

Life lost and found

He that findeth his life shall lose it: and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it.

Matthew 10:39

This sublime paradox can stop us dead in our tracks each time we encounter it in our reading. Jesus defines discipleship in terms of positives and negatives and in the contexts of the present world and the next world. After sending the twelve out to duplicate His work among the people of Israel, He follows in the balance of this chapter with warnings concerning the negative reception to be expected from the present world. He tells them to be wise as serpents and harmless as doves, as sheep in the midst of wolves (v. 16), and warns of persecution by men of authority as well as by close relatives. The context obviously goes beyond the immediate experience of the twelve, and applies beyond the twelve. It is in the verse previous to this text that He introduces the disciple's cross, at a point where no one else even had an inkling of His cross. Then here in our text, He appeals to the seeking heart to understand what is meant by life – the one to be lost and the one to be found. In one stroke of expression He defines both. The life to be found as defined by the world is not worth having, and the life that He gives in exchange for that life is the only one worth finding.

This truth applies not only to the life after death that is readily associated with His word and promises, but also applies to finding the abundance of true life in Him now, which sustains the disciple through the present negatives. Only this truth can explain how our brethren of the past, and abroad even now, face the injustices and attacks of the world, as He predicted in this chapter, with confidence and peace unknown to natural men. It also challenges us to reassess often which life we are seeking to find in our present endeavors. Is it that life that is offered to us continually by this present world, which is not worth having? If so, we will be losing it. Or is it that life bestowed within by His grace through faith in His sacrifice and resurrection? If so, we will be finding it. Even as we wait for the future tense of that kingdom life, He has said that the kingdom of God is within you. As the apostle summarized: "If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth. For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God" (Colossians 3:1-3).