

Profit and Loss

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[0 : 00] Let's turn again to the chapter we read in Mark's Gospel, Mark chapter 8. I'm just looking for a wee while at verse 36.

Well, we can look at verse 35. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the Gospels will save it. And it's really verse 36.

For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his life for his soul? For what can a man give in return for his life?

Now, maths was never my strong point in school. And one of the topics, though, that I do remember was, I don't know if it's the same today, but you have all these different themes that you covered.

And one of them was profit and loss. And it wasn't just something that was confined to school and to the classroom. Profit and loss really is part of life.

[1 : 08] I suppose all companies that are working, all businesses, are operating in this way, that they're trying, if at all possible, to make a profit and to avoid a loss.

And I suppose it's not just companies and businesses that operate in that way. I suppose we could say that every home, every family, every individual, as they go through life, they're trying to operate in this way so that they will make a profit and avoid a loss.

And while that is true at a natural level, it is true in this life, I'm sure it's true of everybody in here, it's certainly the way that we would want things to be, it's also true spiritually.

And that's what Jesus is talking about here. He's dealing with a great issue of profit and loss. Because it's not just at a temporal level, not just at a natural level, that profit and loss works, but also, and more importantly, at a spiritual level as well.

Our journey in this world is all about profit and loss. And the Bible makes it very clear that a person is either in profit, that is, in profit towards God, in and through Jesus Christ, a person is either saved or else they are lost.

[2 : 29] It is either profit by being saved in Jesus or loss. There's no in-between. There's no kind of halfway state. A person is either in Jesus, saving him, trusting their life to him, or else they are out of him.

Now, in verse 31, Jesus has been talking about his death and what he is going to suffer. And Jesus tells him, and even the disciples weren't able to understand this, Jesus tells him that the way of salvation and the great glory is to be found, and he tells him how it is, that he must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again.

And Jesus is showing that the way of salvation and the way to great glory is not the way that we may think. It wasn't even the way the disciples in the days of Jesus thought.

That the way to salvation, the way of salvation, and the way to great glory, Jesus was showing to them, was by the way of suffering, the way of shame, and the way of death.

And even Peter didn't understand that. Peter was so taken aback by what Jesus was saying, that Peter is trying to correct Jesus. We find that, that we find Peter taking Jesus aside, and he said plainly, and Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him.

[4 : 01] It's quite an amazing scene. Here's Peter, and he's taking Jesus aside, and he's rebuking. It's quite an amazing word, rebuking Jesus. And he's saying to Jesus, put these things away from you.

Jesus saw and perceived that at that particular moment, that it wasn't from the Spirit, the Holy Spirit, that Peter was indeed speaking to Jesus, but that the very powers of darkness were using Peter as a mouthpiece, that Peter at that moment was being used by the powers of darkness.

This was an attempt, obviously, to derail Jesus from the great purpose for which he came into this world. And then Jesus turns it in verse 34, and he states that it's not just, it wasn't just he himself that was going to go down this particular road, but he shows us that the experience of shame and suffering might very well belong to the disciples as well.

Now, when a person goes for a job, if you go to apply for a job, I suppose one of the things that you're looking for, you'd be looking for conditions of employment or conditions of service.

You would want to know what the job involves before you would, more than likely before you would go for it, unless you knew somebody who was doing that job and you knew what was involved in it.

[5 : 33] Otherwise, you would kind of want to know, and you'd read through it and say to yourself, well, poor, I'm ready to sign up for that. I would like that job. Or maybe it's a job you think would be really interesting. You see the conditions of employment or conditions of service, and you think, poor, didn't realize all that was involved.

It's not for me, and you turn away from it. Well, in a sense, Jesus here is setting out before people something of the conditions of service.

This is not what he says here, a full list, obviously, but Jesus tells us very clearly that anybody who is going to follow him has to be prepared to deny themselves, to take up the cross, and to follow him.

Now, if that's all that was involved in being a Christian, was to deny yourself, to take up a cross, and to follow Jesus, I'm sure a lot of people would be saying, well, I don't know if this is really for me.

The Bible shows us that there are so many, many blessings, and experience teaches us that there are so many wonderful privileges in following the Lord Jesus Christ.

[6 : 51] For instance, you know where you're going. You know why you're here. You are given a sense of hope in this world.

