

Make Your Life Bigger - Live To Demonstrate Christ Is More Precious Than Earthly Pleasure

Psalm 63:3 - "Because your steadfast love is better than life, my lips will praise you." These great words were modified only slightly in the chorus we all used to sing, "Thy Lovingkindness Is Better Than Life?" What do we *mean* when we repeat those words? Are we merely stating that it is wonderful to know God and experience His grace in our lives? Are we merely saying our lives have been greatly helped and improved by God's grace in Jesus Christ? Or are we saying something more than that - *much* more than that?

The Psalmist's words contain a message that is vitally important to the health of the church, and even *more* important to the salvation of the world. Let me state the conclusion of this teaching right at the beginning and then unfold it. **When we say that God's lovingkindness is better than life, we are not only dealing with the issue of our gratitude to God** ("I'm so grateful for Your lovingkindness to me!"). **We are also polishing up our witness to the world because God is glorified in the eyes of the world when the church treats Him as more precious than life.**

Jesus is gone now. He's ascended to the Father. You and I tell the world about a Jesus they have never seen. We tell them we have experienced God in Jesus Christ - that He has transformed our lives and made us totally new creations. We tell the world it has nothing to compare with Christ - that He means more to us than anything else.

How will they know we are telling them the truth? They will know how much *we love God* the same way we know how much *God loves us*. Just as the Father, in Christ Jesus' death on the cross, treasured *us* more than life itself, we will prove our love for Christ when we treasure *Him* more than we treasure life itself - "**Thy lovingkindness is better than life....!**"

- 1) **WE PROVE CHRIST IS TREASURE BY OBSESSING OUR LIVES WITH THE PURSUIT OF HIS KINGDOM IN A WAY THAT IS NOTICEABLY DIFFERENT FROM OUR FRIENDS AND COMPANIONS EITHER IN THE WORLD OR ON THE COOL EDGE OF THE CHURCH - Matthew 6:31-32** - "Therefore do not be anxious, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' [32] For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all."

There are things we *should* be anxious about and things we shouldn't. Here are the things we *shouldn't* be anxious about. Jesus says our witness hinges on there being a stunningly visible difference between the way we mind material, creaturely pursuits from the pursuits and dreams of those who don't profess Christ as Lord.

Remember, it's not our *words alone* that create this witness. Our words won't ring true unless the world sees we aren't just *professing* something different, but *seeking* something different. And what we are seeking in life will be shown, according to Jesus, ultimately by the way we attain joy and security and equity in life. This world can't put *equity* into your life.

- 2) **HOW CAN YOU TELL IF IT APPEARS TO OTHERS THAT CHRIST IS THE DOMINATING TREASURE AND THE SUSTAINING HOPE OF EACH DAY OF YOUR LIFE? - 1 Peter 3:15** - "...but sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence."

If someone comes up to you and asks, "**Where did you get that shirt?**" you can be certain they *noticed* your shirt and probably *like* your shirt. They want to know where they can get one like it.

But what can you conclude if absolutely *nobody* asks you about the one thing that has made the greatest difference in your whole life? What can you conclude if no one *asks* you about the one thing you *say* you value more than anything else?

The context of Peter's words makes their meaning even more striking - **1 Peter 3:14-17** - "**But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled, [15] but in your hearts regard Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; [16] yet do it with gentleness and respect, having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame. [17] For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God's will, than for doing evil.**"

These Christians are being persecuted for a particular stand they have taken for Christ as Lord. **Verse 14** contains the "hot-spots" of all persecution - "**fear of them**" and "**troubled.**" In other words, these Christians didn't *have* to experience the persecution and rejection they were experiencing, but they *chose* to do so. Intimidation is what happens when everyone wants desperately to go in one direction and you feel you should go in another. **The crowd always hates the hold-out.** Younger adults especially fall prey to this oldest trick in Satan's book.

These Christians were being called upon by their surrounding culture to renounce Christ *officially*. Today, Christians are usually called upon merely to renounce him *practically* in their actions and relationships. They are pressured to **live as though** Christ was not the greatest treasure in all the world. They are called to value relationships, pleasures and material goods *above* Christ because that's the value scale everyone else in this world shares and admires. And they *resent* those who don't fall into line.

Then Peter says this kind of intimidation gives Christians a wonderful opportunity. No one will ask you about your hope if you simply live life *blended in with the crowd*. That's a *wasted life*. But they will notice when you would **willingly embrace ridicule and intimidation and loss because you treasure Christ more than any or all of these put together**. They will notice because, if we live like this, especially when there is great pressure *not* to do so, Christ will look more like the treasure we profess Him to be!

- 3) **MAKE YOUR LIFE BIGGER BY UNDERSTANDING THE NATURE OF THE WARFARE THE CHURCH IS NOW IN** - Ralph Winter - "**The Queen Marry, lying in repose in the harbor at Long Beach, California, is a fascinating museum of the past. Used both**

as a luxury liner in peacetime and a troop transport during the Second World War, its present status as a museum the length of three football fields affords a stunning contrast between the lifestyles appropriate in peace and war. On one side of a partition you see the dining room reconstructed to depict the peacetime table setting that was appropriate to the wealthy patrons of high culture for whom a dazzling array of knives and forks and spoons held no mysteries. On the other side of the partition the evidences of wartime austerities are in sharp contrast. One metal tray with indentations replaces fifteen plates and saucers. Bunks, not just double but eight tiers high, explain why the peace-time complement of 3000 gave way to 15,000 people on board in wartime. How repugnant to the peacetime masters this transformation must have been! To do it took a national emergency, of course. The survival of a nation depended on it. The essence of the Great Commission today is that the survival of many millions of people depends on its fulfillment."

This wartime imagery isn't just an emotional sermon gimmick. It is no stretch whatsoever to make an honest link with the teaching of the New Testament: **2 Timothy 2:3-4** - "Share in suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. [4] No soldier gets entangled in civilian pursuits, since his aim is to please the one who enlisted him."

When Paul calls upon us to suffer hardship like a soldier he isn't calling for macho toughness. He's calling our minds to a **war-time world view**. He's calling us to see the assignment - the **calling** - of our lives in a new light. Honestly, on which side of the partition of the Queen Mary do you see your life unfolding?

How you answer that question has everything to do with whether or not you will make your life **bigger** or **smaller**. Paul pleads with **soldiers** - people who are the first to sense when it's **war-time** and when it's **peace-time**. Soldiers are not free to immerse themselves in the same peace-time treasure hunt everyone else is on. Know the times. War-time is the time for sacrifice for the cause of victory.

Live a life of joyous cross-bearing and personal sacrifice that befits a soldier and makes Christ look magnificent. Live a life, so filled with risk for the kingdom, that you don't blend in with the crowd. Make people come up and ask - "**What is it that makes you tick? Why are you so obsessed with Christ and so bored with the trinkets of this age?**"

Don't be a weightless Christian. The lost have a right to know the truth before they die or Jesus comes again. Can people tell what you're seeking in life just by watching you spend your money? Can they tell by the friends you cherish, by the things that bring you the greatest joy? Is your life a bill-board that says you treasure Christ? Make your brief life **big**, not just **busy**. It takes more than praise choruses to make Jesus look like treasure.