



Luke 9:23–25

23 Then he said to them all: ‘Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me. 24 For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will save it. 25 What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, and yet lose or forfeit their very self?’

Reflection

There's a large and popular church in the area that I grew up in, known for their great music, the good work they do in the margins of society, and their thriving ministry to youth and young adults – a very fashionable church that is by-and-large well respected in the wider community. They are into film and television, have a school next door, train students in theology and worship, and seem to display all the outward measures of success. No doubt God is using them to further his kingdom in many and varied ways.

Coming from a smaller more traditional church context whenever I drove past their gatherings, huge car parks filled to overflowing, I always felt a measure of curiosity and, rightly or wrongly, caution. The

church has a huge sign right out front of their sprawling property, and as with everything they do, it is always eye-catching, inviting and very professionally done. Now the sign would usually change quite regularly but there was a season, no doubt after a rebranding effort, in which the sign was emblazoned with a slogan that looked to be permanent. It was a simple, memorable line and set so permanently and prominently on a main road outside their complex that surely it must have been an attempt to capture and distil the essence of this church's message. The sign read simply and boldly, 'Your Best Life Now'.

These words set off a war within me which I don't think has been entirely resolved even today. In fact, I'm not sure any other combination of words I've ever encoun-

tered have been so true, and so false at the same time. Now, perhaps in this tension lies the genius of the phrase. Perhaps like Jesus' parables these words contain an intentional ambiguity that drives you to think and seek out their deeper meaning. They might be an artful apologetic; a wide and welcoming front door meeting peoples' felt needs and drawing them into a context in which they can encounter Jesus Christ and have their deepest needs met. Or they may well have been a gross over accommodation to our culture speaking volumes of the prosperity gospel likely to be taught within those walls. Your best life now. So true; and so false.

It's a fine line, isn't it, between meeting our culture where it is at and making compromises to that culture up to the point that

we are indistinguishable from it. I wonder what Jesus would say about that street sign? Here's some words that Jesus did say that I think relate to that sign, Luke 9:23–25,

23 Then he said to them all: 'Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me. 24 For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will save it. 25 What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, and yet lose or forfeit their very self?

Perhaps it's a mid-life crisis, a relationship breakdown or some financial troubles in your business – a crack in your armour

that has you re-assessing a few things in your life. 'Your Best Life Now' – yes, I'd like some of that. And so you pull into the carpark to see what Christianity is about. Peter's right there. As we saw yesterday, he's just identified Jesus as the Messiah, God's long-promised king come to reign on David's throne forever. They're witnessing a moment in history. For hundreds of years faithful Jews who have lived in awe of God, and loved his word, have daily searched the Scriptures in anticipation of this day. Today, the promises of Scripture are being fulfilled before their very eyes. Every faithful Jew's dream is being fulfilled in their presence. The Messiah is finally here. In the first-century Jewish mindset, he's going to retake Jerusalem, drive the occupying Romans out of the Holy Land and reign on David's throne over a king-

dom that will last for ever. Peter is right on the verge of his Best Life Now, the mental construct of every first-century Jew, when it came to all that was wrong with the world and all that would set it right. Peter and the disciples think that they are about to begin living their best lives now. And Peter could not be more right and more wrong at the same time. In order for Jesus to make all his dreams come true his dreams first must be dashed. And it's the same for those driving into that car park by the way. Straight after the penny drops for Peter and he correctly names Jesus as Messiah, in that moment where all his dreams pass before his eyes, Jesus drops this bucket of cold water on him, verse 22 from yesterday,

‘The Son of Man must suffer many

things and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life.'

Their dreams of the Messiah suddenly in tatters Jesus begins to re-sketch their best life now, in fact, it's right back to the drawing board,

'Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me. 24 For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will save it. 25 What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, and yet lose or forfeit their very self?

Your best life now. Following in the footsteps of our Lord. Daily sacrificial living. Losing our lives so that we might gain them. Forfeiting the world in order to gain our souls. Jesus dashes Peter's dreams on the cross so that he can make something greater than Peter's wildest dreams come true. Peter's dream, like ours, is far too small. 'Peter, your 'best life now', isn't the palest reflection of what I have in store for you.'

Paul in 2 Cor 4:17,

17 For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. 2 Cor 4:17

Or the writer of Hebrews speaking about

Jesus,

for the joy that was set before him
he endured the cross Heb 12:2

The pathway Peter to your best life now isn't health, or wealth, or well-being. It isn't security, comfort or safety. It isn't a political party or a promotion or consistent double-digit returns in your margin account.

‘Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me. 24 For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will save it. 25 What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, and yet lose or forfeit their very self?

Think & Pray

Living your best life now is about embracing an idea bigger than yourself. It's about expending your life in pursuit of *the* idea, *the* plan, *the* solution and resolution to all of life's dead-ends, shortcomings, fears, failures and tragic end. It might seem like a paradox but the best and most fulfilling life we can live right now is a life of self-denial, a life of daily sacrifice, a life of loss so that we might gain, that others might gain, the kingdom of God. For the joy set before him Jesus endured the cross. And our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all said the Apostle Paul whose troubles were far weightier than most of us could ever imagine let

alone experience.

What is your mental construct when it comes to 'your best life now'? Meditate over these four words in conversation with our passage this morning. Then speak with Jesus in prayer.