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Living Like It's True

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TEXT: John 12:23-24 (NIV)

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.

Acts 1:3-5 (NIV)

After his suffering, he presented himself to them and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God. On one occasion, while he was eating with them, he gave them this command: "Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit."

It's an absolutely beautiful time of year here in the Midwest. And I don't know where you're hearing us from, but what's happening here is spring is starting to break forth. The grass is starting to shoot up, the flowers are starting to poke out. The perennial plants are starting to show their life again this season. And it's this time of year in the Midwest here in these farming regions where every spring farmers all over this great area get their equipment ready for the spring planting season. Many of them are greasing the equipment and pulling it out of the sheds, making sure it's all functioning well, looking it over so that when it's dry enough and warm enough, they can go out into the fields and begin to plant. You know, they're doing this based on a belief. They believe in this miracle of biological life. And they believe in something that Jesus said before his crucifixion, recorded for us in John 12, where he said, "The hour has come for the son of man to be glorified." And Jesus was literally going to be buried in the ground like a seed because of his crucifixion. So he said "The hour has come for

the son of man to be glorified,” and very truly kind of emphasizing what was going to happen with him, he said, “I tell you that unless a kernel of wheat [or grain or corn or a soybean seed, whatever] falls into the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds.” Farmers are getting ready around here because they believe in this miracle of biological life wired into creation by God himself, that a grain of wheat or seed of corn or soybean seed buried in the ground will die there and reproduce itself many times over. And Jesus was really talking about himself being buried so that he could reproduce himself and advance his kingdom in the hearts of many men and women in the years to come. And farmers take action based on this belief, based on their faith or confidence, in the hope that this biological truth, even though they can't see it, they take action based on their confidence, in the hope that it's true, that that a grain that's planted in the ground and dies will reproduce itself many times. Their whole lives are based on their conviction about this, and they show their faith by their actions each spring.

This is really the call of the Christian life: to live in a way like farmers, like we truly believe what we claim to be true, that Jesus came in love to rescue us from sin and conquer death on our behalf and to live like he's done this, like he like he came among us – that he went to the cross on our behalf, that he resurrected over the grave. And he's alive and well. And Christians are to live like that is true. And there's a ton of evidence of this in the early believers' lives. It's truly overwhelming evidence that they lived this way, that they lived like they believed what they said was true. In the book of Acts, chapter one versus three through five, we see that after his suffering, after he was crucified and buried, then Jesus presented himself to his early disciples. This was after the resurrection. After He went through the pain and the suffering, he gave them many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of 40 days. He spoke about the Kingdom of God. On one occasion while he was eating with them, he gave them this command: “Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my father promised, which you have heard me speak about. For John baptized with water. But in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.” And then he said “A little later you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the Earth.” And then from there forward, we see evidence in these early disciples' lives that they believed the resurrection was true. We see it by them just simply believing what Jesus said to them and obeying it. Acts 1:12 tells us after Jesus said this to them and he ascended into Heaven, the apostles returned to Jerusalem doing just what Jesus said. They returned there from the hill called the Mount of Olives. When they arrived, they went upstairs in a room where they were staying, and they all joined together constantly in prayer, waiting there, doing just what Jesus had told them to do, because they

believed they saw him alive. They saw him crucified, buried, and then heard from him afterwards. And so, they continued and they waited there doing just what he said. And Acts 2 tells us, as they waited, just as Jesus had promised, the day of Pentecost came. And on that day they were all waiting there together in one place. And suddenly a sound like a blowing of a violent wind came from Heaven and filled the house where they were sitting, and they saw what seemed to be like tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. And all of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.

