

Which Life Do We Love?

John 12:24-26, Easter Sunday III

May 7, 2006

Beloved of the Lord.....This week, my wife planted some Morning Glory seeds out by the church mailbox. In a few days these seeds will germinate, take root, and grow into the viny plant that the Lord created, producing beautiful blue flowers throughout the summer. The seeds of the Morning Glory are quite unique. Before you can plant them you must first rub the seeds with sandpaper, or nick them with a nail file. They must then be soaked in water overnight before planting them the next day. The reason for sanding them is to break the protective seed coat so that water can penetrate the seed. If the seed coat is not broken, the seed cannot receive water, germinate, and grow.

In a way we are very much like the Morning Glory seed. If we are to spring to life, if we are to grow and be fruitful for the Lord, the protective shell around us must first be removed or at least compromised. This protective shell which surrounds us is pride which keeps us from repenting. Just as the seed itself is quite unable to remove its own shell, so we are unable to remove the pride which surrounds our hearts. Our pride prevents our receiving the water of life, which is the Gospel-waters of forgiveness. Without this Gospel-water we remain a dead seed, a spiritually dead soul. But just as this seed cannot break its own seed coat, so we cannot remove our own pride. There must be help from the outside. Unless God first breaks the pride of our soul, we cannot receive the Gospel-waters of life. Pride therefore must first be broken, or grated upon, before the Gospel can enter in.

And so God preaches the law to our hard and impenitent hearts. He knows that if we are to receive the Gospel, our hearts must first be thirsty for forgiveness. God then grates us against the sandpaper of His Law, the Ten Commandments. His Word smites our conscience. We see that we are "by nature sinful and unclean and that we have sinned against [God] by thought, word, and deed." God's Word is like a hammer, which crushes our pride and makes us low. Once our pride has been broken, in desperation we yield to the Lord and cry out "God be merciful to Me a sinner!"

Now life can begin! Now the dead seed is ready to receive the waters of life which come from the very blood of God's own Son! With tender mercies and lovingkindness, God does not abandon us in our time of need! He hears our cries and He floods our very souls with the waters of forgiveness! Jesus says, "Whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life." This water of life which Jesus gives is forgiveness! Forgiveness from God not only brings the dead to life, but it is an everlasting and uplifting source of strength for

every troubled soul! Jesus gives us His still waters. He calms our troubled soul! These Gospel-waters are the reason each believer is in church here today. We are dead to sin, "but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord." Rom. 6:11 By the power of God's Gospel Word we now become a vibrant, fruitful, and green plant which blooms in the glory of God's grace!

I. If you love your life you shall lose it. It is our Lord Jesus Himself who makes the comparison of a seed which first is dead before it becomes alive. Jesus says, "Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit." Jesus was preparing His disciples for His own death. In order to redeem the entire world from sin, God's own Son would have to suffer and die on the cross in our place. In this way all the sins of the world would be paid for in full, the world's debt completely removed. Jesus "is the Saviour of all men, especially those that believe." I Tim. 4:10 Jesus is your Savior. Though you were dead in trespasses and sins, His death brings you life. Jesus said "I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live." Jn 11:25

The picture of the dead seed coming to life is not only a picture of Christ and the life He brings, but it is also a picture of every believer. We are the dead seed, the spiritually dead soul, which has been brought to life through the Gospel-waters of forgiveness. Though our sins have brought us death, Christ brings us spiritual life by grace through faith. But as we live and breathe in this world, we must be ever mindful of the dangers of sin and the death it brings. Sin is like a hand reaching out of the grave, trying to grab us and bring us back into the spiritual death of unbelief. The whole world around us then is a "tempter" which seeks to seduce us by lust. "For all that *is* in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world." I Jn. 2:16 Truly the world seeks to seduce us. Also our own sinful nature, that is our flesh, seeks our seduction. Paul writes, "I know that in me, that is my flesh, dwelleth no good thing." Our sinful flesh is what we call the *Old Adam*. We must fight against this *Old Adam* and crucify him daily, "that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin." Rom. 6:6

Therefore we are not to love our lives here on earth. Jesus warns us saying, "He that loveth his life shall lose it." But what does this mean? It means we are not to love our life or anything in this life more than we love God. So the Bible says, "Love not the world, neither the things *that are* in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him." I Jn. 2 We are not to love our own lives more than we love God. If your life is good right now, and if you are showered with God's blessings daily, first be thankful. But also be ready and willing to give it up your comfortable life at once if the Lord requires it.

