

**LUKE 9:25**  
**GREAT QUESTIONS OF LIFE:**  
**“WHAT GOOD IS IT TO GAIN THE WHOLE WORLD?”**

“What does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses or forfeits himself?”<sup>1</sup>

**H**e who dies with the most toys wins. At least, that is the sentiment expressed in contemporary bumper sticker theology. It probably sums up the contemporary worldview that esteems winning at any cost. However, the words Jesus spoke are applicable in a broader context than merely acquiring “things.” No doubt, we who name the Name of Christ will benefit from thinking through the issues surrounding this great question.

**CONTEXT** —The verse that is our text for this message follows closely on the heels of one of the better known miracles of the Master. Jesus had just fed five thousand people [see **LUKE 9:10-17**]. Crowds followed him as He led His disciples to an isolated place situated outside of Bethsaida. Jesus had removed Himself to that place with His disciples. The crowds, eager to hear His teaching and seeking healing for loved ones and friends sought Him out. According to the Word, He showed compassion, teaching them and healing many who attended His teaching.

As evening approached, the disciples asked Jesus to send the crowd into the surrounding towns so they could find something to eat and perhaps even find lodging. However, to their dismay, He instructed His disciples to feed the people. These men knew they were unable to fulfil His demand, having between themselves only five loaves of pita and two fish. For the disciples to feed such a large crowd, it would be necessary to go into the town, purchase enough food to care for the large number of people. It is doubtful that there was enough money between them all to fulfil His request.

No doubt noting their discomfort, Jesus instructed the disciples to organise the crowd into groups of about fifty people each. So, with over one hundred groups arranged around the Master, He took the five loaves and two fish, and placing them before Himself, He looked up to heaven and recited a blessing over them. Then, breaking the loaves, He gave them to the disciples, instructing them to distribute bread and fish to the people seated before them.

When the people finished eating, the disciples were instructed to gather up what was left. They picked up twelve baskets of left-overs. Moreover, the people had enough to eat. The divine record states, “They all ate and were satisfied” [**LUKE 9:17**]. This was one of at least two incidents recorded in the Gospels when Jesus fed large crowds of people.<sup>2</sup>

This incident set up the events that would lead to the teaching that will be central to our study today. After the crowd had been sent away, Jesus retired to a place where He could be alone, giving Himself to prayer with His disciples. It was at this time that He asked the disciples, “Who do the crowds say that I am” [**LUKE 9:18b**]? You will recall that the disciples reported the various statements they had heard others making about the Master. Some say You are “John the Baptist. But others say, Elijah, and others, that one of the prophets of old has risen” [**LUKE 9:19**]. Jesus’ response was elicited to draw them out, “But who do you say that I am” [**LUKE 9:20**]. Peter got it right when he answered, “The Christ of God” [**LUKE 9:20b**].

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<sup>2</sup> See **MATTHEW 14:13-21** and **MATTHEW 15:32-29**; cf. **MARK 8:14-21**

I wonder whether Jesus' response to Peter's confession startled the disciples. Superficially, it startles us. First, He commanded them that they were to tell no one who He was. It flies in the face of modern marketing; we imagine that it is necessary to promote the church, to promote the spokesmen of God, to promote the activities of the congregation, if anything significant is to happen. We are taught that we have to generate enthusiasm and excite people with the promise of spectacular events. Jesus, however, operated on the premise that He would draw men to Himself. When He walked among us in the flesh, He drew men to the message He declared. After His crucifixion and resurrection, He draws men through the revelation of who He is as the Word He has given is declared.

If the disciples had been startled by His command to be silent concerning His identity, He surely stunned them when He informed them, "The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised" [LUKE 9:22]. Jesus had just informed His disciples that He was the promised Messiah, following that by telling them that He would be rejected by the religious elite of the land before being murdered! However, they needed to know that He would not stay dead. The revelation must surely have been too much to take in; these men must have stood there with their mouths agape!

Jesus' words were undoubtedly shocking to these men who followed Him. He followed this assertion by making a powerful, stunning statement. "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it. For what does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses or forfeits himself? For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words, of him will the Son of Man be ashamed when he comes in his glory and the glory of the Father and of the holy angels. But I tell you truly, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the kingdom of God" [LUKE 9:23-27].

