

The title of this morning's sermon is, "*The Great Exchange.*"

On Sunday mornings we're working our way through Luke's Gospel verse-by-verse and we find ourselves at **Luke 9:25**.

Let me provide some context...

Jesus is entering the third year of His earthly ministry:

- He is ending the Year of Popularity, and beginning the Year of Opposition.
- After Jesus fed the 5,000 – or 20,000 – **John 6:66** says that **After this many of his disciples turned back and no longer walked with him.**

So now Jesus turns to the Disciples who remain – which is the Twelve – and prepares them for what it means to continue following Him.

Even though Jesus is talking to the Twelve - since we're also followers of Christ - I've been encouraging you to picture Jesus saying these words to us. Let's start at **verse 24**...

24 For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it.

This is one of those paradoxical sayings of Jesus.

- When He says **whoever would save his life will lose it** He's saying people who love this life by pursuing all the ease, comfort, and acceptance the world offers will not find eternal life.
- When He says **whoever loses his life for my sake will save it** He's saying people who do what He said in **verse 23 - deny themselves, pick up their cross, follow Him** – will find eternal life.

In **verse 24** look at the words **lose his life**. I told you in the sermon two weeks ago that everyone loses their life in the sense that all of us choose to spend our lives some way. God has given us some amount of time, energy, and resources that we choose to invest in different ways.

And this idea carries us into the next verse. Look at **verse 25**...

25 For what does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses or forfeits himself?

This sounds worded oddly b/c it says **loses or forfeits himself**, versus saying **loses or forfeits his soul**, which is how it's translated in Matthew and Mark, and which is how we normally quote it. There's no real difference though, b/c:

- Your soul is who you are; your soul is the real you.
- You are not your physical body, but you are your soul.

If you give up – or forfeit – your soul, you're giving up – or forfeiting – you.

And this reveals the great exchange: the world for your soul.

- I don't mean "great" in a good way. It's obviously not "good" to make this exchange.
- I mean great in terms of magnitude. There is no more significant or substantial exchange you could ever make, than this one.

Notice the relationship between **verses 24** and **25**:

- Verse 24 says loses his life.
- Then verse 25 says loses or forfeits himself...which is really saying loses his life.

So let me explain the connection to **verse 24** so we understand what Jesus is saying...

In **verse 24** Jesus made the point we're all investing our resources – or stewardships – in this life in different ways, and you hope for some return – or **profit** – on that investment. For example:

- You invest in a job so you receive a paycheck
- You invest in school so you receive knowledge and a degree
- You invest in relationships – whether it's your spouse, children, neighbors, church family – hoping to bless them and be blessed by them

And the list goes on ways we invest time, energy, money, and we hope for returns on that investment.

Then in **verse 25**, notice the word **profit**. This goes with the word invest...

- You invest b/c you hope to make a profit!
- You invest time, money, and energy hoping to have some **profit** or return on the investment you make.

But with **verse 25** Jesus goes to the extreme...

He says, "What if you could invest your entire life – all of your time, money, energy, resources, gifts, talents, every stewardship you have – and gain **THE ENTIRE WORLD.**"

Let's understand what Jesus means when He says **gain the world**...

1 John 2:16 says **all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life**:

- **The desires of the flesh** refer to every evil desire we have. Imagine all those evil desires being satisfied.
- **The desires of the eyes** refer to greed and covetousness that is aroused by what we see. Imagine having everything we set our eyes on.
- **Pride of life** refers to accomplishments, fame, and social position. Imagine being famous, popular, and loved by everyone.

Picture investing all you have, and getting this in return...everything the world has to offer:

- All the money

- All the fame
- All the power
- All the entertainment
- All the relationships
- All the pleasure

It's a huge profit on your investment...it's an unimaginable amount.

And the question is...

What if you could gain all this...but it costs you your soul? Would it be a good exchange?

The answer is absolutely not, and there are three reasons for this. And this brings us to Lesson 1...

LESSON 1: GAINING THE WHOLE WORLD ISN'T WORTH YOUR SOUL, BECAUSE (PART I) YOU CAN'T ENJOY IT WHEN THIS LIFE IS OVER.

