

Gain by Losing

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[0 : 00] The following message is given by Walt Alexander, lead pastor of Trinity Grace Church in Athens, Tennessee. For more information about Trinity Grace, please visit us at TrinityGraceAthens.com.

Chapter 3 of Philippians, verse 7. We're going to continue where we left off last week. The Apostle Paul writes, But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ.

Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake, I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish in order that I may gain Christ.

And be found in him. Not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ. The righteousness from God that depends on faith.

That I may know him. And the power of his resurrection. That by any means possible, I may attain the resurrection from the dead.

[1 : 32] That's the word of God. Infallible, inerrant, sufficient word. Well, who is the most fascinating person in the world to you?

I remember when I was in the seventh grade, I had to write an essay and argue for an eighth wonder of the world. And I said, it must be my little brother. Even then, he was this relational magnet.

He was born comfortable in his own skin. Makes friends with anyone. A natural salesman, which is what he does right now to this day. I found him so different than me. And so fascinating.

Who's that person to you? Who would you most like to learn more about? Who would you like to sit down for coffee with? Maybe it's an entertainer like Jimmy Fallon or Dolly Parton or Taylor Swift or Johnny Cash for the dudes.

You know, or maybe a great leader like Alexander the Great or Napoleon to see how short he really was. Or Lincoln to see how tall he really was. Or maybe a biblical hero like Moses or Ruth or Mary or Peter.

[2 : 50] All of those people are great and so fascinating, right? They have stories to tell that we would love to hear. They have anecdotes. We'd like to know how they do.

You know, the best interviews are not the interviews that tell you the things you already know, but the ones that tell you the things you don't know. What motivates them to do this or that? What gets them out of the bed, so to speak, in the morning?

But as great as they are, who are they compared to Christ? It's kind of what Paul is saying to us this morning. They're but grains of sand when Christ is Everest.

They're but small and boring. Even the most fascinating person in our minds and in our eyes, they're but small and boring compared to Christ because he's massive and great and endlessly fascinating.

One author movingly states it when he says this. Jesus was born in an obscure village, the child of a peasant woman. He worked in a carpenter shop until he was 30.

[3 : 51] Then for three years, he's an itinerant teacher. He never wrote a book. He never held an office. He never had a family. He never owned a house. He never went to college. He never traveled more than 200 miles from the place he was born.

He never did one of the things that usually accompany greatness. He had no credentials but himself. He was only 33 when the tide of public opinion turned against him. His friends ran away. He was nailed to a cross between two thieves. And when he was dead, he was laid in a borrowed grave through the pity of a friend. Twenty centuries have come and gone.

And today, he stands as a central figure of the human race. He says, We mark our time by him.

Is there anyone greater? Is there anyone more worthy of our thoughts, affection, and life? Is there anyone more fascinating? Is there anyone we should long to know more than Jesus?

[5 : 14] And I know you and I know this room. There's a hearty amen in your heart. And as Paul continues to tell us his story, and these verses are so personal, what stands out is finding out the infinite worth of Jesus Christ and of knowing him.

There's nothing like it. And yet, in these verses, he's not just telling us his story. God is inviting us, as it were, to not just learn a few more things about him, but to discover the infinite, boundless, never-failing worth of knowing Jesus.

So, in a word, where we're going is labor to know Christ and use all your life to gain him. Labor to know Christ and use all your life, all your thoughts, all your affections, all your desires, all your days to know him.

There's nothing greater. So, we're going to break this out in three points. First one is gain equals loss. Gain equals loss. Now, we hit this kind of hard last week.

So, I try not to be too cumbersome in it. But, you know, confidence in any good thing we do is ultimately loss. That's what he's saying in these verses.

[6 : 34] You know, in the previous verses that we talked about, Paul was quite clear. And he said, three times, he said, I don't put any confidence in the flesh. He says, I'm not resting in any good things I've done, not in my religious background, not in my obedience, not in my zeal.

Right? I'm not resting in those things. I'm not taking confidence in those things before God. But here he goes a step further. He says, I count all those things as loss. Look in verse 7.

