

## SUPPOSE YOU DIE BEFORE YOU LIVE

"He that findeth his life shall lose it: and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it" (Matthew 10:29).

Many little children have been taught the simple prayer,

"Now I lay me down to sleep,  
I pray the Lord my soul to keep;  
If I should die before I wake,  
I pray the Lord my soul to take."

There is real wisdom in that line, "If I should die before I wake," meaning before I wake up to live. Suppose you should die before you really come alive to the things that matter in time and eternity. Who are you? From whence did you come? Why are you living? These are the real questions that mark the difference between sensitive awareness and dull apathy. It is easy to approach the end of the earthly life without the realization that life has been a progressive revelation of purposeful planning, struggle and triumph. Instead, the conclusion of an increasing number is that living out one's days really isn't worth the effort involved.

The wondrous truth about the way of life that Christ exemplified and taught is that being a Christian not only prepares one for death, but also equips one to live here and now, as well as hereafter. It is both insurance for death and assurance of life eternal. "'Tis heaven below my Redeemer to know."

Either seeing another life that has come alive to God, or surveying the sorry wreckage of his own, often will prod a person to confess, "I have made a failure of life. If I had my life to live over ...." Then follows the usual, well-intentioned but truthful declaration that all sorts of circumstances would be different. If they had their time to live over, in all probability they would live it again much as they did the first time. A more jolting truth is the unarguable fact that no one has his life to live over. It is a one-way street for all.

The philosophy of finding through losing, as expressed in the words of Christ in our text, was never evolved out of the natural heart. It did not come up out of the muddy stream of human selfishness, but came down from the unselfish heart of God. To many today it seems like shifting into reverse, going backward instead of forward. That it is diametrically opposed to the thought of our modern world is immediately apparent. Some, as they read or hear these words of Christ, will feel like the child who cries out when someone tries to take away his toy. Our old natures quickly suspect that they are being introduced to something that is not to their liking. Some, at the mention of the text, will quickly discern that this service will not be a period of amusement, and they will settle down to a sort of an endurance test. Christ's statement naturally will be considered as a stern but disagreeable word in an age of self-gratification and fleshly indulgence. Those who maintain that happiness is the supremem quest of life will not hesitate to turn away from its bothersome pronouncement. To those whose main objective in life is to have a good time, these words of Christ will seem the sheerest nonsense. Such a paradoxical word will not be understood or appreciated by those who are "lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God." Plainly, this is not the way folks are trying to find life. Nevertheless, these words of Christ would be true and this principle would work even if they were not in the Bible. The truth of this statement is being demonstrated the world around. Experience on both sides of the fence is constantly confirming the accuracy of this word.

In this strong statement Christ is giving us a clue to the "life that is life indeed." Here He is telling us "how to find life." Do you want to find life? Well, here is the

way. These words of Christ only seem unattractive and repulsive because so many are satisfied with life on its lower level. He who wants the best will find here the key that unlocks the door to the life beautiful.!

One who spends his days in uselessness becomes both bored and a bore. Seeing no real meaning in life, he scowls and accuses. Inbred thoughts never widen the circumference of his outlook. Inevitably, his circle of friends gradually narrows, until old age finds him on an island of loneliness, chronic despair and sourness. He remains in an uncommitted, selfish detachment, and is an ineffectual witness for Christ's way of life. To such people, every ship seems romantic except the one on which they sail. Today millions of people have as their sole purpose to get by, to seek out a few creature comforts, to extract what they can without putting much, if anything, back into the world. Actually, this is the nature and activity of a parasite.

When Christ said to His disciples, "He that findeth his life shall lose it," He was trying to startle them into thought. He knew that this word would puzzle them, but that little by little the truth would break through like the sun penetrates the clouds in the sky. You can give your life one of two values, but not both. You can spend your life in seeking worldly values: that is to say in striving for a large bank account, a luxuriously furnished house, the satisfaction of your animal nature, or the respect of others. You can spend your life in cheating others, in gambling, or in the sordid business of drinking. But Christ says these things are perishable. They are like ice beneath the summer's sun, or froth upon the river's flow, or smoke borne by the wind. You simply can't grasp and hold them. On the other hand, there are values that abide. Christ says that they are so precious that you can cheerfully lose everything else in order to keep them. When you find them you find life. Christ's meaning is clear. He that findeth his pleasure in the lower satisfactions shall lose it, while he that companies with the pure thoughts of God shall experience the joy of which Christ spoke.

