

Must I Live

by Vance Havner

The sermon challenges listeners to prioritize their relationship with Christ above all else, even if it means sacrificing their own life or interests.

Duration: 25:25

Scripture: Exodus 20:3, Matthew 10:37, Luke 14:26, Acts 5:29, Acts 20:24, 1 Corinthians 2:2, Revelation 12:11

Topics: "Discipleship", "Sacrificial Living"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher discusses three verses from the Bible that present a challenge to believers. The first verse is from Luke 14:26, where Jesus says that anyone who does not hate their family and even their own life cannot be his disciple. The second verse is from Acts 20:24, where Paul declares that he does not consider his own life dear to himself, but rather focuses on finishing his ministry joyfully. The third verse is from Revelation 12:23, which speaks of overcoming the devil through the blood of the Lamb and the word of their testimony. The preacher emphasizes the importance of stewardship and recounts the story of his father, a faithful preacher who served God with plain faith. He contrasts the devil's way of valuing life with the example of Jim Elliott, a missionary who willingly gave his life for the sake of the gospel. The preacher concludes by highlighting the significance of serving Christ and glorifying Him, even if it means having nothing in the world's eyes but possessing everything in God's kingdom.

Transcript

There are three verses that I would like for you to couple together in your thought that give us an unusual challenge. Our Lord said in Luke 14, 26, If any man come to me and hate not his father and mother, wife, children, brethren, sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple. In Acts 20, 24, Paul said, But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear to myself, so that I might finish in the joy of the ministry which I have received of the Lord Jesus to testify the gospel of the grace of God.

And then in Revelation 12, 23, And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony. And the fourth of July brings forth to our minds those exciting days when a handful of American patriots chose the risk of death to the loss of liberty. Patrick Henry had stood in an old Richmond church and stated in never-to-be-forgotten words, Is life so dear and peace so sweet as to be purchased at the price of change and slavery? I know not what others may choose, but as for me, give me liberty or give me death.

He was tired of finagling, and the fifty-six noble men gathered in Philadelphia and signed the declaration that banished tyranny from our shores and made a choice between liberty and death. Centuries ago, the Church of Jesus Christ had to choose between two still greater alternatives. Then it was the Roman Empire, and then it was Christ or Caesar.

In those days, the early Christians made a living, some of them, by making idols of craftsmen they were, and they gilded them and sold them to the pagans. Of course, they didn't worship the idols, they didn't bow in their shrines, and some thought it was all right to carve and polish images for sale. But there was an old saint of God in those days by the name of Tertullian.

When they said, You've got to live, he asked just one question, Must you live? A Christian has only one must in this world. He must be faithful to Jesus Christ. Come what may, live or die.

There are no ifs, no reservations, and no alibis. You don't have to live. You don't have to be true.

We must obey God rather than man. Oh, that Sunday morning congregations could learn that approach when they stand and sing, Faith of our Father, we will be true to thee to death, most of them not true enough to get back for the evening service. A lot of orders run under the bridge since these days, but the issues are about the same.

At the get-togethers, you know, the orgies, the wild parties, if a Christian belonged to the crowd that made a living through that organization, they were supposed to attend, I suppose. But today when the boss puts on the Christmas party and the drinks are passed around, you say, Well, I work with this outfit and I must live. And Tertullian would call a cross to you and say, Must you live? We have clever ways and devious tricks by which we stay on good terms with Christ and Belial, we think.

In those days, they had to offer incense to Caesar. Now, that wasn't a test of theological orthodoxy but political loyalty for those Christians. But they might have said, You see, I don't really worship Caesar in my heart, but if I get into trouble and stick my neck out, so I'll go through the motions and placate the powers that be, then go to church and worship the way I really believe.

But the early Christians died before they'd offer a bit of that incense on that altar. They had but one Lord, and they loved him more than life itself. They didn't have to live.

They only had to be faithful. Tertullian would have a rough time getting that across to the average American today. In this atomic age, the only important thing is to stay alive now at any cost.

