

Live Or Die?

By Steve Higginbotham

In times past, it was much more difficult to be a Christian than it is today, well, at least in the United States. In times past, and even today but in different nations, being a follower of Jesus could cost you your life. But for those of us living in the United States, Christianity comes easy. Because we live in such a permissive and pluralistic society, no one really cares what we believe and practice. It's all good.

Consequently, we find it easy to answer such hypothetical questions such as, "would you be willing to die for the Lord?" We can quickly respond by saying, as did Peter, "Sure, I'd die for the Lord." However, because we probably will never be asked to do such a thing, it's easy for us to say. So let me challenge you with this thought...

If you can say that you'd be willing to die for Jesus, that's wonderful. But until you're called upon to do so, would you at least be willing to live for him? Give it some thought.

- Steve Higginbotham preaches for the Karns Church of Christ in Knoxville, TN. He may be contacted through the congregation's website at <http://www.karnschurch.org> Copyright © 2019 MercEmail

The Joy of Faith!

Mark N. Posey

The joy of serving the Lord is unmatched in this world. Paul said, "Rejoice in the Lord always, and again I say rejoice." People, things, worry and circumstances will often rob us of our joy! Paul identified four attitudes in maintaining Christian joy in Philippians: the single mind (1:21); the submissive mind (2:3); the spiritual mind (3:20) and the secure mind (4:7). Biblical joy (John 15:11; 16:24; 1 John 1:4) includes the joy of salvation (Psalm 51:12; Acts 8:39); the joy set before us (Hebrews 12:2; Matthew 5:12); the joy of suffering (Acts 5:41; James 1:2; 1 Peter 4:13, 16) and the joy of faith (Philippians 1:21, 25). Consider what the joy of faith involves.

Personal Faith

"For to **me** to live is Christ and to die is gain." When Saul (Paul) was converted to Christ, he considered it a personal conversion (Acts 9:6). Paul had been personally crucified with the Lord (Galatians 2:20). He knew the Lord personally (2 Timothy 1:12). Our faith must be personal in order to defend the truth (1 Peter 3:15). Only a person with a personal faith can say, "The Lord is **my** shepherd, I shall not want."

Purposeful Faith

"For to me **to live is Christ** and to die is gain." Like Paul, we must have the right purpose (live for Christ); we cannot serve two masters (Matthew 6:24). Too many people are "double-minded" (James 1:8). Christians must focus on seeking first God's kingdom and God's righteousness (Matthew 6:33). Joshua exemplified a purposeful faith, by saying, "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord" (Joshua 24:15).

Profitable Faith

"For to me to live is Christ and to die is **gain**." The word "gain" is a financial term: profit, return, reward, dividend. It speaks of the blessings and benefits of serving the Lord. David asked, "What shall be done to the man that killeth this Philistine and taketh away the reproach of Israel?" (1

Samuel 17:26). Moses considered the riches of Christ greater than anything in Egypt because he “had respect unto the recompense of the reward” (Hebrews 11:26). Faithful living benefits us in this life and in the life to come (1 Timothy 4:8). David said, “Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever” (Psalm 23:6).

Conclusion

Notice how the joy of faith was exemplified in Paul’s life. **Personal Faith:** “I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith.” **Purposeful Faith:** “I have fought a good **fight**, I have finished my **course**, I have kept the **faith**.” **Profitable Faith:** “There is a **crown of righteousness** laid up for me” (2 Timothy 4:6-8).

Claim Your Many Blessings

By Mark N. Posey

The Mount Morgan gold mine in Queensland, Australia is one of the richest in the world. For many years, though, the original landowners lived in deep poverty on the mountain’s barren surface. Even though the vast wealth was out-of-sight, it was beneath their feet all the time. Similarly, many Christians live the same way. They plod along and struggle through their spiritual lives, laboring every step of the way. They are unaware of the vast riches God has promised them, and therefore, they do not claim them. Not only must we **count** our many blessing, we must also **claim** them. Consider the nature of blessings found in Ephesians 1:3.

The Source of Blessings

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.” God is the source of all blessings, both spiritual and physical! James said, “Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning” (James 1:17). We should have the attitude of certainty and assurance because God’s resources are ours each day and always; He has and continues to bless **us**. The hymn writer put it this way, “O come to the Father, through Jesus the Son, and give Him the glory, great things He has done” (Fanny Crosby).

The Sphere of Blessings

“In heavenly places (i.e., “in the heavenlies”) in Christ.” Since our sphere (domain) of spiritual blessings is in heaven, we are strangers and pilgrims here on earth (1 Peter 2:11). The New Testament Book of Ephesians is the counterpart to the Old Testament Book of Joshua. Just as Israel’s blessings were found in Canaan (the Promised Land), so ours are found in the “heavenly places.” Furthermore, all spiritual blessings are found “in Christ” (1:1, 10, 20; 2:6). Thus, it is only in Christ that these blessings can be received.

The Scope of Blessings

“All spiritual blessings.” The parameters of blessings are vast! Consider the ways God blesses us. He chose us (v. 4), He adopted us (v. 5), He accepted us (v. 6), He redeemed us (v. 7), He abounded grace to us (vv. 7c-8), He included us in His inheritance (v. 11), and He sealed us with His Spirit (vv. 13-14). We are deficient, lacking or wanting for nothing. All needs have been met by God! Our duty, responsibility and task is to seek first His kingdom and righteousness (Matthew 6:33).

Conclusion

We are made in the image of God, and He provides every blessing available to us in Christ. We must claim and count our many blessings.