

We're 14 days in. How are yours going? Your 2018 resolutions, that is. It took some of you awhile, that's not a good sign! As I thought about resolutions recently, I realized, people's resolutions often require them to sacrifice good things.

Think about it. Someone resolves to work out more. They get one less hour of sleep to do so. And that warm bed feels really good when your alarm goes off at 5am. Someone resolves to eat healthier. But going to Taco Bell at 10pm tastes SO good! Someone resolves to spend their money more wisely. But you get excited when UPS delivers four Amazon packages.

So, why would people make resolutions that require them to sacrifice good things? If resolutions only required the sacrifice of bad things, it'd make more sense, right? "I resolve to stop getting in car accidents." "I resolve to stop stepping on my kids' Legos." Those seem reasonable, because they're bad things. But sacrificing good things? That's a lot harder. So why do it?

People will sacrifice good things for the sake of something they've deemed even better than those good things: A smaller waistline; lower cholesterol; more savings for college.

That principle doesn't just apply to New Year's resolutions. It's a spiritual principle too. In worship today, we hear Jesus calling, "**Come, follow me!**" Are you willing to sacrifice more than just bad things to do so? If God requires, would you sacrifice even the good things in your life to follow Jesus?

It's a challenging question. But it doesn't have to be a troubling one. Because when we sacrifice good things to follow Jesus, we're **Sacrificing the Good for the Best**. In our sermon text today, that was the attitude of a man named Elisha.

The two prophets Elijah and Elisha served God during one of the worst points in Israel's history: the period of the kings, in the Ninth century B.C. A common description of almost every king of that era was, "**He did evil in the eyes of the Lord.**" These wicked, unbelieving kings led Israel away from their covenant God towards idols and unbelief. So God kept sending prophets like Elijah and Elisha, with a message of repentance, so his people would follow him again.

But unsurprisingly, wicked kings didn't appreciate God's prophets calling out their wickedness. So, many of the prophets were killed for their message. Sound like a job you'd sacrifice everything for?

Things got especially bad for Elijah under unbelieving King Ahab and his murderous wife, Jezebel. Fleeing for his life from them, Elijah lamented, "**I have had enough, LORD. Take my life...The Israelites have rejected your covenant...and put your prophets to death with the sword. I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me too.**" Elijah felt alone. Like he was the only one who still followed the true God. Maybe you've felt that way. At work? At school? Even in your own family?

But when Elijah hit rock bottom, God assured him that there were thousands of believers left! Then, he sent Elijah off, reinvigorated to carry out his work, commanding him to "**Anoint Elisha...to succeed you as prophet.**" "**Elijah went from there and found Elisha. He was plowing with twelve yoke of oxen, and he himself was driving the twelfth pair.**"

It's pretty obvious that Elisha had some really good things going for him. First, he had enough animals, equipment, and hired workers to plow with 12 pairs of oxen. Second, that means he had enough land that he needed 12 pairs of oxen to plow it! Elisha wasn't a one-man show barely scraping by in a backyard garden. He was a wealthy, successful farmer who possessed a lot of good things!

But Elisha wasn't afraid to do the dirty work either, as he was plowing too. And that's good, because God was about to call him to a difficult, messy ministry as his prophet.

***"Elijah went up to him and threw his cloak around him."*** That sounds strange, right? You'd be weirded out if some stranger walked up and threw their coat on you. But Elisha knew what this meant. Like the coronation of a new king, or the jersey presentation at the NFL draft, Elisha knew this meant God was calling him to new work; that he'd have to leave behind good things, and take up a difficult, sometimes dangerous calling to serve God as his prophet.

Seems like a pretty easy decision. "Hmm...should I leave behind my family, my peaceful life, my successful business, and become a prophet? Constantly fearing for my life because of an ungodly king and his crazy wife?" To most, that's an easy choice. "You've got a great life full of good things! Why sacrifice that for God's calling?"

You know, God has called you, too. Not by throwing a cloak on you, but by covering you in a robe of righteousness! He covered you as water was poured on you in God's name, at your baptism. There, God didn't ask you to leave behind your family or your job. But he did call you to leave behind your former, sinful, unbelieving way of life, and to give your heart, soul, and body to him.

But what if giving your heart, soul, and body to God requires you to sacrifice the good things he's given you? Your job? Your entertainment? Your family? Anything you've deemed good. Could you sacrifice it to follow Jesus?