He says, whatever gain I had by that background, by that zeal, that fervor, that obedience, I count as loss. Once there were gains, but now they're losses.

Literally, it says, the very things I regarded as gains, those things I now regard as loss. You know, the vivid language here, the financial language, helps us understand what's going on.

You know, we talk about gains and losses. You know, this is the time of year where we're filing our taxes. So we're looking at gains and losses of different things. We're looking at profits and deficits, things that go in the assets column, and things like me that you got a lot of things in the liabilities column, things that are minusing off.

[7 : 47] And he's saying, I once thought those good things I did were gains. I thought they went into this gain column. They went into this column that would give me confidence. They were additions.

They were assets. They were advantages. And so my confidence continued to grow, he says. But now I realize they're losses. Now, note, he's not saying they're just not gains.

He's not only saying they're not gains or they're not advantages. He's saying they're losses, they're disadvantages. He wants us to imagine, as it were, if you're going to the bank.

Now, nobody balances a checkbook anymore, right? Not like your mom used to when you were growing up. Or maybe some people do, and that's not meant to be derogatory. But, you know, if you're balancing a checkbook and you're adding in all the deposits, all the paychecks or whatever it was, all the money coming in, what he's saying is all that, it would be like you're going to the bank, and not only was that money not deposited, it was subtracted.

Not only was that money not added to your account, it was taken away from it. He's saying it's not just that the good things that he did were bad.

[9 : 04] He's not saying they were just bad in and of himself, but he's saying that that false confidence was a loss. Now, I must admit, and we must admit, this is sounding a little bit crazy if you think about it.

I've asked a lot of people this question over the years. If God asked you, why should I let you into my heaven, what would you say? And most people say something along the lines of, I would go to heaven because I've basically been a good person.

And we believe this because it makes sense. It seems fair. It seems right.

You know, it's how the world works. You know, good brings good things. Good brings good. You know, if you do well in school, we get good grades.

If we do well at work, we get promoted. If we do well in sports, we play varsity, or we get a scholarship in college or something like that. That idea that it's what we've been taught all our life, that if you do good, you receive good, be good, and you get good things.

[10 : 08] And even in our personal life, we assume that if we do enough good things, and if those good things somehow outweigh the bad things, then we're safe. We can be confident.

We're okay. We're secure. So we think if there's a good God who lives in a good place reserved for good people, and if our good deeds outweigh our bad deeds, then we are good, and we get in. We go to heaven, right? The only other option would be heaven is filled with bad people. And that can't be true, right? So we all tend to think we should just try to be good enough.

But how good is good enough? Paul says, any of those good things we do, and the confidence and security they bring are losses.

They say to Jesus, I don't need you. Okay, you don't then. Now I have that thing on airplane mode.

[11:08] I don't know how that just happened. Don't talk back to me either. We think if we're basically good, I'm not going to riff on that at all.

If we think that we're, you know, essentially what we say to Jesus, we're good, we're okay. If we're basically good, why did he die?

Remember what Jesus said, those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. He said, I didn't come to call the righteous, I came to call sinners. And sometimes the biggest obstacle to Jesus Christ is not the bad things we've done, but the good things that we have to let go of.

Any confidence that Jesus loves us because we tithe or read our Bibles or lead our business spiritually is false. Any assurance we see from thinking we're good people, we haven't made a mess of our life, surely we receive something good from it, that's false.

Any self-satisfied contentedness that I'm more loving or passionate or serious or whatever is lost. All that confidence is ultimately lost.

[12:18] It gets you nowhere with Jesus Christ. That's the truth. But Paul keeps going. You know, he says confidence because of any great thing you attain is ultimately lost too.

Life is filled with so many good and great things, but confidence because of them is ultimately lost. Look at verse 8. He kind of just keeps going on this theme, but whatever gain I had, I count as lost. Verse 8, I count everything as lost because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.

For his sake I've suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish. You know, you read this, you're like, Paul, you're a madman. What are you talking about? Everything is lost.

All things are lost. What could he possibly mean? He's saying everything good is lost? We understand that you don't want to lean on your religious background or your fervor or your obedience or something like that, but are you saying everything?