As soon as this life is over, everything you've gained from the world is gone.

Let me show you a parable Jesus taught that makes this point. Briefly turn to **Luke 12:16**...

Luke 12:16 And he told them a parable, saying, "The land of a rich man produced plentifully, 17 and he thought to himself, 'What shall I do, for I have nowhere to store my crops?' 18 And he said, 'I will do this: I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. 19 And I will say to my soul, "Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry."'"

This man invested a lot in this life. While I wouldn't say he gained the world, it is clear he did very well for himself and accumulated a considerable amount of wealth.

20 But God said to him, 'Fool! This night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?'

This strong rebuke from God is particularly interesting for two reasons...

First, the man was hardworking, and he didn't obtain his wealth in any unethical or immoral way...by stealing, cheating or lying.

Second, God called him a "Fool"...but he actually looks very smart:

- He was rich.
- He was a successful business man.
- He was able to accumulate a lot of wealth.
- He seemed to be a very wise farmer.

So why did God call him a fool? B/c he wasn't wise enough to consider that in light of eternity he'd only be enjoying his wealth for a very short period of time.

When we think of the richest people, Bill Gates comes to mind. When he dies, people are going to be saying, "How much did he leave behind?"

What is the actual answer to this question? All of it!

He isn't taking any of it with him.

When I was growing up there was a brand of clothing called, "No Fear." One of the shirts I remember pretty well said, "He who dies with the most toys still dies." And that is true!

The next part of Lesson 1...

LESSON 1: GAINING THE WHOLE WORLD ISN'T WORTH YOUR SOUL, BECAUSE (PART II) YOU SPEND ETERNITY IN HELL.

The second reason the world isn't worth your soul, is nothing is worth spending eternity in hell. Listen to a few verses describing what it's like:

- Matt 13:50 says it's the fiery furnace [where] there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth
- Matt 22:13 says it's a place of outer darkness
- Matt 25:46 says it's everlasting punishment
- 2 Thes 1:9 says it's away from the presence of the Lord and the glory of his might
- Mark 9:43 says [it's the place of] unquenchable fire and Mark 9:48 says it's where their worm – as in each person has their own worm – does not die and the fire is not quenched.
- Rev 21:8 says it's the lake that burns with fire and sulfur.

If you have everything the world offers it would never be worth this suffering. No matter what you have in this life, if you go to hell you spend eternity completely bankrupt...except for the darkness, fire, sulfur...and it sounds like the worm that's with you.

The next part of Lesson 1...

LESSON 1: GAINING THE WHOLE WORLD ISN'T WORTH YOUR SOUL, BECAUSE (PART III) YOU FORFEIT ETERNITY IN HEAVEN.

Everything the world offers isn't worth your soul, b/c you forfeit spending eternity in heaven.

Listen to this description of heaven, and consider the contrast these verses make to the verses we just read about hell:

- **1 Cor 2:9** says **What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him**, and this refers to what awaits us in heaven.

- After Paul saw heaven, in **2 Cor 12:4** he said he **heard things that cannot be told, which man may not utter**. I take this to mean it was beyond description.
- **Rev 7:16** says there will be no more hunger or thirst.
- **Rev 20:14** says Death has been destroyed, which means you never have to worry about losing another loved one.
- **Rev 21:4** says the Lord will wipe away every tear from our eyes, and there will be no more mourning, crying, or pain.
- **Rev 21:10-27** describes heaven as a great city, which according to **Rev 21:11** possesses the glory of God:
 - The city is filled with brilliant costly stones.
 - The Paradise of the Garden of Eden is restored.
 - The tree of life is available again, providing fruit for each month.
 - The river of the water of life flows freely through it.
- **Rev 22:5** says there is no night or sun b/c God Himself is the light.
- In **John 14:2** Jesus said He was going to return to heaven to prepare a place for us in this great city.

The greatest part is **1 Cor 13:12** says we will see the Lord face-to-face. We will finally be with the Savior who loved us and sacrificed Himself for us so that we can enjoy His presence in heaven for eternity.

