

Bearing the Cross  
Mark 8:27-38

Grace and Peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. May the words of my mouth and the ears of our hearts be open to the word of God this day. AMEN.

Down through the centuries that have been those who criticized the Bible as being impractical, out of date, written for a people long ago. The same criticisms, of course are laid against Jesus and his teachings as recorded in the Bible, “they were fine then but impractical today”, “it doesn’t apply to me”, or how about this statement, “Time’s have changed, we need to change how we understand scripture to match our society of today.” Ever heard any of those statements? Yes, than what about today’s gospel reading, there are two words as practical then as they are today. Jesus teaching of Profit and Loss could be a headline today as it was then, “For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life?”

So what do you think of when I say Profit and Loss. It is a finance term, most likely two words of most business concerns in our world today. Government is interested in profit and loss, especially as spending keeps increasing with greater demand on agencies and all the bailouts while at the same time the revenue is decreasing – Profit and Loss. Corporations and businesses as you all probably can figure out are NOT like the government who can go trillions of dollars in debt, to stay in business; companies really need to watch their profit and loss reports even more carefully to stay in business. Even here at church, Jeff gives us a profit and loss report that shows our donations, incomes, and investments while also showing our ministry’s expenses and outreach – Profit and Loss reports are important. Even at home – your own budget is based on profit and loss, we budget and spend based hopefully on profits outweighing our expenses, if not we know we are in trouble.

But when I mentioned Profit and Loss did any of you think of something besides the financial understanding of Profit and Loss? I would assume that most of humanity would instantly think of the business of acquiring money and stuff as soon as you mention Profit and Loss. But believe ther was a time when humanity walked with God, was in relationship with the creator above everything else, humanity was fulfilled by the love of God and was content in this grace. But in our weakness it didn’t last long, humanity fell into sinfulness, self-centeredness, greed, selfishness. And humans began to think about the things made by the creator instead of worshipping the creator. We began to strive for titles, prestige, power and money and profit and loss became all about this. What does it cost us to get rich. To get that new car, that new house, that new whatever as long as its new, shinier, bigger, and has more gadgets then the old one.

This is the type of world that Jesus says, “For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life?” Still relevant today I would believe! “While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us” This was the reason Christ came into the world to seek and to save that which was lost, he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on the cross. The suffering, agony, loneliness and shame of the cross was the price he was willing to pay so that all humanity may be redeemed. Jesus was willing to lay aside all his

power, glory, and honor and be shackled with our guilt and punishment of all people of all times, and die on that cross so that we might have life eternal, redeemed to stand with God in the heavenly places.

This is what Jesus had been trying to impress upon the disciples at Caesarea Philippi, when just earlier in our Gospel he is teaching them that the Son of man must undergo great suffering and be rejected and killed and after three days rise again. But that is not Simon Peter's sense of values. That is against what he wanted to see accomplished. He had invested time and energy into Christ as the new coming chosen one, perhaps a king, perhaps as mighty as David of long ago and He knew that the profit would be his ability to rule at his right hand. But Jesus denounces this and commands him to get behind him, for he is about satan's work. He then goes on to point out that anyone interested in following him, would have to suffer persecutions and trials. If they follow Christ, they must take up their cross and follow him.

The cross which had been a thing of shame and death has now become a symbol of glory and joy. In that gift of Christ we are given the inspiration to also deny our own selves and take up the cross. Christ gave himself on the cross so that we may be redeemed from sin and death; as his followers we give ourselves for the sake of the gospel to express our faith and share that love to all. With the help of the Holy Spirit we are called on to offer our life for the sake of the Good news of Jesus Christ. Profit and Loss – “For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life? Indeed what can they give in return for their life?”

So what do you seek is the challenge today? Do you seek the world or your true self, your soul, your eternal life? Some do still seek the worldly things. It is filled with possessions, fame and fortune, pleasure, ease and luxury. This is not to say there is something wrong with material things. God after all did create the world and gave us everything and declared it good. There is nothing wrong with using things in and through your life. But it becomes evil, is deceiving, is corrupt when the things dictate how we live our lives. When we lose the importance of knowing God, being in relationship with God, being God's servants in this time and place, when we give all that up in exchange for acquiring, gaining, seeking pleasure in the things of this world, things that are not eternal then we risk the loss of our true self. The trouble with giving in with these things is that we can rationalize and explain it away without even realizing the loss that we are creating. We get a new job, but it requires us to not see our family, not be at worship, not be about God's business and we rationalize and say but it is a great job, lots of perks, great money. We finally buy the house of our dreams, but then we need to spend more on the upgrades we want, we need to get the furniture to fill it, and to keep it looking new and fresh, and of course we have to pay the taxes and so we have to work more. But we rationalize and say but it's the house I always wanted, everyone is impressed when I show it off. The spiral of this appeal and desire of stuff and earthly honors can just keep turning us further and further away from following God. We may gain some instant gratification and prestige but it will not last and in the end we will be lost for we will have forfeiting our very lives.

