

Loss is Gain

Matthew 16: 24-26

1 Tim.6:6-7 – But godliness with contentment is great gain. ^[7] For we brought nothing into *this* world, *and it is certain we can carry nothing out*. Many in our world today are fixated on material wealth and social status in this life. The majority of their energy is spent trying to obtain more than they currently possess. Paul revealed in the verses I just read that those who walk with God and are content with what He provides have in fact received much. He declared that we had nothing when we were born into this life, and we will be unable to take any of our worldly possessions with us when we die.

It important that we understand the economy of God. His economy does not operate by the same principles that the world's economy does. The Lord's economy operates according to His divine precepts. While many fail to understand, in God's economy gain often comes through loss. Those who are willing to lose what they consider precious and valuable actually gain much from the Lord. His blessings and benefits exceed any this world can provide.

As I pondered this principle, and the convicting words of our Lord, I was reminded of many in the Bible who gained through loss. Abraham was asked to abandon his homeland to follow God unto a land that would be revealed in time. He left with only a promise from God. In His time, and according to His divine plan, God provided much for Abraham. Many of the Old Testament prophets lived lives of ridicule and seclusion, but they enjoyed the blessing of God. The disciples were asked to abandon the lives they had built in order to follow Jesus. One of the greatest examples of gaining through loss was the Apostle Paul. He was a Pharisee with much education and a position of prominence. He had all one could desire from a worldly perspective – wealth, status, prestige, and power. Paul decided to give up all that he had worked to obtain in order to follow Jesus. He had learned that loss was actually gain. Consider his perspective on this matter as he wrote to the Philippian church. Phil.3:7-10 – But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. ^[8] Yea doubtless, and I count all things *but* loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them *but* dung, that I may win Christ, ^[9] And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith: ^[10] That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death.

As we conclude our series on the *Paradoxes in the Christian Life*, I want to examine the **aspects** of this final paradox, spoken of Jesus. As we discuss these powerful words, I want to consider the thought: **Loss is Gain**.

I. The Proposal Extended (24) – Then said Jesus unto his disciples, *If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.* Following an intimate moment with the disciples, when Jesus questioned them regarding their perception of who He was, He offered this proposal to them. Although these words were spoken to the disciples, there is application for everyone who desires to follow Jesus. Let's consider the aspects of this proposal. We see:

A. A Conscious Decision – *If any man will come after me.* There can be no doubt this involves a personal choice and a conscious decision made on the part of the hearer. While it is the desire of Jesus that all would follow Him, as individuals we must make that conscious choice to follow Him. The word will in the text implies “*one's desire, resolve, or determination.*”

- The world presents many options. We are bombarded with opportunities, and each day is filled with choices. What will we decide? Whom or what will we follow? Where do our affections lie? What are we seeking in life? These are all questions that must be answered. If we are to follow Jesus, we must make the decision to do so. Our lives are influenced by something or someone. Which path have we chosen in life?

B. A Committed Denial – *If any man will come after me, let him deny himself.* Jesus revealed the next aspect in serving Him. We must be willing to deny ourselves. These are strong words with even stronger implications. We must be willing to “*disown, forsake, reject, or restrain ourselves, basically doing without the desires of the flesh.*” We must be willing to subdue our flesh in an effort to follow and please the Lord. It isn't easy to forsake our desires and restrain the flesh, but it is absolutely necessary if we are to follow Jesus.

- Few are willing to admit it, but we are our own greatest hindrance. We like to blame our failures and mistakes on others or particular circumstances, but the reality is our flesh too often stands in the way. *Rom.7:18-21 – For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not.* ^[19] *For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do.* ^[20] *Now if I do that I would not, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me.* ^[21] *I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me.* These struggles will continue as long as we live. The fleshly body that we inhabit was not transformed at salvation; it must be denied and subdued daily!

- Our major problem, following the Lord and pleasing Him, is this body of flesh in which we dwell. We have a problem denying the desires of the flesh. The lusts are strong, and the flesh demands to be satisfied. We must be willing to subdue our flesh, bringing the whole of our being unto subjection before Christ.

