

October 4, 2015
Sunday Evening Service
Series: Communion
Community Baptist Church
643 S. Suber Road
Greer, SC 29650
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HIS CROSS IS MY CROSS
(Part 2)
Luke 9:24-25

“There are 70,000 ways to get sick, hurt or mortally injured, and the U.S. is making them official. On Thursday, U.S. hospitals, doctors and other care providers have to start using internationally developed standards called ICD-10 codes to bill government programs and private insurers in the nation’s \$2.9 trillion-a-year health-care system. The codes cover everything from parrot bites to getting sucked into a jet engine. Doctors have already begun mocking the diagnostic list, picking out the most absurd and arcane, such as Z63.1, ‘Problems in relationship with in-laws,’ or V91.07XA, ‘Burn due to water skis on fire.’ Yet for health-care providers who have payments at stake, the complex change is no joke.” (*Bloomberg Business Report*, October 1, 2015).

Apparently, taking care of our physical state has never been more complicated. When I was a child, the rule of thumb was, “Don’t do anything foolish like walk out into traffic, or jump off a cliff, or play with rattle snakes.” Now we are warned not to drink coffee, which warning changes to the benefits of drinking a cup of coffee. The same warnings and non-warnings have applied to salt, sugar, bacon, and almost any other kind of food short of asparagus and artichokes. Still the basic need is for us to eat right, exercise regularly, and try to live to be 100. Oh, and be sure that as you live all those years, you live a quality life.

To people who focus exclusively on a temporal, passing, physical life, Jesus’ words in this text really cut across the grain. He said that if anyone was serious about following Him, we need to take up our cross, which means we will need to die to our own plans,

purposes, and desires. But that is a good death because the end result is eternal life. If this physical life is short and bound to end, and if there really is eternal life to be gained, what reasonable person would choose the temporary over the eternal?

The catch in that argument is the little word “if”. Normal people of the world are not convinced about eternal life. Therefore, their only option is to put all their eggs in the basket of passing life. We who believe Jesus and trust His teaching are fully convinced that eternal life is the most important issue for us to pursue during passing life. But does our life indicate that eternity gained is the most important issue to us?

The Reason for the Proposition (vv.24-25).

Christian wisdom knows that God’s plan for loss or gain is contrary to human wisdom. In the simple statement at the beginning of verse twenty-four, Jesus acknowledged that it is human nature to try to preserve life. He warned, *For whoever would save his life will lose it (v.24a)*.

The point of the argument here is life. The Greek word is *psuche*, which is the root to our English word psyche. The study of psychology is a study of the whole person. It includes the study of the mind. But the psychologist is also concerned about how physical advantages or disadvantages affect how a person thinks. Psychology is concerned about the entire makeup and environment of a person.

So, too, this word in our text speaks of life in all its ramifications, life in totality. Jesus warned that real life is deeper and broader than food and clothing or, in our modern thoughts, passing stuff. He taught, *“Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing?” (Matthew 6:25)*. And to a point, some people of our world agree with Jesus’ conclusion. They believe that life is fuller when you spend time in relationships. That is a good and true conclusion. Likewise, people of the world practice sharpening the intellect or natural abilities. That is a good practice. They recommend pursuing the arts in order to expand the experience of life. I guess that is a good idea. And we all know that the fleshly mind is set on

enjoying as many exciting experiences as possible in order to make life fun.

But, Jesus' lesson is that life is far more important even than focusing all our energies on new experiences or enhancing our circumstances. When the lawyer asked Jesus to state the most important law of God, *Jesus said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind"* (Matthew 22:37). The word translated "soul" in that statement is also *psuchēi*. We find a fulness in our passing life in loving God above all else, especially above ourselves and potential experiences.

That pursuit, that love is not normal by the world's standard. The natural desire is for a person to protect and preserve life. Advisors, leaders, the wise people, the brilliant people who are in the know give us unceasing lists and recommendations for lengthening life and creating quality of life. The people who know tell us to exercise regularly, eat right, don't engage in the common vices, get plenty of sleep, stay out of the sun, and don't eat yellow snow. All of these practices are intended to give you longer quality life.