Profit and Loss, so what are you seeking today? Is it your life, your true self, your very soul – because that is exactly what we are talking about today. The concept of losing your life speaks of your very soul, your true self as able to love, hope and believe. It is that which is our concern when we are tempted to give in to the earthly things, we place our hope in false things that will one day be dust. We place our love in things that can not possibly love us as greatly as God. We put our trust in things that will eventually fail us. Instead through giving our lives in God, we know a love that is eternal, a hope that never ends and a faith that stands strong no matter what may happen in this world, since we know the victory that is coming.

Late in the 4<sup>th</sup> century there was a monk called Telemachus. He had determined that his life was to serve God in prayer and quiet devotion. So he devoted his life to being out in the desert, alone, as a hermit, praying and being in quiet devotion to God. But something was missing, He was seeking his eternal soul, but turning away from all sins and from all distractions, he was seeking his eternal soul, his true self by devoting himself to constant prayer. But something was missing. One day as he got up from praying, it dawned on him that his life, his true self, isn't supposed to be self-less denial of everything to appease God but instead to be a fulfiller of God's love as a servant of God in the world. He knew from that moment on that he couldn't serve God out in the desert alone, but he must go to the cities to the people and be about the Lord's work.

So Telemachus, set off for the largest city, the capital of the empire, the capital by this time of Christendom – Rome itself. By the late 4<sup>th</sup> century, the Roman empire had become a Christian empire, where once Greek and Rome gods and goddess were worshipped, now people assembled to worship in the name of Christ. The only real carry over that was still left from the old Roman days was the arena, Christians were not being cast to lions anymore, but gladiators still fought and enemies of the state were still executed in bloody lopsided duels. And when Telemachus entered Rome, the Arena was that day filled with roaring fans and blood thirsty Christians seeking mayhem and excitement. Telemachus reportedly saw this horror of death and violence and decided that moment to act. With thousands of screaming fans rooting on the battle, Telemachus, the monk, jumped into the arena and stood between the two fighting foes, bringing their battle to an end. The crowds roared their disapproval but Telemachus would not be moved. The empire ordered that the gladiators kill Telemachus and continue their match. When Telemachus was struck down dead by the sword of the one gladiator, it was reported that a hush came over the arena. The horror of seeing a monk executed in cold blood shook the people that day. According to legend from that day on the gladiator fights and horrors of the arena came to an end. Telemachus could have lived a long life in the desert and died turning back into dust of the earth and forgotten to history. But by offering up his life for the sake of the Love and peace of God, Telemachus put an end to horrors and is honored to this day with his own festival saint day in January. Profit and loss.

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true self, your soul, your eternal life? The profit of this world is loss, but the loss of this world is the profit of eternal life? Chose this day which you want! Amen.

May the peace and Grace of God be with you this day and throughout the week to come. AMEN.

Let us pray for the whole people of God in Christ Jesus, and for all people according to their needs.

Heavenly Father we praise you for your glory, you sent Jesus to break into this darkness and pain of this world to give us hope and to give us a place in your eternal kingdom. We give thanks for this great gift that shines above and beyond all the temporary things of this world that distract and try to pull us away from you. We give thanks that he has called to us and claimed us as your own saved and redeemed and made a child of your eternal kingdom. Grant us the power to answer your call and follow you in all that we do.

Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer

God almighty, Allow us to come into that relationship with you that you have offered us through your Son. As we face the hardships of this life, as we are provoked in our faith toward love and good deeds, as we struggle in our beliefs, may you continue to surround us in the comforting arms of your presence so that we may enter into true worship here and now and throughout the week to always worship you and grant you your glory.

Lord in your Mercy, hear our prayer.

God, Grant wisdom and strength to the nations of this world. Send the spirit of justice and peace, and empower all people to work for reconciliation where there is war, conflicts and distress. Bring about the freedom of your peace and lift up your saving hand to rest upon your creation so that we may work towards you, ending hatred and greed that separate, ending sickness and desires that rip apart, ending diseases and disasters that hurt and oppress. Send your spirit this day Lord throughout this land.

Lord in your mercy hear our prayer.

Almighty Lord, we know that you care for all those who are in need. But we ask today humbly before your glory for the comforting spirit to be with those who mourn, those who are near death, and those who still live struggling with depression, addictions, anxiety, or illnesses of all kinds, be with our shut-ins and our hospitalized and all those we lift up in our prayers to you now.....

Lord in your mercy hear our prayer

Into your hands, O lord we commend all for whom we pray, trusting in your mercy; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.