Think of how these men must have received His words, "My life will be taken from Me." While they were absorbing what He had just said, perhaps even before they would form a response, He continued, saying, in effect, "Oh, yes, and if you want to come after Me, you will need to live a life of dying to your own desire each day."

Rome was the reigning superpower in that ancient world. The soles of her legionnaires had marched through multiple lands, conquering nations and subjugating the populations. The conquered peoples were compelled to support Rome, often watching as their youth were hauled away in chains to serve as slaves and never again to see their homes. Six in ten people within the Roman Empire were slaves—men and women without any independent existence from the whim of their masters. A slave could be killed with impunity, could be abused without any hope of justice being meted out on their behalf, could be compelled to forego every pleasure for the benefit of the master.

In such a world where the slaves outnumbered the freedmen, there was fear that those enslaved could rebel. To keep slaves from threatening the peace of the Empire, the Romans adopted crucifixion as a means of intimidation. Crucifixion has been described as one of the most horrendous forms of death ever devised by the fiendish mind of fallen man. One who was crucified could linger for days, suspended between heaven and earth, alternately pushing up in order to breath until the arms and legs would cramp, the dying individual straining against the spikes that affixed arms to the cross as fatigued muscles would seek relief. However, when the cramps were momentarily relieved, the pull of the spikes holding the arms up would force the diaphragm into the lungs so the individual could not breathe. Alternating between exhaustion and suffocation, every muscle would be racked with intense pain.

Roman citizens were exempted from crucifixion; crucifixion was reserved for the most abject members of the race—slaves, non-citizens, people without honour, people who merited no respect. Only those who were considered to be the most detestable, despicable or degraded members of the human race could ever be subjected to crucifixion. Armed with this knowledge, consider how shocking it must have been to those who heard the Master's words, to hear Him call those who would wish to follow Him to embrace crucifixion. Could we really imagine that we would build a congregation by calling people to immolate themselves? Can we truly expect to see disciples come into the Faith by a call to take their own lives?

This call to a life that embraces dying to self appears to have been delivered on at least several occasions. It would appear that the call was issued with increasing frequency as the Master neared His passion. For instance, there is another time that Jesus spoke of dying to self. Jesus was cautioning those who followed Him not to assume that life would be pleasant if they chose to follow Him. Jesus said, "Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. And a person's enemies will be those of his own household. Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. And whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it" [MATTHEW 10:34-39].

There was yet another time when Jesus spoke of a life marked by the execution of the self. The context informs us that it was when great crowds were following Him. Undoubtedly, they wanted to hear the pearls of wisdom that dropped from His mouth. So, they crowded close to listen to Him. At last, He spoke; but when He spoke the teaching was not what they expected, and likely not well received. "If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple. Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple. For which of you, desiring to build a tower, does not first sit down and count the cost, whether he has enough to complete it? Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him, saying, 'This man began to build and was not able to finish.' Or what king, going out to encounter another king in war, will not sit down first and deliberate whether he is able with ten thousand to meet him who comes against him with twenty thousand? And if not, while the other is yet a great way off, he sends a delegation and asks for terms of peace. So therefore, any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple" [LUKE 14:26-33].

I draw a contrast with Jesus' teaching and that of many of my fellow preachers today. Jesus openly warned of the hardship that would attend discipleship. After three years of hard labour, He had a tiny band of one hundred twenty people that were willing to self-identify as His followers after His resurrection. He had twelve disciples, one of whom was a traitor and whom Jesus identified as a devil [see JOHN 6:20]. Jesus spoke of hardship and of death to the self for those who would follow Him.

On another occasion, "Someone said to Jesus, 'I will follow you wherever you go.' And Jesus said to him, 'Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head' [LUKE 9:57, 58]. Would you accept a call to follow One who promised no riches, no abundance of worldly possessions? Would you follow One who did promise that you would not even have a place to call your own in this world? Would you?

Jesus then called another individual, saying, “Follow me.” However, that man demurred, saying, “Lord, let me first go and bury my father.” The response of the Master appears to modern ears harsh and uncaring, “Leave the dead to bury their own dead. But as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God” [LUKE 9:59, 60]. Would you follow One who told you that you must not place family before Him, that you must not be so attached to providing care for ageing parents that you fail to serve Him?