I think what he's getting at is anything is lost that we put our confidence in. It could be our career. It could be our possessions.

[13:27] It could be our relationship. It could be just recognition. For that fear of getting snubbed and being looked over is a thing that takes us out.

It could be power, influence, money, beauty. It could be anything. Anything that makes us feel significant, successful, and secure outside of Jesus Christ is lost. I'm not saying all those things are bad.

I'm just saying they're a horrible thing to lean on. It could be our children. Children are a precious gift. I have three precious gifts, but yet they often reveal where we look for meaning.

I always think it's humorous. If you go out to a soccer field on a Saturday afternoon, the parents are way more passionate than their kids. He's like running around, you know, running the wrong direction. Get out of there!

What are you doing, Johnny? You know, like we're just, our little hearts get so wrapped up in their success. Get so wrapped up in their failure.

[14:34] Such that our significance, our contentedness, our satisfaction and joy comes from the days they're doing well. And when they're doing bad, we submarine. It could be financial success.

You know, our dollar bill says, in God we trust. But our hearts say, in money we do. We just think, man, if I just had a thousand more dollars, a couple thousand dollars more per year, I'd be good. I'd be secure. I could get that bank account where I need it to be. I'd be content. He's looking in our hearts, trying to see if there's anything we're leaning on.

Anything we're leaning on that we ought not. And Paul's saying, if any of these things are it, run from them. Don't look to them.

Don't be passive. They're lost. They're rubbish. There's a word there. Literally, it means, they're no more value to you than garbage. Than the filth those dogs, in verse 2, eat.

[15 : 45] Now, I want you to know, the image here is not of a curmudgeon trying to find something to hate. You know, you know those people in your life. There's people always trying to throw a wet blanket on a good day, you know.

The image is of a sailor and of a sinking ship just trying to make it to shore. If he sinks, it doesn't matter how much treasure is on board. If he sinks, it doesn't matter how much food and clothing are left.

It doesn't matter how many supplies he has on board. So what Paul's kind of saying is, I'm just throwing everything that might get in the way of my confidence off board because I want to make it to shore.

Confidence in any good thing you do, a great thing you attain, will be lost. It cannot hold you on the last day. It will not make you secure. Let me say it again.

Your religious upbringing doesn't make you any better. Your prayer and tears don't make you any better. Your fasting and giving don't make you any better.

[16 : 45] Your success, your wealth, your power, your athletic ability does not make you any more secure. Your influence, your relationships, they don't make you. Jesus does not care. If you want to know him, flee confidence in those things.

If there's a part of our hearts that just has a hard time hearing that, that's because that's the way grace is. It frustrates before it comforts. Point two, loss is gain.

So gain is loss, and loss, because of grace, is gain. The way he's saying here is no confidence in any good thing we do or a great thing we attain leads to ultimate gain.

Now, I'll explain that. But having found that every good thing he does and every great thing he attains to be lost, Paul comes to Christ by faith. Look at verse 7, you know.

He says, What I've gained I had, I count as loss for the sake of Christ. I count everything as loss because of the spasting worth of knowing Christ Jesus my life, my Lord. For his sake, suffer the loss of all things.

[17 : 55] Count them as rubbish in order that I may gain Christ. I ask myself, what does this mean? You know, the idea is not that like in counting all things as loss, he suddenly sees Christ as gain.

The idea is that in counting all things as loss and turning from them, he finally sees faith. The path of faith.

So in these verses, faith is the act of counting all things as loss that bring false confidence. Let me say that again. Faith is the act of counting all things as loss that bring false confidence.

False assurity, false security. Or put another way, faith is finding Christ to be the only gain and source of true confidence. So by faith, loss equals gain.

He sounds like Christ. What would it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul? I can't remember the rest of that little thing.

[19 : 04] But he's playing on that loss is gain. And the gain is none other than knowing Christ. You know, where his confidence in ourself and the great things we attain keeps Christ far from us, faith brings him near.

