

Matthew 16:26 We win while losing! Pentecost 15 September 18, 2017

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God's grace and peace, which are of greater value than the whole world, are yours through Jesus. Amen.
We'll hear Jesus words from the last verse of the Gospel lesson in Matthew 16:26
These are Your words, dear Father. Use them to show us the immeasurable value of Christ for our souls.

Dear Winners in Christ,

Can you think of a time when people won but lost? I remember when a police department ran a sting operation to round up people with arrest warrants. They pretended to have a contest and notified these criminals that they had won a big cash prize which they needed to stop by to collect. Many of these greedy people came to claim their prize but were arrested. They thought they would win, but really lost. It is the opposite with Christians. We truly will win, but we will need to lose to get the prize. Our theme is:

We win while losing!

Why must Christians lose in the world? Christians aren't alone. With life in a sinful world everyone eventually loses because all things here are temporary. Jesus said, "*What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul?*" (v.26) Imagine what it would be like to gain the whole world! You would gain: wealth, pleasure, honor, all that money can buy, also power, and reaching every achievement possible. When you add up what it means to gain the whole world, it's hard to imagine so many good things. But, what of those things has lasting value? Alexander the Great conquered much of the known world, but then died at age 33 and lost it all. King Solomon was the richest king of his time. When he was old he wrote: "*I surveyed all that my hands had done and what I had toiled to achieve, everything was meaningless, a chasing after the wind....*" (*Ecclesiastes 2:11*) Everything we gain in life we will lose.

More importantly, there are things we Christians want to lose. Earlier in Matthew 16, Peter had confessed that Jesus was the promised Christ, the Son of God. Jesus praised him for that confession of faith. But after, when Jesus revealed that He had to die in Jerusalem; Peter boldly stood in the way and said that he would never let Jesus go! Jesus rebuked him, calling him Satan. What was Peter's problem? The way Peter saw it: Jesus' death in Jerusalem would lose all and gain nothing. *He did not have in mind the things of God.*

We are surrounded by a culture that tells us: "Do things your way." We are tempted to make our work, our pleasure, or our earthly lives the most important things. But, if anything stands between us and having Christ as our Savior, it is time to lose it. A rich young ruler once asked Jesus what he needed to do to have eternal life? Jesus told him to sell all his riches, give the money to the poor, and then follow Him to gain life. The man went away sad because he had great riches and he would not part with them even if it meant losing eternal life. (*Luke 18:22*) The Bible doesn't usually demand that all people give everything away to be a Christian. But, if we find that money, pleasure, fame, or achievements stand between us and trusting Christ, we should reset our priorities. Paul warned the Philippian believers, "*Many live as enemies of the cross of Christ. Their ... god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is on earthly things. But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ.*" (*Philippians 3:18-20*)

Second, God offers a win that's worth it! Jesus said "*Whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for Me will find it.*" (v.25) When we follow Jesus by faith, we are saying "No!" to sinful selfish desires. With new insight in Christ, we are saying "No!" to self-appointed judging about what God should or shouldn't do in this world. As Christians, we know that God has promised us an inheritance

of lasting value. When we find that we have sinned against God's laws, we should immediately repent, saying "No!" to that temptation just like Jesus did when Peter's words tempted Him. If Jesus would have listened to Peter, He would have never won our salvation. If we fall to temptation, we are endangering our place with Jesus in heaven! If a friend told saw smoke and told you that your house was on fire, would you ignore it and keep watching TV or making dinner? No, you would check out the problem and put out the fire before there is any great damage. So, when God's Word tells us we have sinned, we will repent of that sin before it destroys our lives. Christ has died for those sins, but we need to repent and believe to receive His forgiveness. Heaven is too good to miss! There will be no evil, no sin, no enemies, no sorrow or trouble. The best days here, cannot compare to heaven's glory. Paul said, "*I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.... and the power of his resurrection.*" (*Philippians 3:8, 11*)

We not only gain heaven as we lose our sins through Christ, we gain strength in Him. Our difficulties serve a good purpose. Just like high-level athletes train and sacrifice pleasures that most people enjoy so they can improve and win in their sport, so God allows losses to ultimately bless us. This happened to Jesus' disciples. They didn't want to lose Jesus by having Him die at Jerusalem. They didn't want to endanger their own lives. Yet, He assured them that His death would give them the only way to win eternal life. After His resurrection appearances, their faith soared in the risen Savior. Peter had a stronger faith. He later wrote, "*Praise be to God.... He has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance... kept in heaven for you.... Though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that your faith--of greater worth than gold... may result in praise, glory and honor [for you] when Jesus Christ is revealed.*" (*1 Peter 1:3-7*) So, we become stronger through adversity by trusting the promises of God in Christ.

As other people see us prioritizing our lives for what is important to our faith, but we are privileged to witness to them about Christ. Jesus promised that believers who confess His name among people, on the last Day He will confess their names before the Father. Sadly, many people still don't know what Christ has to offer them. They are still as confused as the early disciples were. God wants them to win by learning of Jesus. We can help!

We can share the answer to the question Jesus asked: "*What can a man give in exchange for his soul?*" (*v.26*) Even if we owned the riches of the world it wouldn't be enough to pay for one lost soul. Only Jesus could make the payment. If He were only a man, His death would have won Him a place in heaven. Because He also is God's Son, His death had value to pay for all the sins of every soul. By faith in His saving work, we receive Christ's complete forgiveness of all our sins and God's acceptance of us for eternal life with Him. So, let's not get too distressed over temporary losses like homes in the Florida Keys. Our soul is too valuable to give up on God and lose it to this sinful world! So, lose your life of selfishness by honoring Jesus and trusting in Him to win your eternal victory! Rejoice that no loss can separate you from God's love in Christ! Amen.