C. A Costly Departure (24) – *If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross.* This is clearly the most difficult aspect of Jesus' proposal. As Jesus spoke these words, I am sure the disciples were astounded. The world in which they lived was very different than ours. In fact, all of the early believers faced great persecution for their faith. Identifying with Christ promised intense adversity, but this statement was more than they had bargained for. The disciples were no stranger to a Roman cross. These were instruments devised by the Romans to exact intense suffering and pain as one was executed. The cross was an instrument of death. Jesus was literally telling the disciples that they must be willing to crucify the flesh if they were to follow Him. They had to be willing to die to themselves daily to follow Christ.

- While I would never seek to minimize the cross of Christ or the suffering He endured for my salvation, I am convinced our view of the cross has been diluted through modern Christianity and marketing. People wear crosses around their necks as a piece of adornment. They hang in our homes, and yet we fail to recognize the significance. Crosses in Jesus' day were not pleasant; they brought excruciating death. Our westernized Christianity totally misses the profound point Jesus made. We must crucify our flesh daily if we are to follow Christ! [Rom.6:6 – Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin.](#) [Rom.12:1 – I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.](#)

D. A Continual Desire (24) – *If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.* Finally, there must be a continual desire to follow Jesus. This is not an action that is reserved for Sunday or at church related events. We must be willing to follow Jesus daily. This means *“to be a follower or companion of Jesus; to be a disciple.”* It has the idea of *“actively seeking fellowship with Christ and reflecting His likeness.”*

- Following Jesus is not an idle task; it requires action and commitment on our part. Following Him requires effort and work. It demands accountability. The flesh will resist this effort, and there will be many obstacles to overcome, but we must remain committed. We must be willing to deny ourselves and take up our cross in order to follow Jesus!

II. The Paradox Exposed (25) – *For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it.* Jesus revealed the great paradox regarding service to Him. Consider:

A. The Perspective (25) – Jesus was well aware that the disciples and others who heard these words would have a hard time receiving them. This is contrary to human nature and reasoning. The flesh desires to obtain more, not lose in order to gain. This perspective remains today. The world is not interested in giving up any pleasures or sacrificing for the benefit of others. They do not understand the concept of gaining through loss.

B. The Promise (25) – **For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it.** Many would be called upon to give their lives physically for the cause of Christ, but that is not what He is focused on here. Those who are willing to die to themselves, surrendering the passions and desires of the flesh in order to serve Christ through salvation, are promised eternal life. If we are willing to die to ourselves for Christ, we are promised eternal life in Him. On the other hand, those who refuse to die to themselves, choosing the pleasures of the flesh instead of a relationship with Christ, will lose their life when face with eternal death. While physical death is certain, it is only the beginning of life for the believer as we enter the presence of our Lord. Those who die without Christ will face eternal death in the lake of fire. Clearly loss is gain!

III. The Profit Explored (26) – **For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?** Jesus knew this life served as a place of preparation for eternity. The lives we live and the choices we make will pay dividends long after this life is through. Consider:

A. The Inquiry (26) – Jesus questioned the disciples, and again all who would read these words, regarding the value of life lived for self. What profit would there be if one gained the whole world and all it contains, if they ended up losing their soul and facing eternal death in the process? There is nothing worth being separated from the Lord in eternal judgment. He challenged all who hear these words to choose wisely. There is no need to die apart from Christ. He provided forgiveness and eternal life as He died on the cross for our sin!

B. The Incentive (26) – No doubt the disciples would remember these words during their persecutions in the future. There would be times when they battled doubt and discouragement, wondering if their faith in Christ was worth the effort. Those who persecuted them may have enjoyed great power and privilege at the moment, but it would not grant eternal life. The sacrifices made to follow Christ would be worth the effort. Loss is gain in Christ. Consider what a man profits to lose the world and yet gain his own soul through redemption in Christ! There is no comparison. This world has nothing that I desire, and certainly nothing worth spending eternity in hell.

Conclusion: This is a passage that is hard to receive apart from the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit. The world nor those apart from Christ understand. Where do you stand today? Are you willing to abandon yourself and the desires of this world to follow Christ and be assured of salvation? If you are yet unsaved, again consider the words of Jesus. **For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?** Come to Him by faith and be saved today.

Believer, are you genuinely surrendered to Christ? Are you denying yourself and crucifying the flesh in order to please Christ. If you are struggling or need to confess sin, come today.