Where his confidence in the good things we do, the great things we attain, keep him hidden from us, faith invites us to know him. Look at the way it's described in verse 8 and 10. He says, down there, I count everything as loss because it's a fascinating worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. Down at the end of verse 9, that I may gain him and be found in him. Verse 10, that I may know him. All these things are saying the same thing. Faith alone gives us access to knowing Christ Jesus our Lord and gaining him.

Gaining him is knowing him. Think about this. We can't get to know anyone we want.

Right? Now, we may be able to meet him. But we can't get to know him without being invited.

[20 : 20] Now, there's probably great people in your life. Maybe some of those at the beginning, Taylor or Johnny or something like that. These people that we would love to get to know. But we've got to be invited.

You know, I'm not going to get to know Donald Trump by knocking on the door of the White House. Hey, open up. I'm going to get to know you. I don't get to know him unless he invites me.

And knowing God is the same. We don't just decide to know Jesus Christ. What Paul is talking about is this miracle.

He's really retelling what happened to him in Acts 9 where he was on his way to Damascus, on his way to persecuting more Christians. And then a light came down from heaven. And the Lord said,

Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?

He shuts his eye, then later opens them so that he might see Jesus Christ. Jack Packer says it like this. We don't make friends with God.

[21 : 30] God makes friends with us. The word know when used of God is a sovereign grace word pointing to God's initiative in loving, choosing, redeeming, calling, and preserving us, you know.

So what Paul is saying is we should stand back from this word that God wants to know us. And he invites us to know us and say it's absolutely incredible. It's totally thrilling.

Jesus Christ stoops to make friends with us. He invites us not just to know things about him, but know in the scriptures is deep, is personal, is community.

I mean, it's the word used when a husband and a wife get together intimately. That's a deep word.

No, and that's what God said he wants to know us. So Jeremiah says, let not the wise man boast in his wisdom.

Let not the mighty man boast in his might. Let not the rich man boast in his riches. We could say not let the good person boast in their good things, or the great person boast in the great things they've attained, but let him boast in this, that he understands and knows me.

[22 : 37] Do you know him? Do you know him?

Do you know things about him? Or do you know him? Would he call you a friend? I know he would call you a friend, but can you call him your friend?

Some people are a mile wide and an inch deep with friends. Is that the way our friendship is with Jesus Christ? Does that still thrill you?

The king of the universe wants to know me. What causes your heart to soar? Does anything cause your heart to soar more than that?

And in knowing Christ, we find all the acceptance and the confidence we could ever need. He empties us out so that he might fill us up with the right things.

[23 : 54] In verse 9, he continues, Faith brings us to Christ and gives us righteousness.

Now, this verse uncovers the heart of the gospel. Often when we talk about coming to Christ, you ask somebody what it means to be a Christian or what's the gospel. Often we talk about forgiveness, and forgiveness is wonderful, but it doesn't capture it all.

Forgiveness ensures that we won't be rejected. If we're truly forgiven, then there's no sin in our life that God could reject us for, but it does not assure that we'll be accepted.

But the heart of the gospel is this, that just as our disobedience and sin was counted against Christ on the cross so that he might suffer in our place and be forgiven, so too his obedience and righteousness was counted to us so that we could be completely accepted in him.

Scholars call this a double exchange. Just like our sin was credited to him over here so that we might be forgiven and all our sins wiped away, so too his righteousness was credited.

[25 : 15] It was counted. It was pointed over to us. It moved from his asset column to our asset column so that we might be completely accepted in Jesus Christ. That's why I love the hymn, My hope is built on nothing less than Jesus' blood and his righteousness.

Because a sinful man doesn't get accepted in the presence of God with just getting the bad things thrown out. He must be credited with the right things.

And this is what our relationship with Jesus Christ is established on, his completely unshakable, rock-solid truth. Christ's righteousness has been moved into our account. We're rich.

We're rich. We're rich. His assets have been moved into our account. Once there was only loss there. There wasn't just a low balance. There was a negative balance.

But now we have unimaginable gain. Once there was self-confidence and false confidence. But now there's acceptance, assurance, and certainty with the only king that matters. And get this.