No matter how much pleasure you can find in this life, no amount of it could ever be worth losing the joy, blessing, pleasure, thrill, and wonder of heaven.

Let me conclude this lesson by saying this...

This is why the wise decision is invest our lives – which is to say our earthly resources – our time, talents, wealth, energy – in what is eternal...

Matt 6:19 Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, 20 but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal.

Jesus is being so logical with us there was a part of me that had trouble in my studying this week b/c of the simplicity. It seems so basic. I don't mean it's so basic theologically or spiritually. I mean it's so simple and easy to figure out. Who would disagree with this, and think it's good to exchange your soul for the world?

But as absurd as it sounds, LOTS of people do this!

Some people spend their lives - all their time, energy, and resources - investing in this life and...

- They become successful in the world's eyes...
- They seem to have achieved a lot...

- It looks like they've received a large return on their investment – it might even appear to some as though they have gained the whole world.

So while it seems like Jesus is asking a question that is obvious, apparently to many people it's not that obvious!

Let me give you two examples of individuals who could look as though they came close to gaining the world:

- Alexander the Great conquered the known world in his day. He was able to command his people to worship him. Few people throughout history have ever had as much power and fame as him. In other words, few people could ever say they came as close as him to gaining the whole world. But at the age of 33 he caught a fever and died. What good did his conquests do in terms of keeping his soul?
- Ted Turner is a business tycoon and self-declared agnostic. He committed his life to amassing one of the largest fortunes in history. For a number of years he owned more land than anyone else in the country, and more than most anyone else in history. In a sense he owned more of the world than 99.999% of the people who ever lived. Since 1990, he's:
 - Given more than \$350 million in grants
 - Another \$1 billion has gone to the United Nations Foundation
 - \$250 million to the Nuclear Threat Initiative, which he also helped to create.
 - If we were saved by works, maybe he'd be getting close.
 - But assuming he doesn't repent and put his faith in Christ, he'll die and all of his land, wealth, and philanthropy won't cover even one sin.

The true irony of Jesus' statement is that not only do 99% of people never come to close to gaining the whole world, 99% of people never even come close to gaining what Alexander the Great and Ted Turner gained. In other words, many people are willing to sell their souls for far less than what Jesus is saying.

Let me give you an example of someone who really lived the truth of **verse 25**...

Jim Elliot was a promising student at Wheaton College in Illinois. He was a champion wrestler – this is part of why he was so godly – honor student, and he was very popular. I remember his wife, Elizabeth Elliot, describing him as the “big man on campus.”

He read **Luke 9:25** and wrote some words in his journal that have now become famous: “*He is no fool who gives up what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose.*” Let me say that one more time: “*He is no fool who gives up what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose.*”

Jim Elliot was the OPPOSITE of the fool we discussed earlier in **Luke 12**!

He felt led to share the Gospel with an unreached people group in Ecuador. He wrote again, “*Glad to get the opportunity to preach the gospel of the matchless grace of our God to stoical,*

pagan Indians. I only hope that He will let me preach to those who have never heard that name Jesus. What else is better in this life? I have heard of nothing better. 'Lord, send me!'"

Most of you probably know the story. Jim and the four other young men with him were murdered by the tribe. Jim gave up what he could not keep – his life – to gain what he could not lose: eternal life.

As I was studying this week, I thought of something from my past that I think can illustrate what we're discussing. Two years ago I shared one of the most embarrassing seasons of my life. Let me remind you of it again...nothing quite like repeating this to my congregation...

I told you that when Katie and I were first married, I was unable to teach summer school one year and I made the terrible decision to play a video game called World of Warcraft. I quickly became addicted. Let me briefly tell you why it's so addictive, and if you stay with me I'll connect it to the sermon in a moment...believe me, I'm not talking about this to advertise the game...

You create a character that lives in a world with millions of other characters all over the world. I checked the statistics last week and 100 million people have played the game. That's one reason it's nicknamed, "World of WarCRACK."

It's an RPG, or role-playing game, b/c you play the role of a character you create. Your character completes quests and kills enemies to gain levels, get stronger, obtain better equipment. This might sound dumb to you – it sounds dumb to me as I explain it – but it's a recipe for addiction as you want to reach one more level, complete one more quest, obtain one more piece of equipment, make your character just a little better.

