

## Life: Lost or Kept

John 12: 24-26.

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(Extracted from Scripture Truth Vol. 26, 1934, page 217.)

Three verses only are before us. The first gives us, in parabolic or illustrative form, the fact and necessity of the Lord's death. The middle verse gives us the two courses that open before us as a consequence of His rejection and death; and indicates the only way that leads to what is proper Christian life. The last verse gives us in one word what that life really is, what must precede it, and the glorious end to which it leads.

Our Lord Jesus, as the single grain of wheat did not love His life — that life which He took up amongst us as Man, in all sinless perfection — but laid it down in death, to take up life in resurrection which should be eternal, and in which a whole multitude should be found as fruit, of the same order as Himself. This, which verse 24 states, is the basis of the verses which follow.

Now I wish to concentrate attention upon John 12: 25, a most remarkable and significant utterance of our Lord. Of all His wonderful words recorded in the Gospels this is the only one, as far as I know, that is repeated (with slight variations) no less than six times. Let the following passages be read: Matthew 10: 39; 16: 25; Mark 8: 35; Luke 9: 24; 17: 33. These, together with the one in John 12 just read, make six. Three of these, as may be observed, are records of the same utterance just before His transfiguration. The others are records of what He said on other and different occasions. It is evident therefore that He enforced this truth (1) when commissioning His twelve disciples; (2) Just before His transfiguration; (3) When giving a prophetic discourse not long before the end of His ministry; and (4) Within a few days of His death.

Every word He uttered is worthy of our deepest attention; but a word that He repeated in this fashion, and that is recorded in Scripture six times over, must especially command our hearts, believing as we do that all Scripture is given by inspiration of God. We assume at once that there is something of special importance about it, and on examination this assumption is confirmed. This utterance of our Lord is like a key that opens to us the life that is truly and properly Christian.

"He that loveth his life shall lose it." The word translated life here, is one that usually is translated "soul." It refers to that "soul life" which characterizes man in his natural fallen condition. The soul as distinguished from the spirit (which is the higher part of man, capable of putting him into intelligent touch with God) is the seat of our natural desires and aspirations; and "soul life" is that life of enjoyment of all those things that naturally appeal to us.

This "soul-life" is further defined as being "in this world." The word used here for world (*kosmos*) is one that we have taken over bodily into our English tongue. It is the opposite of *chaos*. God's "kosmos" was thrown into chaos by sin; and ever since that the devil has been busy using fallen man to evolve a "kosmos" of his own, with what results we see. The "life in this world" is of course the life of this world — the "soul life" of this "kosmos." Now what about it? Do we love it, or do we hate it? Do we look upon it as something to be gone in for, something to be sought and valued and cultivated, or something to be turned from as worthless, and esteemed as positive loss because calculated to divert from what is infinitely better? WHICH?

Ah! but I love the life of this world. I don't want the doom of this world, but its life is very

attractive. I will endeavour to avoid the grosser side of its life while retaining much of it that is pleasant. Do any speak or think thus? Well, if they do let them face the fact that they are going to lose *it all*. A moment must come when not a shred of it is retained. Lost, *lost*, LOST, and nothing but an aching void left. What a tragedy!

Yet this tragedy need not be, since "he that hateth his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal." He who turns his back on the soul-life of this world, because identified with the rejected Christ and His death, is going to keep life unto life eternal. Here the word for "life" is changed, for the "life eternal!" is a far higher thing. An illustration of what this means is found in Philippians 3 where Paul recounts all his natural advantages and then shows how he counted them loss for Christ. Christ became so infinitely attractive to him that he hated all else in comparison with Him.

Christ is still in rejection and we are left as His followers in the place where He died. Are we going to spend our days pursuing the life that ultimately we are sure to lose, or are we going to grasp the life that abides and is life indeed? God give us grace to answer this question aright.

And what is this life that is life indeed? In one word it is a life of *service*. The next verse opens "If any man *serve* ME." The word is used here in no limited or restricted sense. It does not mean merely service in the work of the gospel or in ministry of the word. It covers all Christian life. There is the service of the sanctuary as well as the service of the field. Once we were lawless, doing our own wills. Now we are subject to Another: our endeavour being to serve His will in all things. This is proper Christian life.

For this life there is an essential preliminary. It is this: "Let him follow Me." Following must precede all service. If we think quietly for a few moments we shall see that this *must* be so. *We must* accept His leadership, and be under His direction if we would serve Him. A person may be an absolutely first class *worker* in some business department, but if he is continually doing what he thinks best independently of the leadership of his departmental chief, he is continually causing confusion, and he is a very poor *servant*.

We must be followers of Christ. He is the Son of God and worthy to absolutely command us. He is in rejection and it is our great privilege to be under His orders, His direction, and follow Him. Then our whole lives, and not merely certain departments of our lives, may be characterized by service to Him. Then see the marvellous end to which His service leads. "Where I am, there shall also My servant be." How extraordinary is this intimacy between Master and servant, this community of place. Its like is not seen amongst men. Supposing you were honoured one day with a command to Windsor Castle to speak to the king in his private apartments in that magnificent royal residence. You are ushered within and at last stand in his presence. Would you be likely to comment on the absence of his servants? Would you feel inclined to exclaim, "But your Majesty, where are all your servants? Surely you have some Hundreds in this splendid place." You would hardly speak thus. But if you did, His Majesty would answer to this effect, "Indeed I have hundreds of faithful men and women in this place, who serve me. But they have their own excellent quarters. They do my pleasure, but they are not *with me*."

We are to be *with* our Lord and Master because we are not merely servants but friends. The one who really serves Him is permitted to share His thoughts and know His secrets and be in attendance on His person. The very acme of our joy and blessing in eternity will be to "live together with Him" (1 Thess. 5: 10).

And there is more than this, for the next words are, "If any man serve Me, him will My Father honour." What in the way of honours can be compared with this?

Let us endeavour to visualise the scene. Here stands the rejected Nazarene. For a moment it seems as if indeed the world had gone after Him. Yet He knew that in a week's time all would be reversed and the mob be shouting for His crucifixion. Are any going to commit themselves to His leadership and be His servants? Then they must expect a bad time of it. No honour will they get from this world: rather a plentiful share of dishonour will be their portion, even as it was the portion of their Master.

The world however, passes away - the lusts of it, and the honour of it — and the dishonour it awards likewise. The moment arrives when God rewards His servants. The rejected Nazarene is the mighty Son of God. Faith enables us to perceive this and inspires us to serve Him. The Father appreciates the service done to His Son, and especially that done to His Name in the days of His rejection.

Some 3,000 years ago David became God's king in Israel and many a devoted servant had he. Yet, pretty evidently, no service was of greater value in his eyes than that rendered by the valiant men who cast in their lot with him in the days when he was being hunted and persecuted by Saul. They served him sometimes in but very small things, yet that was the service he so highly rewarded when the kingdom at last became his. These devoted followers of David hated their life in the world of Saul's kingdom, and lost it. But in effect they kept life to the glorious reign of his successor, and they were honoured in David's kingdom.

This is but the type. It points forward to something much more satisfying and abiding. A day is coming when God the Father will publicly honour those who have served His Son in the time of His rejection. How paltry are all earth's honours in comparison with this.

Do we value the honour that comes from God alone? Then let us take the way that leads to it in identification with Christ Himself.