[26 : 15] His righteousness never changes. It's perfect in heaven. You know, we just sang that song, Before the throne, the great son of righteousness. There my righteousness is, right there at the right hand of the Father.

Nothing you do can defile it. That's what Scripture says. No matter how ugly your sin or shame get, nothing you can do can undo it. No matter how your heart wonders, the only light that will survive on the last day is the one built on this.

Everything else is built on sinking sand. It'll all pass away. It's all lost, you see. It's all lost. It won't hold up. It won't hold up. If you don't know that, I want to invite you to receive the gospel.

That he who knew no sin became sin. How did he become sin? How could he become sin? And yet he became sin, so that you in him might become the righteousness of God.

Perfect, acceptable. Viewed and treated just like his own son. And this truth is the fount of all joy.

[27 : 39] Scholars call this penal substitution. The idea is that Jesus Christ substituted himself on the cross for the penalty of our sin.

Penal, reference penalty of sin. substitution obviously represents him substituting himself instead of us so that his righteousness might be freely given to us.

J.I. Packer says it like this again. He says, The notion which the phrase penal substitution expresses is that Jesus Christ our Lord, moved by a love that was determined to do everything necessary to save us, endured and exhausted the destructive divine judgment for which we were otherwise inescapably destined, and so won for us forgiveness, adoption, and glory.

To affirm penal substitution is to say that believers are in debt to Christ specifically for this, and that this is the mainstream of all their joy, peace, and praise, both now and for eternity.

That's the mainstream. That's where it all comes from. That's the source. That's the fountain of all our joy, all our peace. Nothing of what we've done is in that. Nothing of what we've attained is in that.

[28 : 52] He alone. And there's the joy. You know, what does Isaiah say? We're going to the wells of salvation gladly.

Oh, they just shoot up and are amazing to us. And for some of us this morning, God wants to bring you back to this. This alone is the joy. A couple months ago, we moved to Athens seven months ago.

We bought an old house. We always buy old houses, you know. It's all we can buy. And one of our many pipes was getting clogged up.

You know, that slow. Gradually, your bathtub starts draining slower and slower. So I had to get my buddy, our plumber, to come over. And he took a shot of the pipe.

Now, look at that. I was like, did you shove some dirt in there? Tell the truth. That's what the pipe looks like. And our hearts like that pipe.

[29 : 52] They get clogged with our performance. They get clogged with our success. They get clogged with our good deeds, our self-congratulatory thoughts. They get clogged up with our comparison, our fear, our trying to measure up.

They get clogged up. And this morning, the gospel wants to purge it out. He wants to clean out the pipe because our joy comes straight from the gospel and nowhere else.

He wants to set us free. Labor to know Christ. The joy of complete acceptance. Life equals looking to the future to know Christ more and more.

Looking to the future to know Christ more and more. If this has happened to me, then I want to know Christ more and more. That's all my life is. You know, after coming to Christ, after that dramatic coming to Christ, you know, we might be tempted to think that life would be gravy now. Easy now. But anybody that's been a Christian longer than a week knows that isn't true. So how does knowing God or knowing Christ affect my life? It means regardless of what lies ahead, I will press on to know Christ more and more.

[31 : 06] Look in verse 10. He says that I may know him. That is, in the power of his resurrection.

It may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death. That by any means possible, I may attain the resurrection of the dead. You know, it says this future that lies before us, it says two things are certainly there.

His powerful presence and suffering. His powerful presence lies ahead. The power of his resurrection.

In the Old Testament, God promised he'd never leave us or forsake us. But now, just as Jesus was raised from the dead, he raises us as well. And until he raises us on that final day, he'll be with us. Wherever we go, he'll be there. Wherever you move, he'll be there. However old you get, he will be there. Seek him. Know him. Every day, know him.

[32 : 04] Regardless of how dark and dry and confusing it gets, know him. That's what he's saying. His presence will be there. Reminds me of Psalm 139, but even greater than that.

You know, if I fly to the heavens, you're there. If I go down to Sheol, you're there. Even when I was in my mother's womb, you were there. You planned all my days. But this is even better because Christ is with us.

