What Does It Profit a Man to Gain the Whole World?

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[0:00] Then Jesus told his disciples, in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay each person according to what he has done.

Truly, I say to you, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom. Amen. This is God's holy word.
It's great to be with you tonight. If you notice in the bulletin, the title is a little bit awkward. It kind of went to a different line. I think when I first picked up the title, it was like, what does it profit a man, dot, dot, dot, the ellipsis.
But we'll end up putting half the question instead of the whole question. But I think it's a very important question that we're answering tonight of Jesus' question. What does it profit a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul?
We all probably have this idea of what an amazing life would look like. Many of you may know, I don't know if all of you would know the name Tom Brady.
[1:25] Tom Brady, a lot of you, some of you, yeah, as American football players, many of you know I love American football, coach at the University of Edinburgh, American football team. Tom Brady is considered maybe the greatest NFL player to have ever played.

He won like seven Super Bowls, just retired after 23 years, not long, a couple years ago. Three MVPs. There was actually, there's a show in the U.S.
called 60 Minutes, and it's like an hour long, 60 Minutes, clever name, where they're interviewing people, special stories, those kind of things. Well, after he'd won his third Super Bowl, he'd just signed this massive $60 million contract, which in 2005 was a whole lot of money.
He was, his partner was a supermodel that many of you may know named Giselle. He had everything that you would consider like a fulfilling life.
He had money, fame, beautiful woman, family, this great, incredible pinnacle of his career. He actually went on to have an even better career. And as they're interviewing him, they're asking him about these things, and he says, to me, I look at this and say, there's got to be more to life than this.
[2:40] You should really go look to YouTube and look this up, Tom Brady 60 Minutes. It's really sad in some ways, but also very insightful that here you are seeing a guy who has reached the pinnacle of everything that we would say is an amazing life.

And he's like, there's got to be more to life than this. And the interviewer actually asked him, well, what do you think that is? He said, I wish I knew. And we're just like, oh, we do know.
We know what your soul is crying out for. But he's saying, there's got to be more to life than this. And this really hits on what Jesus is talking about here with his question.
What does it profit a man to gain the whole world and yet forfeit his soul? Why did Jesus ask this question? Well, if we look at the context, the setting here, Jesus has fed the 5,000.
He's walked on water. He's performed a bunch of miracles. He fed 4,000 more. And then it's quite interesting. At the beginning of chapter 16, it says the Pharisees and Sadducees came up to Jesus asking him for a sign from heaven.
[3:46] So after he's done all of these things, they're like, but show us a sign from heaven that would authenticate your message. It's like, seriously? Sometimes evidence for Jesus' identity is just not enough for people.

And there will always be skeptics, but they have witnessed, they've seen, and they're asking for a sign. And later Jesus asks his disciples, who do people say that I am?

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And they tell them the rumors. Some say you're John the Baptist, come back from the dead. Some think you're Elijah or Jeremiah or some other prophet. And then he responds, but who do you say that I am?
Now that could have been the question we talked about tonight, question Jesus asked, maybe the most important question, who do you say that I am? And in that moment, Peter says, you are the Christ, the son of the living God.
And it says in verse 21 of chapter 16 in Matthew, from that time, Jesus began to show the disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things.
[4:50] Jesus must go and lose his life. And Peter actually rebukes him for that. He says, whoa, whoa, whoa, this will never happen to you. I think you're misunderstanding the scriptures, Jesus.

Now he didn't say that, but that's what he's implying. You're the Messiah. You're going to go to Jerusalem and deliver us, not go to lose your life. What are you talking about? And Jesus then rebukes him and says, get behind me, Satan.
And then he says something that's very important for our passage in verse 23. For you're not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man.
And if we're honest with ourselves, we often many times can recognize this in our own lives where it's like, I know, I wish I was setting my mind more on the things of God. I'm thinking more about the things in this life, the things of man.
We're all tempted to do this. It's something that's really our default mode to really more focus on the things of man, the things in this world. We recognize this often.
[5:54] We want this to be different. But that's the setup for Jesus' response here in his question. What does it profit a man to gain the whole world and yet forfeit his soul?

Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul? When he's asking this question, he's actually giving us the rationale for his statement about the nature of being his disciple. So if you're trying to gain the whole world, you're not going to be setting your mind on the things of God because his disciples, he says, to follow him, he says, you must deny yourself, take up his cross, and follow me. To be his disciple, you must deny himself. We have to learn to say no to ourselves. This word literally means to refuse or to resist or to reject ourselves.
It's the idea of forgetting oneself, to lose sight of yourself and your own interests. It's like, I'm an afterthought. But it's actually, denying yourself is the same way later as we'll see Peter is denying Jesus where he says, I do not know this man.
It's kind of looking at ourselves and saying, I don't know this person. It's an, I'm an afterthought. I'm not the main thing, the center of the universe like my default nature thinks I am. John Stott says, this isn't just denying things to myself like to say no to sweets, which I can have a problem doing, but it's to deny myself to myself.
[7:20] To deny myself to myself. It's denying my agenda, denying trying to gratify the pleasures that are selfish. Instead, I must think about others, put others before myself.

It's where we come and say, here's my plans, Lord. I lay them down on the altar to present them before you and say, not my will, but your will be done.
To be his disciple, we must deny himself, it says. And then it says we must take up his cross. The cross, as we know, is a symbol of shame and humiliation. And it's really hard to imagine what they would have been thinking when they heard this because they did understand the imagery.
They understood that the cross was a convicted prisoner being marched outside of town, being led to pay what was called the supreme penalty. It was a slave's death, a traitor's death, some common euphemisms for taking up your cross or for the crucifixion was called the extreme penalty, the most severe punishment, and there were Latin words that are used for these things that I didn't dare try to bring in because I don't know Latin.
But the slave's punishment, the wretched death, all of these things that they would have understood when they heard Jesus saying you must take up your cross.
[8:40] Paul talks about what this looks like in Galatians 5, 24 when he says, and those who belong to Christ have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.

So it's where we put our sinful selfishness on the cross and say, not my will but your will be done, dying to these desires, dying to these passions, crucifying them.
And also, I think one of the reasons he said that Jesus said this is because crucifixion was a slow death. And so being his disciple, taking up his cross, is learning to die to the flesh, which is a slow

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and painful process.
It's a slow death. Luke even adds when he records this that Jesus said that he must take up his cross daily. Our default mode is to wake up and to put ourselves back on the throne instead of back on a cross.
And Luke says we must, he records it as we must take up our cross daily, learning to say it is not about me but embracing a life that is about Jesus, another's agenda instead of my own.
[9:48] So if you would come after me, if anyone would come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross and follow me. Follow me is I go where you go, Jesus. I do what you do.

This is all about following our Lord and doing as he commanded. And in following him, we find our true lives. We find our true selves.
Trading our agenda for a lasting and better one. It's letting Jesus set the direction for our lives. That's what it means to follow him. And it's how we truly gain life.
But it comes through denying and dying. I don't know where I heard that but just putting those two words together, it's actually really helpful. denying and dying. That's what it means to follow Jesus. Jesus is the Messiah. They thought the Messiah was going to come and take power but instead he is saying I must lose my life.
[10:47] The way of the kingdom is to lose your life so that others might find it. Jesus says whoever tries to save his life will lose it and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.

This word life here is not life where it's like breathing in and out and life as opposed to death but it's actually the word where we get the word soul or psyche. It's your very identity.
Who you think you are. Your core. Your inner person. You must be willing to lose that for Jesus' sake and when you do that you truly find it. In other words for the Christian we let go of our lives and we let go of anything that we're trying to build our identities on besides Jesus besides Christ. It means that we subordinate our thinking about our own personal issues and serving ourselves subordinate that to Jesus where it's about serving Jesus his interests his agendas his thoughts obeying his commands.
So whether that's our careers whether it's relationships comfort and leisure making a name for ourselves whatever we think success is it's all laying that at the feet of Jesus and say this is not about me but this is about you losing your life in order to gain it.
[12:06] So why would we embrace this self-denial and this self-death? And Jesus gives the answer. What would it profit you to gain the whole world and yet forfeit your soul?