We are forced to buy medical insurance that covers many kinds of tests and checkups that we would prefer not to have. But since we have to pay for them, we might as well preserve life. We are encouraged to buy long-term care insurance so that when we finally end up in the nursing home we will not need to worry about shortening our stay because we ran out of money. Does it sound to you like we who live in America, the land of the free, are not even free to decide how long we want to extend quality life? Apparently, if you are an American, you are going to be forced to save your life whether you like it or not!

But there are some things that even an intrusive, arrogant, overly confident government cannot guarantee. Jesus taught in perfect wisdom that there is danger in losing life. Does it seem odd that a person who is very careful to preserve life can lose it? Of course there are unexpected accidents or sicknesses that can snatch life away from even the most meticulous protectors and preservers of life. But when Jesus warned about losing one's life, He did not refer to the physical life here. It is sad but true that nearly everyone who lives in the world is most concerned about the length and quality of physical life.

But there is something far more important. The risk of losing is far greater than physical death. Jesus also used the word *psuchēi* when He warned the disciples, "*And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell*" (Matthew 10:28). In this statement, Jesus warned that God our Creator not only can but will destroy in hell the body and soul of those who reject Christ. We generally think of the word destroy in terms of annihilation. The word does indeed refer to death or destruction. But is that the end? Does the person just go out of existence?

The Greek word (*apollumi*) which is translated *destroy* also means to ruin, lose something, or waste it. In that sense, God promised that He will destroy the wisdom of the wise (1 Cor. 1:19), which means He will prove that it is in error and inferior. But God did not annihilate it because the worldly wise still use it. Other Scripture affirms that losing the soul means the eternal soul suffers the pains of hell for eternity, which cannot be true if it is annihilated. Jesus warned that the wicked "*will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life*" (Matthew 25:46). He said that it is a place, "*Where their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched*" (Mark 9:48). Many will be there because, *if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire*" (Revelation 20:15). It is the place for *the devil who had deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and sulfur where the beast and the false prophet were, and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever* (Revelation 20:10).

Every person who is wholly concerned only with saving temporal, passing life, loses his or her eternal soul to eternal punishment.

Conversely, God's plan is for us to find eternal life while being lost in Christ. The one who tries to save his life will lose it, *but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it* (v.24). Jesus recommends that we lose our temporal, physical life. This fits with the preceding explanation where Jesus *said to all, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me"* (Luke 9:23).

Taking up our cross requires daily denial because it is full identification with Christ's death on the cross. It is a continual

reminder that *“I have been crucified with Christ” (Gal. 2:20)*. Therefore, in a very real way, taking up our cross requires the sacrifice of life. We are no longer interested in doing everything possible to make life pleasurable. Seeking the latest and greatest thrill or experience does not motivate us. We have higher goals, and therefore, higher aspirations.

Jesus words, *“For my sake,”* is a very important qualification. Many religions teach that laying down your life for the “cause” will guarantee eternal life. Jesus also taught the high regard we naturally have for a person who sacrifices his own life to benefit another. He told the disciples, *“Greater love has no one than this, that someone lays down his life for his friends” (John 15:13)*. However, Jesus was referring to the extreme sacrifice of Him, being God the Son, laying down His life in order to win salvation for all of us who trust Him. Peter, thought that he grasped the importance of laying down life for the sake of Jesus our Lord. *Peter said to him, “Lord, why can I not follow you now? I will lay down my life for you” (John 13:37)*. Peter did not consider how strong the natural pull is for us to preserve life until after he ran away and after he denied he knew Jesus.