Do not let your love for the comforts of this world be more of a treasure to you than the priceless treasure of Jesus Christ. For you were not redeemed with corruptible things like silver and gold, but you were redeemed "with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot." I Pet 1 If your love for this present world exceeds your love for your dear Savior, that love will overthrow your faith. You will become like Lot's wife who turned around to cast one last longing look upon the worldly city that seduced her. Her love for this present world exceeded her love for God. God turned her into a pillar of salt as a lesson for us all, that if we love our life we shall lose it eternally as she did.

II. If you hate your life you shall keep it. So we see then that we are not to love this world, but we are to love God. Jesus now says, "He that hateth his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal." And what does that mean? First we see Jesus using a very strong word, namely "hate." But are we are to hate our own lives? The word "hate" in this verse means to regard with less affection, or love less. Jesus teaches us that we are to love our life here on this earth less than we love God. In that way we will keep our eternal life with Him. This is a very important statement which we should all take to heart. If we want to stay in the true faith of Jesus Christ, then we must value our earthly life less than we value our spiritual life through Christ Jesus. Hence if anything in our earthly life interferes with following the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, then we should turn away from such distractions. We should fear, love, and trust in God above all things. All that pertain to God and His Kingdom, particularly His Saving Word of grace, the Gospel, we should hold in higher esteem than the things of this world. By faith we must tightly cling to the Gospel, never letting go. For the Gospel Word of our salvation is the life-line which safely delivers us to the mansions of heaven. Hang on tight by faith and never let go!

In order to do this we must renounce our sinful and earthly ways, this earthly life we live. We must drown our *Old Adam* daily, by contrition and faith. Our catechism says, "The Old Adam is to be drowned in us by daily contrition (sorrow for sins) and repentance (faith), by which we also resist the evil desires and suppress them." The Bible says, "They that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts." Gal. 5:24 If we are to follow Christ then and not love this world, we must daily renounce our present lives by confessing our sins to God. Even more important, trust in the power of God's forgiveness. For there is no sin, there is no transgression, that is more powerful than the redeeming blood of Christ Jesus. The Bible says, "Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound." His blood is priceless! His blood carries with it the power to cleanse every sin and stain that grieves us! Not only do we receive this Gospel-water of forgiveness through preaching, we also receive it through

the other Means of Grace, namely Holy Communion. His body and blood are "given and shed for you for the remission of sins." His body and blood give you strength to resist the devil, world and our flesh. The Lord warmly invites all who sorrow over sin to find comfort in His own body and blood.

III. To serve the Lord is to follow His Word. In our last verse for the day our Lord Jesus says, "If any man serve me, let him follow me; and where I am, there shall also my servant be: if any man serve me, him will my Father honor." Jesus is our Good Shepherd. Those who follow Him follow His voice, which is His Word. "The sheep hear his voice: and he calleth his own sheep by name, and leadeth them out..... the sheep follow him: for they know his voice." Jn. 10 To follow the voice of our Good Shepherd is to follow His teachings were are contained in our Bibles. He sends His Holy Spirit to teach our hearts not only His Gospel Word, but also His good doctrine which helps to guide us through this world. His doctrine is good doctrine. The Holy Scriptures are "profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness." The Good Shepherd then helps to preserve His sheep with the Truth, so that they will not follow the voice of another shepherd. Jesus says, "a stranger will they not follow, but will flee from him: for they know not the voice of strangers." Therefore to serve the Lord is to follow His Word. The sheep know the Gospel voice of their Good Shepherd. Wherever His Word is to be found, there will His sheep be gathered. And here we are this morning, gathered around this Gospel Word, receiving His Means of Grace by the waters of the Gospel, and through the body and blood of the Lord Jesus.

In conclusion, let us remember not to hold our lives here on earth too dearly, but rather to treasure our spiritual life and faith through the Lord Jesus Christ. His Word, His Kingdom, His treasures of grace, those are the things that really matter in life. All else is but dross. So our love for this world and the things of this world must die daily, in order for us to bring forth fruit for the Lord. Therefore brethren, put all things in a proper perspective. It is our life in faith through the Lord that we are to value and cherish, not our life in this world. Though we were once that dead seed, God has humbled our hearts through His Word, in order to fill us with His Gospel-water. Go forth therefore as new creatures, redeemed by the blood of Christ. Grow in God's grace and be fruitful for Him. Amen.