Or what can you give in exchange for your soul? We know that the right investment is investing in the soul. The way of the world is meaningless and vanity and yet our default mode is to go that way and so we must learn to deny ourselves take up his cross daily and follow him because what can we give in exchange for our souls?
The word soul here is the exact same word that's translated life in the previous verse but often when we hear this deny yourself take up his cross follow me whoever loses his life for my sake will gain it we tend to hear this disregarding the things of the world material things and we see this as a test of our faith or maybe even a deep burden instead of understanding that he's showing us what it means to flourish to have a beautiful life to have a life that is true life indeed we hear these things about denying ourselves why is it that that is such a burden instead of Jesus saying let me show you the way to find true life because what does it profit a man to gain this whole world and yet forfeit the soul he's not trying to deprive us he's trying to show us true abundant life and Jesus gets down to the very heart of things when he says gains the whole world he's talking about when we try to gain everything the world values anything that we would set our hearts on here on this earth and you know we all dream hear stories of celebrities or musicians or whatever the famously rich people and how they've come into this wealth and we then hear how miserable they are at some point how they turn to a life maybe of drugs and alcohol or just broken relationships by the way
Tom Brady and Giselle are divorced it's like we hear these stories of just relationships broken lives we hear all these things of people who've gone after the world but we're like but I think I'd do it a little bit differently I don't know that that would happen to me maybe that's the cross you should give me Jesus is seeing if I can handle wealth we just think things would be different for us but guys this is this is not a new problem I mean obviously it wasn't new with Jesus he's talking about addressing people that try to gain the whole world but in Ecclesiastes chapter 2 verses 1 through 11 which is attributed to Solomon who was at the time known as the world's wisest and wealthiest person this passage Ecclesiastes chapter 2 verses 1 through 11 Solomon says I said in my heart come now I

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will test you with pleasure enjoy yourself and he goes on to say that here are the things that he pursued he said
I made great works I built houses and planted vineyards for myself I made myself gardens and parks and planted them with all kinds of fruit trees I made myself pools from which to water the forest of growing trees I bought male and female slaves and had slaves who were born in my house had great possessions of herds and flocks more than anyone who was before me in Jerusalem he said I also gathered for myself silver and gold and the treasure of kings and provinces I got singers both men and women I had entertainers people both and had many women and concubines the delight of the sons of man so I became great and surpassed all who were before me in Jerusalem also my wisdom remained with me and whatever my eyes desired I did not keep from them I kept my heart from no pleasure for my heart found pleasure in all my toil and this was my reward for all my toil then I considered all that my hands had done and the toil
[16:39] I had expended in doing it and behold all was vanity and striving after wind and there was nothing to be gained under the sun he said I went after everything I gathered anything that my heart wanted and all was vanity and striving after the wind and we don't believe that do we like we think it would be different if it was me or maybe it's just me but like we really think we would be different but yet Jesus is telling us if you try to gain the whole world you forfeit your soul and the way for true life is deny yourself take up your cross and follow me what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and yet forfeit his soul and have you ever wondered why this is the way of the kingdom the nature of the kingdom wouldn't it be possible that Jesus denies himself for us and instead of us and takes up his cross for us instead of us why did he have to call us to the same life why would he tell us that we must do this as well

I think a few reasons one I think because he knows the human condition he understands our sinful nature we would pursue the things of the world at the expense of our souls if he didn't command us to do this we would twist everything and make it about us I mean have you ever been around anyone who's like we would consider a little narcissistic where they make everything about themselves miserable people to be around but yet you flip that and turn someone who is other centered someone who wants to serve who genuinely is about other people and they're amazing to be around we love those kinds of people Jesus knows when he's telling us that it's not about ourselves to not deny ourselves take up our cross and follow him that it's the way of life he also knows that this is just the nature of the kingdom because this is his nature he tells us that because when we lay down our lives for others putting needs before our own we're demonstrating
God's very nature God's very heart we're displaying his glory to the world that's what he himself did that is the way of life and he knows best and then I think a third thing is he really just knows what will satisfy us he created us and he knows where true life really is and he's just telling us the way of that as a little side note I came across this article online as I was looking up something else I was like oh this is kind of appropriate the title of the article was Serving Others in Brain Health the Neurological Benefits of Altruism it sounds really interesting article it says this the effect of serving others on the human brain is more profound than most people realize altruism activates the same reward circuitry that responds to food and sex drops cortisol floods the brain with dopamine and oxytocin and in older adults measurably slows cognitive decline helping someone isn't just a nice thing to do neurologically speaking it's one of the most potent brain health interventions available to you
God designed us so that even serving other people is good for our own health now they probably were thinking this is an evolutionary thing this wasn't a Christian article but Jesus when he's telling us these things he knows how we're made because he made us and he's not giving us a burden or placing on like just just take it for the team and trust me it's like no like this is the way of the kingdom and it is good and it is right and lovely and praiseworthy when we live for something beside ourselves it actually blesses us in ways that we don't even totally understand so want us to get the fact that Jesus is not being cruel or giving us a terrible burden when he calls us to deny ourselves and take us across and follow him but it's literally for our good and for his glory we feel because it's such a hard battle that it's a loss for us to follow this way but David Livingston the well-known Scotsman missionary in South Africa says this people talk of the sacrifice I made in spending much of my life in Africa is that a sacrifice which brings its own blessed reward and healthy activity the consciousness of doing good peace of mind and a bright hope of a glorious destiny hereafter away with a word in such a view and with such a thought it is emphatically no sacrifice say rather it is a

