

Two engineers, one from UGA and one from OSU, were beside a flagpole arguing over a topic when a GA Tech student walked by and asked what they were arguing about. The guy from UGA replied, "We're talking about how best to determine the height of this flagpole and what equation to use." The Techster replied, "That's easy. So he took the pole out of the hole, laid it on the grass, pulled out a tape measure and declared: "It's 10' 6" long." As the Tech student walked away, the guy from UGA said to the guy from OSU, "Isn't that just like a guy from Tech. You ask him for height and he gives you length."

During Jesus' time on earth, he often left the establishment and even his followers scratching their heads over the things He'd say. This is b/c one of his favorite ways to teach was to speak in parables. **A parable is a story w/ point – an earthly teaching w/ a spiritual punchline.** And sometimes that point wasn't that obvious to the listener.

Today we're beginning a series of some of the most prolific teachings of Jesus found in the parables. I'm entitling this series, **The Red Letters** b/c everything we're going to consider came directly from the mouth of Jesus – and in most of our Bibles, we find the words of Jesus written in red.

I learned this week that the concept of the red letters was derived by Louis Klopsch in 1899. Klopsch was a young man pursuing a career in journalism who was working as an editor for the Christian Herald. One day while studying Luke, he was taken by Jesus' words in Luke 22:20 – *This cup that's poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood*. Impressed by the symbolism of blood, Klopsch came up w/ the idea of printing Jesus' words in red – and it took.

This Easter AM, I'd like to begin our study by focusing on the only parable directly related to the death of Christ. In John 12 we find – the Parable of the Kernel of Wheat.

As a means of setting the stage for this teaching, let's begin reading from **John 12:12-16**.

The next day the great crowd had come for the festival heard that Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem. 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!" Jesus found a donkey and sat on it, as it is written: "Do not be afraid, Daughter Zion; see, your king is coming, seated on a donkey's colt." At first his disciples did not understand all this. Only after Jesus was glorified did they realize that these things had been written about him and that these things had been done to him.

Jesus is entering into Jerusalem for the celebration of the Feast of Passover. The Passover was the commemoration of the most significant event in the history of Israel where God intervened to rescue the Israelites from Egyptian bondage. The story of the Passover in **Exodus 11-12** reminds us that God told the Israelites to sacrifice a spotless lamb and paint the blood on the sides and top of the doorpost as a sign of faith so that when the death angel came to dispense the 10th plague, he would Passover and give grace every home where the blood had been applied.

On the day Jesus entered Jerusalem, the people laid down their cloaks and palm branches b/c they thought Jesus was going to be their savior from Roman tyranny. Little did they know Jesus wasn't concerned about their physical bondage to Rome, but their spiritual bondage to sin? They didn't realize Jesus had come to be the sacrificial lamb for all people so if by faith anyone would receive His grace, then the atoning blood of Jesus would be applied to the doorpost of their lives so the death angel will pass over them.

On the heels of Jesus' arrival in Jerusalem, an interesting exchange took place – some Greek gentiles in town for the feast approached Philip in the hope of getting backstage access to Jesus. Their inquiry triggered an important and poignant teaching from Christ – a hard teaching and parable regarding His very purpose. (vs. 20)

Now there were some Greeks among those who went up to worship at the festival. They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, with a request. “Sir,” they said, “we would like to see Jesus.” Philip went to tell Andrew; Andrew and Philip in turn told Jesus. Jesus replied, “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Very truly I tell you, 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. Anyone who loves their life will lose it, while anyone who hates their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honor this man. “Now my soul 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!” Then a voice came from heaven, “I have glorified it, and will glorify it again.” The crowd was there and heard it said it had thundered; others said an angel had spoken to him. Jesus said, “This voice was for your benefit, not mine. Now is the time for judgment on this world; now the prince of this world will be driven out. And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.” He said this to show the kind of death he was going to die. The crowd spoke up, “We have heard from the Law the Messiah will remain forever, so how can you say, ‘The Son of Man must be lifted up’? Who is this ‘Son of Man’?” John 20:20-36

In this teaching Jesus offers (3) vital insights into His life:

I His Time had COME

The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.

Jesus had accomplished everything necessary to reveal to the world that He was the long-awaited Messiah. He had fulfilled every prophecy concerning His life – He had taught every lesson and performed every miracle to identify Himself – He even had prepared the 12 disciples (and all who were to follow) to carry on His mission for generations to come. He had completed everything but one thing. **He still needed to stretch out His life on an old rugged Cross to make an atoning sacrifice so His blood could be applied to the doorpost of our lives. (Listen to Isaiah)**

Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering, yet we considered him punished by God, stricken by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed. We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

II His Purpose was CLEAR

Very truly I tell you, 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.

Now this news came as a shocker to everyone around Him. It was okay that Jesus was going to be glorified, but it was okay that He was going to be **lifted up**. After all, how can He save the people from Rome if He's dead? Needless to say, His purpose didn't compute w/ the crowd...

