

Hating One's Life

Scripture: John 12

Code: BQ052413

He who loves his life loses it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it to life eternal. If anyone serves Me, he must follow Me; and where I am, there My servant will be also; if anyone serves Me, the Father will honor him. (12:25-26)

Jesus knew that after the cross the gospel would spread far beyond the borders of Israel to all the nations of the world. Thus, He responded to the Greeks' interview request by pointing to His impending death. The Greeks wanted to see Him. But Jesus knew that the only way they could truly enjoy fellowship with Him was through His atoning sacrifice. Just as **a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies** to produce a rich harvest, so also Christ's death would bear **much fruit** by providing salvation for many, of every tribe and language (Matt. 20:28; 26:28; Heb. 9:28; Rev. 5:9). That fruit would include countless Gentiles like these Greeks who desired to meet with Him.

Regardless of race, every person who through faith in Christ receives eternal life is part of the spiritual harvest that resulted from His death. Jesus' obedience "to the point of death, even death on a cross" (Phil. 2:8) was also the ultimate manifestation of His submission to the Father (John 4:34; 5:19, 30; 6:38) and refusal to seek His own glory (John 5:41; 7:18; 8:50).

Jesus then applied that truth with a general invitation illustrating the heart attitude required of one who receives His gift of salvation. The one who **loves his life** in this world (cf. 1 John 2:15–17), by preferring it over the interests of God's kingdom, ultimately **loses it**. On the other hand, the one **who hates his life in this world** by making Christ, not self, his first priority **will keep it to life eternal**. Hating one's life is a Semitic expression that has the connotation of giving preference to one thing over another (cf. Gen. 29:31; Deut. 21:15 [the word translated "unloved" by the nasb in those verses literally means, "hated"]; Luke 16:13; Rom. 9:13). In this context it refers to preferring Christ over one's family, possessions, goals, plans, desires—even one's own life (Luke 14:27). This call to sell all to buy the pearl, to purchase the treasure (Matt. 13:44–46), is the constant, unmistakable demand of the Gospels.

Jesus repeatedly cautioned those who would follow Him to consider the extreme cost that could entail:

He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me; and he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not

worthy of Me. He who has found his life will lose it, and he who has lost his life for My sake will find it. (Matt. 10:37–39)

If anyone comes to Me, and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be My disciple. Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple. For which one of you, when he wants to build a tower, does not first sit down and calculate the cost to see if he has enough to complete it? Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who observe it begin to ridicule him, saying, “This man began to build and was not able to finish.” Or what king, when he sets out to meet another king in battle, will not first sit down and consider whether he is strong enough with ten thousand men to encounter the one coming against him with twenty thousand? Or else, while the other is still far away, he sends a delegation and asks for terms of peace. So then, none of you can be My disciple who does not give up all his own possessions. (Luke 14:26–33)

In Luke 9:23–24 “He was saying to them all, ‘If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow Me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake, he is the one who will save it’” (cf. 17:33). Therefore “whoever exalts himself shall be humbled; and whoever humbles himself shall be exalted” (Matt. 23:12; cf. Luke 14:11; 18:14). In Luke 9:26 Jesus warned, “Whoever is ashamed of Me and My words, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when He comes in His glory, and the glory of the Father and of the holy angels.” Though it may not be required, being willing to give up everything to follow Christ is what separates true disciples from false professors. Jesus does not identify true saving faith by its perfection but by its affection. Those who truly come to Christ love Him above all else—all sin, all self-righteousness, all relationships, and all self-will.

The one who **serves** Jesus **must follow** Him; “the one who says he abides in Him ought himself to walk in the same manner as He walked” (1 John 2:6; cf. 1:7; 3:24; 4:15; 1 Cor. 11:1; Eph. 5:1; 1 Thess. 1:6). So true salvation is not only affection but also direction. To those who follow, Jesus made two ultimate and glorious promises. First, **where** He is, **there** His **servants will be also**. That is nothing less than a promise of eternal heaven. In John 14:3 Jesus told His disciples, “If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am, there you may be also” (cf. 17:24). In contrast, His enemies did not know where He was going (John 8:14; 9:29) and could not go there (John 7:34; 8:21).

The second blessed promise to the one who **serves** Jesus is that **the Father will honor him**. All human honors pale into insignificance compared to the eternal honor God will bestow on those who love and serve His Son. Those who “obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus [gain] with it eternal glory” (2 Tim. 2:10). Through the death of Jesus Christ, God was “bringing many sons to glory” (Heb. 2:10). Though the world may hate those who serve the Lord Jesus Christ (John 15:18–19; 16:2; 17:14; 1 John 3:13; cf. Matt. 10:22; 24:9; Luke 6:22; 21:17), God’s promise still holds true: “Those

who honor Me I will honor” (1 Sam. 2:30). That promise, originally given to the Jews of the Old Testament, now extends through the cross to all people who truly believe.

Less than a week after Jesus spoke these words, He would die as God’s once-for-all perfect and complete sacrifice for the sins of God’s chosen. Through that sacrifice, He would abolish the social and cultural barriers that had previously separated Jews from Gentiles. In Ephesians 2:14–16 Paul wrote,

For He Himself is our peace, who made both groups into one and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall, by abolishing in His flesh the enmity, which is the Law of commandments contained in ordinances, so that in Himself He might make the two into one new man, thus establishing peace, and might reconcile them both in one body to God through the cross, by it having put to death the enmity.

As a result, “the Gentiles are fellow heirs and fellow members of the body, and fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel” (Eph. 3:6), and “there is no distinction between Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and freeman, but Christ is all, and in all” (Col. 3:11; cf. Rom. 3:29; 4:11–12; 9:24; 10:11–13; 1 Cor. 12:13; Gal. 3:28).

Out of the tragedy of Israel’s rejection of her Messiah came good, in keeping with God’s eternal plan. “By their [the Jews’] transgression,” Paul explained, “salvation has come to the Gentiles” (Rom. 11:11). Israel’s loss was the Gentiles’ gain, as the blessings of salvation reached out to embrace to them. And, in the future, the salvation of the Gentiles will, in God’s perfect time, provoke the Jews to jealousy and to salvation. Paul spells it out:

I say then, they did not stumble so as to fall, did they? May it never be! But by their transgression salvation has come to the Gentiles, to make them jealous. Now if their transgression is riches for the world and their failure is riches for the Gentiles, how much more will their fulfillment be! But I am speaking to you who are Gentiles. Inasmuch then as I am an apostle of Gentiles, I magnify my ministry, if somehow I might move to jealousy my fellow countrymen and save some of them. For if their rejection is the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead? (Rom. 11:11–15)

This will occur when in God’s purpose He acts on the Jews, as described in Zechariah:

I will pour out on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the Spirit of grace and of supplication, so that they will look on Me whom they have pierced; and they will mourn for Him, as one mourns for an only son, and they will weep bitterly over Him like the bitter weeping over a firstborn.... In that day a fountain will be opened for the house of David and for the inhabitants of Jerusalem, for sin and for impurity. (Zech. 12:10; 13:1).

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