

*“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, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.”*

Dear friends in Christ and fellow redeemed:

One of the more popular game shows in years gone by was a program called Let's Make a Deal. Contestants were given a choice of prizes and were supposed to make the best possible deal that they could. The problem was that the prizes themselves were often hidden, and so people had to try to guess which box or which curtain hid the better deal. Sometimes people who started with nothing traded up to cars, trips, furniture and a host of other valuable things. But there were also times when people gave up valuable prizes, only to be 'zonked', winning some gag prize of very little value. Of course, they really didn't lose anything, because they started with nothing in the first place. Even if they didn't win a prize, there was really no risk involved. In playing the game they had nothing to lose, and everything to gain.

Do you think that a game like Let's Make a Deal would have been as popular with people if they first had to make an investment in order to play? Would people have been willing to mortgage their home or sell their car if there were no guarantee that they would win a prize? Actually, some of them would be willing to take the risk, because we see that very thing happening in the lottery craze in our country. People will shell out money for a piece of paper that they merely hope will become valuable in a contest. There are those who have sold their homes or their cars in order to buy tickets for the lottery - and many have lost everything in the effort. But for the most part, we would consider that a bad investment. Spending your life savings on lottery tickets is risky. It is better to put your money in the bank and earn interest, or to invest in real estate, or in something solid that will produce a favourable return on your investment.

That is the way of our world, the way of profit and loss. We view certain things as profitable or beneficial, while others are of little or no value to us. And we will surrender something, give up something, lose something, if you will, so long as there is something to be gained in doing so. Corporations will invest money and even take a loss on their investment, so long as there is a profit to be gained somewhere down the line. In a war the loss of a certain number of casualties is considered acceptable in order to win a battle. People will scrimp and save and will give up going out for dinner or buying a new car, or will even deny themselves certain necessities in order to achieve a goal like buying their own home. We will deny ourselves certain foods, even things that we love, if it is profitable and necessary for our health. And there are many others such decisions that we have to make. We have to decide what we want, what is important, and what is it worth to us?

In our text today we see St. Paul asking those same questions in terms of his relationship with Jesus Christ. Paul had to determine what it was worth to him personally to know Jesus Christ. His answer is found in our text today. He says: *Whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Jesus Christ my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in Him.* For Paul, there was nothing more important, nothing of greater value than knowing Christ. But what about us? What is it worth to you to know Christ? What are you willing to invest, to lose or to give up for the sake of gaining all that Christ offers to us? In the long run we all have to answer those questions for ourselves. But if you really want something profitable out of life, then look to Christ, because there is nothing of greater value than knowing Christ and the life and forgiveness that comes from Him.

Throughout history, people like St. Paul have gladly and willingly surrendered everything in this world - prestige and honour, family and friends, their wealth, their comfort, and even their lives, for the sake of knowing Christ. Many Christians, following the example of the twelve apostles, have left everything and gladly have given their lives so that they might be known as followers of Jesus Christ. There are the missionaries and evangelists who have left their homes to go out into the world, into some very dangerous and difficult areas, to share their faith in Jesus Christ with others. People who come from Jewish, Muslim

or Hindu backgrounds risk being ostracised and outcast by their own families because of their faith in Christ. There are those who have given away all they possessed and those who have given up positions of influence and power, all for the sake of knowing Christ. And why do they do it? They do it because Jesus Christ, and the life they have in Him is more important, more profitable, more valuable than anything else they can imagine. Paul goes so far as to say that everything that was important to him, everything he once considered profitable and beneficial—be it his family, his Jewish heritage, and even his own life was nothing more than rubbish when compared with the value of knowing Christ - knowing him intimately, knowing Him by faith, knowing Him as Saviour and Lord.

Paul was right. The most valuable thing in the world is to know Jesus Christ as our Saviour and Lord. In Christ, and only in Him, do we have forgiveness for all of our sins, the very sins which would condemn us to an eternity of torment in hell. It is His death on the cross that frees us from the condemnation we deserve. That alone makes Him more valuable to us than all the world has to offer. But there is still more. Jesus not only died in our place upon the cross; He also rose again from the dead. His resurrection is the sure and certain guarantee that we too shall live, enjoying a perfect life of peace and joy in the glories of heaven. That is why Paul says that he wants to know Christ and the power of His resurrection. To have that confidence, a confidence in a life that goes beyond all the worries and cares of this world, a life that is even beyond the power of death—that is something worth having. Knowing the power of Jesus' resurrection and all that it means for our lives means that no matter what may happen in this life, we cannot lose. The ultimate victory is ours. Knowing Christ means we know a Lord who cares about the things that affect us, who cares about the worries of day to day living. He is there to forgive when we feel the guilt of our sin. He is there to help when we feel we just can't go on. He is there to love us when we feel unloved. Since all this is ours when we know Christ, is it any wonder that Paul should say: ***“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.”***

Our lives are not a game of “Let’s Make a Deal”. The truth is that we may think we are clinging to and enjoying things of real value in this world, but they are meaningless. Like the tenants in the vineyard in the Gospel lesson today, we think that we can do things that will leave us with all the benefits of this world. We wheel and deal, but will always come up empty. Paul reminds us: ***“for we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world.”*** (1 Timothy 6:7, ESV) Yet God doesn’t leave us in our lostness, emptiness and hopelessness. He came and made the best deal, the best trade for us. As Scripture declares: ***“For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich.”*** (2 Corinthians 8:9, ESV) Our Saviour left the glory of heaven, setting aside all that was His so that He might give Himself in our place, suffering for our sins, bearing our guilt in His body as He dies in our place on the cross. He exchanged His life for us. But we rejoice because He also exchanged the power of His resurrection for our death. In Him we have the glory of life that will never end. We have blessings forevermore!

One of our hymns is entitled, *Jesus, Priceless Treasure*. (LSB 743) That is what Christ is: a priceless treasure of life and salvation. Paul knew that to be true, and He valued his relationship with Christ above all things. Christians throughout the ages have known that to be true, and have counted all things as lost, for the sake of knowing Christ and the power of His resurrection. Christ is the way that we find what really of lasting worth. Knowing that, we pray: *Dear Lord Jesus, by Your grace You set me free to live in Your righteousness and in Your image. Loosen my grip on earthly advantage, and take my hand in Yours. Amen.*