And you know, that's a phenomenal thing. One of the things the Bible tells us that if we push Jesus aside, if we do not want anything to do with Jesus, if we're trying to work through life just on our own, that we are without God and without hope in this world.

And that really is an awful condition because hopelessness, I think, is one of the most awful conditions a person can be in. Sometimes you meet people who are in a spirit of darkness.

And that's one of the things they say, you know, I just feel helpless and hopeless. And your heart goes out to them because it's a fearful state, a fearful condition for any person to be in.

But the thing is that without Jesus Christ, often people don't realize the hopelessness of that life. But when you look at life, not just in the immediate, we're living in a day of the immediate.

[8 : 06] We're governed by the immediate. We're always thinking in terms of what can I do now? What can I get now? Where am I going now? Instead of looking at a bigger picture.

Now, of course, I'm not saying we're not to be involved in the here and now. Of course we are. And we're to throw ourselves into the here and now and do whatever we're doing in the here and now with all our heart. Of course we are.

The Bible tells us to do that. But we don't just live in the here and now and for the here and now. We've got to project our minds and we've got to think.

What is life about? Where am I going? What is at the end? And that's one of the wonderful things. The Bible reveals all these things to us.

The Bible opens up for us what this natural world cannot tell us. The Bible opens up. It's like it pulls the shutters back and opens up before us spiritual realities to show that there's more to life than just the here and the now and the physical.

[9 : 05] That there is a spiritual. We have a soul. And I think people, even although we live in a very materialistic society, people are aware.

Many people are aware. People who may not be religious in the broader sense of the term are still conscious that there is a spiritual side, a spiritual side to man. Of course there is.

And God made us that way. And so there are many blessings. One of the great blessings in being in Jesus Christ is that hope. A hope in life.

A hope in death. A hope for eternity. Again, one of the great blessings, there are many we could give examples of, is peace. Again, we live in a society that is becoming increasingly, I suppose, in many ways fragmented.

A society that is, in many ways, changing rapidly. And there are so many people who are filled with anxieties. So there are so many pressures in life.

[10 : 10] We cannot escape pressure. But the great thing is that in Jesus Christ, he promises us peace. And that's a wonderful thing that even in the middle of turmoil, in the middle of surrounding chaos, we can have that peace.

Because Jesus promised that. He said, He said, My peace I give you. Not as the world gives, give I unto you. And that's a great thing to experience, to know the reality of peace.

A peace that is, for instance, part of his peace that we experience is the forgiveness of sin. And that's a wonderful thing.

Because you see, as sinners, we carry guilt around with us. We're all sinners in here. And if we look back over our lives, we're so conscious of how often we've failed, how much wrong we have done.

And whenever we do wrong, we carry guilt with us. And guilt can have a crippling effect upon people. In a way that they often don't realize.

[11 : 17] But you see, the wonderful thing is that in Jesus, our guilt is removed. It's one of the extraordinary things. That is part of what he took upon himself on the cross.

Our guilt. So anyway, Jesus here is saying that along with all the great blessings and all the great privileges, part of discipleship involves taking up the cross and following.

If anyone, that's what he says in verse 34, if anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. You see, being a Christian is no half-hearted thing.

You can't be a bit of a Christian. You can't say to yourself, well, I'll be a Christian this week and for next month. You know, many people that work offshore sometimes are two weeks on, two weeks off or two weeks on, three weeks off or whatever.

Different rotas. Well, Christianity doesn't work like that. You can't say, well, I'll be a bit of a Christian. I'll be a Christian part of the year and I won't be a Christian another part of the year. It can't work like that.

[12 : 27] You're either following Jesus or you're not. Now, sadly, there are times when we're following Jesus. Like Peter, we follow Jesus afar off. That our commitment, our zeal, our walk is not what it should be.

There are times we slip and we stumble and we fall. And yes, all these things happen. But the main thrust of our life is one that is following the Lord Jesus Christ. And Jesus says, it's got to be all or nothing.

You cannot be a bit of. It's all or nothing. And that's what the Lord is saying. When you enlist, as it were, in my army, when you follow me, if you are to be a disciple, you have to deny yourself, take up the cross and follow me.

Now, I suppose that question has to be asked just now. Are you ready for that? Are you, if you're here tonight and you're saying to yourself, well, you know, being honest, and you know, it's a very personal thing.

