

Most people are willing to make sacrifices if the reward they are seeking is important enough to them. An athlete is willing to train for years — hours every day — to prepare himself for a chance to win Olympic gold. Most of us will never even dream of making a sacrifice like that because we do not have that desire. But we are willing to make other sacrifices in our life for things that are important to us. If we go the doctor for our annual check-up, and he tells us that we need to shed a few pounds, we probably go home that night and eat everything that we always have eaten — it is not important enough to us to make a major change in our eating style. However, if we have just had a major health crisis, and the doctor says that we need to change our diet or we are going to heading for a fatal heart attack, suddenly the motivation has changed, and we are willing to make sacrifices in the way that we eat so that we might be able to keep on living. If the reward is great enough, we are willing to make the sacrifices necessary to gain that reward. In the Word of God before us this morning, Satan puts a temptation in front of our Savior, asking Him if He was willing to make the sacrifice necessary to win the salvation of the world — to lay down His life for us on the cross. We know that Jesus was willing to make that sacrifice for us because that was the only way that any of us would ever to be able to be taken to be with Him to heaven. He considered that sacrifice to be small in order to gain the reward of the salvation for all sinners. Now He asks each one of us to TAKE UP OUR CROSS TO FOLLOW HIM. 1. He reminds us that He who wants to save his life will lose it, but 2. He who loses his life for Jesus will find it.

The Word of God before us this morning is the account of Jesus speaking plainly to His disciples about His approaching suffering and death in Jerusalem. Jesus had prepared them for this announcement through the reading which we had last week as our gospel lesson, asking them who the people thought that He was, following that question with the more important, “*Who do you say that I am?*” Peter had made that brilliant statement of faith that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of the Living God. Jesus accepted that statement, but wanted them to understand properly what that would mean for Him. **From that time on Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life.** (21) Jesus knew very clearly that He would be crucified and then rise again on the third day in order for Him to be that Christ — the Savior God had promised.

But this did not sit well with the disciples. Even though they should have known better — that this is what had been prophesied about the Messiah — they could not accept it. **Peter took Jesus aside and began to rebuke him. “Never, Lord!” he said. “This shall never happen to you!”** (22) Peter had just confessed that Jesus was the promised Messiah. Still he could not accept the fact that Jesus was talking about His coming suffering and death. He did not want to hear anything about it, and he did not want Jesus even to be speaking about such things. Like the rest of us, Peter did not want even to consider something bad or evil happening.

It is not popular to talk about things that are not entirely pleasant. In fact, we try to avoid anything unpleasant if we can, either for ourselves or for others. Like Peter, we want to think only about the good things that can come our way in this life. Yet, if Jesus had thought that way, we would not have a Savior. We would still be lost in our sins. So Jesus says that same thing to us, that we are to be willing to make sacrifices in our life. **Whoever wants to save his life will lose it.** (25) The pleasures of this world are very alluring. It seems natural to grab for all of those things which the world holds out for us to enjoy. Isn't that what many commercials on TV are telling us? Sure, it is more expensive, but I am worth it! It sure seems like more fun to enjoy the pleasures of this world, to place them as a high priority in our life so that we sacrifice other things so that we can enjoy them.

But Jesus does not want us to be making sacrifices only so that we might enjoy the joys and pleasures of this life. He wants us to remember that there is something much greater in store for us. And we need to be willing to make that a priority in our life. To save our earthly life, we may feel that our job is a priority, even if that job harms our spiritual welfare by making us work hours that deprive us always of

worship or time for family devotions. We do not always understand that by doing such things we are not honoring our Savior Who gave His life for us.

Many times it is easier to take the path of least resistance in order to have the pleasures of this life. We might not confess our faith before those who are ridiculing our Savior. We might sacrifice our time with our Savior in order to have time for other things in this life. If we do that, we may think that we are able to enjoy our life on earth, but we might well be in danger of losing our eternal life with Him in heaven. No matter how great a reward we might receive in this life, it is only temporary. It can never compare with the eternal reward which our Savior wants to give to us. The desire to seek first the pleasures of this life always originates with Satan.

Just look at what Jesus said to Peter, when Peter told Jesus not to talk about suffering and dying: **Out of my sight, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men.** (23) Whether Peter knew it or not, he was doing Satan's work by trying to convince Jesus not to suffer and die for the sins of mankind. Peter thought he was proposing a simpler, easier way for Jesus, but it was not the way that God had intended. So Jesus said that, at that point in time, Peter was like Satan himself. Jesus knew that if He tried to save His life here on this earth, He would lose eternal life for all men for eternity. So Jesus was willing to take up His cross for us, in spite of all that it would cost Him in His suffering and death.

Now He asks each one of us to be willing to do the same for Him. **If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it. What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for soul?** (24-26) Here Jesus tries to put our life in the proper perspective. Jesus willingly gave up His life out of love for us. Remember how He prayed fervently in Gethsemane that if it were possible to find another way, that is what He would prefer. But there was no other way, so Jesus willingly laid down His life, suffering even the agony of hell itself while hanging there on the cross. so that you and I might always taste the blessings of heaven. In giving up His life, Jesus offers us life eternal.

Now He asks us to give our life over to Him. Jesus tells us that we are no longer our own, but we have been bought with a price — the price of His holy, precious blood — and His innocent suffering and death. The life we now live here on earth is to be lived for Him. Our old, sinful nature is to be crucified with Him.. This does not mean that we will be seeking our own salvation through our own puny efforts. We will not seek only to enjoy our life on this earth if it means denying our Savior. We will not look for our salvation in the pleasures which this world seems to offer. We may still enjoy those pleasures as long as they do not interfere with our life of service to our Savior.

We know that what Jesus offers to us through His suffering and death on the cross is the most important thing which we could ever possess. In love for Him Who has done this for us, we are willing to devote our whole life to Him. The pleasures of this world do not compare with the eternal treasure that is ours in heaven. So we are willing to sacrifice in this life, to sacrifice time, treasure, ridicule, our own pride, and anything else that is needed so that we may boldly confess to the world that Jesus loved us enough to lay down His life on the cross so that we might be taken with Him forever in the mansions of heaven.

If we think that we can keep on living as just people of this world, without making any sacrifices of time, talents or treasure, we may find that we are sadly mistaken, for when we truly understand the sacrifice which our Savior has made for us, we will gladly sacrifice everything in this life to keep Him as the first priority in everything that we do. Take up your cross and follow Jesus!