

THE UPWARD CALL

*Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet;
but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead,
I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God*

IN CHRIST JESUS.

(Philippians 3.13-14 NASB)

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UNLESS A GRAIN OF WHEAT FALLS

And Jesus answered them, saying, "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. He who loves his life loses it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it to life eternal. If anyone serves Me, he must follow Me; and where I am, there My servant will be also; if anyone serves Me, the Father will honor him." ... "Father, glorify Your name." Then a voice came out of heaven: "I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again." So the crowd of people who stood by and heard it were saying that it had thundered; others were saying, "An angel has spoken to Him." Jesus answered and said, "This voice has not come for My sake, but for your sakes. Now judgment is upon this world; now the ruler of this world will be cast out. And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to Myself." But He was saying this to indicate the kind of death by which He was to die. (John 12.23-26, 28-33 NASB)

Jesus spoke these words as He was facing the cross to die as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world (John 1.29). The Pharisees were agitated because "the world" had gone after Him, to the point that some Greeks sought out Jesus through His disciples (see John 12.19-22). It was when the disciples approached Him that He spoke these words about a grain of wheat, which speak of His death on the cross. He was the grain of wheat that fell into the ground to die so that all mankind would live. If He had not died, then He would have remained alone as the only Man deemed fully righteous in the sight of God. He exemplified God's principle that through death comes forth life.

Most commentators interpret Jesus' words about the ruler of the world being cast out as referring to the devil; but, given the context, there is another interpretation that is more compelling. The Lord Jesus Himself is the ruler of the world; the world cast Him out by crucifying Him. God declares: "**But as for Me, I have installed My King upon Zion, My holy mountain**" (Psalm 2.6 NASB). The Father spoke out of heaven in response to His Son's request and His name was glorified. The Son of God was lifted up on the cross, and He will draw all men to Himself because it is God's will to save all mankind, and He will.

But there is more to the story, for God's principle of death leading to life applies to the believer while occupying a body of death. Recently, the Lord gave me an illustration and spoke to my heart on this matter to explain why my wife and I have been going through what we would call a death.

One morning, I had finished dressing and was ready for the day when out of the corner of my eye I saw this black object moving in the air. At first, I was slightly startled as I thought it was a flying insect buzzing near me. But then my eyes focused on this small piece of lint that was quietly floating in the air and very slowly falling to the floor. I am not sure where it came from except perhaps it fell off the sweater I had put on a few moments prior. My attention was fully on this little speck of lint when I heard the words, almost as if they were audible: "**Unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it cannot bear fruit.**" I realize that this is not exactly how Scripture reads, but I believe it conveys what the spirit of God meant to impress on my heart in that moment.

We have been going through a trial for nearly a year that has not ended as of this writing. We have been trying to sell our home so that we can move closer to my wife's elderly mother and help with her

care. It seemed right for us to make such a move, but everything associated with the move so far has been a trial that has only gotten worse as the financial and housing crisis has continued to grip the U.S. economy. The trial has been a death of sorts, so that we both have come to put all our plans on the altar, even if it means that we do not move. Please understand that we headed down this road after seeking the will of God, which we continue to do; it was not a plan put together in haste or without much prayer and thought. We truly thought that this was in the will of God. After all, **the mind of man plans his way, but the LORD directs his steps** (Proverbs 16.9 NASB). He had even spoken very clearly to us: **Delight yourself in the LORD; and He will give you the desires of your heart. Commit your way to the LORD, trust also in Him, and He will do it** (Psalm 37.4-5 NASB). However, at this point, nothing seems to be working according to the way we thought it would.

We can plan, but the Lord must direct our steps, and at times those steps are not what we have in mind. So often we make the plans, but we also want to direct our steps. We must see that the steps may be entirely different from the way we would do it. The plan may be in the will of God, but the steps to get there may seem quite contrary to the way we would do it based on our own reasoning.

Over the years of being led by the spirit and coming under the Lord's "sonship" discipline, we have been reminded over and over again that the Lord's vested interest in His people is to train them and conform them to His image, or, if you will, His character. To do this, He often has to bring His people into death so that life will spring forth. It is God's principle that life comes out of death.

The best example of this principle is the redemption of the body when it is raised from the dead in the resurrection, either the first or the second. However, while we live in our earthly tents, the Lord often brings things in our lives to a point of death, even good things and things that He leads us into. The Lord directs our steps and these may be steps into death. He opens a door and we walk through it only to discover that it seems that the whole matter that was set before us is about to go up in smoke, to vanish. So we cry out to the Lord: "Why? I thought You were in this thing, Lord. Where are You?" The answer is that He most assuredly is in the thing, even allowing it to go into death. Why? Because God's principle is unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone! Falling to the ground is a death sentence, which means that the thing in question must be brought to death so that it can live. If it is of God, then it must die so that life can come forth. After all, the Father allowed His Son to die for the sin of the world that life might come to the many, which is all mankind.

If we, or our plans, do not fall into the ground and die, then we will remain alone in our plans and not bear fruit for the glory of God. If our Lord had not gone to the cross, He would have remained the only one who **absolutely** walked righteously in all His ways while on this earth. But because He died, He has, and yet will, bring forth a full crop of fruit to the glory of His Father. Of course, His harvest will be in stages until ultimately all mankind will be harvested into the kingdom of God.

I would paraphrase the Lord's words as such: **If a grain of wheat remains alone, it bears no fruit. To bear fruit, it must fall into the ground and die!**

Consider these verses: **They conquered [nikaō] him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they did not love their lives in the face of death** (Revelation 12.11 HCSB). **He who holds his life dear, is destroying it; and he who makes his life of no account [hating his soul] in this world shall keep it to the Life of the Ages [life eonian, life age-during]** (John 12.25 WNT [CV /YLT]).

Of course, much could be said about these verses, but the point is that they represent the principle of the grain of wheat. If we want to conquer and live in the coming eon, reigning with Christ, then we must allow God's death sentence to work in our lives. Through much tribulation we must enter the kingdom of God, and that often requires that we and our plans fall into the ground and die so that we will not remain alone, but will bear fruit to the glory of God.