

Lives Lost and Found

By: Gary Henry

One of life's ironies is that we get some things by giving them up. This principle is even true of life itself. Jesus taught, "For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for My sake will find it" (**Mt. 16:25**).

To understand the truth of this text, begin by considering the paradox in **Prov. 11:24,25**: "There is one who scatters, yet increases more; and there is one who withholds more than is right, but it leads to poverty." Although the miser holds his money tightly so he won't "lose" it, the deeper reality is that he "loses" far more in life than he "saves" by his stinginess. Just ask yourself: was Ebenezer Scrooge "richer" or "poorer" the day he let go and spent a large sum to buy the Cratchet's Christmas turkey? He owned less money, of course, but was he "richer" or "poorer"?

The principle is a general one. Money just illustrates what is true of many other things in life. The surest way to "impoverish" ourselves is to be too concerned about "holding on" to what we've got. It sounds contradictory, but it's true. And when applied to spiritual things, the principle has profound implications. The man who has no higher objective than to "protect" his holdings in the here and now – he plays it "safe" in every situation – that man is among the "cowardly" (**Rev. 21:8**) who will lose their souls and go to hell.

In **Mt. 16:25**, Jesus is teaching that it's possible to have such a tight grip on "life" that we lose all that life really is. In this sense, to be too "conservative" is the height of folly. My own paraphrase of the passage would go something like this: "Whoever aims above all to protect his life will let it get away from him, but whoever lets his life go for Christ's sake will find that he has kept it." In the context of the verse, Jesus had been discussing His own death at the hands of His enemies. When Peter objected to the idea of Jesus' death, Jesus rebuked him and said not only must He die, but His disciples must also face martyrdom. Jesus said, in effect, "The time will come when they will put you to death unless you renounce Me. But if you deny Me in order to save your physical life, the thing you save will hardly be worth the name 'life'. On the other hand, if you will go so far as to die rather than deny Me, you will find what life really is."



But the question of whether to hazard one's actual life for Christ is only the highest example of a type of decision we face every day. What Jesus says about life itself is no less true of all the things we consider important in life. In **Mt. 16:25**, try "plugging in" things like *comfort, security, family, reputation, wealth, and pleasure*: "For whoever desires to save his _____ will lose it, but whoever loses his _____ for My sake shall find it." Just name anything that we deem "valuable" (comfort, security, etc.) If we will put following Christ above what the world calls by that name, we will ourselves gain the thing that deserves that name in the deepest and truest sense. *The more we risk the lesser quality, the more we gain the greater.* Like Paul, we will be "as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things" (**2 Cor. 6:10**). "Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day" (**2 Cor. 4:16**).

Deep down, we realize that we are dual beings, both temporal and eternal. We obviously have an outer, physical life; but we also have an inner life that is spiritual. In Ecclesiastes, it was Solomon's wise observation that we get the full meaning and enjoyment out of *this* life ("under the sun") only by making *something else* our main pursuit. When we lean our whole weight on the temporal, it collapses under us. But when we make a proper *eternal* relationship with our Creator our ultimate priority, we find ourselves not with less of the temporal, but more. Hence, "Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is man's all" (**Ecc. 12:13**). At last, those who "find" life are those who "lose" it looking for something greater.