It's something that is between yourself and the Lord. It's very personal. You've got to ask yourself, am I right with God and Jesus Christ? Have I dealt with this? Or is Jesus somebody that I'm putting away?

[13 : 42] Before I go any further, ask yourself that all-important question. Now, we must be clear here that when Jesus says in order to be a disciple, then that you've got to deny yourself, take up the cross and follow me.

And Jesus is not saying here that a person is saved simply by taking up a cross and denying themselves. A person is saved by believing and accepting and trusting the Lord Jesus Christ as their own Savior.

But Jesus is showing that discipleship is serious business. And then Jesus goes on to show that people will reject him and people will turn away from him because they are ashamed of him and his gospel.

Now, that's quite an extraordinary thing. Now, at one level, when Jesus was talking here, crucifixion was a form of death and the cross was a place of shame. It was a place that it was the cross, the form of death, crucifixion, which was probably one of the most hideous and awful forms of execution ever devised because it says that those who were crucified that they died a thousand deaths.

In other words, it was devised to produce the most lingering death possible where a person was experiencing the most intense torment and it was to go on and on and on.

[15 : 19] And it was reserved for often the worst of criminals and for slaves and there was a real shame attached to crucifixion. And Jesus is deliberately using this word, the cross.

Of course, he was going the way of the cross. But he is showing that within the Christian faith there will often be a shame attached to it. And it's quite an extraordinary thing because you see, many people today are ashamed of the gospel.

Many people are ashamed of the gospel. They're ashamed to become Christians. It's quite an extraordinary thing. But it's a fact.

People are ashamed. Sometimes people are ashamed to be seen going to church. They're ashamed to be seen reading a Bible.

And I know that is a fact. Because to my own shame, I've been ashamed. I remember as a youngster being ashamed, being seen with a Bible.

[16 : 25] That's what people are. And it shows us how illogical sin is. When you think about it logically, here is God who made us. God who has given us this extraordinary life.

God who has filled our life with so many brilliant things. Who has given us so many abilities and capacities in life to live life and to be fulfilled in life.

And he has given us all the blessings of home, family, of friendships, of all these different abilities and capabilities in life. And above all, he's given us his own son, Jesus Christ, the greatest gift of all.

And yet people are ashamed of God. And if ever we can see the twistedness of sin, it is here. How can we be ashamed of the God who made us and gave us everything in this life?

And the only answer is because of sin. Sin is twisted, it is perverse, it is deceitful, the heart, we're told in the Bible, is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked.

[17 : 39] And that is why sin is so twisted, so illogical, that instead of rejoicing in the fact that God has sent his son into this world to be the savior of sinners, we in turn are ashamed of him.

Ashamed of the gospel. Ashamed of what other people might think. if they saw us reading the Bible or they saw us going to church or ashamed of becoming a Christian.

There are many people who are ashamed of becoming a Christian because they're afraid of what people will say, of what people will think. They're not ready for it. And they're saying, I don't know, I'm scared of what people will say.

Well, Jesus is handing out a note of warning. because you know what Jesus tells us? That that shame will work two ways.

Jesus goes on to say in verse 38, for whoever is ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him will the son of man be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his father with the holy angels.

[18 : 53] You see, it's an awful thing to be ashamed of Jesus because if we spend our life being ashamed of him and rejecting him and turning away from him and all the riches and the blessings he brings, there will come a day when he will be ashamed of us.

And just as we may say in this world, as Jesus offers himself to us, depart from me, the day will come when Jesus will say to the soul that has rejected him, depart from me.

That's the way it works. It's incredibly solemn. But that's the picture that Jesus is showing us. Of course, the other side of it is that those who accept Jesus, that Jesus will openly acknowledge and acquit on that day.

But here, Jesus is showing how awful it is to be ashamed of himself. And then Jesus shows us that by trying to save our own life, we will actually lose it.

And the way to gain eternal life is by losing our life. What does Jesus mean? Well, it means very simply to lose our life in Christ is simply to hand our life over to him.

[20 : 15] and that is a lot harder than it sounds for this reason that naturally we want to be in absolute control of our own lives.

You want to call the shots in your life. So do I. That is a natural thing about life. We want to be masters of our own destiny. every person wants to be the boss of his life and her life.

It's my life and I'll do what I want. That's what the song said. It's my life and I'll do what I want. And that's what the natural heart says.