From there, the disciples, after following Christ's instruction to wait and then receiving the promise that Christ had given them, all of this validating the truth about Jesus as Savior, as Lord, as King of kings. And it was just convincing and convincing and convincing them that who they had given their lives to was who he said he was and he's worth living for. And so they went forward from there in faith, living the rest of their lives like it was all true, sharing and proclaiming the good news of Jesus' death and His resurrection, bearing witness to this truth about Jesus with their whole lives. We see the early disciples living like the resurrection was true simply by believing what Jesus said to them, obeying it, and then after that, living with an unquenchable hope and optimism in Christ in their lives, in spite of all kinds of resistance and persecution. Historian Kenneth Scott Latourette says this:

It was the conviction of the resurrection of Jesus which lifted his followers out of despair into which his death had cast them and which led them to the perpetuation of the movement begun by him. But for their profound belief that the crucified had risen from the dead, and that they had seen him and talked with him, the death of Jesus and even Jesus himself would probably have been all but forgotten.

But these early disciples, they lived with an unquenchable hope and optimism in Christ in their lives, in spite of the resistance and persecution. It was not easy to be a Christian in the first century. I mean, Christians were mocked and opposed by a godless government, and they were tasked with, by Jesus himself, the organization of an entirely new movement that was intrinsically countercultural to their time. The New Testament, after the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, it tells the story of the leaders and events of the early church, and nearly all of its authors were eventually killed for the sake of Christ in many cases. The stakes were high and the earthly rewards so very low, meaning that if Jesus' followers stuck with him even after he resurrected, they must have had some sort of evidence that he truly was God. And of course, we see that he gave them many convincing proofs and their faith just continued to grow. As they obeyed, Jesus came through for him. They saw His faithfulness, and they

trusted more. And their faith grew and it was strengthened. And these disciples faced all kinds of challenges.

The resurrected Christ appeared to Paul, and we see that not long after the resurrected Christ got a hold of Paul's heart. And Paul was a persecutor of Christians. He was one who kicked against Jesus and his followers. But after the resurrected Christ appeared to Paul, his whole life changed. And Paul said this, he said, "The Holy Spirit testifies to me," after Christ appeared to him that in every city that he was going to go to, that imprisonment and persecution were waiting for him. And of course, we see that in his life. He was kidnapped, beaten, threatened, arrested many times, accused in lawsuits, interrogated, ridiculed, ignored, shipwrecked, even bitten by a viper. And tradition tells us we don't see this in the scripture, but tradition tells us that Paul eventually was put to death for his work in sharing about Christ. We also know of many of these disciples. James was put to death by a sword after edict from King Herod because of his proclamation of the truth about Jesus. Other church tradition points to the reality of Andrew being crucified, another close disciple of Jesus, crucified in an "X" shape for his faith because he didn't want to be crucified in the same way that Jesus was. Most of the other early disciples were stoned, beheaded, or died of unknown causes while continuing their bold witness for Christ throughout their lives. They were persistent. They were courageous. Even after James was killed by Herod, Peter was seized by Herod and put in prison. But God freed Peter and he knew the risk. But he kept on telling others about what he knew to be true about Jesus. He wrote letters about it, and its significance, is he is said to have been crucified upside down for his faith because he didn't want to be crucified in the same way Jesus was.

I mean, these individuals became radicals after the resurrection. They gave their whole lives in service to Christ after the resurrection, because they believed a proper understanding of the reality and the purpose and the death and the resurrection of Christ is crucial for people to grasp. They prayed and kept sharing. They prayed for boldness. They believed it was very loving of them to share with others the truth about Jesus. Because it's this truth, this central truth of history, that they had come to know beyond doubt. A truth that can set men and women free, that can bring salvation, eternal salvation to the souls of men and women. They shared this because they knew it was true at risk of their own lives, because they loved people and they wanted them to know the truth, the saving truth of Jesus. That was a great love that drove them.