Now hold on to this imagery for a moment, while I share another related story with you...

A few years ago I attended the Christian Heritage conference for the first time with Jim and Vicki. I didn't know any of the speakers except Voddie Baucham, but Vicki recommended a workshop taught by Phillip Telfer discussing some of the dangers associated with media...specifically movies, television, and video games. He discussed some of the things you'd expect in a workshop like this, in particular the immorality of movies and television, and the way they have an un-sanctifying effect on us.

I thought it was a great message, and there's one thing he said that I don't think I'll ever forget b/c of how much it resonated with me. It was his last warning associated with video games, which was also the last thing he taught in his message. You could feel that he was building up to this point. He said...

"One of the big problems with video games is the strong sense of accomplishment...when you have accomplished nothing."

And this brings us to Lesson 2...

LESSON 2: GAINING THE WORLD IS ACCOMPLISHING NOTHING.

Luke 9:25 could almost be considered one of Jesus' paradoxical statements, b/c He mentions gaining the world – which sounds like the highest, greatest achievement someone could accomplish – but it's actually accomplishing nothing.

Can you see why Phillip's quote resonated with me?

It completely reminded me of my time playing World of Warcraft:

- You're living in a world that's not the real world...
- You're investing time, and energy, and life in this alternate world...
- You feel like you're doing so much, but you're not really doing anything...
- You've traded some amount of your life – and for some people it could be a huge amount of their lives – for absolutely nothing.

When you get up from the chair – when you leave the game – you don't take anything with you...you leave it all behind.

Hopefully you see the parallels...

- The world we're living in isn't the real world...
- You could invest your time, and energy, and resources, and talents in this world, and feel like you've accomplished so much, but you haven't really accomplished anything.

You've traded your time and energy for that which has no eternal value!

Abraham understood this. He had a lot of wealth, possessions, servants, animals, but listen to this verse about him...

Heb 11:10 [says] he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God.

This is the real world! This is our true home!

I want to show you two individuals in the Old Testament who illustrate the main point of this sermon. Please turn to **Dan 5**. We won't turn back to Luke. Here's the context...

Belshazzar was the king of Babylon, which was the superpower of the day. While I can't say whether he was the richest, most powerful, most famous person in the world, I can say he was close. Think of Belshazzar as the person who **gained the whole world**...

Dan 5:1 King Belshazzar made a great feast for a thousand of his lords and drank wine in front of the thousand.

This is a HUGE party:

- You know you're rich, famous, and powerful, when you have one thousand lords.
- Earlier I said gaining the world means experiencing the pleasure and entertainment the world offers, and a party with thousands of people getting drunk is a picture of that.

But it wasn't enough for Belshazzar to simply get drunk, he had to make sure he antagonized God while doing it. Babylon had conquered the Jews and destroyed the temple, but before that they ransacked it and took all the gold and vessels. Look at **verse 3**...

3 Then they brought in the golden vessels that had been taken out of the temple, the house of God in Jerusalem, and the king and his lords, his wives, and his concubines drank from them. 4 They drank wine and praised the gods of gold and silver, bronze, iron, wood, and stone.

Not only was it not enough to get drunk with vessels from the temple – which was a way to show disdain for the God of Israel, or Yahweh – they also had to praise all their false gods.

Things were going well, until look at **verse 5**...

5 Immediately the fingers of a human hand appeared and wrote on the plaster of the wall of the king's palace, opposite the lampstand. And the king saw the hand as it wrote. (now look at what might be the best, concise description of terror in the entire Bible...) **6 Then the king's color changed, and his thoughts alarmed him; his limbs gave way, and his knees knocked together.**

When your knees knock together, you know you're terrified!

Jack did such a great job acting last time I brought him on stage, when I was going over my sermon with Katie she said I should have him come up again to reenact this 😊.

To shorten this up a little, let me tell you what happened...

Belshazzar tried to get all the magicians and occultists to read the words, but they couldn't do it. His wife, the queen, knew there was one man who could read the words, so Daniel was summoned. Look at **verse 16**...