Another individual volunteered, “I will follow you, Lord, but let me first say farewell to those at my home.” Now, take note of Jesus’ response to him, “No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God” [LUKE 9:61, 62]. To modern ears, Jesus’ demand appears thoughtless, cold, insensitive, even heartless. He didn’t consider the hardship this man might encounter; He didn’t seem to think of the sacrifice the man was willing to make.

Consequently, we contemporary preachers attempt to soften the call to discipleship. Jesus’ call to those who would follow Him was, “Come! Live! Die!” Our call today is, “Come! Prosper! Enjoy!” We are timid, fearful of insulting those who are so enmeshed in this dying world that we dare not call them to this great and noble task of serving the Son of God. We call people to join the church, promising them that we will press no demands on them. We call people to believe the message, promising all the benefits of the Faith. However, we fail to tell those who would respond that the cost will be great—that they must be willing to crucify their own desires. Disciples are called to serve the Master and to serve His people.

Churches today are run as corporations. If there is a need in the congregation, we hire someone to care for the need. If the building needs attention, we hire carpenters and plumbers and electricians; we would never think of asking the members of the assembly to volunteer. If there is need for people to operate the equipment required to broadcast the services, we hire someone to do what is necessary; we don’t want to burden busy people by inviting them to invest their own lives in the work of the Kingdom. What is esteemed among the modern church goes is the knowledge that they can come to a service and witness a presentation that touches the emotions and diverts the mind for a brief time. So it is today that we go to church, but we have ceased to be the church. Church membership makes no demands of us, and we are unprepared to offer to inconvenience ourselves for the sake of Christ or His people.

I am astounded that there are actually people who have convinced themselves that they can sing as part of a worship team on Sunday, all the while complaining if they have to spend more than an hour in a service of worship presented to the King of kings, and then sing in a cabaret on Saturday evening, assisting the bar to sell drinks by entertaining the drunks. I am even more amazed that they still imagine they are somehow honouring God. The churches of this day have reduced the worship of the King to a presentation by specialists which is watched by bored occupants of the pews who feel as if they are performing a duty by being in the service.

I am astonished at the number of ministers who are too busy to prepare a message for one service a week. They manage to find a brief presentation on the Internet or plagiarise a sermon from someone else. Listen and you will even hear stolen illustrations transformed into personal experiences of those who have pirated them. Such people imagine that they are serving the Lord.

There was a day in the not too distant past when the churches of the nation were sending out missionaries to spread the message of life throughout the world. Men and women, called of God to serve in distant places, volunteered to go to distant lands and to difficult places in order to reveal the love of God through testifying to the transforming grace of the Master. Seminaries and Bible training schools were built because of the demand of those wishing to equip themselves for service in the Kingdom of God.

During the years of my service among the churches of the Master, I have witnessed a disturbing transformation in the life of the faithful. Today, churches occasionally organise a group to go to some mission station—for a week or perhaps even for two weeks. Some especially motivated individuals may serve for six months, but seldom any longer than that. It is no longer difficult to matriculate in a Bible curriculum or to enroll in seminary classes—entering classes are not full and there is ample room for those who decide to attend these institutions. Requirements for acceptance to courses in pastoral studies have been changed to reflect the lack of preparation for service in the Kingdom. Today, few view service in the Kingdom as a career. Most students entering Bible colleges want to take a few courses, or attend for a year or two; there is no sense of preparing for a lifetime of service.

Ezekiel decried the loss of spiritual vitality in his day. Speaking on behalf of God, the prophet wrote, “Her priests have done violence to my law and have profaned my holy things. They have made no distinction between the holy and the common, neither have they taught the difference between the unclean and the clean, and they have disregarded my Sabbaths, so that I am profaned among them” [EZEKIEL 22:26]. In a similar manner, contemporary Christians are indistinguishable from the world. We dress the same, watch the same movies and television shows, speak the same way and act in the same manner. What is worse, we preachers fail to make a distinction between what is holy and what is common.

I have said these things so that I might display in bright colours the manner in which the Faith is being changed by our culture from the days in which the Master walked among men. The message of the Master has not changed; we have changed. Sin is as evil as ever it was; however, it seems as if the saints have ceased resisting wickedness. Whereas there once was a sharp distinction between the righteous and the wicked, today there is a bland sameness. The colour of sin is no longer seen as black, nor is it contrasted with the pure white of the faithful. Rather, life today is muted into shades of grey. Christians are no longer distinguishable from the world, nor do we particularly wish to be so distinguished. We want to be liked, but we are no longer respected. The message of the Master peals out, calling those who would follow Him to choose voluntarily to live a life of sacrifice.

