

## **Introduction**

A couple of months ago, I saw a bumper sticker at Rogers Flea Market that pictured a revolver pointing out, with these words beside it, **“Nothing in this truck is worth dying for.”** That declaration prompts a question. Is there anything worth dying for? Yes, there is. The fact is that some things are worth dying for, which means that they’re worth living for and that’s what I’m going to preach about today.

## **Dying for Jesus**

In 1 Corinthians 13:1-2, Paul mentions four spiritual gifts. The first, in verse 1, is speaking with the tongues of men and of angels. That refers to the Spirit-given ability to speak eloquently and effectively. The second gift, in verse 2, is prophecy. That refers to the Spirit-given ability to receive and speak messages from God. The third gift, in verse 2, is knowing mysteries and knowledge. That refers to the Spirit-given ability to grasp insights and ideas through study and thought. And finally, the fourth gift, in verse 2, is having faith. That refers to the Spirit-given ability to believe God for great things.

Having mentioned those four gifts in verses 1-2, Paul goes on to mention two deeds in verse 3. The first is giving all of our possessions to feed the poor. That refers to remarkable acts of charity. The second deed is surrendering our bodies to be burned. That refers to voluntarily dying for the sake of Jesus and His kingdom.

As we’ve already learned, today is the “International Day of Prayer for the Persecuted Church.” Because it is, I’d like us to focus our thoughts on that second deed Paul mentions in verse 3 – surrendering our bodies to be burned. He may have been alluding to Daniel 3, which records King Nebuchadnezzar casting Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego into the fiery furnace because they stood up for God.

There’s something we need to grasp on this special Sunday. History is littered with the bodies of disciples and friends of Jesus who

voluntarily died for the sake of Him and His kingdom.

I think of a Puritan turned Quaker named Mary Dyer who lived from 1611 – 1650. Mary was arrested and sentenced to death in Boston for defying the Massachusetts Bay Colony's anti-Quaker law. After taking her to the gallows, Captain John Evered gave her one last chance to repent and be spared. To which she replied: **"Nay, I came to keep bloodguiltiness from you, desiring you to repeal the unrighteous and unjust law made against the innocent servants of the Lord. Nay, man, I am not now to repent."** Those were her last words because Evered had her hung immediately after she spoke them.

Over 70 million Christians have been killed for the sake of Jesus and His kingdom during the last 2000 years. Almost 65% of those, 45.5 million, were killed in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Currently, over 10,000 are being killed for the sake of Jesus and His kingdom every year, primarily by Islamic fundamentalists and communists.

### **Die for God and Others**

Anyway, those martyrs teach us one of the most fundamental truths of our existence. Some things are worth dying for.

Many people disagree with that. In 1978, Jimmy Carter attempted to reinstate the draft and college students all over the country protested as a result. At a Princeton protest, one student held up a placard that said, **"Nothing is worth dying for."** Another held up one that said, **"Better red (meaning communist) than dead."**

I've ministered to and observed hundreds of people over the years and have come to a conclusion on the basis of that. The one thing that almost everyone values the most is staying alive on earth. That's essentially what those Princeton students were saying. Nothing is as important as we staying alive on earth is.

But the Christian martyrs teach us they're wrong. Anne Gordon wrote a book titled *A Book of Saints*. One chapter is about what she calls **"the martyr saints."** She summarizes what we learn from them: **"If the**

**martyr saints teach us anything, it is that some things really are more valuable than life itself.”** That isn’t exactly correct. I’d say it this way. Some things are worth dying for.

But what are those things? I’d point out that the word **“things”** isn’t accurate. In reality no material thing is worth dying for. Let’s go back to the bumper sticker I read, **“Nothing in this truck is worth dying for.”** That’s literally true. A petty robber held up a man at gun point and said, **“Your money or your life.”** That’d be a no brainer to most of us. It’d be our money. Material things aren’t worth dying for.

But living beings are. First, the triune God is. Those 70 million Christian martyrs recognized it was worth losing their lives to please and esteem Him. Second, human beings are worth dying for. Jesus taught us that in John 15:13, **“Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends.”** He was the ultimate example of that. He willingly laid down His life on the cross for every human being who ever lived: that they and we might be saved not damned. That’s what He did and so should we. We should be willing to lay down our lives to preserve two things: the lives of others and the quality of those lives (assuring their freedom, for instance).

I read about a teenager named Ross Barfuss. Ross was walking along an Oregon beach and saw an 11 year-old struggling in heavy surf. He knew the ocean and the risk of rescuing him, but tried anyway, dying in the attempt. He surrendered his body for a stranger.

Ross Barfuss illustrates that we shouldn’t value staying alive on earth more than anything. God and others are worth dying for.

### **Live for God and Others**

But being willing to die for God and others isn’t enough. Notice the clause that closes out 1 Corinthians 13:3, **“It profits me nothing.”**

That’s a startling statement to most of us. Let’s face it. Nothing impresses us as much as someone dying for someone else, especially God. We think that there’s nothing nobler than that. We hold martyrs in the

highest regard simply because they're martyrs. We place them on pedestals and assume God will as well. We can never have the place in His eternal kingdom that they'll have. Surely, we think, we can never have the place in heaven that Mary Dyer, for instance, will have.

