

"What will it Profit"

Genesis 17:1-7, 15-16; Romans 4:13-25; Mark 8:31-38

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Lars and Ole decided to go into the produce business. They had a pickup truck, and drove 100 miles into the country, brought watermelons for fifty-cents each, and then drove back to town, set up a produce stand and sold the watermelons two for a dollar. At the end of the day they were really pleased to find that they had sold all of the watermelons but then they did not make any profit. Ole hollered at Lars, "I told you we wouldn't make a profit unless we got a bigger truck!"

Finally we come to a matter that we can understand. Amid all of this talk of hope and faith - talk of taking up a cross and following Jesus talk of Jesus suffering and being put to death at the hands of religious leaders finally we have a down to earth subject that we can wrap our heads and hearts around. PROFIT! It is easy to get a bit lost in all of the 'churchy language of theology. But profits and loss is something that we are trained to understand. We know that we want to make a profit we know what it takes to come out ahead we want to come out ahead. So when Jesus brings up the notion of profit I immediately became more interested. "What will it profit" What's in it for me?

How many times do you suppose that you have asked yourself or others this simple question: "What's in it for me!" Maybe you didn't exactly form the question in that way but we do all ask that kind of question time after time - both consciously and unconsciously. The reality seems to be that if we can figure out that there is something 'in it for me' in doing a certain thing, then we are willing to do extraordinary things in order to receive that profit. Ole and Lars will probably go out and buy a bigger truck so that next time they will realize a profit with their two for a dollar melons. — We are good at looking out for number one and figuring out how we can profit from something. We are willing to do many things if we can see that there is a profit to it for us. I was stunned by the results of a poll that I read about some time ago that asked people what they were willing to do for \$10,000,000. What they asked people to do was probably hypothetical but the questions and answers were quite amazing. If someone would give you 10 million dollars would you do any of these?

25% said that they would abandon their entire family.

25% said they would abandon their church.

23% said they would become prostitutes for a week or longer.

16% said they would give up their American citizenship.

7% said they would kill a stranger.

3% said they would put up their children for adoption.

The survey also shared that in 1967, 44% of college Freshmen thought it was essential to be financially well off. But by 1987 that figure had jumped to 76%. In 1967, 83% of those same college Freshmen said it was essential to have a philosophy of life but by 1987 that figure dropped to 39%. How often do you ask, "What's in it for me?"

Did you know that a few years ago, the first night that "Who wants to be a Millionaire" aired it had 26 million viewers. In response, the FOX network quickly put together a show called "Greed" and the night the show was introduced, FOX doubled its normal viewing audience? I am really not sure what it means that now the show with the highest number of viewers is "American Idol". What's in it for us? Where is the profit? What are you willing to do to make a personal profit?

Jesus told the crowd and His disciples; "If you want to be my followers, deny yourself, take up your cross and follow me."

Think for a moment about how foreign that call is to our whole way of life. "Deny yourself ... take your cross ... follow ..." What's in it for me? It is no wonder that it is so easily left at the door of the church as we go back out into the world where it seems as though every aspect of our lives is shaped by that simple question - 'what's in it for me.'

"Deny yourself ...take up your cross and follow Christ" But then Jesus asks a great question "What will it profit"?

It's a great question He is about to put the whole matter in a language we can understand. In a nut shell, it seems to me that Jesus asks us to consider what our lives are worth and what we are willing to do for a life that is eternal. What is your life worth? What would you give in return for life [not just now but for all eternity]. Often in the church we talk about the cost of discipleship. The cost is high. The cost is a cross and following Christ into a life that runs counter to our culture. But there is a sense in this text that Jesus changes the question. The question is more than 'what it costs to be a disciple of Christ' - - - it is rather, "What is the cost of not being a disciple?" The cost of not being a disciple is losing your life - - - forfeiting life. We can quickly guess that He is referring to eternal life. But I suspect that He is also talking about the life of joy and peace that God wants us to have here and now as well. "What will it profit you to gain the whole world ... and then forfeit your life?"

We are good short term thinkers. We see and feel our immediate concerns intensely. A million bucks would be wonderful - 10 million, even better. If only we have a bigger truck we can really make a profit. But, in the whole balance sheet of life, do we look beyond the bigger truck to the bigger picture of life and true gain and loss?

What will it profit you to gain the whole world and then lose your life? Do we know where life apart from Christ will take us? Do we care? Are we willing to respond to the bigger picture?

The good news of God is that He cares about both the short term and long term futures of His children. He calls us to turn to Him and follow as a way of life so that in the short term - for our life time we will enjoy to blessing that come from following in His footsteps. And He has acted on our behalf to provide a long term future of glory. As we journey through Lent we hear again the call to repent and follow. And we are reminded of the gift of life eternal that He is accomplishing on our behalf.

AMEN