Many are out on a strange quest of which they are but vaguely conscious. They talk about seeing life. They go here and there, making all sorts of attempts and having all sorts of experiences, only to discover that their expenditures of time, effort and money have not brought them what they expected. They start out to see life and stumble up on death. They are like the case of the herbs in the kettle in the Schools of the Prophets. They were cooking a meal which they believed would satisfy and relieve their hunger, but some poisonous roots had gotten into the pot, and as God revealed the fact to one of the Prophets he cried out, "There is death in the pot!" So in the pots of pleasure and self-gratification, where there is supposed to be life, death is lurking. That is like the man who ran to catch a bus and caught an ambulance; he didn't intend to, but he did. Or, like the prodigal son who received his portion of the estate and went out to see life, but was sorely disappointed with what he found. They fancy that money, pleasure and good times are essential to finding life, only to wake up with a headache and find that they have been duped and hood-winked.

If life is to be ours it will be found, never bought. Life is not for sale at any price. It is too expensive for our poor pocketbooks. God must give it. "The gift of God is eternal life." Christ said, "I give unto them eternal life." This is life supernatural and superlative; life as it is in Christ; life in its pure, unsullied essence, communicated by the Spirit of God. This new, higher form of life, then, is none other than Christ's own life imparted to us. Therefore, many who are seeking life are failing to find it because they do not go to the right place. They seek it in the "pots of death." If you want life, eternal life, you must go to Christ for it. On one occasion He said: "Ye will not come to me, that ye might have life" (John 5:40). Why don't folks come to Christ and find life? Simply because they are unwilling to lose and give up the inferior, lower kind of life. Selfishly and tenaciously they hang on to the animal and earthly form of life, and in so doing miss

the higher. It takes the power of God to loosen our hold upon life mundane and passing, and anchor us to the life that is abiding and endless.

This principle of finding through losing continues through the entire career of the believer in Christ. It has always operated and is operating now. We are still on the earth where the world, the flesh and the devil are ceaselessly at work and where we may choose the lower and reject the higher, or vice versa. Thus the saved are being graded and each one does his own grading. One may be a spiritual babe, being carnal and fleshly, or he may be a young person with spiritual power, or he may be a mature, grown-up believer. Some merely want to get inside the kingdom, and do not want others to suspect them of being Christians. They want to get as much as possible out of the world. They are spiritually feeble and anaemic. Their names may be on a church roll; they attend services if and when it is convenient, they love this present world, and they miss the glory and power of the "life that is life indeed."

The question that is ever before us is, "Shall I let go the lower forms of interest and occupation for the higher, or shall I make the most of this world and let eternal things stand aside?" As we yield to the soft and convenient and beguiling, all the while we are losing our taste for the real life and are sinking instead of rising. This principle is illustrated in many ways.

Here is a young man in the university. He comes to the place where two courses open before him. One is to spend his time with pleasure-seekers who care more for frolic than learning. He can spend his nights in pleasure-seeking and gay company or he can take the sterner way, forcing himself to concentrated application and diligent study, building into life sturdier qualities. He cannot do both. To find life with the social set, drinking and carousing, will mean losing his life or scholarship and achievement. He must choose between losing his life -- this animal, baser form of existence, and finding the life that is intellectual and superior. This law is never abrogated or evaded. It may work quietly and undramatically but it works out with startling accuracy.