Okay. Secondly, it says suffering lies ahead. Here again, we see that phrase we saw before in Philippians. He says, I may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death.

You remember Jesus promised that all who follow him would suffer. Our servant's not greater than his master. And so he says suffering will be ahead. Now, knowing suffering's ahead, it's kind of like knowing surgery's ahead.

It's great to know, but it also stinks to know, if we're honest. I think the emphasis here, though, is we're to be comforted knowing sufferings ahead. Because in those sufferings, we'll know him more.

[33 : 10] The idea seems to be that his powerful presence comes before suffering so that we can be certain in suffering we can learn to know him more through it. How many people have told you they learned to know God so well through comfort and wealth?

No one. But so many say it on the flip side. And that's what we can be confident about. We can be confident that we'll learn like Spurgeon to kiss the way that throws us against the rock of ages.

Knowing Christ is with us and in every suffering liberates us. It sets us free from self-pity and complaining. Life also, though, will bring many uncertain things to help us knowing more.

Look down at verse 11. He says, stacks all those phrases up. Then he says, that by any means possible, I may attain the resurrection of the dead. He's saying, I don't know what tomorrow will bring.

You know, we've read this whole letter. You know. I don't know whether I'll be released from prison or whether I'll die here. I don't know if I'll see you again. But I know that I will know him more. And I know that by any means, by joy or sorrow, imprisonment or freedom, I will know him and the power of his resurrection.

[34 : 28] One thing I can be confident about, I will continue to know him. And to know Christ like this is to fill us with joy in any circumstance and to set us free.

To make us care less about our lives. And give us a willingness to exhaust them for Christ. Nothing can take it from us what we already have.

Nothing can give to us anything we ultimately need. In England, after the message of the gospel swept into the country from Germany and Switzerland, different kings and queens came to power who punished those who preached the gospel of free grace.

One such leader was Queen Mary. Bloody Mary. I don't know how the drink's named after her, but maybe because it's red, I guess.

But because of the number of Protestant preachers she burned at the stake. Two such preachers were Hugh Latimer and Nicholas Ridley.

[35 : 31] For preaching the gospel of free grace and teaching the doctrines of the Reformation, both Ridley and Latimer were thrown into a cell at the Tower of London. On October 16, 1555, they were brought down from the tower and met at a stake.

They talked and prayed. Before they were tied up and the fire was lit. The senior, Ridley, comforted his friend and said, Be of good heart, brother, for God will either assuage the fury of the flame or else strengthen us to abide it.

And as the flames caught fire underneath them, the younger Latimer had his turn. He raised his voice so Ridley could hear.

Be of good comfort, Master Ridley, and play the man. We shall this day light such a candle by God's grace in England, as I trust, will never be put out.

By God's grace, that fire has not been put out. But that's someone who's labored to know Christ and to use his life as gain.

[36 : 57] There's a sense in which it frees us from being entangled with our life. Our lives are not about acceptance or approval or trying to make a great name for ourselves. Our lives are about Christ.

So anything that comes gives me an opportunity to say something about Jesus Christ and make much of him. That frees us in a wonderful way. And that's what you hear. Be of good courage, Master Ridley.

And play the man. I don't know what tomorrow will bring to you. But I know that Christ will be there. And there will be another invitation to know him, to live for him, and to gain him. Let us pray. Father in heaven, we thank you for this morning and this word.

God, we need it. Our hearts are so prone to wander. Lord, we feel it. Prone to look to so many other things to lean on.

[38 : 05] So many things to define us. Such that we miss the greatest treasure in the field, which is knowing Christ Jesus, our Lord.

Lord, I pray that you would come by your spirit and open our eyes to see again this wonderful treasure. Lord, I pray for anyone convicted by this word, that you would draw them again into a sense of your favor and your love.

Lord, keep us in perfect peace as we cling to Jesus, we pray.

Amen. Amen. You've been listening to a message given by Walt Alexander, lead pastor of Trinity Grace Church in Athens, Tennessee.

For more information about Trinity Grace, please visit us at trinitygraceathens.com. Thank you. you