

Living Life Backwards

† **Saving life will lose it.** (vv.27-31,35)

† **Losing life saves it.** (vv.32-35)

In the name of Jesus, our loving and determined Leader, dear fellow disciples:

Maybe I should just admit it. This sounds like a nutcase theme for a sermon. **Living Life Backwards.** I can just hear the scoffers. “What? Ya gonna drive your car backwards all the time? Ya gonna ride your bike in reverse wherever you go? I know! You’ll have supper every morning and breakfast at night! Watch the end, then the beginning. Never miss a game – backwards!”

Would all our funny friends still be so sarcastic if they could turn back the clock on Wall Street? What if you could have made all your investments backwards with absolute knowledge of the bubble burst? Pour it in while the millions grow, take out your billions before the bottom drops out. Buy low; sell high. Or at least skip that extra real estate investment and buy a smaller car if you knew beforehand that your job was on the line. Maybe it’s not so dumb, **Living Life Backwards.** Here’s a little secret: That’s how God wants you to live. He tells us the end from the beginning because...

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Why does the law require investment brokers to always say, “Past results do not guarantee future returns”? Because people believe what they want. Send an email saying your Christian husband died and you have his millions for a favorite charity (with a little on the side for helping). There must be Americans sending bank accounts to Africa for spam to work. Pay hundreds of dollars for a lottery ticket and celebrate that you won twenty? Spam and lotteries would die if we could live **Life Backwards.**

Spiritually, we all are heading for disaster. It’s the human race. Imagine the laughter at Noah and his three sons building an ark on dry land. “‘Rain,’ you say? What’s rain? A flood is coming? What’s a flood? Right! And I’m going to a wedding while you boys keep sweating away another hundred years on your ark!” Jesus says, “*As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. For in the days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day Noah entered the ark; and they knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and took them all away. That is how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man.* (Matthew 24:37-39 NIV) Noah and his family listened to God’s Word. Everyone else failed their first swimming lesson.

It really comes down to whom do you believe? When Jesus points to a flood that some scientists insist never happened, do you believe them or the scientists that say the evidence proves the Flood? Scientists have been wrong before, even Bible-believing scientists. Can any of them see the end from the beginning? Or won’t the sharpest minds finally have to admit Jesus is right? **Saving life will lost it.**

It may seem as if Jesus is driving backwards into this lesson, trying to make the most of some alone time on a retreat with His disciples. First, He presses for answers about popular opinion. “*Who do people say I am?*” Guesses range from John the Baptist to Elijah or one of the prophets – all compliments. And all dead wrong no matter how good it might make you feel about Jesus. His second question is the one that makes all the difference: “*What about you? Who do you say I am?*”

Not long before this Peter had seen Jesus give sight to a blind man. He saw Jesus feed about 4,000 men with seven loaves of bread and a few small fish, followed by seven baskets full of leftovers. It was a totally different miracle from feeding the 5,000 with five loaves of bread and two small fish which yielded twelve baskets overflowing with leftovers. Right after that Peter thought he and the disciples would drown in a storm on the lake. But Jesus walked on the water to them. “*It is I; don’t be afraid.*”

As soon as they took Jesus into the boat, *“immediately the boat reached the shore where they were headed.”* (John 6:20ff) Peter was convinced from these and many other miracles: *“You are the Christ.”*

But then Jesus started talking **Backwards** as far as Peter was concerned. Jesus *“warned them not to tell anyone about him.”* What kind of Christ, or Messiah, would tell His disciples not to publicize His identity? Why talk about dead-and-buried? **Backwards!** Jesus *“then began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again.”*

That made as little sense to Peter as someone standing at the doors of the World Trade Center early morning 9/11, shouting, “Don’t go in! These towers will be destroyed today by terrorists!” Can’t you hear the crowds – if anyone would stop to ask: “You don’t say! And how will that happen?” “The terrorists will fly a jet plane into each tower and it will come down today!” “No way! Call the cops. Get this Looney Tunes off the street.” And you know you would have been hauled away immediately. But how many could look back on that dreadful day and wish, “If only I could live my **Life Backwards**”?

If you invest all your time and energy in twin towers of money and pleasure without God, cars may come and friends may follow, but in the end everything will collapse. So who are you going to believe? Don’t be like Peter trying to write your own life story. **Saving life will lose it.** But...

✝ **Losing life saves it.** (vv.32-35)

“Peter took [Jesus] aside and began to rebuke him.” He could have quoted Scriptures that spoke of the conquering Messiah, great David’s greater Son, who would crush the heads of His enemies and bring back the reign of righteousness throughout the land. That’s what I’d want to hear. How about you? No one wants a deadbeat message. We all want to fast forward to glory.

This seems even more **Backwards**. *“Jesus turned and looked at his disciples,”* more literally *“knew his disciples,”* what they were thinking and how everyone would lose life if He listened to Peter. Jesus knew He had to call down the leader of the only Twelve disciples left after thousands disappeared in disgust. *“Get behind me, Satan!”* Jesus called Peter *the enemy*. *“You do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men.”* Human intelligence and logic are wrong? People think **Backwards** from God? “Preacher, are you telling us that **Losing life saves it**?”

Exactly! Here’s how Jesus puts it in our last two verses. He obviously wanted everyone to get this because He *“called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: ‘If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it.’”* It sounds so **Backwards!**

But it’s easier to understand if we project ourselves back again to the morning of 9/11. Everyone running up the stairs died. Running down escaped. Peter wanted Jesus to lead the way up to heaven. Instead the Lord was taking him down to the cross and shame and death. Should we follow **Backwards**?

No one in Noah’s day got a second chance. The Bible says today is our time of grace to repent and believe in Jesus. No second chances: *“Just as man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment, so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people; and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him.”* (Hebrews 9:27f NIV)

Just ask yourself who really loves you. Scientists on big government grants? Preachers living on what people want to hear? Or the Son of God and Son of Man, born of the Virgin Mary? He volunteered for this sin-cursed earth to substitute Himself under God’s wrath for you. Jesus stands on centuries of prophecies about His suffering, death and resurrection triumph: “I did it all for you to spend eternity with me in unending bliss and joy.” Slow down. You’re going too fast to throw that car in reverse. Driving in the rearview mirror is hard. Let Jesus take the wheel. Backwards for us is forward for Him. Lose life here for lasting glory there. From the cross to the crown, past results do guarantee future returns. Amen.