**EVALUATING WHAT COUNTS** — In the schools of the nation, our youth are taught that they are special. Everyone wins; there are no losers. Some schools no longer give letter grades because it negates the message that the young people are special. We go to a sporting event for youth, and everyone is declared a winner. The school presents a sports day, and every child receives a ribbon. Striving to excel is no longer necessary because each child, regardless of exertion or ability, is special. Thus, an entire generation is reduced to a bland sameness.

I bring this up, not because I desire to start a fight with schools or the teachers’ unions, but because that same decadent attitude is brought into the churches of our Lord. Today, churches present heaven without hell. The modern message is salvation without sanctification, redemption without repentance. We are promised justification without transformation. Consequently, the churches are populated with people who know the language of Zion though they possess none of the divine credentials that would admit them into the holy fellowship.

Nehemiah bemoaned the conditions prevalent in Jerusalem on his second journey there. “I saw the Jews who had married women of Ashdod, Ammon and Moab. And half of their children spoke the language of Ashdod, and they could not speak the language of Judah, but only the language of each people” [NEHEMIAH 13:23, 24]. Much the same situation prevails among the churches of this day as people claim allegiance to the Faith and walk according to the world.

The Master uttered the words of the text in the context of discipleship. It is necessary to state what discipleship is not so that we can establish what discipleship is. Discipleship is not church membership, though those who are disciples will undoubtedly unite with a congregation of like-minded believers. Discipleship is not participating in the rites and rituals of a church, though disciples will assuredly seek to identify with the Master through baptism and they will remember His sacrifice as they share in the Communion Meal. Discipleship is not doing good deeds, though the disciple of Christ will long to do that which is good to the praise of His glory.

Discipleship is nothing less than voluntarily enrolling oneself in the School of Jesus. Discipleship is accepting His call to die to self that He might live through His disciple. Discipleship is choosing “by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect” [ROMANS 12:1, 2]. Discipleship is learning to say, as did the Apostle, “I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me” [GALATIANS 2:20].

Jesus calls those who would follow Him to crucify their own desires that He might shine through them. Let me demonstrate the distinction between one who is religious and one who is a disciple. It is witnessed in an exchange between Jesus as a rich young man, recorded in Mark’s Gospel. “As [Jesus] was setting out on his journey, a man ran up and knelt before him and asked him, ‘Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?’ And Jesus said to him, ‘Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone. You know the commandments: “Do not murder, Do not commit adultery, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Do not defraud, Honor your father and mother.”’ And he said to him, ‘Teacher, all these I have kept from my youth.’ And Jesus, looking at him, loved him, and said to him, ‘You lack one thing: go, sell all that you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me.’ Disheartened by the saying, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.

“And Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, ‘How difficult it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!’ And the disciples were amazed at his words. But Jesus said to them again, ‘Children, how difficult it is to enter the kingdom of God! It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God.’ And they were exceedingly astonished, and said to him, ‘Then who can be saved?’ Jesus looked at them and said, ‘With man it is impossible, but not with God. For all things are possible with God’” [MARK 10:17-27].

Keeping rules and performing rituals will never suffice to make one a disciple; a disciple must love Christ supremely. And the evidence of love for the Master is willingness to follow Him regardless of the cost. When I first came to faith, I visited throughout the Oak Cliff section of Dallas with a man named Ben. Ben was about as smooth as the backyard gate; he was abrasive in many ways and he was aggressive in presenting the Faith of Christ the Lord.

Whenever someone would confess faith in Christ, Ben would ask them if they were ashamed of the Saviour. No one ever said they were ashamed of Jesus. “Let me ask you,” he would probe, “would you follow Him wherever He leads you?” Again, the new saints would agree that they would follow Jesus. Then, Ben would ask one final question. “If Christ clearly called you to leave your parents behind, if He called you to leave all your friends, calling you to go to Africa to tell the people there about faith in Jesus, would you go?”

