus. Jesus replied to them, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Truly I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains by itself. But if it dies, it produces much fruit. The one who loves his life will lose it, and the one who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. If anyone serves me, he must follow me. Where I am, there my servant also will be. If anyone serves me, the Father will honor him.

"Now my soul is troubled. What should I say—Father, save me from this hour? But that is why I came to this hour. Father, glorify your name." Then a voice came from heaven: "I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again." The crowd standing there heard it and said it was thunder. Others said, "An angel has spoken to him."

Jesus responded, "This voice came, not for me, but for you. Now is the judgment of this world. Now the ruler of this world will be cast out. As for me, if I am lifted up from the

earth I will draw all people to myself." He said this to indicate what kind of death he was about to die.

This passage begins with some Greeks from the West who came and said, "Sir, we would see Jesus." The Greeks were considered the intellectual elite of the day. It's fitting that when Jesus was born, wise men from the East came looking for Jesus. And a few days before Jesus died, wise men from the West came and said, "Sir, we would see Jesus" Wise men still seek Him.

Early on in my ministry, I was a pulpit pounder. And I was a yeller. Back in my 20s and 30s I started out loud and got louder. But in every church I've served where I used to pound a pulpit, including the pulpit built to go in the Worship Center, I had a little brass plaque on the pulpit that said, "Sir, we would see Jesus." It was a reminder that whenever I preach, my desire is for the listeners not to see me, but to see Jesus.

When these Greek intellectuals sought out Jesus, he proceeded to give them some profound spiritual truth. This truth can be boiled down to give us three powerful spiritual principles. The Old Testament is a book of laws, but the New Testament is a collection of spiritual principles. Let's look at these three powerful principles.

### **1. THE PRINCIPLE OF SACRIFICE: By dying like a seed; Jesus produced much fruit.**

Throughout His three-year ministry, Jesus was always aware that He was moving toward a place, a way, and a time when He would die. He was going to die on Calvary, which is on the slopes of Mount Moriah where Abraham almost sacrificed Isaac. And as Moses lifted up the serpent on a pole in the wilderness, Jesus was going to be lifted up on a Roman cross in order to draw all people to Himself. My next message from John will be "The Magnetism of the Cross."

Jesus knew He would die during Passover, when thousands of Passover lambs were being sacrificed. He said in John 12:23-24, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Truly I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains by itself. But if it dies, it produces much fruit."

When He said, "The hour," He wasn't talking about a 60-minute period, but the week of Passover. And Jesus chose to use the metaphor of a seed to illustrate how dying would bring about life.

A seed is one of the most powerful things on the planet. It contains life. But that life is not released until the seed is planted, and dies as a seed to produce the life of the plant.

Seeds are life. Archaeologists found seeds that were over 3,000 years old when they discovered the tomb of the Egyptian King Tut. They planted those seeds and they sprang to life after 32 centuries. Dying seeds produce life.

We probably all know about preppers who are preparing for global disaster. The ultimate prepper scenario actually exists in Norway in the Svalbard (Svall-bard) Global Seed Vault. On an island north of the Arctic Circle there is a huge \$30 million vault where food seeds from around the world are stored to be used in the case of a global famine or disaster. The planners realize that seeds are life. There are almost a million seeds stored in air tight bags in plastic crates kept at a temperature of minus 18 degrees Centigrade.

Have you ever thought about the amazing multiplication power of one seed? Consider a pumpkin seed. It is so small and light that it takes 75 seeds to weight just one ounce. But when a pumpkin seed is planted and dies, it will ingest so much moisture nutrients that it can grow to an enormous size. Every year in New England they have a contest for the largest pumpkin. Last year a farmer in Connecticut grew a pumpkin that weighed in at over 2,500 pounds. That's 122 million times the weight of a pumpkin seed. And every pumpkin has over 500 seeds that can be planted and produce pumpkins that are 2.5 billion times the weight of a single seed. There is amazing potential for life in a single seed.

As we consider this metaphor of the seed, there is a literal application and a spiritual application.

Jesus was willing to literally sacrifice Himself on the cross. He was literally going to die and be planted in a tomb, and then He would burst forth with the power to bestow eternal life. He was one seed, but today three Billion people claim to be following Him. That's a lot of fruit!

But for us, the spiritual application means that we won't ever see fruit in our lives until we are willing to die to self. And that leads us right to the next principle.