You know, there's an errant belief in our world today, and that is that faith should be a private thing. Something that someone keeps to themselves so as not to ruffle someone else's feathers

so as not to step on someone else's toes or, God forbid, hurt someone else's feelings. But that's not what the Bible tells us. The Bible tells us, and in the Holy Spirit, I think, confirms this in the heart of true believers, that the truth needs to be shared. The truth that sets people free needs to be proclaimed. Whether it's popular or not, the scripture tells us that the truth sets people free. And it says even farther. When the son, Jesus, sets us free, we're free indeed. Free from sin, free from fear about death. Friends, the world has been enslaved by the fear of death, even extensively for the past few years. Many hearts have shrunk back in the fear of death. But the scripture says we can be set free from it. We can live with an unquenchable hope. We can go forth in love. We can confidently share the truth about Jesus. And even in a world that doesn't believe there's absolute truth, you and I can cut through the chaff by the power of the Holy Spirit. These believers prayed for boldness. They prayed for courage, they prayed for perseverance. And God gave it to them even unto death, because they were set free from that fear. And they lived – they truly lived – as if they believed it was true because they knew it was true. And there is no question the world needs people like this today, who will who will step up to the plate and say, “What do I have to lose? I know the truth. I know the truth sets people free and in love. I'm going to go and share it in whatever way God gives me opportunity.” We should tell people. We should tell people for their own sake that Jesus is the way, the truth and the life, that no one comes to the Father except through him, that that he hung on the cross for them, for their sins, so that they could be forgiven. To create in them a life, to give them the Holy Spirit that he came, that they could have life and have it to the full.

Friends, these early followers of Jesus were living as if they knew it was true because they did. And friends, many who are listening today, you know it's true. You know it's true. But you've been living more in comfort and safety. You've been living more in fear of man, anxiety, and worry than in courage and faith and boldness. And friends, we need people who will step out and be salt and be light in a unique way God has made you. Are you living like it's true? I mean, are you living with an unquenchable optimism? No matter what you're facing, do you believe that God is big enough? This God who conquers the grave is big enough to deal with your challenges. Are you living with a confidence and a hope in him? The Holy Spirit has been given to believers to stir in them and unquenchable hope that that can never perish, spoil or fade. The resurrection ought to change our lives. Friends, it's outside the box. It is something that God performed as a sign in wonder to demonstrate who he is and what he's like so that you and I might live differently. We might live victoriously in a world that is plagued with fear and enslaved to things like fame and fortune and sensuality. We can be set free to just truly live as God created us to live. And by his Spirit, as we obey him and walk in his way, he empowers us to do just that. And we become the light of the world. We become the salt of the

earth. And friends, if the salt loses its saltiness, what good is it? If you hide a light under a lamp, stand under a bush or whatever, what good is it? Are you living like it's true friends? Maybe you need to study the disciples' lives yourself, and ask God for courage like they did. Ask God for opportunity like they did, because really, truly, as the Bible says, time is short and we have just this opportunity to leave our mark.

I sure hope after this Easter season, you're stirred by the Holy Spirit in your life if you've never opened your heart to the gift of Jesus, I just tell you again today he went to the cross on your behalf. He hung there on that tree. Not because they put him there, because he chose to go there to pay the penalty for sin, for your and my sins. The scripture says the wage of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Christ Jesus, our Lord. And he hung there and he paid the price for sin. And he went into the grave. And then on that third day, he rose again. He came out of that grave demonstrating that everything he said about himself and everything he taught us about the Kingdom of Heaven is absolutely true.

Let's pray together. Heavenly Father, thank you for this opportunity to come before you and open your word. We know that your word is empowered by your spirit. So, we ask that your spirit would impress on our hearts the things we need to hear from you today on how we're living it. Correct us in ways, instruct us and train us in the right path. And Father, if there's some listening who haven't opened their hearts to Jesus and they sense you knocking on the door of their heart, help them receive the gift of your son, put their faith in him and his work on the cross, and be adopted into your eternal family forever. And then may we go forth with a confidence and a boldness in that truth, because of the shed blood of Jesus. We pray this in the name of Christ. Amen.