

+ Genesis 39:6b-12, 16-23 + Is It Worth It? + 5th Sunday after Pentecost + 28 June 2015 +

“If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will save it.” (Luke 9:23-24)
Those are some pretty hard words that we heard from Jesus just a few minutes ago. Deny yourself? Take up your cross daily? Follow Jesus? Lose your life to save it?

No matter how hard you look at that description you won't find anything saying “pleasant,” “easy,” “comfortable,” or “victorious.” No, by Jesus' description, the Christian life is a journey beneath a heavy cross following after him. So is it worth all that difficulty and heartache and trouble?

After all, if you've paid attention in the last week or the last couple months or the last few years, you've probably noticed that it's getting harder to be a confessing Christian publicly living out your faith according to God's Word. That includes speaking about your faith and your Savior and what God says in his Word. So the question begs to be asked, “Is it worth it?”

When those attempting to protect the life of the unborn are shouted down by those who hold no value for any life but their own, when even the highest court in the land makes it more difficult to defend marriage as God intends it to be in his Word, when reasonable discussion dissolves into polarized, angry rhetoric, when peer pressure ratchets up to compromise with what the world says is right while ignoring what Christ says, when Christians and Christian congregations continue to cave in to the increasingly anti-Christian world around them, it's very tempting to ask, “Is it worth it?”

Is it really worth being a confessional Christian today who believes that the Bible is God's holy, authoritative Word from cover to cover? Is it therefore worth conforming your life to God's Word so you can grow in your Christian faith? Wouldn't it be easier to dismiss the Bible as some ancient book full of myth and superstition or at least the parts you don't like?

Is it really worth being part of a congregation and church body that many consider to be too conservative? Is it really worth putting yourself and perhaps even loved ones in a position that could lead to ridicule and scorn from others and perhaps worse? Is it really worth being willing to give up everything for Christ? Wouldn't it be easier to just cross the line?

Yes, it would be easier to do all that, but would that would be worth it? Let me tell you about a young man named Joseph. Joseph grew up as one of twelve sons in a wealthy, God-fearing, often dysfunctional family. Of the twelve sons, Joseph was the favored son of his father Jacob. The Lord even allowed Joseph to see dreams of a time when his whole family would bow before him. Joseph's sinful nature got the best of him though. His arrogance made his brothers so angry that they wanted him dead.

One day they got that opportunity as they grazed the family flocks in another region. Jacob sent Joseph to check on them. So when they saw him coming, his own brothers actually plotted to kill him. Thankfully, that didn't happen, but they did eventually sell Joseph to some traveling slave traders passing through the region. Joseph was hauled off to faraway Egypt, where he was bought by an Egyptian official named Potiphar.

Things seemed pretty bad, but ***“the LORD was with Joseph and he prospered... When his master saw that the LORD was with him and that the LORD gave him success in everything he did, Joseph found favor in his eyes and became his attendant. Potiphar put him in charge of his household...”*** The Lord of grace was on Joseph's side and blessed his service. He soon became Potiphar's personal attendant and the manager of his entire household. The Lord kept blessing Joseph and those he served.

Life was good again. Joseph had the respect of his boss and authority over the household. He had a comfortable life. Above all, he had the Lord of grace on his side. Somewhere along the way Jacob had taught his son about the Lord and his promises given to their forefathers. He had taught Joseph about trusting the Lord of grace, who had blessed and cared for his great-grandfather Abraham, his grandfather Isaac, and his father Jacob. Above all, he taught Joseph about the Messiah—the Savior who would come from their family to deliver all people from the curse of sin and death. By grace, that Messiah would bring forgiveness and life and salvation. Jacob had taught Joseph that following the Lord of grace was worth it.

It didn't take long for Joseph to realize how difficult that would be. You see, Joseph was a good-looking guy and the ladies noticed, especially Mrs. Potiphar. She noticed this up-and-coming slave in her husband's service, but her interest soon became unhealthy lust for Joseph.

One day Mrs. Potiphar propositioned Joseph. **“Come to bed with me!”** There it was—temptation so easy and appealing right there in front of him. He had so much. Now he could have it all, **“but he refused.”** In no uncertain terms, Joseph told her, **“Everything [my master] owns he has entrusted to my care...My master has withheld nothing from me except you, because you are his wife. How then could I do such a wicked thing and sin against God?”**

Not only did Joseph not want to dishonor his master, not only did he clearly understand the boundaries of marriage, but above all, he loved his Lord too much to give in to temptation and do such a wicked thing against God. Following the true God mattered more than anything else in the world. By faith, Joseph had an awe-filled respect for God’s holy will and he loved his Lord, who had chosen his family to be the cradle for the Savior.