The manner in which Ben asked the question sobered those whom he addressed. They recognised that he was serious. I don't recall anyone responding in a cavalier manner; all alike took the matter serious. I don't recall anyone demurring or stating that they would refuse to go. The issue before the disciple is, "Do you love Me more than these" [see JOHN 21:15].

Jesus does not call everyone to travel to foreign, exotic places. He does call all to follow Him wherever He may lead. That leading may be to a neighbour with a broken heart, to a friend who is reeling from a numbing diagnosis or to a colleague who is watching her marriage dissolve before her eyes. He will absolutely lead you into time alone with Him, challenging you to consider what the most precious thing is in your estimate.

What is the most precious thing you possess? Can it be measured in dollars and cents? Can it be weighed or calibrated? Can it be quantitated in some manner? Or is the most precious thing you possess something that is properly called an intangible? For some people, family is the most precious thing in the world. However, sweet family ties must one day be dissolved. If we enter Heaven, we do so as individuals and not as families. No child goes to Heaven because of a godly father. No man goes to Heaven because he had a praying wife. No woman goes to Heaven because her husband pursued hard after the Saviour.

For others, gaining knowledge consumes their attention; this is the most precious thing in the world in their estimate. Tragically, mental acuity dissipates as we age. The brilliant mind of an earlier day is one day quiet, unable to acquire any further information. Hobbies that gather the things of this world must one day be set aside, and the things we have so carefully acquired will be treated as junk by others who did not value what we thought to be so precious. Jesus challenged those who would follow Him to think carefully about what is valuable, distinguishing the precious from the pedestrian. That which is destined for dust is ultimately of no value to you. That which persists for all eternity is of infinite value to you.

The Apostle of Love has written, "Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him, because all that is in the world (the desire of the flesh and the desire of the eyes and the arrogance produced by material possessions) is not from the Father, but is from the world. And the world is passing away with all its desires, but the person who does the will of God remains forever." [1 JOHN 2:15-17 NET BIBLE].

All that is identified with this world must one day perish. That which panders to our personal comfort must one day perish. That which is pleasurable and which stimulates our senses must one day cease to exist. That which makes us so proud now, shall be no longer. However, that which is done for the glory of Christ the Lord remains. In an earlier day, the believer would often hear a couplet designed to encourage service to the Master.

Just one life, 'twill soon be past;  
What's done for Christ alone shall last.

In this vein, Jesus taught on one occasion, "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" [MATTHEW 6:19-21]. Your treasure is revealed by what brings you the greatest pleasure in life. Your treasure is that which you would most hate to be without. Your treasure is divulged by that to which your mind turns when it is free to think whatever you wish. By this criterion, what is your treasure? After all, where you treasure is, there your heart will be also.

A dear friend recently passed into eternity. I've thought a lot about Mary and Craig in these past several weeks. They had suffered greatly all the days we have known them. Mary was afflicted with rheumatoid arthritis throughout the time we knew her. She endured multiple surgeries, painful treatments and the limitations and frustrations that accompany that dreadful disease. Her only son was cruelly injured in an auto crash. Because he is permanently brain injured, she spent the final decade of her life providing round-the-clock care for him. Then, she was diagnosed with a malignant brain tumour; there would be no cure.

Despite her hardships, Mary was a joyful, gracious woman; there was always a smile affixed on her face. She was always ready to tell others of her faith in the Saviour, encouraging those whom she met to trust in God. She was a gifted teacher who taught many women, especially, about the Faith; she always reflected the grace and goodness of the Master. I can only imagine the number of people whom Mary led into the Kingdom through her witness and by her winsome personality. She was rich in the things that count.

Contrast Mary's obvious estimate of what was truly valuable with the valuation of a man that was introduced through a parable Jesus told on one occasion. "The land of a rich man produced plentifully, and he thought to himself, 'What shall I do, for I have nowhere to store my crops?' And he said, 'I will do this: I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I will say to my soul, "Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.'" But God said to him, 'Fool! This night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?' So is the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God" [LUKE 12:16-21].

Rich toward God? Whatever could the Master have meant by using that strange phrase? He pointed to the individual who actively sought to know the will of God and who courageously did the things that God commanded. He was speaking of one who loved the Lord his God with all his heart and with all his soul and with all his mind and with all his strength [see MARK 12:30]. He spoke of the individual who had learned to maintain an eternal perspective, valuing that which is of true worth.