But the words "**It profits me nothing**" reveal how wrong that thinking of ours is. Do you grasp what Paul is saying here? Just dying for someone, including God, doesn't make us great in God's sight. It's possible, in fact, to do that and it makes no difference to Him at all that we did. I don't doubt it. Some of us will have higher places in heaven than many of the Christian martyrs will.

Here's why. In some ways, it's easier to die for things than it is to live for them.

Take Abraham Lincoln, for instance. He died for the Union and became our most beloved president as a result. But what if he had lived? He would have faced one of the most perplexing problems in American history, reconstructing the South. His successor in fact, Andrew Johnson, was impeached for implementing Lincoln's lenient reconstruction policies. In some ways, he dying for the Union was easier than living for it.

It's the same with us. In some ways, it's easier to die for God and others than to live for them. There are glory and finality in dying for them but routine and constancy in living for them. Dying for them requires ultimate sacrifice but living for them continual sacrifice.

Many people find the former easier than the latter, which explains a curious fact. They don't live for what they're willing to die for.

Years ago, I counseled a husband, who was consumed with his profession and golf game, and his neglected wife, who was on the verge of leaving him. I remember an enlightening exchange between the two. The husband desperately pleaded his case by declaring: "**I love you. I'm willing to die for you.**" To which his wife replied, "**Yeah, you'd give up your life for me. The problem is that you won't give up your golf game for me.**" And she was right, as it turned out. I think he would have given up his life for her. But he wouldn't give up the

quality of his golf game for her.

What about us? How many of us are willing to die for Jesus, but aren't willing to live for Him? How many of us are willing to die for our spouses, children, brothers and sisters in Christ, friends, co-workers, and strangers, but aren't willing to live for them?

1 Corinthians 13:3 makes it perfectly clear. It profits us nothing to **"die for"** if we don't also **"live for."** Remember the teenager Scott Barfuss, who died trying to rescue the 11 year-old. His mother said in that regard: **"He wasn't a hero in his death as much as he was a hero in his life."** That articulates our call. Live for whom we're willing to die for. Dying for them profits us nothing if we don't.

### How to Live for God and Others

Now, Paul tells us how to live for others in verses 4-7. It's by loving them. Since the thrust of those verses is loving people, let's focus our thoughts on that. We live for people by loving them.

It's beyond the scope of this sermon to explain in any depth what love is, but I would generally describe it this way. It's an inner condition that routinely manifests itself in practical ways. Paul mentions 15 of those ways in verses 4-7, each of which I'll summarize: (1) Patient: is long-tempered not short-tempered with people's flaws; (2) Kind: adds value to people's lives not subtracts it; (3) Not jealous: roots for not against others; (4) Does not brag: is **"you-deep"** not **"me-deep"** in conversation; (5) Is not arrogant: is others oriented not self oriented; (6) Does not act unbecomingly: behaves appropriately not inappropriately in the presence of others; (7) Does not seek its own: pursues the interests of others over its own; (8) Is not provoked: is thick-skinned not thin-skinned with others; (9) Does not take into account a wrong suffered: resolves to forgive the wrongs of others; (10) Does not rejoice in unrighteousness: is sad not glad when others fail morally; (11) Rejoices with the truth: recognizes the moral failures of others and tries to restore; (12) Bears ("covers") all things: acts to conceal not reveal the

moral failures of others; (13) Believes all things: assumes the best about people until it knows otherwise; (14) Hopes all things: believes in and cultivates people's potentialities; (15) Endures all things: doesn't get fed up with people. That is how we live for people. We love them that way.

You can see from those definitions how moment-by-moment love is. You can also see the depth of the sacrifices it requires of us.

An out of town daughter told her parents that she wanted to have Christmas at her house, instead of bringing her husband and children to theirs, as they had always done. Her annoyed mother agreed, but not without making her feel guilty about it. She'd make subtle comments here and there, expressing how disappointed and hurt she was. Notice what that mother did. She subtracted value from her daughter's Christmas experience. She should have added value to it instead because that's what love does. "**Love is kind,**" as Paul says it in verse 4.

That illustrates, by way of contrast, how we live for others. We love them with the kind of love Paul describes in verses 4-7. Loving that way is a four-step process. First, we apprentice ourselves to Jesus, which enables Him to transform our inner dimensions. Second, we learn in detail how love manifests itself by studying verses 4-7. Third, we intend to love others that way. And fourth, we carry out our intention as best as we can. If we do those four things faithfully, we'll eventually become the kind of people who pervasively and habitually love others.

## **Conclusion**

I close with an observation about the mother who made her daughter feel guilty. There's no doubt in my mind. She wouldn't hesitate to die for her daughter. But notice something. She wouldn't live for her by being kind about Christmas. That's why I said what I said. In some ways, it's easier to die for God and people than it is to live for them. But according to Paul, in verse 3, if we don't live for them, it profits us nothing if we die for them. So, let's live for them by loving them. They're worth dying for, which means they're worth living for.