

# The Cost of Being a Blessing

by J.R. Miller

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*The sermon teaches that true blessings require significant personal sacrifice and self-denial.*

**Scripture:** Matthew 5:16, Matthew 16:25, Luke 6:38, John 12:24, Romans 12:1, 2 Corinthians 1:4, Galatians 6:2, Philippians 2:4, James 1:12, 1 Peter 5:10

**Topics:** "Sacrifice", "Service to Others"

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## Description

J.R. Miller emphasizes that while doing good may seem effortless, true blessings come at a significant cost, requiring self-denial and sacrifice. He illustrates that a life of genuine service to others often involves small, thoughtful acts that stem from a heart focused on others rather than oneself. Miller argues that to be a true blessing, one must embrace the struggles and pains of life, as all meaningful contributions to the world are born from suffering. He draws parallels between the sacrifices made by Jesus and the necessity of personal sacrifice in our own lives to yield a fruitful harvest. Ultimately, Miller concludes that a life lived for self will yield no blessings, while a life given in service to others, despite its costs, will bring about true joy and fulfillment.

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## Transcript

Preachers sometimes tell us, in urging us to live a useful life, that it costs but little to do good. In a sense this is true. Without large outlay of money, and without great expenditure of strength--one may do many helpful things and make one's life a rich blessing in the world; yet there is a deeper sense, in which one cannot be a true blessing in this world, except with much cost.

"What had she done?" asks one, in referring to a life which had filled a home with blessings. "Absolutely nothing--but radiant smiles, beaming good-humor, the tact of knowing what everyone felt and everyone needed--told that she had got out of SELF and learned to think of others. So that at one time it showed itself in quenching by sweet words, the quarrel which lowering brows and raised tones already showed to be impending; at another, by soothing an invalid's pillow; at another, by soothing a sobbing child; at another, by humoring and softening a father who had returned weary and ill-tempered from the irritating cares of business. None but she saw those things; none but a loving heart could see them. That was the secret of her heavenly power. The one who will be found in trial capable of great acts of love--is ever the one who is always doing considerate small ones."

Such helpful ministries seem to cost nothing: they flow from lip and hand and heart, as quietly and naturally as if no effort were required to perform them. Yet the least of them is the fruit of self-denial and

sacrifice. They cost heart's blood. No real good or blessing of any kind, do we ever get, which has not cost some other one, a pang or a tear. Nor can we in our turn do good to others--without cost. The life that is to be a beneficent one, cannot be one of ease and selfish enjoyment. Even a grain of wheat must fall into the ground and die--before it can yield any harvest. To become useful and helpful, we must die to SELF and to personal ambitions and longings: "He who loves his life shall lose it; and he who hates his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal."

We may have our choice. We may live for SELF, taking good care of our lives, not exposing them to danger, not making personal sacrifices, having a keen eye always for our own interests and advancement. By this plan of life, we may come to old age hale and with our strength unabated. People may congratulate us on our well-preserved state, and we may have considerable pride in the outcome of our prudence and carefulness. There certainly seems to be something quite pleasant and attractive in such a life--yet really it is only the grain of wheat remaining safe and dry in the garner, and kept from falling into the earth. It is well preserved--but there is no harvest from it. The life abides by itself alone, well enough kept--but with no increase. It has been no blessing to the world. It has wrought no ministry of love.

But there is another way to live. It is altogether to forget self--not to think of nor care for one's own life--but to throw it away in obedience to God and in the service of others. People will say we are foolish thus to waste our golden life, to wear ourselves out in toils that bring us no return, to make sacrifices for others who are not worthy. They sought to hold Jesus back from his cross. They said his life was too precious to be wasted in such a way--that it ought to be kept for crowning and for reigning among men. But we understand now that Jesus made no mistake when he chose the way of sacrifice. The grain of wheat let fall into the ground--has yielded a most glorious harvest! Jesus has never been sorry for the choice he made; he has never regretted Calvary.

The heart of the lesson is, that we cannot be blessings in this world--and at the same time live for our own selfish pleasures and desires. That which has cost us nothing--is worth nothing to others. This principle applies in every life and in all spheres. All along the ages, whatever is good and beautiful and worthy--has been the fruit of suffering and pain. Civilization has advanced through wars, through revolutions and failures, through the ruin, decay and overturning of empires and kingdoms. Every thoughtful reader of the world's history understands this. What Christian civilization is today--it is as the harvest of long, sad centuries of weary struggle, toil and oppression. Earth's thrones of power, are built on the wreck of hopes that have been crushed. Every advance worth recording, has been made through carnage and disaster.

