

I.N.I.

4th Sunday in Lent
March 26, 2017
Matt. 20:17-28

In Christ Jesus, our suffering Savior, who came to serve not to be served and to give His life as a ransom for us, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

What do you think about when you hear the phrase “living the good life”? Fun, goods, time off. From the world's point of view that phrase means having it all: money, vacations, cars, boats, cruises, no problems, a life of luxury, being served, etc.

But from our Savior's point of view it is entirely different. Living the good life meant perfect obedience, humility, sacrifice, self-denial, suffering, serving. Well that is our theme for this morning:

LIVING THE GOOD LIFE!

Our text takes place a few days before Jesus rode into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday. This is the third time that Jesus has prophesied about His upcoming death. Only this time He is much more specific. He speaks of being betrayed to His enemies, of the chief priests and scribes condemning Him to death and handing Him over to the Gentiles to be mocked, whipped and crucified. Jesus knew what was to come. He was not caught unawares and unprepared. He set His face toward the cross and willingly allowed Himself to be arrested in the Garden, to be tried and unjustly convicted, to be beaten, mocked, ridiculed, spit upon, whipped and finally crucified. He gave Himself into death.

LIVING THE GOOD LIFE!

I: That's what Jesus did from birth to death.

Yes, Jesus lived the **GOOD LIFE** from the beginning to the end. That's the good life? Yes, from His birth to His death, Jesus lived the **GOOD LIFE**, the **PERFECT LIFE** for us. That was the reason for His coming. In the last verse of our text Jesus clearly states, **JUST AS THE SON OF MAN DID NOT COME TO BE SERVED, BUT TO SERVE, AND TO GIVE HIS LIFE A RANSOM FOR MANY.**

Jesus calls Himself the Son of Man throughout this section. He is God who became Man. The Seed of the woman promised so many years ago in the Garden of Eden. Acting as the representative of the human race, He submitted to His Father's demands in His law and fulfilled everyone of them perfectly; with a perfect obedient heart of love. He had no sin and yet He endured the wrath and condemnation of His Father against sin for the whole sinful human race. He suffered and died in the place of all of us.

Yes, Jesus **LIVED THE GOOD LIFE!** Not according to the world's standards. What greater sufferer could you find. The world would describe Jesus' life as one to be pitied; a miserable, destitute, lonely existence; a poverty stricken person who had a low self image, in fact was dysfunctional because He wanted to suffer and die. But from God's point of view it was the **BEST LIFE, the PERFECT LIFE** of selflessness, or service, submission, sacrifice, obedience, humility. Jesus helped all who were in distress, he was a servant to the sick, diseased and downtrodden. He washed His disciple's feet. He was a friend to the despised and lost. He performed miracles for others, not Himself. He allowed Himself to be arrested. He did not struggle and try to get away. He gave Himself into the hands of His enemies and gave His life as a ransom payment for the world. Jesus drank the cup of suffering that He was given, willingly, without complaint.

Yes, Jesus **LIVED THE GOOD LIFE** from birth to death because He saw the end result of His suffering and death. In Hebrews 12:2 we read, **LET US FIX OUR EYES ON JESUS, THE AUTHOR AND FINISHER OF OUR FAITH, WHO FOR THE JOY THAT WAS SET BEFORE HIM ENDURED THE CROSS, DESPISING THE SHAME, AND HAS SAT DOWN AT THE RIGHT HAND OF THE THRONE OF GOD.** Jesus saw the end result of His perfect life of obedience, of His suffering and death.

The result? The redemption of all of mankind. God declared the whole world, all people, not guilty because He laid our guilt upon His Son. Paul tells us in Phil. 2:7-11 **BUT (HE) MADE HIMSELF OF NO REPUTATION, TAKING THE FORM OF A SERVANT, AND COMING IN THE LIKENESS OF MEN. AND BEING FOUND IN APPEARANCE AS A MAN, HE HUMBLING HIMSELF AND BECAME OBEDIENT TO THE POINT OF DEATH, EVEN THE DEATH OF THE CROSS. THEREFORE GOD ALSO HAS HIGHLY EXALTED HIM**

AND GIVEN HIM THE NAME WHICH IS ABOVE EVERY NAME, THAT AT THE NAME OF JESUS EVERY KNEE SHOULD BOW, OF THOSE IN HEAVEN, AND OF THOSE ON EARTH, AND OF THOSE UNDER THE EARTH, AND THAT EVERY TONGUE SHOULD CONFESS THAT JESUS CHRIST IS LORD, TO THE GLORY OF GOD THE FATHER.

Jesus not only foresaw His suffering and death, but also the results of it and of His glorious resurrection and ascension and of His being restored to the Glory of the Father which He had before His incarnation.

Unfortunately His disciples did not understand what was being said. The mother of James and John came up to Jesus and requested that He place her two sons in the position of highest honor and authority in His kingdom. At this point in their life we see that they were still confused and didn't know what Christ's kingdom was all about. They were looking at it from the view of this world and sought an earthly kingdom where Christ would rule. Instead of self-denial, self-sacrifice and service they wanted a position of honor, power and prominence where they would rule over others. They wanted to live **THE GOOD LIFE!**

In their sinful pride they wanted these positions fully expecting that they had merited them, not giving a thought to the desires of the other disciples who had also forsaken all to follow Jesus. They selfishly desired preferential treatment from Jesus.

