

Loving and Hating One's Life

by J.R. Miller

J.R. Miller's sermon emphasizes that true life is found in selfless love and service, rather than in self-preservation and comfort.

Scripture: Matthew 16:25, Mark 8:35, Luke 9:24, John 12:24, Galatians 2:20, Philippians 2:3

Topics: "Sacrifice", "True Life in Christ"

Description

J.R. Miller emphasizes that true life is found in selfless love and sacrifice, illustrated by the parable of the grain of wheat, which must die to produce new life. He reflects on Jesus' own sacrifice, which seemed like a loss but became the source of hope and salvation for humanity. Miller warns against the temptation to prioritize personal comfort and ease over fulfilling our duties to others, asserting that in trying to save our lives, we ultimately lose them. He encourages believers to embrace the hard paths of service and love, as these lead to true fulfillment and eternal life. The sermon calls for a commitment to God's will over self-interest, highlighting that losing one's life in service is the path to true gain.

Transcript

Our Lord's teaching is that only the life which is lost in love--is really saved. The illustration is in the little parable of the grain of wheat. "I tell you the truth, unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds." John 12:24. The teaching is very clear and simple. You may keep your flower-seeds out of the earth to save them from rotting; they will be clean and beautiful--but nothing will come of them. They will be only flower-seeds. If, however, you put them into the earth, they will seem to perish--but shortly there will come up from the dead seeds--lovely plants, which in the season will be laden with sweet flowers that will fill the air with their fragrance.

It is easy to find the meaning of the parable, in the life of the great Teacher himself. The precious seed fell into the earth and died--but it sprang up in glorious life. Had Jesus saved his life from the cross--he might have lived to a ripe old age, making all his years beautiful as the three or four he wrought in such wondrous way among the people. But there would have been no cross lifted up, to draw all men to it by its power of love. There would have been no fountain opened to which earth's penitent millions could come with their polluted lives to find cleansing. There would have been no atonement for human guilt, no tasting of death by the Son of God for man, no bearing by the Lamb of God, of the sin of the world. There would have been no broken grave with its victory over death, and eternal life for all who will believe.

It seemed a waste of precious life--when Jesus died so young, and in such shame. No doubt his friends spoke together on those days, when he was lying in the grave, of the great loss to the world, his dying was. Perhaps they thought he had been imprudent and reckless--almost throwing away his life. Peter may have referred to the time he had spoken so earnestly to his Master, begging him not to go up to Jerusalem to meet death. It seemed to them all, that his early death was a sad loss to the world, a wasting of most precious life. But it was not a loss, not a waste. He lost his life--but it became the seed of the world's hope and joy! We understand it now. Christianity is the outcome of that waste. Heaven is the fruit of the Redeemer's sacrifice!

There is more of the lesson. It carries in it the law of life for all of us. Jesus went on to say, "The man who loves his life--will lose it, while the man who hates his life in this world--will keep it for eternal life." All true life must bear the brand of the cross. If we love our life and try to save it--we shall lose it. If we keep ourselves from the hard service or the costly sacrifice to which duty calls us--we may seem to be gaining by it. We spare ourselves much toil. We have more time for ease, for leisure, for pleasure. We have the money in bank which we might have paid out in helping others. We have saved our life. Yes; but it is a saving, which is losing.

The finest thing in life, is not to make a success of one's career--as the world rates success. One may come to high renown, and do deeds divinely fair, as men see them, and become a pillar of the state, winning an empire all one's own--and yet miss himself, lose his own life! If he does this, he makes a mistake in whose shadow his eternity must be spent!

Perhaps we do not always realize how easy it is to make this mistake. We think of large services and great sacrifices--but we have much more to do with small ones, and the principle is the same. Every day brings to us opportunities of saving or losing our life. Here is a duty which is unpleasant, from which we shrink. We are not bound to do it; we can choose either the harder or the easier way--and may decline the duty. We weigh the pros and cons for a little while, and then decide not to do it. Worldly prudence approves our choice. We could not afford to pay the price. We have saved our life. Yes, so it seems. But really--we have lost our life.