Churchill said, Safety is the sturdy child of terror and the survival of the twin brother of annihilation. We've come to that point. Somebody asked a boy the other day, What are you going to hope to be when you grow up? He said, Alive.

I can understand that. Madame Chiang Kai-shek said in one of her great speeches, Because of the much intelligent hand wringing over the horrors of modern warfare, freedom and the values of human dignity, which we have been taught to cherish above all else, have been made secondary to biological survival. I wrote through Israel right after the 1967 war and thought of what James Reston said about those Israelites, those soldiers who fought the whole world around them, it appears.

Those people have acted as if the life of the nation was everything, and their personal lives were inconsequential. Now in America, sometimes the military is looked down upon, and amnesty is advocated

rather freely. And the foundations of this land, we forget, were laid by men who counted their lives not dear to themselves.

We negotiate with gangsters and bandits. We've reversed the American policy of the past, anything to stay alive. We didn't start out that way.

When Patrick Henry made his pronouncement, he was not suffering from the ailment that afflicts us today. He said, Give me liberty or give me death, no other choice. And that gallant crew that backed up on this day a long time ago, they had their heroes.

Harrison of Virginia was a heavysset man, and he turned around to Gary of Massachusetts and said, Well, I guess we'll all hang for this, but I'm heavy and I'll go quickly. I imagine you'll dangle around for quite a while. They had only one obligation that day, and thank God they lived up to it.

Teddy Roosevelt said today, what would he say now? Safety first instead of duty first has become the chief enthusiasm. Peace at any price, they say now, is better than no peace. Life at any price must be maintained.

And if we don't get over this obsession of saving our hides and losing our honor doing it, we're going to end up without honor or hides either one. It's man's prediction to be saved when for the truth he ought to die. Do you remember when Chamberlain and Churchill changed jobs? Mr. Chamberlain was a fine man, but he didn't know how to cope with Hitlerism.

And then came along Churchill, who was willing to pay the price and walk through the ruins of London with a victory sign always before him. But we're not even purchasing safety by the present code. It's better to die with a conviction than live with a compromise.

Self-preservation is a powerful instinct. It's not the most important thing on earth. I've said all that to say this.

A Christian doesn't have to live, he has only to be faithful, not only until, but unto. That's what it says here, unto death if necessary. When a man becomes a Christian, he loses the right to his own life.

No longer his own, he's bought with the price of the blood of Jesus Christ. He's the personal property of the Savior bought and paid for on Calvary's tree. Living and dying are incidental, and his business is to glorify Jesus Christ whether by life or by death.

Whether he lives, he lives unto the Lord. If he dies, he dies unto the Lord. He counts not his life dear.

To live is Christ, Paul said, and even that makes dying a paying proposition. To live is Christ and to die is gain. That's the only way I know you can do that, but you do that when you can say, I live for Christ.

And anything that compromises that all-out devotion is to be refused and turned down flatly at any cost. Now that little pinch of incense may have seemed very insignificant. You've seen the great painting of some being led away to be killed because they wouldn't put into the altar that little insignificant bit of an offering.

It may have looked innocent, but to them it was anathema because they knew only one God, and they would not by life or lip pay even a gesture to another. If belonging to your pagan guild compromises your views on Jesus Christ, lose your job first. You don't have to eat.

You don't have to be faithful. You say, that's radical. I know it's radical.

Turned the world upside down one time. No use quibbling about it. You can't untie these knots today.

You have to cut them, and that's radical treatment sometimes. But it's better than cutting off the dog's tail by inches, which is slow business and hard on the dog besides. Now there are a thousand angles to this question.

I work in a bookstore where they sell some abominable books. What do I do? Must you live? Tertullian would say. I don't own the place.

I have to live. Do you have to live? A friend of mine, a jet pilot who used to fly 757 to London, quit. He said, I'm so tired of pushing a thing with a beer and liquor supply behind me, and I can't take it.

Well, you say, that's rather radical. I don't like flying a bar all over the world. You say, that's absurd.

