

"THE SECRET OF WINNING"

A Sermon By

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106 East 86th Street  
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September 29, 1991

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### INTRODUCTION

Someone has suggested that the secret of winning in life is to be willing to do whatever is necessary. Whatever is necessary. Note the first letter of each of those three words - WIN. A good way to remember them...whatever is necessary.

General George Patton was a 29-year old Colonel commanding tanks in World War I. His tanks were called upon to protect foot soldiers against enemy machine gun fire while crossing difficult terrain. However, there was a problem for these tanks were difficult to see out of. So George Patton, they say, got out and led his tanks against enemy fire on foot. Patton was always a winner. Why? Because he was willing to do "whatever is necessary".

### DEVELOPMENT

Two of the disciples of Jesus - James and John - one day asked Jesus for a favor. They asked Him to allow them to sit one on His right hand and the other on His left hand in glory. I guess they wanted to be recognized as "winners". They wanted the best seats in the house - places of honor and prestige. But they wanted to be appointed to these choice places not because they had earned them or deserved them, but because they were "in" with the Boss' Son. Does it sound at all familiar?

Jesus turned to James and John and said,

"You don't know what you are asking. Are you able to drink from the cup that I drink...or to be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?"

In other words, He was asking them, "Are you willing to do whatever is necessary to see My Kingdom established?" To their credit James and John answered, "We are able!" And then Jesus said to them,

"The cup that I drink, you will drink, and the baptism with which I am baptized, you will be baptized, but to sit at My right hand or left hand is not Mine to grant".

What does it take to be a "winner" in life? What does it take to be a "winner" as a follower of Christ. Let's think about this here this morning.

### WINNERS PAY A PRICE NO ONE ELSE WILL PAY

Actually, the process is quite simple. To begin with, I think we would discover that winners in life are often willing to pay a price that others will not pay.

Many of you have seen the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel in Rome, painted by Michelangelo. In order to do that masterpiece he had to lie flat on his back. That posed a problem for Michelangelo had a "bad back". After several hours on his back he experienced excruciating pain. In addition, he had some kind of a nasal obstruction which cut off much of his air supply when on his back. So what? He lay on his back all day long - every day - for 20 months. It's said that he often slept with his clothes on so he could go back to work without losing time in dressing. He painted one of the greatest masterpieces of all time. And that's how it happens. We call it total commitment. Long, hard, difficult hours.....focusing on one prize.

Back in 1949, an unknown scientist started working on a cure for polio. For five years, it was 16 to 18 hours a day...six days a week. The ultimate discovery of a polio vaccine made Dr. Jonas Salk a winner in the world of medicine. I'm sure that someone is working just as hard for a cure for AIDS.

Carl Lewis, a Gold Medal winner in the '84 Olympics, was asked once in an interview how many years he'd spent developing his skills. He replied,

"The day I stopped crawling I took up running!"

Winning comes by paying a price...whatever field. Inevitably. Jesus asked James and John, "Are you able to drink the cup that I drink?" We know what winning over darkness and death cost Jesus. Are we willing to pay the price?

A colleague in ministry tells of conducting the funeral of a dear friend's father. He was of another denomination and two other ministers were assisting him. One of the other clergy said of the deceased,

"Our dear Brother has worked 'off and on' for the Lord for nearly forty years..."

It struck my friend as an odd thing to say. Working "off and on" for the Lord. But then, perhaps the same thing could be said about many of us. But working "off and on" doesn't usually produce winners. Winning comes from paying the price no one else is willing to pay! But let's move on to a second thought.

MAKING HARD DECISIONS NO ONE ELSE IS WILLING TO MAKE

And it also comes from making those hard and

tough decisions that no one else is willing to make.

Rufus Broadway tells of a heart-breaking decision he once had to make. It was about the time that the government was just starting to fund kidney dialysis cases. The government set up a number of pilot programs, but the funds were so limited that they had to set up a committee to decide who would be dialyzed. Dr. Broadway was on the first committee down in Miami.

He said that one evening they met to choose between two patients - because they could only dialyze one of them. One was a young working man with a wife and three children and the other was a lovely 16 year old girl who was destined to become a concert pianist. One would live; the other would die. It was up to them to decide. Dr. Broadway resigned the next morning because, as he put it, "He didn't want to play God".

We can appreciate his agony. Hard to make a decision like that. Sometimes we have to make difficult decisions. Our good intentions should never be a substitute for good judgement. Persons who make their mark in this world are decision makers.

Pavarotti, it's said, was unsure when he graduated from college whether he should be a teacher or a professional singer. His father told him,

"Luciano, if you try to sit on two chairs, you will fall between them. For life, you must choose one chair...."

