



The King's Ransom

Matthew 20:28

Text

Matthew 16:24-17:8

Topic

Jesus tells His disciples whoever loses his life for His sake will find it

Title

"I'm a Loser, and That's What I Aspire to Be"

Introduction

I had not heard of Berkshire Hathaway. Have you?

It's not a person. It's an American corporation. Headquartered in Omaha, Nebraska, it oversees and manages a number of subsidiary companies.

The company wholly owns GEICO, BNSF, Lubrizol, Dairy Queen, Fruit of the Loom, Helzberg Diamonds and NetJets; it owns half of Heinz and an undisclosed percentage of Mars, Incorporated, and has significant minority holdings in American Express, The Coca-Cola Company, Wells Fargo, and IBM.

According to Fortune500, in 2013 it was the fifth most profitable company in the U.S., and number 18 in the world.

The most profitable U.S. company was WalMart - ranked second in the world behind Royal Dutch Shell.

On the loss side, J.C. Penney had the worst stock performance of any Fortune500 company.

Profits and losses of a different kind are the subject of our verses.

Mat 16:26 For what **profit** is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and **loses** his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?

In business, it's not uncommon to be asked to present a profit and loss statement - also known as a P&L.

What if you were asked to present a *spiritual* P&L?

I'll organize my thoughts around two questions: #1 How Does Your P&L Read?, and #2 How Will Your P&L Reward?

#1 How Does Your P&L Read?

(16:24-26)

Jesus had just revealed to His twelve disciples that He would be rejected by Israel's leaders, suffer at their hands, then be crucified. He would rise from the dead and, though He had not yet told them, ascend into Heaven to await His Second Coming.

Between His first coming and His Second Coming, He would be building His church on the earth. These first disciples would make other disciples, and so on, up until The Lord calls His church home.

It seems appropriate, therefore, to talk a little about what it means, from the Lord's perspective, to be His disciple.

Greg Laurie made popular the statement, "All disciples are believers, but not all believers are disciples." It captures what we see all the time among Christians. There are those whose commitment to Jesus seems, for lack of a better word, "uncommitted."

Others teach what has been labeled Lordship Salvation. Their position could be summarized by saying, "if Jesus isn't Lord of all, then He's not Lord at all."

We want to be biblical and, biblically speaking, Jesus *can* be Lord of aspects of my life while I withhold other areas of my life from His control.

I would cite Romans 12:1 as a prooftext that, at least sometimes, believers do not settle the Lordship of Christ in their lives until some time after they've been saved.

Paul told those who were already believers to "present themselves as living sacrifices, wholly and acceptable to God." Apparently they were not doing so at the time.

James told believers to "submit to God" (4:7). Apparently they were not doing so at the time.

In fact, any of the Bible's many exhortations to greater dedication indicate that not all genuine believers are committed disciples.

But we want to be, do we not? Sure we do - and here is how:

Mat 16:24 Then Jesus said to His disciples, "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me.

Mat 16:25 For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it.

Mat 16:26 For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?

The desire to follow Jesus by denying yourself and taking up your cross, and the commitment to lose your life, is best brought into focus by first answering the questions posed in verse twenty-six.

Question #1 - "For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul?"

The "soul" is referring to the real you - the part of you that is eternal and will exist beyond this life.

Do you remember the very first *MasterCard* "priceless" commercial? A young boy and his dad were attending a baseball game. The narrator says, "Two tickets: \$46.00. Two hot dogs, two popcorns, two sodas: \$27.00. One autographed baseball: \$50.00. Real conversation with your eleven year old son: Priceless. There are some things money can't buy. For everything else, there's *MasterCard*."

The ad works because we understand that things pertaining to the soul are precious when compared to the things of the world.

"Loses his soul" can apply to both nonbelievers and believers:

- If a person rejects Jesus Christ and pursues only the things of the world, at the final judgment they're going to find they've lost their soul to an eternity in Hell.
- If a Christian loves the world rather than The Lord, they will suffer the loss of reward when they stand before Him.

The question supposes you, by yourself, gained the entire world. It would still pale in comparison to the value of your one soul.

Since the whole world gained cannot substitute for a soul, how can any lesser worldly pursuit or passion be worthy of my greatest efforts? I should prefer things that are spiritual for they alone are precious.

Question #2 "What will a man give in exchange for his soul?" It literally reads, "for the redemption" of his soul. If he had the whole world to give, and would give it, it would not be a sufficient ransom for it.

