

Intro:

How exciting to hear about our restore projects. It's so exciting that the God gives us an opportunity to get involved in restoring and renewing our world. In fact, we're going to touch on that theme for the next few months here at Ethnos- starting next week we're going to tackle a series of talks called Change the World- I invite us all to go through that journey together.

But you know, this idea of restoration and renewal, begins in a sort of unique way, as it relates to God, Jesus, and life. It happens in a sort of upside down way, because it begins with death.

Now, death often precedes the beginning of something new. Spring is ripe with this sort of message- winter is a time where plants are seemingly dead, with no leaves and no fruit. In fact, the fruit has dropped to the ground, and has seemingly died. Or has it? You and I know that it is actually beginning something new.

It's the same with spirituality they way God intended. In fact, Jesus used the imagery of a dead seed and a new beginning; I'd like to spend the next few minutes thinking about this together.

Slide: John 12:24

What was he talking about? What sort of death, what sort living? I believe Jesus was thinking about two things.

Jesus' own death for our renewed living.

We see this in what he says right before this. Here's this saying in context of what comes before: (show slide). This is actually said in the final week before Jesus gets put on a cross and dies- throughout this record of Jesus' life, Jesus' death and resurrection is described as Jesus' time of glorification. And so we see that Jesus is talking about His death. But we see, this is also about our lives and the life we receive through this. This is what the "many seeds" refers to.

The question is why did Jesus have to do this?

Well, the Bible talks about how this world was initially created by a God who made everything good, from our relationships to the different galaxies that exist.

But evil came. Not just out there. But within all of us.

The consequence of this evil was death and destruction. It would do it on its own. It'd also face judgment from a holy God.

Jesus took all that on himself, away from us.

And it is through that we have life.

And as you can tell, we're not just talking about life meaning our hearts beat, our brain functions- just being alive biologically. We're talking about life in the fullest sense- one of the words used later is "eternal life." Life as it was meant to be. You know, life where relationships are actually working, where you actually connect honestly, without having to fake it, and where one day they will be full of all pain and sorrow. Life where every form of seemingly unsolvable brokenness and evil, within yourself, in this greater world- from governments to the environment- will one day be figured out, both in the future and even in the present. Life beyond our wildest and purest hopes.

This all comes from this death of Jesus. But this is received, on the individual level, from a second death: our own.

Our own death brings this new life to us.

Let's read what follows this saying. (show slide). What is Jesus talking about? I think this talking of hating our life in this world is actually about our death.

When Jesus uses the love/hate language in this context- and this is seen even clearer in other passages like Luke 16:13- Jesus is not talking about getting all mean and violent on yourself, being depressive or desperate. It is strong language for sure. But what it's getting at is the issue of our core preference or center: what do we really love at our core? Who or what is at the fundamental center of our lives- who/what are we really living for? Who really defines us? Will it be "our life" or more specifically "our life in this world," which refers not our life living world as in this planet, but our live living in this world in its systems, systems that maximize our personal pleasure in things other than God? Will our life be about that, will we love that? Or will it be revolved around God and becoming a follower of Him, as the next verse points to- will we love Him?

This is not about being all religious on certain days, going to church and all. This is about the core of our lives, what will be the center. And it's really about finding life, full-life, through it all. The irony is that if we love our lives as defined by and centered by the world, we lose it. But if we center it around Jesus, dying to a life centered around ourselves, we end up finding it. Easter beckons us to consider not just the death of Jesus, but this second death: our own.

We may think this dying is too big of a price. And rightly so- I mean, so much of life is tied into having ourselves at center. But isn't what we want really life, life to the full? And isn't this sort of dying worth it?

Some of you remember this story, I'm sure. In 2003 outdoor enthusiast Aaron Ralston was doing some canyoneering- crawling through canyons, essentially- out in Utah when a 800-1000 pound boulder fell on him, crushing his right forearm, and pinning him below in a way where getting out was impossible. Aaron had told no one about this trip, and knew no one would be looking for him in this area. Assuming that he would die, he spent five days drinking his own urine because of lack of water, carving his name, date of birth and presumed date of death into the boulder, and videotaping his last goodbyes to his family.

But at day five, Aaron decided to take drastic measures or else die right there. Levering his arm at a certain angle, he snapped the radius and ulna bones in his forearm. From there, he took his pocket knife and cut away the tissue and tendons, freeing himself. He then rappelled down 65 feet to the ground, found a family of three on vacation that helped him make a phone call and get out of there, being ultimately rescued by a helicopter search team to safety and a life well lived up to this day.

There are times the death is worth it, because life is at stake. The message of Easter is about one of those moments. Will you embrace this moment- wil you embrace both Jesus' death and yours today, and let Jesus be the center by letting him be your leader, all for the sake of Life?

Let's pray.