The Master related two parables that illustrate what it means to be rich toward God. Here's the first one. "The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and covered up. Then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field" [MATTHEW 13:44]. The second parable is akin to the first. "The kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls, who, on finding one pearl of great value, went and sold all that he had and bought it" [MATTHEW 13:45, 46].

Jesus identified that which is of eternal worth when He said. "I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life? And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? Therefore do not be anxious, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you" [MATTHEW 6:25-33].



**A CAUSE THAT WILL LAST** — The United States held elections this past week. It is apparent that the United States is now a divided nation—red states and blue states, wealth creators and redistributionists appear to be about equally divided. The war against the Christian religion appears to have intensified, and those who have respect for this most holy Faith no longer predominate. The moral majority has become the moral minority. Undoubtedly, progressive moralists will continue their attempt to redefine the Christian Faith, applying their vision of a social utopia that is no longer bothered by what is commonly viewed as archaic and bothersome moral values of the past. The situation there appears dramatic because it is novel in light of the history of that nation. The identical situation has prevailed in our own nation for many years.

If Christians in the United States and in Canada have fixed their hope on a deliverance from evil by political means, they will be sorely disappointed. No politician will bring in the Millennium. Politicians seek to use the Faith for their own schemes; and we Christians too often permit them to do so by identifying more openly with a political party than we do with the Son of God.. The Faith was born at a time when tyrants ruled; and it spread despite persecution. The times of greatest danger to the Faith are the times of peace with the world. Perhaps our days of social rest are at an end; perhaps we are entering days of persecution and coercion now.

It would be very easy for the conscientious believer to become discouraged. The reason we grow discouraged is that too often we are so tied to this present dying world that we forget why the Master left us here. I do make this note from history—the Faith of Christ the Lord has always done well under persecution. Like stamping on a campfire in the midst of a tinder dry forest, persecution will only spread the embers, ensuring the growth of the true Faith.

Opposition to that which is good and holy and noble will only ensure the spread of the Faith.

I don't deny that many of the professed people of God will fall away under pressure; they will be unwilling to suffer for the cause of Christ. Such is to be anticipated as so few live for Him in a time of relative peace. However, there will always be those drawn to the Faith when they witness the courage and commitment of the few. Bear in mind the ancient maxim that minorities, not majorities, change history. The faithful have never been in the majority; rather the few have directed the course of history as they walked humbly before the Master.

Let me speak pointedly in these closing moments. I would rather suffer defeat in a cause that is destined to succeed than to win a victory in a cause that is destined to fail. The Christian has enlisted in a cause which is destined to succeed. God Himself has promised that we shall not be defeated. Jesus said, "I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it" [MATTHEW 16:18]. When the Master was preparing to leave this earth, He charged His servants, "Engage in business until I come" [see LUKE 19:13].

Among the most comforting words the Saviour ever spoke to His servants were these. "Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also. And you know the way to where I am going" [JOHN 14:1-4]. We have a hope. We live in anticipation. The world can only live for the moment; the Christian lives for eternity.

The Master has gone away for a brief while; He is coming again. His final charge delivered to disciples was to engage in His eternal business. "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age" [MATTHEW 28:19, 20].

“What does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses or forfeits himself” [LUKE 9:25]? The answer to the question is ignored by far too many of the professed people of God. Living for the moment, focused on the things which cannot last and which cannot give lasting joy, far too many of us are absent from the labours that we have been assigned. Jesus appointed us to call the lost to life. He appointed us to testify of what we know to be true concerning Him. He charged us to be His witnesses. When we fulfil His command, we will discover the greatest treasure we can even know. When we work together with Him, we will advance His Kingdom. Then, we will avoid the dark warning which Jesus spoke immediately after the words of our text were spoken. “Whoever is ashamed of me and of my words, of him will the Son of Man be ashamed when he comes in his glory and the glory of the Father and of the holy angels” [LUKE 9:26].

Jesus is coming to receive His own to Himself. Are you ready to meet Him? The hope of the child of God is expressed in the words John wrote so many years ago. “Little children, abide in him, so that when he appears we may have confidence and not shrink from him in shame at his coming. If you know that he is righteous, you may be sure that everyone who practices righteousness has been born of him.

“See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him. Beloved, we are God’s children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure” [1 JOHN 2:28-3:3]. Amen, and amen.