It goes without saying that this law operates with the same certainty in the spiritual realm. Choices are ever confronting us. Voices are quietly whispering to us, "Don't take religion too seriously. Take thine ease. Let someone else do it." Silent voices are ever finding their way into our souls saying to us, "Don't go out of your way for Christ. Don't sacrifice; take it easy." There follows a brief struggle and, if the decision is in favor of the fiendish whisper, life begins to dwindle and we lose out. The one who might have become a spiritual giant becomes a midget instead. Two roads stretch out before us -- the low road and the high road; lower life and higher life. Which will you choose?

This talk about finding through losing makes us think of money. Life is treated very much as money. Certain things are true of money, which all understand who have anything to do with it. Its value is not in itself. It gets its value from the things it can accomplish. What it will buy is what makes it valuable. The moment you separate money from the power of purchase that belongs to it, that moment all its worth is gone. If any man separates money from its uses, he really destroys its value. The miser who will not spend his money thereby makes it a worthless thing.

The same things are true of human life. Life is meant for certain purposes. Freely given to secure these purposes, it is invaluable. But when a life is withheld from its purposes it loses its value. There are the spendthrifts of life, or those who value neither life nor its purposes. There are the misers of life, or those who value it for itself, and apart from all its purposes. There are the merchants of life, who value life for what it will do, and so get the best out of life without ever asking for it.

When life is bent to the altars of accounting sheets, then something happens inside a man's soul. Modern education must come in for its share of blame for teaching techniques without

doing much for the technician, for giving rise to a generation of nuclear giants who, in some cases, are moral infants and spiritual dwarfs. There are Phi Beta Kappa scientists who are spiritual duds; those who know all the hypotheses but never come to a knowledge of the Truth. There are financial millionaires who are spiritual paupers. God put us here to serve Him, and not to line our pockets in selfish acquisition while living out our days as egomaniacs.

Luigi Corneglio died after seventy years of poverty. Most of those years were spent in begging. The outstretched hand was his trademark. In an old, cheap tenement they found his body after it had lain dead three days among dirty rags and papers yellowed with age. From all appearances, here was an old man who had nothing and came to a monotonously familiar pauper's death. Not so. For in the attic of the dirty tenement, forty-seven violins were found, one of which was an expensive Stradivarius. Think of it: A priceless violin lying still and silent in a miser's attic. That instrument wasn't made to collect dust or to be taken out of circulation by hoarding hands. It was made to be played, to speak in mellow notes of beauty. For that matter, neither was Corneglio made to join the dirty rags and trash of life. Music was in him too, but he never got it out of him. Collecting musical instruments became twice a sin to him. He neither became a musician himself, nor did he make the violins available to those who were musicians. Cobwebs and dusty rafters are inappropriate props for a Stradivarius. Colorless, staid existence is poor fare for a man made in the image of God, who is capable of something better.

From Christ we learn that the man who loves himself dies, whereas the man who loves God supremely and his fellowmen rightly lives here and will live in glory forever. Christ's words are here directed against every form of selfishness. The person who finds the natural and lower life will lose the spiritual and higher life. The one who is bound up in himself and saving his earthly life shall lose the spiritual life, but the one who is willing to crucify his lower life shall find and enjoy the higher life. We are called upon to give up the sinful self-life of the old man in order that we may find the true life both here and hereafter.

Life is worth living and part of the process involves the romantic mystery of answering the question, When does a person really live? How can I know that I am realizing at least a part of my potential for God? Is length of days any indication? Hardly. Longevity is no ultimate measure of worth. The length of a rope does not determine its tensile strength nor do length of days necessarily deposit anything to the account of resourceful living. If one's religion does not make his heart merry, his lips whistle or sing, his heart rejoice, and his mind reach out, it is not the religion of Jesus Christ.

Man's best guarantee that he shall live beyond the grave is the fact that he, as a child of God, has really lived on this side of the grave. Eternal life is a present possession. The harmony and radiance begun in this life will continue in brighter lustre in the life to come.

If you are now captive to your lower self, listen to Christ's delivering and heartening word, "No matter what you have been or done, believe in My Father and in Me. Repent of your sin. Kneel at the cross. Claim my mercy. I will give it to you and make you free."