## **2. THE PRINCIPLE OF SURRENDER: To really live, we must hate our self-centered life (Ego).**

Like a buried seed, we must be willing to die to self to bear much fruit. A paradox is a statement which on first glance seems to be contradictory, but upon deeper reflection has a sensible truth. Let me give you an example of a modern paradox: "Social media disconnects us from others."

Jesus was the Master of paradoxes. Here's one from John 12:25: "The one who loves his life will lose it, and the one who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life."

That can be confusing if you think life means physical life. We aren't to hate our physical self. Instead He means that we should loathe the self-centered, egotistical life that we are all tempted to live. So, let's substitute the word ego for life and it makes more sense. "The one who loves his ego will lose it, and the one who hates his ego in this world, will keep it for eternal life."

Jesus expressed the same paradox in different words in Luke 9:23. I'll substitute the word ego for life again. Jesus said, "If anyone wants to follow after me, let him deny himself, take up his

cross daily, and follow me. For whoever wants to save his ego will lose it, but whoever loses his ego because of me will save it." (Luke 9:23-24)

We've all met people who are egotistical. Some people are so narcissistic that they consider themselves to be center of the Universe, and the stars and moon, any everyone else revolves around them. Our culture promotes this attitude. We all hear things like: You Only Live Once. Your life is your own, live it any way you want. Look out for #1. Some people live by the last lines of that song first made famous by Frank Sinatra: "I Did it MY Way." It says, "For what is a man, what has he got? If not himself, then he has not. To say the things he truly feels and not the words of one who kneels. The record shows I took the blows and did it my way."

That's the recipe for a wasted life. But for the record, I'm going to be the man who kneels. And if you want to discover the secret of a meaningful life full of purpose, then deny your self daily and take up your cross. The cross has only one purpose—it's a place where people die.

Would you like to know the Bible verse I quote more than any other? And I don't quote it to other people. I quote it to myself. I do it to remind myself that I am dead to self. It's found in Galatians 2:20. "For I am crucified with Christ; nevertheless, I live. Yet not I, for Christ lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and died for me."

In Galatians 2:20 Paul used the personal pronouns "I" and "me" seven times. He had an "I" problem, and it had nothing to do with his vision. We all struggle with the same "I" problem. The big "I," our ego always wants to be in control. What's the middle letter in the word "sin?" "I" What's the middle letter of the word "pride?" "I." What's the middle letter in the word "guilt?" "I." The central problem of sin, pride, and guilt, is the big "I."

The big "I" is constantly trying to climb back onto the throne in our hearts and displace Jesus. So several times a day, we must renounce self and surrender our will to Jesus.

One of my friends and mentors in the ministry was Adrian Rogers who was the pastor of Bellevue Baptist Church in Memphis. I heard Adrian say once that in every person's heart there is a throne and there is a cross. When we are on the cross, then Christ is on the throne, but when we are on the throne, then Christ is alone on the cross.

I once asked Adrian what was his secret to being used by God. He said that every morning, during his quiet time he considered the chair he was sitting in to be an electric chair. Every morning he pushed the 220 button, the Galatians 2:20 button. And he would imagine 220 volts surged through his selfish nature. He said, "I'm a dead man, but Christ lives in me." When he said that I was sorta' shocked (no pun intended). But it is something I have pictured myself on many mornings since then. I'm dead, but Christ lives in me.

You can't really insult a dead man. A dead man can't be enticed away by temptation. But God uses people who are dead to self and alive with Christ living through them.

Jim Elliot is one of my spiritual heroes. On January 8, 1956, he and three other men were attacked and killed by the Auca Indians in the jungles of Ecuador. Elliot and a few others went to take the gospel to these primitive people. The story about their deaths captivated the nation because of a story in *Life Magazine*. Jim's wife, Elizabeth Elliot, wrote about the event in *Through Gates of Splendor*. Although it was a tragedy, Jim was ready to die. In his journal, Jim Elliot wrote: "God, I pray Thee, light these idle sticks of my life that I may burn for Thee. Consume my life, my God for it is Thine. I seek not a long life but a full one like You, Lord Jesus." And then he wrote the quote for which is famous: "He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose." Jim Elliot was 28 years old when he died carrying the Gospel to those who had never heard.

Those jungle warriors didn't kill Jim Elliot because he was already dead before he got to South America. It's like the other paradoxes of Jesus but the only way you can truly experience life is by dying to Self. A real disciple is a dead man walking. He has died to the charms of the world and to the lusts of the flesh.