Why? B/c the people were looking for a Messiah to address their earthly needs instead of for a Savior who was going to solve their eternal condition. They missed that Jesus' life was for a reason beyond their present earthly circumstances.

And people still do this today. Too many people are looking for a God to get them through the day instead of a God who desires to get them into His family and into eternity – their looking for a genie in a bottle instead of a Savior to forgive their sin.

So Jesus made it clear in a short but intense parable. *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.*

Jesus was saying – **Life can only come through death** – and I'm going to make a way and show you the way.

To grasp what Jesus is saying requires an understanding of the planting process. A kernel of wheat is reference to a dormant seed. So long as a seed remains unplanted – it's state is singular and stagnate – basically of no value.

The germination of a plant begins when a seed is planted. Germination is the process in which a seed moves from dormancy to a growing, living plant. Amazingly, every seed contains w/in itself a tiny embryo and all the nutrients it needs to begin its growth cycle when certain conditions are met. Basically, every plant embryo has an internal “on/off” switch that when triggered releases the seed to establish roots and shoots. Interestingly, every seed has a thin coating to protect the seed from turning “on” too quickly. Thus, when the dormant seed is planted into soil at a temperature b/w 40-75 degrees (depending on the seed), the germination switch turns "on" and the seed begins to take in water and oxygen causing the seed to begin to expand breaking the seed coat. Once the seed pod bursts and cellular respiration begins, the tiny seedling gains the energy it needs to push up through the soil where photosynthesis takes over and the plant spouts and produces multiple shoots and seeds.

Consider the Parable of the Sower. God is the farmer, the seed is the reality that Jesus died for our sins and the soils are the conditions of the heart. Only the seed that's been planted in the good soil of a receptive heart germinates and produces a fruit. Thus, if there's no fruit then there's no life.

Don't miss this. Jesus was expressing that His existence, teachings, miracles and sinlessness were all for naught w/out His sacrifice. But in His death, grace could be planted in you and me that would produce life when watered by faith.

So what we discover is that for any person to have life w/ God it requires (2) deaths: **His death on the cross – and our death to ourselves and to the things of this world – His death for sin and our death to sin.**

Jesus makes a clear and concise statement – “I’ve come for one purpose only – to offer my life to give life. I’ve come to seek and to save the lost. I’ve come to be lifted up. I have come to show that I am the way, the truth, and the life – and that no man comes to the Father except through me.”

His death has provided life to anyone who will believe.

His death also proposed a very challenging teaching – His time had come. His purpose was clear – and His call is...

III His Call is COSTLY

Anyone who loves their life will lose it, while anyone who hates their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honor this man.

This is where His teaching gets personal. Here’s where the rubber meets the road. And in all honesty, this is where I fear to many of us fall short. This is where too many of us have a grave misunderstanding of what it means to follow Christ.

Jesus clearly expressed that the way to life is through death so He offered His life on a cruel cross to atone for what we are incapable of doing for ourselves. Quite simply, *He paid a debt He did not owe and I owe a debt I cannot pay.* This is called grace. Jesus bore our pain and curse on the cross.

So what now is required of me? Are you ready for this? The answer isn't for the faint of heart. And the answer is greater than most of us think. We think we can pray a prayer, walk an aisle, join a church, perform a few good deeds or have a good sense of morality – but that's not what Jesus said. Jesus says that if His physical death is going to bring spiritual life, then it'll require our complete surrender and death to our wants, whims, and wishes.

Jesus never offered easy believe-ism; but requires total surrender. His grace isn't cheap. Yes, I know we've been sold a bill of goods. I know many of us have desired fire insurance. I know we often want enough of Jesus to be saved, but not enough to have to live abandoned – but that's not the way it works. Jesus requires EVERYTHING!

**If anything comes b/w our everything – we have nothing.
We have to count the cost of following Jesus.**

In Acts 20 we find an amazing statement made by the Paul before the Ephesian Elders that makes Jesus' point. Paul is explaining to them the requirement/result of genuine faith.

But I do not account my life of any value nor as precious to myself, if only I may finish my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God. Acts 20:24

Paul is saying that only a life that's abandoned to Christ is a life worth living. Let me explain:

Paul got it! In Ph. 1 he said. *For me to live is Christ and to die is gain.* In Ph. 3, he said, *Whatever gain I've had, I count as loss for the sake of Christ. I count everything as loss b/c of the surpassing worth of knowing Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in him...*

The term **account** is an accounting term. It means to pull out a ledger and perform an audit of the true intent of your heart.

On one side you write "LIFE" and on the other side you write "JESUS". Life is about pursuing everything life has to offer. It is about how you can thrive and survive according to the economy of man. It is the pursuit of everything that make you feel important, valued, and comfortable. On the other side is everything we know God desires of our lives to bring glory and honor to His name. **Here is what Paul concluded:**

**Everything w/out Jesus is worth nothing; but nothing w/
Jesus is worth everything.**