It's what the natural heart thinks. And that is why when we come to give our life to Jesus we are saying Lord you call the shots.

You Lord are the one who has my life. Now that doesn't mean that we don't live life to the full. Of course we do. It doesn't mean that as a Christian that there aren't times that we make mistakes.

[21 : 20] Of course there are. And that is where so often it causes us grief when we do wrong when we sin when we fall when we fail. But the fact is that by giving losing our life in Jesus we actually gain life.

and it's in there we gain the peace we gain the momentum we gain the sense of belonging which is a wonderful thing. This sense of hope this sense of future all these things that the Lord promises to give.

But the very way to lose our life is actually to try and save it. In other words by saying to yourself I'm not going to give my life over. I want to this is my life and I don't want anybody else to have it.

And that's why Jesus then comes back to this or we come back to what Jesus is saying about the profit and loss. The way to save your life is to lose it in Christ. And Jesus then asks this question what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit or lose his own soul?

Now when Jesus says here about a person gaining the whole world it's quite an extraordinary picture. Now I don't think he's talking there about the likes of Alexander the Great who was reputed to have wept after he had conquered the known world of the day.

[22 : 45] But to gain the world I suppose if we were to look at it in modern terms if we were to reach the pinnacle of fame and fortune and celebrity and wealth and all that this world holds out if we were to have tremendous power if we were to have the kind of mind that had tapped into all scientific knowledge and technology and philosophy and all the different learning that can be found if we had all the abilities that were channeled in different ways so that we could reach the very top in any sphere and we'd say to ourselves I've arrived you know how there are some people that are called A-list celebrities they're right up there as far as the world is concerned and they seem to have they say the world is their oyster but the thing is it's this kind of picture that Jesus is saying supposing you gain the whole world or even if you were to look at it just from a wealth point of view supposing you were to be given all the wealth of this world if you were to be given not just all the money but all the gold the silver the diamonds if you were to be given all the coal all the timber all the oil and the revenue that you could get from all these things well it goes we can't we can't begin to work out that kind of wealth but Jesus is saying supposing it were possible to gain everything and to be the most powerful the most influential person in the whole wide world supposing you had everything that this world could give and holds out to you and yet lose your soul you're in loss not in profit what will it profit you nothing nothing and Jesus is saying to us look in this busy world please take stock of your soul it's vital it's important your soul will carry on because at the end of the day when you think about it what do you take from this world when we came into this world we came in with nothing but you know when we go out to this world we'll go out with even less we came in with our body when we go out we're even going to leave our body behind everything we've achieved everything we've acquired everything we've amassed everything that we have even our family our friends everything our limbs our body everything is going to be left behind and that's why

Jesus is saying I want you to look on the spiritual side of life and to remember there's another side and please deal with this what will it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul for what can a man give in exchange for his soul what nothing that's it there's no answer you know there are some questions that there's no answer to give because Jesus doesn't give an answer for what can a man give in return for his life what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his life he asks these questions he doesn't answer them because there is no answer so so I would ask you tonight in the quietness of your own heart that you would deal with this all important issue of getting yourself right with God and Jesus Christ of asking the Lord to become the Lord of your life and it is a life of fulfillment it is a life that will bring with it lasting peace and happiness and fulfillment the Lord has given us many abilities and many capabilities many gifts in life and we're to use these not a denial of what we are and a denial of what we have

Jesus isn't asking us to go and to live in some monastic style of life where we're hidden away we are to live life to the full Bible makes that very clear that whatever we do we're to do it with all our heart we're to give in whatever abilities the Lord has given us let's give ourselves in these things but remember your soul remember your soul most precious thing you have that's Jesus' words to us tonight and he's saying the way to your soul being right with me is by accepting me as your Lord and Saviour let us pray Lord our God we pray to bless us tonight and we give thanks for being reminded again of just the importance of getting right with God we pray that we might be directed as we go through life and to realize this all important issue of the spiritual aspect of our being

Lord bless us we pray bless us in all our relationships one with another bless us Lord in all that we do and all that we set our hand to do help us to do it with our might we pray Lord to be with us and take us all to our home safely part us with thy blessing continue with us throughout this week guiding us and keeping us wherever we go and whatever we do forgive us all our sin in Jesus name we ask all Amen Amen