...But was it worth it? Joseph could’ve had it so easy. Potiphar didn’t have to know, but remaining firm and steadfast in the faith is never easy. Mrs. Potiphar tried to wear Joseph down day after day, but **“he refused to go to bed with her or even be with her.”** He didn’t even want to be in the same room with her and her temptation, but things only got worse.

“One day [Joseph] went into the house to attend to his duties, and none of the household servants was inside. She caught him by his cloak and said, ‘Come to bed with me!’ But he left his cloak in her hand and ran out of the house....She kept his cloak beside her until his master came home. Then she told him this story: ‘That Hebrew slave you brought us came to me to humiliate me. But as soon as I screamed for help, he left his cloak beside me and ran out of the house.’ When his master heard the story his wife told him...he burned with anger. Joseph’s master took him and put him in prison, the place where the king’s prisoners were confined.” Was it really worth it? Was it really worth remaining faithful under temptation? Was it really worth running away once more? Was it really worth getting tossed in prison for remaining faithful to God and trusting that God knows what he’s doing? It could’ve been so much easier to give in with much less pain and sorrow, but for Joseph, it was worth it.

The Lord of grace had greater plans for his faithful servant and continued to bless Joseph. The young man should’ve been put to death for Mrs. Potiphar’s claim, but instead was put in a minimum security prison. He was even put in charge of all the prisoners by the warden. In spite of losing everything for remaining faithful in the face of temptation, **“the LORD was with him; he showed him kindness...”** literally, “faithful, never-failing, loving-kindness.” Eventually, the Lord used Joseph’s position in the prison to make him the second most powerful man in Egypt, which eventually saved his family and above all, preserved the line of the Savior. It was all worth it.

So what does that have to do with you today? Well, think about why Joseph remained faithful. It wasn’t because he had a faith that could move mountains. It wasn’t because he was such a great guy in God’s eyes. It wasn’t even because he came from a churchgoing, God-fearing family.

No, Joseph remained faithful, because he knew God’s gracious love. He knew his God would be faithful to his promises especially that promise of a Savior. There’s good reason why Joseph is included in that **“cloud of witnesses”** (Hebrews 12:1) who by faith in the coming Savior threw off the sin that entangles and ran the race before them with perseverance. Joseph looked forward to the coming of his Savior, who would fulfill every promise, even to the point of death. Following Jesus was most definitely worth it.

Now if God kept his promises to Joseph, will he not keep them to you too? Yes, he promises to care for you, but also to save you when you suffer for your Christian faith. Yes, Jesus does not promise that your life as a Christian is going to be easy, but he has guaranteed that it’s worth it.

You see, it wasn’t easy for Jesus to leave his heavenly throne and become a baby like you once were. It wasn’t easy for him to grow up like you and live a perfect life in every thought, word, and action. It wasn’t easy being betrayed and arrested and mocked and beaten and flogged and crucified. It wasn’t easy taking your sins on his shoulders only to die for those sins and be buried in a borrowed tomb. It wasn’t easy conquering death and the grave. It wasn’t easy guiding all of history so you would be born and hear the Gospel and come to faith in Jesus even though he knew you would disobey his holy will and wander from his loving care. It wasn’t easy, but it was all worth it because he saved you, because he brought you here today, and because he will bring you home to heaven someday. It was all worth it.

That’s why it’s worth it that you stand firm in this Christian faith with God’s help to the end. It’s worth it that you stand firm in the face of temptation with God’s help and then flee that temptation with all your might. It’s worth it to trust that your Lord knows what he’s doing when you face hardship or tragedy, when your faith is challenged

by friends or teachers or co-workers or strangers on the street, when others ridicule you or worse because you don't want to disobey your faithful God and his holy, life-giving Word. For the one who remains faithful to the end, even to the point of death, Jesus promises a crown of life bought with his own blood.

My dear friends, Jesus bore the cross for you and now he rules all things for your good. So then, like Joseph, ***“let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful people, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.”*** (Hebrews 12:2-3) Following Jesus is and always will be worth it. Amen.