

Lose to Win

Many of you recall the 1981 movie *Chariots of Fire*. It was about Scotsman Eric Liddell running in the 1924 Olympics in Paris. Liddell was a committed Christian and refused to run on Sunday (which he felt was the Christian Sabbath). The consequence was that he was forced to withdraw from the 100 meters race, his best event. Instead he entered the 400 meter race. The day of the race as Liddell went to the starting blocks, an American masseur slipped a piece of paper into Liddell's hand with a quotation from 1 Samuel 2:30, "*Those who honor me I will honor.*" He not only won the race, but broke the existing world record with a time of 47.6 seconds. That record stood for twelve years.

Liddell lost his chance to race for the gold in the 100 meters. But he saved his integrity. He held true to his Lord and his convictions.

In our scripture today Jesus said, "**For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will save it.**" (Luke 9:24).

We have been studying Luke 9 and finding out what it means to be a disciple, someone who comes after Jesus. We saw that a disciple is one who denies himself, takes up his cross daily, and follows Jesus. Now Jesus tells us the consequences surrendering our lives to Jesus and His Kingdom, and the consequences if we are not willing to surrender.

Jesus' saying in Luke 9:24 is a paradox. We'd expect that by attempting to save ourselves we would succeed in doing so. But Jesus says that just the opposite is the case. Only by losing ourselves by self-denial and surrender to Jesus will we save our lives.

There are two significant verbs in this verse: to save and to lose. The word "save" means to deliver, to heal or to make whole. It is the root word for salvation and Savior.

The other word is to "lose." This word means to destroy or perish. It means not just to lose, as in losing a game or a race, but it means to lose your life, to lose yourself.

And there are two phrases in this verse. The first part, "**For whoever desires to save his life will lose it,**" and the converse, "**but whoever loses his life for My sake will save it.**"

Let's examine the first truth:

1. Whoever desires to save his life will lose it.

Jesus says, "**whoever desires.**" This is a conscious choice. Jesus is talking here about our will, our desire, what we want out of life.

What do you want out of life? To be comfortable; to be safe; to be rich; to be healthy; to be admired? All of those things the world runs after. Are they the things you seek? Or is your life about something more significant?

Jesus is calling us to examine our desires, what we want out of life.

Jesus says this same statement in Luke 17:33. There He says, **"Whoever seeks to save his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life will preserve it."**

One of the most vivid illustrations of this principle in the Bible is found in Genesis 19. There we find the story of God's destruction of wicked cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. Lot and his family are living in Sodom when God decides to destroy the city. And God sends messengers to warn Lot and his family to get out of the city. They said to Lot, **"Arise, take your wife and your two daughters who are here, lest you be consumed in the punishment of the city,"** (Gen. 19:15). When Lot hesitated the angels even grabbed Lot, his wife and his daughters by their hands and led them out of the city. And they told them, **"Escape for your life! Do not look behind you nor stay anywhere in the plain. Escape to the mountains, lest you be destroyed,"** (Gen. 19:17).

Genesis 19:24 says, **"Then the LORD rained brimstone and fire on Sodom and Gomorrah, from the LORD out of the heavens."** And then verse we need to take warning of is verse 26, **"But his wife looked back behind him, and she became a pillar of salt."**

Lot's wife didn't want to leave. Her heart was still back there in the city. She wanted what was there. She wanted her beautiful house, and her clothes, and her friends in the city of destruction.

She was thinking about all that she would lose if she kept going away from the city. Then she heard an explosion. She looked back and fire was raining down on the city out of the sky. She must have thought, "Oh, my beautiful house! Oh, my wonderful friends! I want that! I want it!" She turned back toward the city of destruction - and the Bible says: "His wife looked back behind him, and she became a pillar of salt" (Genesis 19:26).

Now why is this important? Because in Luke 17:32, right before Jesus repeats the words, **"Whoever seeks to save his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life will preserve it,"** Jesus says, **"Remember Lot's wife."**

Lot's wife desired to go back to Sodom, to go back to her old way of life. She wanted to save her lifestyle, her possessions, herself. And she lost it all—not only all her possessions and her lifestyle, but her very life.

