

DEARER THAN LIFE

"But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God." Acts 20:24.

In these words the apostle Paul reveals some valuable and commendable characteristics:-

1. Calm determination.

(1) As to himself.

He is greatly concerned as to the conduct of his own life. He has a great work to perform, and he is most anxious that nothing should mar it, or reflect upon the great purpose of the gospel. While he looks well to the end, he is vigilant all along the road. He anticipates the crown, but meanwhile he is ready to bear the cross unmoved.

(2) As to his ministry.

About this he was most careful. From the time he first said, "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?" he had been "instant in season and out of season" in the pursuit of that one grand work of "testifying the gospel of the grace of God." Such determination could not be changed, and such preaching none could silence.

It is a great gift of God to think deliberately, to speak discreetly, and to act wisely. Self-possession is a great secret of life, and I do not know of any road to real self-possession except the Christian way. Jesus said, "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you."

2. Simple steadfastness.

He who exhorted others to be steadfast was a consistent exponent of his own teaching. He looks down upon "these things," and says, "None of these things move me." Outward circumstances had no tendency to draw him aside. He displayed firm conviction, solid faith, calm rest, and simple steadfastness. But, we must remember that if one is to be independent of external circumstances he must be dependent upon God.

3. Ready sacrifice.

"Neither count I my life dear unto myself." This was not an empty boast, for Paul had already suffered. Rather, it was a spiritual appraisal. What was his life in comparison with that ministry with which he had been put in trust? He was willing to suffer the loss of all things if thereby the cause of Christ might be served and advanced.

How dear is life! There is a physical enjoyment of life. Good health, a fine appetite, and the joy of living are experienced by many people. Our Father's world, the grandeur and beauty of nature, the privileges of friendship, and the joys of home life are invaluable. How much good books add to life! Good conversation, creative thinking and expression mean so much to us.

There are three uses of life: --

(1) There is the non-use of it.

There are those who pamper life, coddle it, and seek to save in order that it might be used selfishly, indulgently, and chiefly for their own ease or pleasure.

- (2) There is the abuse of it.

Many injure life, waste it, and pour it out in wrong living.

- (3) There is the noble use of it.

To spend it for God's glory, bring it to its highest fulfillments, use it in the service of our fellow men, and dedicate it to the great ends which God intended is the way that God would have us to use life. When so used, the law of self-preservation is supplanted by the higher law of loving sacrifice.

The Apostle Paul illustrates this noble use of life in an outstanding way. He counted his life dear, but not unto himself.

I. Duty Is Dearer Than Life.

Duty is an august, a noble, and a majestic word. It has a priority that should be in a man's soul. Obligation is at the heart of it. It is deeper than one's wishes or desires or feelings. Duty involves conscience, faithfulness, and loyalty. When a man does his full duty he brings much good to others and great glory to God.

II. The Welfare Of others Is Dearer Than Life.

In his Merrick Lectures, Dr. Robert E. Speer said, "Service is the man of truth and purity spending himself upon the highest use of life, namely, the uplifting of life and the making of men. We have the best ground for regarding this as the supreme service, the real purpose of life."

And when men settle in their own souls the great issue of whether they will serve others before self; that they will ally themselves with the great moral forces of the universe and spend and be spent in the unselfish service of others; when men hear and obey the still small voice that speaks to them, they are counting unselfish service dearer than life.

III. The Cause Of Christ Is Dearer Than Life.

Jesus made this plain to those who wanted to come after Him that they might follow in His steps. "He that loveth father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me; and he that loveth son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me; and he that taketh not his cross and followeth after Me is not worthy of Me." "He that findeth his life shall lose it and he that loseth his life for My sake shall find it." Only One gave Himself to redeem men from sin's guilt and power. No founder of any other religion dreamed of dying for his followers. The ethnic religions may contain some fine truths but not one of them has a Redeemer. Jesus Christ alone laid down His life that men might have life abundant and eternal. And ever since Jesus lived and died, men have been counting their lives not dear unto themselves, but rather dear for His sake and the Gospel's. Some worldly classmates said to one of their number who was about to sail for China: "Why do you throw your life away in that God-forsaken country?" The young man replied: "Christ poured out His life for me and for them; why should I not go?"