

DYING TO LIVE, Part 3

Life's True Value

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Your life is worth more than you can imagine. You may have fallen. You may have failed. You may feel stuck. You may think of yourself as pond scum. But God has a different idea! Let's see if we can catch it today.

Lose It To Find It

Matthew 16:24 Then Jesus said to his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. ²⁵ For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it. ²⁶ What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul?"

If we are "dying to find life" in its fullness, Jesus has instructed us to be prepared to lose it first. If we are not prepared to experience loss and grief first, we cannot enjoy the sweet taste of full life.

Gaining the Appreciation

Not merely because we lack the contrast that heightens the flavor (as when we sprinkle a little salt on watermelon), but because we will lack the ability to appreciate it (as when our taste buds are damaged because we have eaten something that was too hot). This sensibility is actually created by our suffering. Instead of making us less of a person, when it is by God's design, suffering makes us more of a person — deeper than we had been before — even though it hurts.

As it is in the physical world, so also in the spiritual: no pain, no gain.

Created to Grow

When God created the world and all that is in it, including human beings, He did not create it in its designed completeness. He created everything partially. Not imperfectly, just partially. Everything was designed for growth, which means it was incomplete until it grew.

So, the seed becomes a seedling, and the seedling a sapling, and the sapling a tree, and the tree blossoms and bears fruit. We describe it as mature, or complete.

Of course it does not freeze at that point, but continues to grow toward its next cycle of completeness. And in so doing, the fruit spoils. But when the fruit spoils, it releases its precious cargo, its seeds. And the seeds dry and are buried.

It seems that, to many people, completeness in our world means death. "You're born, you live, you die."

Yet, for the seed that is buried it is a continuation of the journey for which it was made in the first place. Its husk splits and a tiny tap root begins its journey toward the center of the earth, while the baby stem (the epicotyl) works its way to the surface. With the right combination of humidity and

sunlight and protection from natural predators, the tiny sprout will eventually become another tree, bearing fruit like the first.

Knowing this, we may even say that a fruit-bearing tree, in which is stored its seed, is not truly complete (has not fulfilled its life-cycle) until its fruit has perished and reproduced a new tree. We may even say that death is not the sign of its completeness at all, but reproduction is.

Can that be applied to human life also. Indeed it can.

Losing to Multiply

John 12:24 I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat is planted in the soil and dies, it remains alone. But its death will produce many new kernels—a plentiful harvest of new lives.²⁵ Those who love their life in this world will lose it. Those who care nothing for their life in this world will keep it for eternity.

Enjoying your life is not what is forbidden. To “love your life in this world” means to seek to preserve it at any cost. And I emphasize, at *any* cost, as though there was nothing to be experienced and enjoyed beyond this life.

The inescapable result is: you will die. Everyone dies. The statistical evidence is simply overwhelming. So, even if you fight like a madman to keep alive, eventually you, too, will succumb.

Beneath that superficial result, you will also lose your only shot at finding true life, or finding life’s true value.

Those who find it — those who enter true life, eternal life with Christ — develop a disdain for this life, shallow and plastic as it is. Real faith is not cynical, but neither is it blind. Life in this world is not worthy to be compared with the life that comes from Jesus Christ.

The Rate of Exchange

Matthew 16:26 What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul?

Gain the whole world, forfeit your soul — that’s not a good exchange! But to develop your soul, you must let go of the whole world.

If you had it all, could you buy back your soul at some later time? It would be something like trying to buy a new car with Confederate dollars or Monopoly money. Confederate dollars may have been worth something at one time, but they’re no good anymore. Monopoly money may have been good for playing a game, but it’s worthless in the real world. If you had the whole world and offered it to God in exchange for your soul, would that be a decent price to offer? To the One who made it all from nothing?

What is one soul worth? Once it was thought that 30 pieces of silver was a fair exchange for a man’s life — the cost of a slave (about US\$30). It was the price offered for the betrayal of Jesus.

I have heard modern evangelists justify excessive ministry expenses with words like: “If just one soul was saved, it was worth it all.” In spite of sounding pious, such thoughts are absurd. Souls are not saved with dollars or euros! People are saved only by the blood that Jesus shed in His death on the cross.

Jesus clearly implied that the amassed wealth of the whole world would be insufficient to redeem *even one* human soul. No wonder he lamented how difficult it is for the rich who cling to their wealth to enter the Kingdom of Heaven. What people sell their souls to acquire and protect today will only be good for paving the streets in Heaven. They might as well bank gravel!

The Worth of a Soul

What is your soul worth? God thinks you are worth His everything!

John 3:16 God loved the world so much that he gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life.

Jesus loved us and gave Himself for us! The Just One for the unjust many.

The price of our salvation was nothing less than the life of our Redeemer, Jesus.

This is why He was determined to go to Jerusalem, though He knew what sort of reception and treatment was awaiting Him. The ancient prophet gives us insight:

Isaiah 50:4 The Sovereign Lord has given me his words of wisdom, so that I know how to comfort the weary. Morning by morning he wakens me and opens my understanding to his will. ⁵ The Sovereign Lord has spoken to me, and I have listened. I have not rebelled or turned away. ⁶ I offered my back to those who beat me and my cheeks to those who pulled out my beard. I did not hide my face from mockery and spitting. ⁷ Because the Sovereign Lord helps me, I will not be disgraced. Therefore, I have set my face like a stone, determined to do his will. And I know that I will not be put to shame.

That is why, when faced with shameful and agonizing death on a cross, He would still pray, “Nevertheless, not my will but Yours be done.” (Mark 14:36)

All of His life, He knew the end He would face. He came into our world on purpose — for this very purpose.

John 12:25 Those who love their life in this world will lose it. Those who care nothing for their life in this world will keep it for eternity. ²⁶ Anyone who wants to be my disciple must follow me, because my servants must be where I am. And the Father will honor anyone who serves me.

²⁷ Now my soul is deeply troubled. Should I pray, ‘Father, save me from this hour’? But this is the very reason I came! ²⁸ Father, bring glory to your name.

Michael W. Smith taught us to sing this chorus:

Crucified, laid behind a stone

You lived to die, rejected and alone

Like a rose, trampled on the ground

You took the fall and thought of me above all

Jesus’ entire life was guided by this purpose. It was *supposed* to end in death (but only briefly), so that greater life could be the result. And Jesus has called us to walk in His steps.

Die Like a Christian

Luke 9:23 Then he said to the crowd, "If any of you wants to be my follower, you must turn from your [self-preserving] ways, take up your cross daily, and follow me. ²⁴ If you try to hang on to your life, you will lose it. But if you give up your life for my sake, you will save it.

"Take up your cross daily" does not refer to the aches and pains of life, or the daily annoyances that weigh you down, or the aggravating person who won't leave you alone, nor even the dreaded disease that haunts you. The cross means only one thing: death. For you and I, it means death to self-preserving ways that attempt to skirt the will of God. No more searching for loopholes, or imagining I have "special" circumstances or entitlements.

It means embracing the life of Jesus and pursuing the lifestyle of Jesus every day.

Where will you find the courage and strength to live like this, or to die like this? Directly from the One who has led the way. If Christ is in you, you will have the grace to truly live — a life that is full, a life that even death cannot end, a life that produces a harvest of life in others.

Become Jesus' partner. Follow His lead. Treat others as He would treat them. Don't sell your soul for what cannot satisfy. Find the life you've always wanted, in daily fellowship with Jesus Christ.