As Christians, we acknowledge the need to sacrifice sinful things for Jesus, because we know they're bad. "I'm not going to cheat on my wife; cheat on my taxes; cheat on my test, like so many do." And that's good! We need to sacrifice sin, and follow Jesus.

But if we refuse to sacrifice good things to follow Jesus—body refreshing extra sleep...instead of soul refreshing worship; relationship building family game nights... instead of faith building family devotions; then those good blessings from God become dangerous distractions.

Whether our stumbling blocks are sinful things, or good blessings from God, if they get in the way of following Jesus, both trip us up and leave us flat on our faces. Elisha's farm, oxen, equipment, and workers were all gracious blessings from God. Yet, if he had refused to let them go to follow God's calling, those beautiful blessings would become a dreadful curse.

In a world striving for fulfillment and pleasure, sacrificing good things sounds foolish. But just like our resolutions, we can sacrifice good things, when there's something better for us out there. We can sacrifice the good... for the best.

That's why Elisha, out in the field, wrapped in Elijah's cloak reacts this way. ***"Elisha left his oxen and ran after Elijah. "Let me kiss my father and mother good-bye, and then I will come with you." So Elisha left him and went back. He took his yoke of oxen and slaughtered them. He burned the plowing equipment to cook the meat and gave it to the people, and they ate. Then he set out to follow Elijah and became his attendant."***

At first, it sounds like Elisha is using the old "Let me go kiss my parents goodbye" stalling tactic. But his actions revealed his faith. Elisha doesn't go home sulking, or scheming to get out of this calling. Rather, he goes home and throws an impromptu feast, using the good things of his former occupation to celebrate his new calling from God. He makes a decisive break from his former livelihood, so he could live as God's prophet without distraction. He wouldn't need plows or oxen anymore. He only needed God's Word.

Elisha could joyfully follow God's calling, because he knew he wasn't just sacrificing good things for better things. He was sacrificing for the best thing!

Elijah reminded Elisha who he was sacrificing for, when he said, **"Go back. What have I done to you?"** This calling wasn't driven by Elijah. God had chosen Elisha. Elijah wasn't going to convince him into the ministry. God had molded and shaped Elisha's heart to follow God's call. Elisha willingly sacrificed all the good things he had, because he knew he was sacrificing them for God, who had given those good things to him. He trusted that God would certainly give him everything he needed and more as he sacrificed good things to serve. Our good things come from God too. Will we sacrifice them to follow him?

Really, it's a matter of priority. What is truly "best" in your heart? We all need to honestly evaluate our lives and consider, "What have I deemed "best"? What am I willing to sacrifice for?"

Elisha could have rejected God's call, and continued living his comfortable, successful farming life. But it wouldn't last forever. Even if it meant sacrificing his livelihood, comfort, or even his own life, Elisha knew that serving God was best, because as Paul wrote to the Corinthians, ***"The time is short...For this world in its present form is passing away."***

Eventually, every other good thing would pass away. But following and serving God was best, because Elisha's faith in the Savior whom God promised, meant an eternity of the best in Heaven.

Eternity, because that Savior didn't cling to "good." That Savior, God's own Son, set aside his almighty power and divine glory for a time, so he could become man. That man, who stood at the shores of the Sea of Galilee and called some inadequate fishermen to be his disciples, ***"Come, follow me."***

Jesus gave up the best...so he could save the worst. So that he could stand at the shores of the waters of your baptism and call to you, the worst of sinners, "Come, follow me." So he could cloak you in a robe of his righteousness. So he could shape and mold your heart to hear and answer that call by faith. And in his eyes, that's the best. You are best. Worth sacrificing every good for, to win eternal life for you and all the world.

The good things in your life are still a gracious blessing from God. And maybe God will never call on you to abandon every good thing in your life. But the gospel shapes and molds our hearts to willingly do so if faithfulness requires it; gives us a mindset that has forsaken everything in this life, for the sake of the next life.

So, brothers and sisters, let this be your resolution. Be willing to sacrifice everything; the bad and the good, to follow Jesus. Jesus, who sacrificed everything for us calls, "Come, follow me!" May he shape our hearts through the gospel, to willingly sacrifice every temporary good, for the one eternal best.