

If You Save Your Life, You Will Lose Your Life

These words of Jesus are repeated throughout the Gospels: “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel’s will save it” (Mark 8:34–35; see also Matt. 16:24-25; Luke 9:23-24; 17:32-33; John 12:24-25). But what, exactly, did the Lord mean by these words?

Here are two powerful examples from history that illustrate the crucial point that Jesus was making.

In 1965, opposition was rising within the Civil Rights movement to Martin Luther King’s non-violent but confrontational methods. Wouldn’t it be better not to confront the issues so openly? Perhaps it was too dangerous? Dr. King responded to these concerns in a famous message he delivered in Selma, Alabama, March 8, 1965.

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He said, “Deep down in our non-violent creed is the conviction there are some things so dear, some things so precious, some things so eternally true, that they’re worth dying for. And if a man happens to be 36-years-old, as I happen to be, some great truth stands before the door of his life—some great opportunity to stand up for that which is right.

“A man might be afraid his home will get bombed, or he’s afraid that he will lose his job, or he’s afraid that he will get shot, or beat down by state troopers, and he may go on and live until he’s 80. He’s just as dead at 36 as he would be at 80. The cessation of breathing in his life is merely the belated announcement of an earlier death of the spirit. He

died...”

Dr. King continued: “A man dies when he refuses to stand up for that which is right. A man dies when he refuses to stand up for justice. A man dies when he refuses to take a stand for that which is true.”



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Dr. King was saying that those who wanted to save their lives by playing it safe and compromising their convictions were actually losing their lives. In contrast, those who were determined to do what was right regardless of cost or consequence, even at the risk of losing their physical lives, actually saved their lives – meaning saved their freedom, saved their dignity, saved the very essence of themselves. They also helped save the nation from the ugliness of segregation and racial hatred.

The second example comes from the life of pastor Richard Wurmbrand who became world famous after enduring 14 years of horrific torture and imprisonment under the communist regime in his home country of Romania. His book *Tortured for Christ*, which may have been the most translated religious book written last century, remains an important read to this day.

As recounted by Anna Waltar, “When Romania fell into the hands of the Russians in 1945, Wurmbrand found his work made more dangerous than it had ever been during World War II. The Communists believed Christianity to be completely incompatible with Marxism, and so they used every method at their disposal to cleanse the country of true believers.

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“First, they sought to force pastors to swear their allegiance

to the state, promising them the freedom to keep their churches open as long as they preached in support of Communism. Early on in the regime, the government summoned a gathering of all the Christian leaders in Romania, and called upon each of them one by one to affirm their loyalty to Communism.

“As Wurmbrand listened uneasily to the confessions of his fellow ministers, Sabina turned to him and asked, ‘Will you not wash this shame from the face of Christ?’ When he responded that she would lose her husband if he chose to speak out, she boldly replied, ‘I don’t need a coward for a husband.’ Convicted by her words, he then gave a rousing speech in which he wholeheartedly rejected Marxist doctrine and affirmed Christ Jesus as the sole head of the church.”

The choice they made on that fateful day was terribly costly – agonizing torture and solitary confinement for Richard and years of horrible deprivation in a slave labor camp for Sabina.

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But it’s a choice that neither of them regretted, ultimately enabling them to draw worldwide attention to the evils of communism and the plight of the suffering church, as well as to inspire millions of believers to take their stand for Jesus.

Most of us will not be faced with the life and death decisions that confronted Dr. King and the Wurmbrands. But all of us ultimately have choices to make, choices to go the way of compromise and convenience in order to save our lives – choices to save our popularity or finances or social media standing or security. Or choices to do what is right in God’s sight, regardless of cost or consequences, losing something valuable in the process but thereby saving our very lives.

Let us choose wisely!

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