No, we have just, thank God, a few people left who dare to be a little bit queer in the sight of people for the sake of their devotion to Jesus. What puts butter on my bread and determines my conduct a great deal today? A pleasant, agreeable Christian at terms with this age and an amiable neutralism that raises no eyebrow at gilding images and offering some incense to Caesar, that's one of our problems. I believe Christian people ought to let the world follow its own love and sing its own music.

Take my voice and let me sing only always for my King. The other day somebody said, we've got to get our new music. Young people cannot understand the idiom of Isaac Watts.

Now, that's a slam on young people. I've been preaching for 68 years, and I have a better response today from young people than I've ever had in all this time. I'm not going around over the country lambasting the kids, because they've inherited a lot.

And you know who they got it from, don't you? And so I don't lambast them. But it's pretty difficult today to stand alone in such a time. Do you realize that one of the best known hymns, if I'm right in this, and I think I am, is Jesus and Shall It Ever Be, that wonderful hymn written by a 10-year-old.

So don't underprice these youngsters. Back in 1938, I went down to speak at the floor of the Bible Institute. A long-legged, toe-headed, good-looking young fellow came out and said to me, I'm Billy Graham from Charlotte.

You never know who you're meeting when you meet young people. He carried my bag into that school. I wish I had a picture of that.

That's Billy Graham carrying my bag. You don't know. They understand a lot more of these young people than you think they do.

They can get the idiom of Isaac Watts when somebody sings it in the Spirit of God. It will go across every time. I heard just the other day in Dayton, Ohio, in a church there, two ladies got up and sang.

I thought, well, this will be the run of the mill, do it maybe. But no, that lovely lady and her lovely daughter just stood there and sang, My hope is built on nothing less than Jesus' blood and righteousness. Sang it slowly and moved that congregation.

I sat there and I was overwhelmed. My soul has no desire to stay, they sang then, where doubts arise and fears dismay. I hadn't heard that in years.

I was preaching to 1,500 preachers and their wives and moved the Institute the other day. That great crowd got up and sang, not something new that had to be brought into style, but, Oh, happy day that fixed my choice on him, my Savior, and my God. Happy day when Jesus took my sins away.

For you, the Thothias and the Methodists can't meet them when they've had such a wonderful time. They can get it. Every new advance in the history of Christianity has been made by a persecuted minority scorning the values of this age and living by rigid discipline, fools for Christ's sake, counting not their lives dear to themselves.

God's gathering a master's minority today, that's what I think we ought to call it. The last thing he said to the church was, after he'd spoken to all of them and called most of them to repent, the last thing was, I've got one more proposition to make to Laodicea. I'm standing at the door.

I want to disturb you, knocking. I'll take anybody I can get. If any man will hear my voice.

Do you know what we're seeing? We're seeing the assembling of the anyones today. I said that to the Baptist preachers in the Southern Baptist Convention last year out in Los Angeles. I said to them, oh, we had a host of Southern Baptist preachers.

I said, we brag too much. I said, we're out here now in Los Angeles. I believe we could blow this smoke out in three days.

But you don't get rid of that kind of smoke by hot air. But a meteorologist said some weeks before then when they had an unusually bad spell of it, he said this, and it's got a double meaning. Only a wind from elsewhere can clear up this situation.

It's going to take the kind of wind that blew at Pentecost to clear up this muddled situation today when dogma has become smogma. It's going to take the hand of God to do it. Utter devotion.

I watched the training of a seeing-eye dog some time ago. I've always admired those wonderful animals. Here he came down the walk with his charge, and there was a cat lapping up milk out of a saucer out there.

Now, what dog doesn't like to chase a cat? But not that dog. He had eyes only for his master. I thought, Lord, teach me something out of that.

We're not here to survive. We're here to serve, and all that matters is whether by life or by death that Christ be glorified. Paul didn't think he had to live.

Better die right than live wrong. Paul was not to survive. He was not to succeed.

He was out to serve, and serve he did. Some time ago a Coast Guard crew was called in to get out and rescue the folks that had gone down on a boat, and it was an awful night. The captain said, All right, hustle.