It seems that without shedding of blood, there is not only no remission of sin--but no progress in life, no growth. Heaven's victorious throngs wearing white robes and waving branches of palm, have come up out of great tribulation. Even Jesus appears in glory as a Lamb that has been slain; his blessedness and his saving power--are the fruit of suffering and death. We know, too, that all the joys and honors of redemption come from the Savior's cross, and that personal holiness can be reached only through struggle, conflict and the crucifixion of SELF. Thus whatever is good in earth and in heaven--is the outcome of pain, sacrifice and death.

This law of the cost of whatever is best--even of all that is truly useful--in life finds illustration at every point. We cannot live a day but something must die--to be food for the sustaining of our life. We cannot be warmed in winter but some miner must crouch and toil in darkness to provide fuel for our fires. We cannot be clothed but worms must weave their own lives into silk threads, or sheep must shiver in the chill air, that their fleeces may cover us. The gems and the jewels which the women wear, and which they prize so

highly, are brought to them through the anguish and the peril of the poor wretches that hunt and dive for them; and the furs that we wrap about us in winter--cost the lives of the creatures which first wore them, and which have to die to provide the warmth and the comfort for us. The child lives through the mother's pangs and anguish. We cannot even pray--but pierced hands must be reached down to lift up to heaven our sighs and cries, and then held up in continual intercession to press our pleas before God. Divine mercy can come to us--only through the blood of the Lamb.

It is doubtful whether in the realm of spiritual influence, any blessing of real value ever comes to us from another which has not received its baptism of pains and tears. That which has cost nothing in the heart of him who gives it--is not likely to be of great use to him who receives it. The true poets must always learn in suffering, what they teach in song.

The story of all the world's best thoughts is the same. The things in men's writings that really and deeply help us--they have learned in pain and anguish, in sore mental conflicts or in suffering. The words of the preacher, however eloquently and fluently uttered, which he has not himself been taught in experiences of struggle, may please the ear and charm the fancy--but they do not greatly help or bless others. We all know that the most effective oratory is not that which flows without effort from the lips of the speaker--but that which in the knit brow, the glowing eye and the trembling voice--tells of strong feeling and of cost of life. All great thoughts, are the fruit of deep pondering, and oftentimes of suffering and struggle! "Wherever a great thought is born," said one who knew by bitter experience, "there always is Gethsemane."

The lessons alone which have cost us pain, which we have learned in struggle, which have been born out of anguish of heart--will heal and really bless others.

It is only when we have passed through the bitterness of temptation, wrestling with evil and sore beset ourselves, victorious only through the grace of Christ--that we are ready to be helpers of others in temptation.

It is only when we have known sorrow, when the chords of our love have been swept by it and when we have been comforted by divine grace and helped to endure--that we are fitted to become comforters of others in their sorrow.

This law prevails, therefore, in all life. We yield blessing--only through dying.

There is a Chinese legend of a potter who sought for years and years to put a certain tint on the vases he made--but all his efforts failed. At last, discouraged and in despair, he threw himself into his furnace, and his body was consumed in the fire; then when the vases were taken out, they bore the exquisite color he had striven so long in vain to produce. The legend illustrates the truth--that we can do our noblest and best work, only at cost of SELF. The alabaster box must be broken--before its fragrances can flow out. Christ lifted up and saved the world--not by an easy, pleasant, successful life in it--but by suffering and dying in it and for it. And we can never bless the world merely by having a good time in it--but only by giving our lives for it.

Work for others that costs nothing--is scarcely worth doing! At least, it takes heart's blood to heal hearts. Too many of us are ready to work for Christ and do good to our fellow-men, only so long as it is easy and requires no sacrifice or self-denial; but if we stop there, we stop just where our service is likely to become of use. This saving of life proves, in the end--the losing of it. It is those who sow in tears--who shall reap in joy. It is he who goes forth and weeps, bearing precious seed--who shall come again with rejoicing,

bringing his sheaves with him! We may take easy work if we will--work that costs us nothing, that involves no pain or self-denial--but we must not then be surprised if our hands are empty in the great harvest-time!

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