

## **Introduction**

- When visiting Taiwan, Deborah and I stayed in my aunt's home. My aunt's husband is a very quiet person; almost all of our relatives couldn't chat with him. It seems to be strange in my sister's eyes that I could actually talk to my aunt's husband without any problem, so my sisters (both Stella and Grace) asked me, "How do you pick up conversations with him?"
  - I replied, "Well, we talked about the changes in the surrounding area. North part of their house used to be sugar-cane farm; and if you walk about half a mile to East, it was a huge swarm...and he started to talk."
  - My sister, Stella, asked again, "it seems you've talk more than just histories; you almost chat all kinds of topics!" I replied, "not all topics. Some topics you don't want to touch..." She asked again, "what topic we shouldn't talk about?" I said, "something relate to death."
1. Do you agree? How many of you have the experience on starting a conversation with death? Let me ask you, who do you want to die?
  2. No body likes to talk about death. Especially, no body likes to talk about his or her own death, unless it comes to a certain point. We tend to avoid, ignore, deny...we don't want to deal with death. No one wants to die.
  3. But today, in the Gospel reading of John and many readings from Luke, it's all talking about Jesus' passion, His sufferings, His death.

## **I. Die to gain life**

1. Jesus started the conversation about His death. John 12: 23-24, "**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.**"
2. The death of a grain of wheat, in this case, isn't about getting rusted or spoil because of moisture or some inappropriate storage. It's talking about falling into ground, the skin of the grain starts to bust, one part goes down and grows root, the other part goes up and form a stem. When it keep growing to the right heights and right season, this plant starts producing fruit...many wheat grains will be produced by just one grain.
3. People may argue about this kind of "death" isn't a real death of the grain, at least not in science. The point of this parable or illustration isn't about facts in science; it's about willing to sacrifice, to pay price, to take the risk, to be away from your comfort zone, to be out of box, so that you may embrace abundant life...and the life is so fruitful that it can be benefit, be a blessing to others!
4. Yes, Jesus is talking about His sacrificial love. He is the grain of wheat, He is crucified, He is place into the tomb, He is resurrected, He is the eternal King, He is alive and living inside of you, the church.
5. But, His illustration of grain of wheat is also talking about you. What do you live for? Some live for money, some for reputation, some for power, some for relationship, some

for job or work, and many live for themselves. They maybe successful in some degree, but in God's definition, it's not an abundant life.

6. It happens to us, Christians, too. We want to see Jesus, oh yes, in our terms. We don't like to face the pain of loss and death in whatever form it comes. In many cases we want something from Jesus more than we want Jesus Himself. Be careful, brothers and sisters. Don't become the consumers of God's love, rather, be the participant of God's life and plan. Spiritual life is about participating Jesus' life, death and resurrection; in worship, in work, in daily lives.
7. "...**unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.**" I think this text applies to Lenten season, too. Many people try to "give up" something for God in this season. Some give up a meal a day, some give up chocolate or sweets, some give up movies, some give up steak and pork for 40 days...that's a sacrifice to Chinese people, you know. But, Lenten season really isn't about giving up something for God; it's about acknowledging our sins, deny our wicket ways, focus on Jesus' sacrifice, and live for Him.
8. If we really want to talk about giving up something, try to give up one thing that leads you away from God's presence; one thing or one behalf that stop you from shinning for Jesus.

## **Conclusion**

1. We have many passion readings today, so I will shorten the message.
  - When I was still a youth, a man asked me a very serious question, "What will you do if you have 5 more years to live?" I answered, "Maybe I will spend more time with my family; I will study harder; I will read more Bible, and I will share the Gospel to the people around me."
  - This man asked, "What if you have only 1 year left?" I replied, "probably the same, but instead of staying here in Belize, I will fly back to Taiwan and spend my 1 year with my mom and sisters."
  - This man asked, "Why do you want to do these things?" I said, "Well, as I am a Christian, a son, and a student, I think this type of life style is appropriate and meaningful."
  - This man said, "So, Why don't you live like this way now?" "Well, maybe I think I still have time, so I..." "So, you just choose the lower life, the relatively useless and meaningless life styles?"
2. I still remember this conversation, and I exam myself once a while. What am I doing here? What is the purpose of my life, as a Christian, a husband, a son, a brother of 2 sisters, and a pastor? Have I produce fruit for the Lord, just like the grain of wheat fall into the ground? And...have you?