

Winners or Losers for Jesus?

Mark 8: 34 and 35

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Dear friends in Jesus,

After giving a talk in Melbourne, the Austrian psychiatrist Victor Frankl, was given a boomerang as a gift. He remained in thought for a few minutes, and then said that he felt the boomerang symbolised our human existence. People assume that the function of the boomerang is to return to the thrower. But this isn't true. The boomerang returns to the thrower only when it misses the target. The same is true in life, he said, that we return to ourselves to become self-centred and selfish, when we have failed to find meaning in life. If we live for ourselves, spend our money only on ourselves, squander our time, we pay the price of a meaningless and empty existence.

That analysis of life coincides with what Jesus has to say in today's Bible verses. ***'For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake and for the sake of the gospel will save it.'*** You lose if you win! You win if you lose! Life can boomerang!

The boomerang effect grows out of the fact that there is sacrifice involved in the Christian's life. Jesus put it this way, ***'If you want to become my follower, you must deny yourself and take up your cross and follow me.'*** To be his disciple is to die to self. When we hear Jesus' call to follow him, we are tempted to try and save ourselves, to avoid the cross. It won't work Jesus would say. You succeed only in losing yourself.

To seek to save your life you lose it. A well-known French lawyer had his life pretty well under control, when one night as he walked along the bank of the River Seine, he heard a drowning woman's cry, and he ran away. Years later, totally ruined, he constantly talked to himself. "Young woman, please throw yourself into the water again, so that I may have a second chance of saving both of us".

Quite a different kind of experience came in real life to a woman named Patricia West. She discovered that her blood contained some very unusual antibodies, found in one of every 5,000 persons. Since most people are unwilling or unable to give blood, her blood was like one in a hundred thousand.

She was asked if she would be willing to give some of her rare blood in the event that someone needed it. She did. Later, after moving to another state, someone with that rare blood type haemorrhaged following a simple surgery. Her life was at stake. It was Patricia West herself. None of her type of blood was available in the area, but there was some in a freezer in a blood bank in the state where she once lived. It was her blood, kept for an emergency. The emergency was hers. In her willingness to give life, she found life.

In attempting to avoid sacrifice, to save your life, you lose. Jesus told his disciples that he must be put to death. He could have avoided it. He could have fled before they came to seize him in the Garden. He could have called upon twelve legions of angels to fight his battles for him, and spare him from death. He could have saved himself, but then he could not have saved the world's sinful people. He could not have lived with himself, if he had forsaken the purpose for which he was sent down, to save us.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, great German theologian, lost his life in his effort to resist the evil Hitler brought upon Germany and many other countries. He might have saved his life. He was in the United States of America, where he was encouraged to stay, and where he might have waited out the war. But he was determined to stand with his people against the Nazi horror. For his opposition to Hitler he was imprisoned, and finally put to death. According to reports he went calmly to his execution, filled with Christian hope and certainty. In his own life and death he dramatized the cost of discipleship. He lost his life, to be sure. But no less than Jesus himself would assure him that he had saved it.

A missionary who had come home from his field of service to recuperate, went shopping in search of a globe of the world, to take back with him to his mission. A shop assistant showed him a moderately priced globe. Then she pointed to another one with a light that switched on inside. That would be much nicer she told the missionary. "But, of course," she said, "a lighted world costs more."

She was right, more than she knew. A lighted world costs more. Jesus says to all who would follow him, 'Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works, and give glory to your Father in heaven.' To light the world, so that people may see the love of Jesus in our lives, can be costly. But to lose our life for his sake and the Gospel's, is to save it.

While few of us will ever find ourselves in a situation comparable to a Bonhoeffer or this missionary, we do have opportunities to lose ourselves for the sake of the Gospel, and let our lights shine. A woman accepts a volunteer position to serve her church and community in a position that demands so much, that it consumes most of her time and interest.

A generous salary wouldn't begin to compensate her commitment, but she receives nothing. She has lost herself in service, but wonderfully such people do not lose at all.

Sometimes it costs more, but those who lose their lives for Jesus and the Gospel, will save them. Amazing and powerful grace, God's grace and forgiving love, centred in Jesus, and showered generously on us every day! We losers are winners! **Amen.**

Now may the peace of God, which passes all human understanding, guard our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

Sermon from Pastor Graham Zweck 12 September 2021