

Theme: Loss is Gain

Text: Mark 8:31-35 (EHV)

³¹ Jesus began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things; be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the experts in the law; be killed; and after three days rise again. ³² He was speaking plainly to them. Then Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. ³³ But after turning around and looking at his disciples, Jesus rebuked Peter and said, “Get behind me, Satan! You do not have your mind set on the things of God, but the things of men.” ³⁴ He called the crowd and his disciples together and said to them, “If anyone wants to follow me, let him deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me. ³⁵ For whoever wants to save his life will lose it. But whoever loses his life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it.

Do you like to lose? I’m pretty sure no one really likes to lose, but some people really, really don’t like to lose. They despise it with all their being and will do anything and everything in their power to win. Well, if this describes you then this text for today is not for you...or perhaps it is the perfect text for you? Of course it is! These are the words of our Savior, Jesus so they are the perfect words for us to hear. Jesus’ words remind us that in the most important way losing is victory and **Loss is Gain!**

As we take a closer look at our text we’ll notice that there are, in fact, several things Jesus calls on us to “lose,” and in doing so, Jesus also promises us great gain. I’m looking in particular at His words to us in the last two verses of our text:

First of all, Jesus calls on us to “lose” our “self.” Now that definitely sounds like a bad thing to lose, doesn’t it?! However, what Jesus is talking about here is our sinful “self,” our sinful nature when He says, **“If anyone wants to follow me, let him deny himself” (v. 34a)**. We know how hard “self-denial” can be on a physical, mental or emotional level. Saying “no” to that piece of cake or delaying gratification for the sake of something better in the future is a near impossibility for us at times as humans. “Self-denial” in the spiritual sense is impossible without Jesus. However, what do we have to gain when we **“deny”** or “lose” our sinful “self?” We gain Jesus!

Denial of our own will and desires and conforming them instead to the Lord’s will means saying “no” to our sinful **“self”**—which does not know better and only steers us in wrong and destructive directions—and instead trustingly saying, “Thy will be done!” to Jesus who does no better and is **“the way, the truth, and the life” (John 14:6)**.

“Denying ourselves” includes subjecting all our thoughts and beliefs to what Jesus has told us about Himself in the Bible. This was the lesson Jesus had to teach Peter in our text. When Jesus told His disciples plainly that He was going to suffer, be killed, and rise again the third day, Peter’s response was to **“rebuke”** Jesus! Jesus, in turn, had to rebuke Peter and tell him, **“Get behind me, Satan! You do not have your mind set on the things of God, but the things of men.”** Jesus was reminding Peter, and all believers for all time, that His purpose in coming to this earth was not to establish an earthly kingdom, not to guarantee all of His believers material prosperity and power, not even to guarantee them earthly health or happiness. He came to serve as our perfect substitute, to suffer and die as our atoning sacrifice for sins, and, yes, to rise again on the third day victoriously to prove He was who He said He was and to guarantee our own resurrection and place of eternal glory and happiness with Him in the kingdom of heaven.

Jesus' words in our text also remind us that we will gain **"a cross"** when we "lose" our self and follow Him. He says in **v. 34**, **"If anyone wants to follow me, let him deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me."** That does not sound pleasant! Why would we want to gain **"a cross"**?

Well, it is true, Jesus calls each one of us to carry our own personal **"crosses."** These **"crosses"** are the things we are called upon to bear because we are believers in Jesus—however small or large they might be. Let's also remember, however, God does not leave us to drag our burdens and crosses around on our own. He lovingly invites us to **"[cast] all your care upon Him, for He cares for you" (1 Peter 5:7).**

In His wisdom and infinite love Christ has given each one of us our own particular lot in life with our own "crosses" to bear to strengthen our faith and draw us closer to Him. He's also given us our "crosses" as a way to show our love and devotion to the One who bore the ultimate cross for us all.

When we think about those personal "crosses" we are called upon to bear, let's also think of that cross that Jesus bore for us—both physically and spiritually. He willingly took upon Himself the responsibility of the salvation of every man, woman, and child who's ever lived on this earth. He bore that cursed cross, with the nails and the thorns, with the verbal abuse and spiritual agony of hell itself. He bore all that for you and me! Jesus' **"loss"** was our **"gain!"** He was willing to lose His life so that we would gain eternal life!

In that light, our crosses don't seem large or heavy at all, do they? They are a "burden" of love for our Savior, that He may be glorified through our lives. With the Spirit's help we will daily take up our crosses out of love for Christ and gladly follow Him!

What does that mean? What does it mean to follow Jesus? It means listening to Jesus' words, willingly doing what He says, and believing everything He has said about Himself and our salvation. He tells us simply in His Word, **"My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me" (John 10:27).** Following Jesus means walking where He leads us, following His example, and includes being willing to suffer for His sake.

So, will it be worth it? Jesus hasn't exactly painted a bright and cheery picture of what it means to follow Him. It sounds hard. It sounds like a lot of work and it sounds like He is calling us to **"lose"** a lot! Is it worth it? Let's consider Jesus' words in the last verse of our text, **35 " For whoever wants to save his life will lose it. But whoever loses his life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it."** This is one of Jesus' greatest paradoxes. What does He mean? Whoever would rather save his life physically here on this earth and put the things of this earth first, will lose his life spiritually in this life and eternally in hell when this life is over. But whoever "gives up" his earthly life—willingly and trustingly giving his very body and soul to Jesus will be saved eternally! That type of willing sacrifice does not come naturally. Again, we can't do it on our own. Thankfully, that is why Jesus has give us His Holy Spirit to make our dead hearts alive and to move us **"to will and to do of His good pleasure" (Philippians 2:13).**

Is it worth it? You bet! Jesus goes on in the verses after our sermon text to give us the reason why, **"After all, what good is it for a man to gain the whole world and yet forfeit his soul? ³⁷ Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul?" (v. 36-37).** Our soul is our most valuable possession. Our soul is Christ's most valuable possession as well. That is why He was willing to lose everything to gain it and keep it for eternity. Jesus calls on us to **"deny ourselves," "take up our cross"** and **"follow Him"** for our own good!

Giving up our soul in exchange for the pleasures and good times of this short life—do we realize how completely foolish and “not worth it” that is?! I know I’ve used this illustration before, but I’m going to use it again because I think it’s effective: It would be like me offering you \$1, and telling you that you can take this \$1 bill right now, or you can wait until next Sunday, and I’ll give you a check for \$1 million dollars! Taking \$1 over 1 million because you can’t “deny yourself” or bear the “burden” of waiting a little while? That isn’t worth it! Losing your soul for the sake of the pleasures this short life—which is so often filled with anything but pleasure. That isn’t worth it! Losing your life for Jesus who has eternally saved your soul. That is worth it! Praise God that in Jesus, **Loss is Gain**; in Him “losing” is victory! Amen.