### **3. THE PRINCIPLE OF SUBMISSION: When you don't know what to say, pray: Father, glorify Your Name."**

So, what do you think was the emotional state of Jesus during the days before the cross? We know from the narrative that Jesus was burdened and troubled. Later that week he would be in such agony that sweat drops of blood appeared on His head as He cried out, "Father, take this cup from me, but nevertheless, Your Will be done."

We see evidence of this burden in John 12:27-28. Jesus said, "Now my soul is troubled. What should I say—Father, save me from this hour? But that is why I came to this hour. Father, glorify your name"

To me this is one of the hidden jewels of truth found in the words of Jesus. He was so troubled that He didn't quite know what to say to His Father. Look at the verse again, He asked, "What should I say?" He was struggling with His human nature that recoiled at the thought of the pain and agony He would soon be facing. But then He said, "But that's why I came, to die." So he prayed four simple words. "Father, glorify your name." That is a prayer of submission to God's perfect plan.

Let's be honest. It's just us. Sometimes we are so burdened with pain and sorrow that we know we need to pray, but we just don't know what to pray. Just pray these four words, "Father, glorify your name."

That is a prayer that will give you a sense of security. It starts with "Father." My friend Ron Dunn used to tell a funny story about being on a plane sitting next to a woman he didn't know. He said that he had never been into horoscopes. So when she asked him, "What are you?" He didn't know what she meant, so he said, "I'm a preacher on my way to Denver." She said, "No, what sign were you born under?" Ron still didn't get it and wondered if there was a sign in the room where he was born that said, "Labor and Delivery." So when he didn't answer, she said,

"What's your birthday?" He said, "October 24." She said, "You're a Scorpio and I'm Pisces." He said she didn't say much after that, as if she should not engage a Scorpio or something.

I've known people who wouldn't leave home without reading their horoscopes. Although there are many forces in this Universe, I want you to know that your future is not up to some impersonal fate, or the position of the stars. Your future is in the hands of a Heavenly Father who loves you and only wants the best for you. "Father, glorify your name."

I'm a father and a grandfather. And I'm a frail, imperfect, fallen man. But with God as my witness, I would never do anything to hurt my daughters or my grandchildren. I only want what is best for them.

And this is prayer God will always answer. He may not answer it in the way in which we expect, but God will always bring glory to Himself. What do you pray after you've heard about a school shooting? "Father, Glorify your name." What do you pray when you hear about 1300 precious Chinese people dying from the coronavirus? "Father, Glorify your name."

When Jesus prayed this prayer of submission. God spoke from Heaven and said, "I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again."

God will honor anyone who prays that prayer and seeks to submit to the will of the Father. In John 12:26 Jesus said, "Where I am, there my servant also will be. If anyone serves me, the Father will honor him."

## **CONCLUSION**

Many of you recall the movie "Chariots of Fire" about Eric Liddell. It actually won the Oscar for the best picture in 1981. And Eric Liddell was a young Scottish preacher who could run like the wind. During the 1924 Olympics in Paris, he refused to run in the 100-meter dash because it was held on a Sunday. Instead, they entered him in the 400-meter run which he had never trained for before. Before the race an American handed him a piece of paper with a Bible verse on it. It was 1 Samuel 2:30 where God says, "Those that honor me, I will honor." He held that scrap of paper in his hand as he ran. He won the race setting a new Olympic Record. In those days, there were no medal ceremonies, instead the gold medal was mailed to him after the race.

But after the Olympics he didn't remain in Scotland and have his picture on a box of Wheaties. The movie Chariots of Fire ended too soon. The real story was what happened after his Olympic career. He went back to China to be a missionary. He had been born in China where his parents were missionaries.

During the Japanese invasion, Liddell was arrested with other Chinese Christians and placed in a prison camp. Even in the camp, He led other Chinese to Christ and taught them. Winston Churchill arranged for Liddell to be released in a prisoner exchange with Japan. But Eric refused and instead had a pregnant Chinese woman take his place in the prisoner exchange. Just months before the war was over, Eric died in the prison camp. His last words in a letter

written on the day before he died at age 43 on February 20, 1945, exactly 75 years ago this Thursday, were, "It's full surrender."

And the moment he died, He received something much greater than an Olympic gold medal. He received a crown of righteousness which is more priceless than gold.

So are you just marking time, living to die? Jesus has a better way to live. Follow Him, deny your self, take up your cross daily and you will find the kind of exciting life that serving Him can bring. Get out of that rut and start really living!

## OUTLINE

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For the Joy...  
Pastor David Dykes



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