Let's get going. One fellow said, But, Captain, we'll never get back. The captain said, We don't have to come back.

We only have to go. That's taken missionaries across the ocean for years and years and years. You see, when you have this, though, you've got everything.

Paul said, They've got nothing, and they've got everything. Having nothing and possessing all things. Did you know you could have nothing and everything all at the same time? That's what the Bible says.

The devil comes around the Christians and says, I'll give you this, and I'll give you that if you'll follow me. The Christian says, You can't have got everything. You can't do anything with a Christian like that.

Oh, the main thing is not success. It's not survival. It's stewardship.

Think of my old daddy. He ought to have been a preacher. God told him to preach, never preached, and he lamented it the rest of his days.

He had two brothers preachers, one a Methodist, one a Baptist. But that little old country church, he was just plain faithful. That's all, just plain faithful.

Cold winter morning, first thing to go up and light that little old wood burning fire in that little old stove. When the preaching was good, when it wasn't, he was there. When he felt well, when he didn't, he was there.

When the weather was good, whether the weather be good or whether the weather be not, whether the weather be cold or whether the weather be hot, whatever the weather, he weathered the weather, whether he liked it or not. He was there every time. There are two ways of counting life, not dear.

Every few days you hear about a car full of teenagers at the end of a wild drunken ride wrapped around a telephone pole, maybe in a horrible scrambled mass of flesh, glass, and steel. That's the devil's way. But there's another way.

I think about Jim Elliot in the jungles of Ecuador, stabbed to death. But he didn't count his life, dear. Take my life, Lord, and use it.

He wrote like a mystic, although he was a good-looking young fellow. He thought he was one of the old-timers. A friend of mine, that was before he went to South America, took me there.

We went to his house to look at television, and God spoke to me by Psalm 119.37, Turn thou mine eyes away from beholding vanity. You say that's extremism. Yes, but it sends the kind of people that can be stabbed to death for Jesus Christ.

I don't know why they always put in the index of the hymn book, Take My Life and Let It Be Consecrated, Lord of Thee. They don't have room to put it all out of the title. So they just put Take My Life and Let It Be.

Just put it up on a shelf somewhere, Lord. Don't do anything with it. That's not what it means.

Don't stop in the middle of that sentence. There's no place to put a period. Take My Life and Let It Be Consecrated, Lord of Thee.

Must you have to live? You don't have to live. You have only be true to God. But you say life is dear.

Count not my life dear to myself. Yes, but notice the next two words. Dear enough that Jesus died to pay for it.

I count not my life dear to myself. Your life is dear to God. Your life is dear to Jesus Christ.

Jesus paid it all. My same old father made it over to heaven just as he went. I noticed he was trying to sing.

I leaned over and the last words he said, Jesus paid it all. All to him I owe. He recognized the heavenly indebtedness.

But thank God it's an indebtedness that pays you dividends all the rest of your life. There are people here this morning. You're living your life.

And it's dear to you in a fashion. It ought to be, of course. But somebody else has a claim on you.

God so loved you that he gave his only begotten son. What have you done about Jesus Christ? You don't believe in walking down aisles and so on. Well, one of these days when you stand before the judge of all the earth, let's see.

You had many opportunities, but it wasn't worth putting one foot in front of the other to say Jesus Christ ought to be worth more than everything in all this world. And there are church members here who ought to say that too. Because we church members don't always put him at the top of the line.

When opportunity is given to you in a moment, how dear is your life? Not dear to you, but dear to Christ. Let's get it straight. It would be a wonderful thing if this could be the morning that somebody would come down here and say, I want to get my values right.

Let's start with what means most. Must you live? Father, we thank thee that there is one who died, the depths of which we never can fathom as long as we live. It will take all eternity to get to the bottom of what a wonderful thing happened.

When you cried out, why, why, hast thou forsaken me? Lord, we are not scholar enough for that, but we thank you for it. Could there be out of this blessed congregation this morning somebody who would say, well, my life is worth more than I thought, but I've been figuring values wrong. I'd like to give it to the one that deserves it, help him to do it, in Jesus name.

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