But ultimately, Peter did lay down his very physical life for Jesus. He sacrificed all the pleasures of life to follow Jesus and tell the world about salvation through Him. According to tradition, He was literally crucified for Jesus’ sake. And such has been the story for thousands of people who have been killed because they love Jesus. And such will be the testimony of a multitude in the coming days who resist antichrist because they love Jesus. John saw that in the future many will lose their lives at the hand of the antichrist. But, *they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives even unto death (Revelation 12:11)*.

That kind of person does not preserve physical life but does deliver his eternal soul. Notice that the individual is responsible to *lose his life*. Because God’s grace draws us to Christ and redeems us from the penalty of sin, we have a special relationship with the Savior. We do not follow Him because we think it is a good idea. We do not live sacrificially because we hope that Jesus will take pity on us and show us mercy. He has already showed us mercy, He has already taken pity, He has already delivered us from eternal

punishment. Therefore, because of what God through Christ has already done for us, we respond by identifying with Christ’s cross. That means that we give up our physical life in favor of living for Him. In fact, faith hands the eternal life over to Jesus for safe keeping. Our duty is to live daily according to these completed facts.

Jesus said that whoever would save his life will lose eternal life, and whoever dies to self gains eternal life. In a statement that expands on this truth, Jesus warned that there is no profit in forfeiting the eternal. His statement acknowledges the truth that human wisdom seeks to gain the world. Jesus questioned, *For what does it profit a man if he gains the whole world (v.25a)?* This proposition is hyperbole. No one really gains the whole world. The proposal includes all wealth, all fame, all possessions, everything possible to gain. Human nature strives for this goal unceasingly because human nature is never satisfied. The American dream was hijacked by Hollywood and Wall Street and twisted to require endless pursuits of possessions, pleasure, prestige, and popularity.

As a result of a daily bombardment of this impossible dream, Christian children grow up rather confused about what is really important in life. Therefore, Jesus’ words are like a bucket of cold water dumped on our heads for no good cause. How does taking up my cross, dying to self, fit with watching out for number one?

Let’s suppose for the sake of argument that a person actually can gain much of the world even if not all the world. Most people in our culture have literally sold their soul to strive for this goal. The heart is set on things of this world whether experience, or possession, or just accomplishments that the world praises. Instead of loving God with all their heart, they love the passing things of the world with all their heart. That means that their thinking will be set on stuff. Their emotions respond to experience. Their wills are fastened directly on mundane and passing things.

Two results of this kind of errant love prove the danger of pursuing such goals. The achievement of the goal is always disappointing. The natural wickedness of human nature is revealed so that what God said about the human race in Noah’s day is true about our day. In that day, *The LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart*

was only evil continually (Genesis 6:5). The world has bought Satan's lie that there is much profit in that which God assesses as evil.

The sad reality is that as human wisdom pursues what the world offers, it loses in the end. How sad to gain the whole world *and loses or forfeits himself (v.25b)*? The truth is that in spite of great gain in this world, the eternal is lost. To lose or forfeit self is to come to the end of life and die. It is inevitable. We are born dying. Worse is that to lose means to come to the end of physical life, die, and realize that you forfeited eternal life.

The reality is stark and non-negotiable. The person who focuses on the matters of this passing life might gain stuff but will lose his or her eternal soul to eternal judgment and suffering. The person who dies to self, lays himself or herself on the altar of self-denial by taking up full identification with Christ's cross will gain eternal life.

Consider the cost. Is it worth a few years of minor suffering or inconvenience to gain the unchanging promise of eternal life in the presence of our Creator? People whose eyes God has opened realize this is the best deal in all eternity. When God the Father draws us sinners to God the Son, we come to understand our great offense against Him, and His great mercy to offer us eternal life through Jesus' sacrifice. That is not a true condition for most of the human race. The sad reality is that most people are blinded by the God of this world. *In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God (2 Corinthians 4:4).*

Those people will pursue passing things until they come to the grave empty-handed. Because they are the majority, it looks like they are right. But we whose spiritual eyes God has opened know and trust the teaching about the cross of Christ. We rejoice in His cross because it leads to eternal life—the promise no one can take from us.