This is definitely looking at the nonbeliever. It reminds me of the rich man and Lazarus, described in the Gospel of Luke. After he died, the rich man, in torment, would have given everything to save himself; but it was too late.

The Lord is to be preferred to the world; I get it. But how do I approach the world while awaiting eternity?

Basic discipleship is described in verses twenty-four and twenty-five.

Mat 16:24 Then Jesus said to His disciples, "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me.

If I don't "desire to come after" - to *follow* - Jesus after answering those two questions, then there's something seriously wrong with me.

On a more positive note, His was the richest, purest, fullest living of all time. He walked on this earth in perfect obedience to His Heavenly Father. His was the most profitable life ever lived, on every level. Following Jesus is how life is meant to be lived.

First, you "deny [your]self." Denying yourself isn't the same as self-denial. People always think of the Christian life as one of self-denial. I'd like to do some things, but God says not to, so I can't - *even though they're so much fun!*

Denying self is totally different. Because I know God loves me, any boundaries He has set are for my own good. I therefore gladly submit to Him and find true satisfaction and genuine joy rather than pursuing the world's happiness which often leads me into slavery to sin and self.

Second, you "take up your cross." Criminals who had been sentenced to death carried the crossbeam on their shoulders to the place of their crucifixion. It signified to onlookers they were in total submission to the government - to the point of death at its hand.

As a Christian, I **want** to die, everyday, to self and to sin. I can - but only as I submit to the guidance and governing of God.

"Taking up your cross" is choosing to yield the members of my body to the Spirit of God rather than to my flesh. Yes, it involves discipline and sacrifice; but it's for my benefit, not detriment. It makes me better.

Third, Jesus said, "follow Me." Odd, don't you think, that He said, "if anyone desires to come after Me... follow Me." It could read, "if anyone desires to follow Me... **follow Me.**"

Maybe I'm oversimplifying, but I think Jesus was saying we need to quit holding back, stop waiting, and engage.

You know those exhortations I mentioned earlier - like presenting your body a living sacrifice, and submitting to God? Heed them! Do them! Follow them and you will be following Him.

Don't assume that, because you're a Christian, you are a disciple in every area. You're not; I'm not. Part of my daily walk is to discover where I'm holding back.

Mat 16:25 For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it.

In those areas I'm holding back, I'm trying to "save" aspects of my life. Maybe because I'm afraid to give them to The Lord; after all, He might want me to do something I don't want to.

Maybe I'm trying to "save" some remnant of my flesh, some guilty pleasure I enjoy and want to keep hidden.

You've probably heard it said, "God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life." The Bible puts it better, saying, "for we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago" (Ephesians 2:10).

Losing your life for God is the only way you will "find" the good things He planned for you long ago.

All that being said... If your thought life, and your activities, and your investments, could be summarized on a spiritual P&L, what would it look like?

Let's make the commitments necessary so that the bottom line of our lives shows constant spiritual gains.

#2 How Will Your P&L Reward?

(16:27-17:8)

It's pretty important to any discussion of discipleship to emphasize that the best is yet to come. I choose discipleship now, knowing that my commitments to Jesus will be rewarded when I leave this temporary timeline for eternity.

Jesus gave His disciples a glimpse of what was coming.

Mat 16:27 For the Son of Man will come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and then He will reward each according to his works.

You know those "works" you did for Jesus when you could have been pursuing the things of the world? The Lord is keeping a record of them in order to "reward" you.

You won't realize your full reward until The Lord returns. But, when He does, you'll go one-on-one with Him in a review of your works with the goal of His showering you with rewards.

Some Christians minimize receiving rewards since it seems we're only going to offer them back to The Lord. Let me ask you this: Do you want to be empty-handed when the time comes to throw your crowns at His feet?

Besides that, it delights The Lord to reward you. Do you want to deny Him His delight?

Mat 16:28 Assuredly, I say to you, there are some standing here who shall not taste death till they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom."

There is no mystery as to what Jesus meant. You see it immediately - in chapter seventeen. Three of His disciples get a glimpse of what The Lord will look like when He returns in His Second Coming.

Mat 17:1 Now after six days Jesus took Peter, James, and John his brother, led them up on a high mountain by themselves.

Mat 17:2 and He was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and His clothes became as white as the light.

"Transfigured" is where we get our word *metamorphosis*. It is an outward change that comes from within. Jesus didn't reflect light; He radiated it.

For a brief moment, on that undisclosed mountain, the deity of Jesus Christ shone forth.

Mat 17:3 And behold, Moses and Elijah appeared to them, talking with Him.