It applies in the matter of service. A friend or neighbor is in sore need or trouble. We learn of his condition, and it is in our power to relieve him, or at least to give him valuable help. It is not convenient, however, nor easy for us to do it. It will cost us much trouble, perhaps considerable outlay of money or exertion. It will be much easier not to render the service. Yet the law of love says we should help our neighbor. SELF answers and pleads, that it is not our matter, that we are not responsible, that we are not bound to do it. After more or less parleying between love and selfishness, we decide not to do the thing he needs. We have saved our money, our labor, our time--but we have lost our life; we have hurt ourselves irreparably.

Both the priest and the Levite in the parable saved themselves a great deal of trouble, time, toil, danger, and sacrifice--by not stopping to help the unfortunate man they came upon on their journey. But, after all, was it a saving that was profitable? It cost the good Samaritan a great deal to stop and care for the wounded man; but who will say that he made a mistake? It was a losing--which was a saving.

We all come every day, to similar points in life, where we must choose whether we will save or lose our life. Duties that are hard are facing us continually; what are we doing with them? It is less trouble not to take them up. It is easier to be self-indulgent, when we are weary or slightly indisposed, or the weather is unfavorable, than it is to go to the church services; so we save our life by putting on our robe and slippers,

and quietly staying at home. It is easier not to be a teacher in the Sunday-school; it ties one down to have to go out in all seasons to meet a class; and besides, there are others who can teach; why shouldn't they do it? It is easier not to give money systematically to God's cause--there are so many things of our own we can spend it for, and it is comfortable to have our bank account grow. It is easier not to be forgiving--but to hold grudges, and remember wrongs done to us, and to let our heart nourish its bitterness; it costs far less struggle just to hate people who have been unkind and hateful to us--than to try to love them and repay them with kindness. It is easier not to try to be active in Christian work, taking part in meetings, working on committees, visiting the sick--but rather to fold our hands and let others do the work. It is easier not to trouble ourselves much about lost souls, just to look after our own life; it is hard to be always feeling the responsibility of evangelizing others. It is easier just to think of SELF, and go on doing business, making money, building up our own fame, marching toward the goal of our selfish ambition--and giving no thought to other people. Other people are in our way; they take our time; they hinder us; they keep us back; it costs to wait for them, or to stop in our busy life to help them.

These are illustrations of what loving our own life means. It is taking good care of one's self, keeping one's self back from inconvenient and burdensome serving. We do not need great occasions, to give us chances to save or lose our life--we have plenty of chances every common day. Every time we decline a duty of love because it is hard, unpleasant, or costly; every time we choose the way of selfishness; every time we take the easy path to save ourselves trouble--we are saving our life. But in such saving--we are really losing. We have things easier--but our loss is irreparable.

Look at the other side. "The man who hates his life in this world--will keep it for eternal life." Of course this does not mean that we are to despise our life, or be careless of it, or waste it. Life is sacred. It is God's gift to us, and we must never do anything to harm it, to lessen its value, to mar its beauty. To be reckless of life--is a grievous sin. Our life is not our own--it is God's, and we must nourish it, use it, then answer for it. We must love our own life.

But the teaching is, that the first thing must always be our duty--that to which God calls us. To love one's life over-much, is to care more for one's own safety, comfort, and ease--than for doing what God gives one to do. To hate one's life, is to hold ease, personal pleasure, safety, comfort, as of no consequence, when the doing of God's will, one's duty, is concerned. Jesus hated his life--when he gave it up to suffering, shame, and death--rather than fail in doing his Father's will. So must we all always hold our life--if we would worthily follow Christ. The first thing must ever be our duty. We must never count the cost--nor think of the danger. The duty of love must be done, though in doing it we empty out our whole life for our friend.

We need never fear that the losing of life in service of love, in Christ's name--is losing indeed. It is he who saves his life from duties involving suffering and sacrifice, who is the real loser. He who gives out his life in doing God's will--shall find it again. He who sows his life in the furrows of human need--shall reap a harvest of blessing.

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