Dan 5:16 [Belshazzar said to Daniel], "I have heard that you can give interpretations and solve problems. Now if you can read the writing and make known to me its interpretation, you shall be clothed with purple and have a chain of gold around your neck and shall be the third ruler in the kingdom."

Now I'm not saying Daniel was offered the whole world...but pretty close! When you're given this much wealth and you're the third most powerful person in the most powerful nation in the world – a nation that has parties with thousands of people – you're not going to be going

without...in other words, Daniel would easily be able to get what he wanted if he accepted this offer.

Look at Daniel's wonderful response though...

17 Then Daniel answered and said before the king, "Let your gifts be for yourself, and give your rewards to another. Nevertheless, I will read the writing to the king and make known to him the interpretation.

Daniel rejected the offer to gain the world. Keep that in mind and skip to **verse 25...**

25 And this is the writing that was inscribed: Mene, Mene, Tekel, and Parsin. 26 This is the interpretation of the matter: Mene, God has numbered the days of your kingdom (Babylon) and brought it to an end; 27 Tekel, you (Belshazzar) have been weighed in the balances and found wanting; 28 Peres, your kingdom is divided and given to the Medes and Persians."

29 Then Belshazzar gave the command, and Daniel was clothed with purple, a chain of gold was put around his neck, and a proclamation was made about him, that he should be the third ruler in the kingdom.

Even though Daniel declined, Belshazzar gave it all to him anyway...but look what happened...

30 That very night Belshazzar the Chaldean king was killed. 31 And Darius the Mede received the kingdom, being about sixty-two years old.

First, let's talk about Belshazzar...

- He gained the whole world, but forfeited his soul to have it.
- He lived an ungodly life of immorality and rebellion against God.

All of his wealth, power, and fame meant nothing even two seconds after he died.

Then there's Daniel...

He was offered the world, but he declined.

His response looks pretty amazing. We could easily say:

- Wow, what a godly man to turn all this down!
- He's so committed to the Lord he was willing to give all this up!

Yes, Daniel was a godly man. Yes, he was committed to the Lord. But this wasn't really that amazing of a response, for two reasons...

1. First, he would've been in his 80's at least, so he knew he didn't have many years left.
2. But second - and more importantly - he knew he would only enjoy all this for a few hours! He knew what was happening to Babylon. You could say he could "read the writing on the wall."

I'm guessing Daniel probably would've turned it all down anyway, but I can tell you it was particularly easy to turn it down for these reasons.

So we could look at Daniel and say, "Well, his response is no big. If I was only offered the world for a few hours, I'd give it up too."

The truth is, this IS the offer that's made to us! And this brings us to our last lesson...

LESSON 3: YOU ONLY GAIN THE WORLD FOR A FEW HOURS.

Jesus said, **"For what does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses or forfeits himself?"**

One reason Jesus said this is if you gain the whole world – even for years, decades, centuries, or even millenniums – in light of eternity it's only a few hours. You're not gaining the world any longer than Daniel gained the world in this account.

If you look back at Daniel's words in **verse 17** he said, **"Let your gifts be for yourself, and give your rewards to another."**

I love the way this reveals the open-handedness with which Daniel viewed Belshazzar's offer. It's a great picture of the way we should view this life and what the world offers us.

The Christian life must be lived by keeping in view the shortness of it in light of eternity:

- When Jonathan Edwards was just 19, he wrote down 34 resolutions that he committed to practice for God's glory. Number 9 was, "To think much, on all occasions, of my dying."
- This might sound a little morbid, but the point is he wanted to live in light of eternity, or live life always thinking about it coming to an end, and how he could prevent having any regrets.

Let me close by asking you a few questions:

- How are you living this life?
- How do you view your possessions and the things of this world?
- Are you holding on tightly and eagerly seeking that which won't last...or are you keeping that eternal perspective and remembering nothing this world offers is worth the life that awaits us?

If you have any questions about anything I've discussed this morning, or if you'd like prayer for anything, Pastor Doug and I will be up front after service and we'd consider it a privilege to be able to speak to you.

Let's pray.