Jesus' heart must have been breaking when He heard this. Here He is speaking of all that He was willing to endure for them, to suffer for them, to be beaten and mocked for them, to be crucified for them and these two disciples completely miss the point and arrogantly request positions of highest honor for themselves. Lovingly yet firmly Jesus rebukes these 2 friends. **YOU DO NOT KNOW WHAT YOU ASK. ARE YOU ABLE TO DRINK THE CUP THAT I AM ABOUT TO DRINK, AND BE BAPTIZED WITH THE BAPTISM THAT I AM BAPTIZED WITH?**

Jesus tries to open their eyes to see their foolishness. Do they really think that they could fulfill God's plan of salvation and drink the bitter cup of suffering, wrath and damnation which He must drink? Could they endure being immersed in the baptism of blood which He would shed for all people? In fervent love and devotion yet spiritual ignorance they respond **WE ARE ABLE.**

Jesus responds, **YOU WILL INDEED DRINK MY CUP,** you will suffer, not with Me as Savior, not for Me as My substitute, but by following Me as My disciples. They could not share in Jesus' suffering and death for the sins of the world but as followers of Christ they would experience suffering, they would drink the cup of sorrow, suffering, ridicule, rejection, persecution, loss and pain. James did. We are told in Acts 12:2 that James was killed with a sword because of His faith in Jesus. John was not martyred for his faith, but when he was an old man he was exiled to the island of Patmos as a punishment for being a follower of the Lord Jesus.

II: That's the only proper response to Jesus' death and resurrection.

They wanted to **LIVE THE GOOD LIFE** and Jesus said "you will! But it's not what you expect. You will respond to My suffering and death by being moved by the Holy Spirit to live the **GOOD LIFE** of sacrifice, of service, of humility, of self-denial, of obedient love."

How like James and John we also are. We want to **LIVE THE GOOD LIFE**, from the world's point of view. **Our human nature** wants no troubles, wants a care-free life of leisure and luxury, wants to relax and enjoy our days, and serve our self with our time, talents and resources. We don't want suffering and sorrow. But when we are led to see the **GOOD LIFE** of obedient love and suffering sacrifice Jesus lived for us, then the Spirit leads us to regard living this kind of **GOOD LIFE** of service, self-denial, humility, sacrifice, repentance, obedience and giving as the only kind of life that is truly worthwhile.

It is the only proper response of a Christian to Christ's death and resurrection.

As Christians we should expect and yes, even rejoice in suffering for Christ's sake. Let's repeat that. **AS CHRISTIANS WE SHOULD EXPECT AND YES, EVEN REJOICE IN SUFFERING FOR CHRIST'S SAKE.** We can never earn the glory of heaven by our suffering here on earth. Christ has already done that for us. It is God's free gift in Christ to all who believe. But the way to glory is through the cross. It was for Christ and it will be for us also.

We need to ask ourselves not only during this Lenten season when we focus on our sins and on our Savior's suffering but throughout our life, are we able to suffer cheerfully and even in the worst of times still cling to Jesus and His Words of promise? Can we really part with everything in this life

for Jesus as we heard two weeks ago? Do we really believe that our purpose in life is to serve rather than be served, to give rather than to be given to? Do we look upon ourselves as better than others or can we with the power of the Holy Spirit working in us put down our haughty pride and in humility emulate Christ's life of serving others? Do we expect our life as a Christian to go smoothly and happily with all that we want and need, blessings upon blessings, because we are Christians---or are we willing to bear our Christian cross of suffering and shame for Jesus?

James and John missed the point of Jesus' words, may we not do the same. Someone has said, **CHRISTIANITY, IF IT IS WORTH ANYTHING IT IS WORTH EVERYTHING; BUT IT IS WORTH VERY LITTLE, IF IT IS NOT WORTH SUFFERING FOR!**

Jesus said in our text: **YOU KNOW THAT THE RULERS OF THE GENTILES LORD IT OVER OTHER THEM, AND THOSE WHO ARE GREAT EXERCISE AUTHORITY OVER THEM. YET IT SHALL NOT BE SO AMONG YOU; BUT WHOEVER DESIRES TO BECOME GREAT AMONG YOU, LET HIM BE YOUR SERVANT. AND WHOEVER DESIRES TO BE FIRST AMONG YOU, LET HIM BE YOUR SLAVE--** May the spirit of Christ's willingness to suffer for our sakes and His humble serving of others be showered upon us through the Holy Spirit's working in His Word. The disciples had a lot to learn. A little over a week after our text took place the disciples were being seated for the Passover on Maundy Thursday and an argument broke out among them as to who of them should be considered the greatest in Jesus' kingdom. And Jesus had to rebuke them again.

We **TOO** have a lot to learn. Our inborn selfish nature demands my rights, wants my way, looks for the easy way out and arrogantly feels we are better than others and should be served. But when the message of Christ's selfless sacrificing love fills our hearts we will be led to repent of our sins and put down the old Adam, the selfish human nature, our sinful flesh and through the power of the Gospel be led to live the really **GOOD LIFE** of humble service, obedience and suffering for Jesus' sake.

May God grant this for each of us, throughout our lives here on earth, alone to His glory.
Amen.