The temptation to focus on the things of this world and to build our life around them is strong. It was too strong for Lot's wife. How about you?

The second part of Luke 9:24 then is:

2. Whoever loses his life for My sake will save it.

What does it mean to lose your life for Jesus' sake?

Certainly there have been many Christians down through the ages who have willingly, literally given up their very lives for the sake of the Kingdom of God. Many have died rather than compromise their faith in Jesus.

But the ability to do that stems from a choice we make about our life. If I have already lost my life, myself, to Jesus—then when that time comes it's no big decision. The die is already cast. My life is already lost.

How do we make that decision today? I don't think this just means to plan to lose your life in the way that a soldier might lose his life in battle. It means to become so immersed in something that you "lose yourself" in it. What is the glorious obsession of a disciple? Jesus Christ and His Kingdom. All you need in order to have a kingdom is a king: That's Jesus. Remember, Jesus said, **"seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness."** (Matthew 6:33). Why doesn't it say, "seek first the kingdom of God and *its* righteousness?" Because the Kingdom of God is all about Him, King Jesus. British pastor Henry Drummond said to a group of young seminary students: "Don't touch Christianity unless you are willing to seek the Kingdom of Heaven first. I promise you a miserable existence if you seek it second."

Jesus said, **"seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness."** (Matthew 6:33).

There are two aspects to the Kingdom of God. There is the *present kingdom* of God: Jesus said, **"the kingdom of God is within you."** (Luke 17:21); And Paul says, **"The kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit."** (Romans 14:17). There is also a *future Kingdom*. In Luke 9:26 Jesus speaks about Him coming in the glory of the Father and the angels—that's what we call the Second Coming. Jesus is coming again and will one day set up a literal Kingdom. Don't you want to be a part of that kingdom? I do, but you must lose your life in the Kingdom of God now in order to find your life in the Kingdom of God to come.

Discipleship is Sacrificing what is TEMPORARY and gaining what is ETERNAL.

Is Jesus Christ and His Kingdom my obsession? Do I live to be a disciple and a disciple-maker?

The best part of Eric Liddell's life occurred after his Olympic medal. He didn't return to Scotland to have his picture on a box of Wheaties and to live off his endorsements. In 1925 Liddell accepted God's call to serve as a missionary in China as his parents had earlier done. During the Japanese invasion, Liddell was arrested along with many Chinese Christians and placed in a prison camp. Even in the camp, he led many Chinese to Christ and disciplined them.

In 2008 it was revealed by the Chinese authorities that Liddell had given up an opportunity to leave the camp and instead gave his place to a pregnant woman. Apparently, the Japanese made a deal with the British, with Churchill's approval, for prisoner exchange. This information was released near the time of the 2008 Beijing Olympics by the Chinese government and apparently news of this great act of sacrifice came as a surprise even to his family members.

Eric Liddell died at the camp on 21 February 1945, five months before China was liberated. At the young age of 43 He met his Master. He had run another kind of race, for another kind of prize and he received another kind of medal—more

priceless than gold. Liddell is quoted as saying, "*We are all missionaries. Wherever we go, we either bring people nearer to Christ, or we repel them from Christ.*"

Are you a missionary, a disciple? Are you running the right race? Jesus isn't after attenders or spectators. He doesn't just want thousands of well-dressed carnal believers to gather in church every Sunday. He is still calling people to be disciples and to be disciple-makers.

You see, the choice to be a disciple of Jesus is not an option for the Christian believer. It is a necessity. We will either lay down our lives and follow Jesus, or we will seek to add Jesus to our own lives and risk deceiving ourselves about our Christianity and lose our very selves. Discipleship is not a more difficult path in Christianity. It is the only path to life. We either follow Jesus' path, or we lose our way.

In Luke 9:25 Jesus said, "**For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and is himself destroyed or lost?**"

Don't gamble on your soul. Decide today. Lose your life in Jesus and He will save you.