Pavarotti chose singing. It took seven more years of hard work, discipline and

frustration before his first professional appearance. It took another seven years before he reached the Met. But he had chosen his chair and he did not turn back. I thought of this bit of fatherly advice the day I saw him over at the Campbell Funeral Chapel three years ago. He was there to pay his respects to Vladimir Horowitz. And a big man like that would need one big chair....granted!

I've always appreciated these words of Eleanor Roosevelt. She wrote,

"One's philosophy is not best expressed by words. It is expressed in the choices one makes. In the long run we shape our lives and we shape ourselves. The process never ends until we die. And the choices we make are ultimately our responsibility."

God said to the people of Israel,

"I have set before you life and death. Therefore, choose life"

I think that many of us delude ourselves into believing that we can achieve our dreams without making hard, tough decisions. And yet deciding is the most "god-like" characteristic which the Creator has bestowed upon us. If being created in His image means anything at all, it means we have the ability to choose. Not to choose means giving up that which makes us uniquely human. Remember, first, that winners pay the price no one else is willing to pay, and secondly, they make the hard decisions no one else is willing to make.

WILLING TO GIVE MORE THAN THEY EXPECT TO GET

winners are willing to give more than they expect to get. Early on in life winners learn to,

A third thought that I'd like you to think about is that

"Always do a little bit more than is expected".

Calvin Coolidge was once known to offer up this word,

"No person was ever honored for what he received.  
Honor has been the reward for what he gave."

And there's much truth in that. When Jesus said, "It is more blessed to give than to receive", he was not just giving preachers a line to say in the Sunday service, but offering up to all a rule for living. "Go-getters" will shine brightly for a season or two. "Go-givers" are remembered for ages.

A monk once found a precious stone and kept it. One day he met a traveller. As the monk opened his bag to share his provisions with this weary traveller, the traveller saw the jewel. He asked the monk to give it to him and the monk did so without the slightest hesitation.

The traveller departed, overjoyed with the unexpected gift of the precious stone. A few days later, however, he came back...searching for the monk who had given him the stone. He found him, gave him back the stone and made a request.

"Please give me something much more precious than this stone valuable as it is. Give me that which enabled you to give the stone to me...please."

The traveller was correct...on target. The ability to give is greater than the ability to attain. The real winners always give more than they receive.

The cup from which Jesus and His disciples drank meant giving everything they had. Are you able to drink from that same cup? We need more folks like the lovely widow who recently gave fifty thousand dollars to the East Texas Baptist University. (I like the way the Baptists give...) She was asked how she wanted to designate her gift. She didn't fully understand at first. It was then explained that she could give her gift in the name of a loved one. Then she caught on and wrote on the bottom of her check:

"In the name and for the sake of the Lord, Jesus Christ"

HOW ABOUT YOU? She was a winner, but what about yourself. Are you willing to do whatever is necessary....whatever Christ may call upon you to do?

Are you willing to pay a price greater than others are willing to pay, and to make the hard decisions others may be unwilling to make, and to give more than others are willing to give?

This Church is strong today because across the years at its heart there has been a group of real winners. Oh, they may not have been winners out there in the eyes of the world, but they were winners in the eyes of God. Their names are not known like St. Paul's or Simon Peter's. But they are truly disciples of our Lord and whether they sit at the right or left of Jesus or not, they are most certainly in His presence. I could easily name a dozen names...some of them you know, or knew.

Halford Luccock who taught homiletics to a generation or two of young preachers up at Yale once told about two persons whose deaths made the papers of their time. The first was a woman who died in London. She was famous as "the best dressed woman in Europe". She left behind almost a thousand dresses. With each dress, however, she had worn, according to Luccock, "the same unseeing eyes, the same deaf ears, the same enameled, painted face."

The second was a man who died in the same city. He owned but one suit, blue with a red collar on the coat. Remember his name? William Booth, founder of the Salvation Army. He had but one costume - but he lived in a thousand lives inspired by his example. The same city...London...and almost the same day.

With which do you identify? Which of those two do you consider to have been a winner? You know, through our church we have the opportunity to live in thousands of lives in the ministries which this church supports. There are ways to participate so that our good works "live on" longer after we are gone. Will the earth be a better place because you have walked on it? Are you made of such stuff? A "winner" in the Kingdom of Jesus?

CLOSING Whatever is necessary. That should be the measure of our living, and our giving. And when that happens, our church wins. Our community and city win. We win. Ultimately and most important of all - Christ wins. To Him be all honor and glory. Amen. Amen!

PRAYER And now dismiss us, O God, with Your blessing and with a willingness to do whatever is necessary within the dictates of the spirit of Christ. In His name we pray. Amen.