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privilege anxiety sickness suffering or danger now and then with a foregoing in the common conveniences and charities of this life may make us pause and cause the spirit to waver and the soul to sink but let this only be for a moment all these are nothing when compared with the glory with which will be revealed in and for us and then he says I never made a sacrifice this is what it looks like to set your mind on things above to understand that losing our life means saving it focusing on eternity is the blessed life and following the example of our Lord who lost his life emptied himself so that we could have life in his name as we've been talking about that being united to Christ means that we have a relationship with God and then he calls us to do the same and that is a life that is the opposite of having a superiority mindset but it is one that gives us humility when we trade our agendas for his agenda it's saying it's not about me the way I spend my time the way I spend my money it is not about me but how can I use these gifts that God has given me to serve and bless others and if you think about it think about how like when we are pursuing the ways of the or the things of this world pursuing like a way to gain the world think about the worry and anxiety that causes worry is like saying

[23:12] I think I know how a good God would what he would do in this situation and I'm afraid you're just not going to come through in that way I mean think about the people we know that have walked away from the faith because God didn't come through for them in the way that we thought he should but instead we've got to learn we don't know better than God so we trade our agendas for his and it allows us to say okay God in this thing that's going on what are you up to what do you want me to learn from this how are you wanting to show yourself to me in a way that we will be glorious we must learn to set our minds on things of God not on the things of man as he told Peter and this changes the way we see everything it changes even the way we see suffering which suffering is one of those things that is like I was actually supposed to preach this sermon a few weeks ago and because of some things some crisis going on in our family

I'm preaching it three weeks later it's been three weeks of hard suffering and it's very tempting to to doubt the goodness of God to doubt that his way is the best way but in those times we understand that he really knows what's good for us and we can see from his word and when we cling to him and his word that this suffering is producing wisdom it's producing joy in ways that we never would have understood it's producing endurance as scripture says it's producing a courage that maybe we needed but it's also producing a humility and we just have to cling to those things and say God you know what's best more than I do and so I trust you in that setting our minds on the things of God not the things of man changes the way we see all of life helps us to learn to see life in the way that he sees it and that's the nature of the kingdom to deny ourselves take up our crosses and follow him greatness comes by being last saving your life means we lose it and Jesus establishes kingdom by losing his life he calls us to do the same and this is the abundant life it is not drudgery it's not a burden doesn't mean it's always easy but it does mean it's good and it will glorify him and be for our benefit let's pray father we we just acknowledge right now together that we are prone to try to gain the world to try to go after the ways of this world to find success in the way of the world to find success and even more than that lord we we wake up every day wanting to be the center of the universe to say it's about me we don't wake up wanting to serve we wake up wanting to be served and so

I pray that you would help us to cling to you and your word and the promises and the wisdom and the goodness of this passage that says what would it profit you to gain the whole world and forfeit your soul but instead losing our lives for the sake of really finding it to deny ourselves to take up our crosses and follow you that is the way of true life that is the way to abundant life help us to trust you in that so that when we wake up in the morning we will really try to crucify the flesh with its passions and desires as Paul says but this is a daily thing Lord and we need your grace to do it so please grant us that grace to grow in these things help us to do what you said and set our minds on the things of God and not on the things of man please help us to do this we pray in Jesus name amen amen amen

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