This verse is a wealth of information. It teaches us, for example, that saints have conscious existence in the afterlife. There's no such thing as soul-sleep or reincarnation.

It also teaches us that we will be able to recognize everyone in eternity. Moses had died some 1400 years earlier; Elijah had ridden his chariot of fire alive into Heaven some 900 years earlier. Yet the disciples knew exactly who they were.

Why these two guys? For one thing, they closed-out the Jewish Scriptures we call the Old Testament. In Malachi 4:4-5 you read,

Mal 4:4 "Remember **the Law of Moses**, My servant, Which I commanded him in Horeb for all Israel, With the statutes and judgments.

Mal 4:5 Behold, I will send you **Elijah the prophet** Before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD.

They represented the Law and the Prophets - the whole of God's revelation thus far. In symbolism they were pointing to Jesus as the fulfillment of all God had promised Israel and the nations of the world.

The transfiguration gives us a glimpse of Jesus at His Second Coming to earth. He'll come in His glory to establish the kingdom.

Mat 17:4 Then Peter answered and said to Jesus, "Lord, it is good for us to be here; if You wish, let us make here three tabernacles: one for You, one for Moses, and one for Elijah."

Jews constructed tabernacles during the Feast of Tabernacles. That feast both commemorated their wilderness wanderings as well as proclaimed their hope in the coming kingdom on the earth.

Even though Peter's suggestion was off-base, it was at least grounded in some understanding of Jewish history. You have to remember that these guys, despite Jesus' clear words to the contrary, kept thinking He was going to establish the kingdom at any moment.

Mat 17:5 While he was still speaking, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them; and suddenly a voice came out of the cloud, saying, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear Him!"

The "bright cloud" was what is called the *shekinah* glory of God. It was the presence of God with the Jews in their exodus. It had filled the tabernacle and, later, the temple. During the siege by Babylon against Jerusalem, Ezekiel records the departure of that glory from the temple. It had returned at Jesus' birth during the announcement to the shepherds guarding their flocks. Here it was again.

"Hear Him!" reminds us that Jesus is not just another great religious person. He's the Son of Man, the Son of the living God, the God-man.

Mat 17:6 And when the disciples heard it, they fell on their faces and were greatly afraid.

Fear and worship are not incompatible. C.S. Lewis captured this idea in his Narnia books. In an exchange between Mr. and Mrs. Beaver and the children, you read:

"Ooh!" said Susan. "I thought he was a man. Is he - quite safe? I shall feel rather nervous about meeting a lion."

"That you will, dearie, and no mistake," said Mrs. Beaver; "if there's anyone who can appear before Aslan without their knees knocking, they're either braver than most or else just silly."

"Then he isn't safe?" said Lucy.

"Safe?" said Mr. Beaver; "don't you hear what Mrs. Beaver tells you? Who said anything about safe? 'Course he isn't safe. But he's good. He's the King, I tell you."

If you meet with Jesus after death, and are not a believer, Jesus is not "safe." It will be too late for your soul to be saved.

As a believer, while you're "safe" for eternity, life can be anything but "safe" as a disciple.

Mat 17:7 But Jesus came and touched them and said, "Arise, and do not be afraid."

Mat 17:8 When they had lifted up their eyes, they saw no one but Jesus only.

We're drawn to the word "touched." The God-man, transfigured before them, revealed in His glory, "touched" them.

It prompted one commentator to exclaim "the touch of His manhood was more reassuring to poor flesh and blood than the blaze of the Godhead."

Aren't you glad your God and Savior understands what it's like to be human?

Heb 4:15 For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin.

Whatever you are struggling with today, let Him touch you, and look beyond, to your reward.

There will be a final P&L for all of us. Again, I stress, let's have a lot in the spiritual profit column.

Dr. Charles Ryrie, a favorite theologian of mine, has this to say about discipleship:

The Lord Jesus, the God-man, offers... salvation freely, and He can do so because He is God who became man. The same Lord Jesus through many New Testament writers asks those who have believed to submit to His mastery over their lives. Some do to a great extent. No one does it fully and always. Some do to a lesser extent. But He was, is, and always will be Lord whether He is acknowledged as the God-man Savior or whether He is acknowledged as Master of the believer's life.

If your reaction to that is, "Whew! I can go on living a mediocre spiritual life, concentrating on accumulating more-and-more of the things of the world," then you've completely missed the point.

Instead, get a glimpse of the glory of your Lord and be like the prophet Isaiah, who when He saw The Lord, said, "Here am I, God; send me!"