

Great Gain
Matthew 16:21-28
September 3, 2023

What did Jesus come to do on His created earth? He came to die. Yes, when He left heaven to join with that egg of Mary, He knew what was His future and part of that would be what we have Jesus addressing today.

Jesus comes to them after addressing Peter's haste in trying, in a sense, to keep Jesus from what He had come to do. Yes, Jesus rebukes Peter after his rebuke of Jesus. He knows who is behind it, and that is Satan, who knows that if He actually goes through with it and withstands the pain and suffering He is going to go through, then he will have lost and Jesus will rule. Satan knows that with Him ruling, he will find himself in outer darkness, enduring the fires of hell forever.

Did you notice that Matthew wrote that Jesus began to show His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things. Jesus didn't just "tell" but showed. Why show?

You know it is one thing to hear something and some have said you have to hear things a few times before it really sinks in and you remember. What happens though, when you live through it, experience it? Is it easier to call to mind? It is not just your ears getting involved but your other senses are likely to be involved as well.

Think about a time in you past when you went through something memorable. You may remember just what you were doing when you heard of President Kennedy being shot. You may remember where you were, what you were doing and how it affected the rest of those around you.

Oh, there may be other times when that appealing smell of some fresh baked bread brings back memories of the bread coming out of your mother's oven. Yes, that first loaf was for immediate enjoyment as Mom got out the knife and sliced off some slices, still hot and then put some butter and some brown sugar on it and you were left to enjoy it with your brothers and sisters or whoever happened to be there at the time. The smell, the taste, the texture and the warmth of the bread, all comes back in an instant.

Matthew points out that Jesus is going to show them what He must go through, which will sink in and stay with them as they remember, after He has ascended all that had happened that time in Jerusalem. Will they walk past that intersection and

remember what happened that day in the past there? Will they look at that hill and not remember the sounds, the smells the weather that day they looked to the hill of death for the Savior Jesus? No, it is good that God had Matthew write that Jesus **SHOWED** his disciples that He had to go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from those who should have celebrated His coming but instead wanted Him killed.

Was Jesus telling a little of Himself when He told His disciples about denying themselves and following Him? Yes, Jesus denied Himself when He came to earth, to a world where many had turned their backs on Him. So many wanted nothing to do with Him and yet He was willing and eager to go to earth to be born in the normal way and live a perfect life to go to the cross and die the perfect death, taking on the sins of the world and declaring you and me righteous because of what He has done.

Jesus was given the opportunity from the devil to forfeit His soul for the world after His stint in the desert. Jesus didn't fall for that lie for the earth was His already but to save it, He had to face the cross and what He would have to endure there.

What did Jesus gain by coming to earth for a bunch of sinners? He gained what He had in the beginning, people made righteous. Yes, Adam and Eve were made righteous in the beginning but spoiled the whole world that they had before them with a piece of fruit.

It was a sorry trade, a whole world for one piece of it so it would take a great trade, the trade of the source of all righteousness to shower the world with righteousness, His righteousness which is given to all. It was a hope that was lost in the garden as Adam and Eve awaited the coming of God who had every right to strike them dead, right then and there. But that hope was restored as Jesus showed what He did for all.

We are on the other side of the cross. Yes, some have toured the roads where Jesus trod and have said how it made the Bible come to life for them. They experienced some of the same places where Jesus was likely to have been 2000 years ago. Did their eyes see some of the same things that Jesus saw? Did they touch some of the same things Jesus touched? It is something they will never forget as they think on who Jesus is and what He has done.

We listen to Jesus today, telling us to take up our cross and follow Him as He told the disciples that day. Yes, we understand our baptisms that in a sense it is losing our lives in those baptismal waters. We lose our old Adam life and are given a new life

in Jesus. We wake up each day hopefully understanding what our baptism means. We are now Jesus' brothers and sisters, adopted into His family.

We are a part of the family of God and yet what goes on in a family? Do any members ever do anything that would go against what the family believes? Do any of the sons or daughters ever do anything that the parents don't approve of? You know you did. You may even know of some who not only disobeyed but thought it good to abandon the family and go out on their own, not thinking they could ever return.

Yes, many have gone out on their own to gain more from the world. Some do well and others find out how tough it is out there and may fail. We think of the prodigal son who took his inheritance and abandoned the family. Did he even think about it as he was having a good time? The text seems to indicate that it wasn't until he hit rock bottom that he thought to himself that even being a hired hand back home was better than he was dealing with.

We think of our baptisms as a death in a sense but what about after our baptisms? Do we still, day after day, have to deal with the death of ourselves and then living the life given us in Jesus? Yes, we deal with it, day after day. We would think that we could get past it but like Paul who asked to be healed from whatever he was going through, we are to trust in Jesus to bring us past, to have the Holy Spirit convict us of our sin and to look to Him for forgiveness, once again.

But are you ready to face your cross and take it up to follow Jesus and what He wants from you so that others may see your good works and glorify God? How many times do you look to glorify self, though? How many times do you not give in to letting yourself die to yourself in order to let others see Jesus? It may not be easy to take up that cross. If it would be easy, you would have less of a time taking it up.

We remember the cross Jesus had to bear only to have to have Simon of Cyrene pick it up and take it to the place where Jesus would be mounted on it. But it was an even harder cross that He would have to bear as He hung there in pain, shedding His blood for the world. He would have to endure the cross of the abandonment of His Father. We think of hell, yes, the abandonment of God is hell, nothing good, darkness, suffering and on top of that, the sins of the whole wide world, past present and future.

We deal with our crosses and sometimes we fail, thinking that by not sticking out our necks we may get some benefit over and against taking up that cross given us by

God. Maybe we should ask the Holy Spirit to help us weigh what we might lose and what great gain we might enjoy.

What great gain might you receive? Yes, you have eternal life ahead of you but what about now? Is there any great gain in your day to day? The trouble is, that daily cross. It seems to weigh so much on you. Wouldn't it be easier to just ignore it? That cross is there for you, provided by the one who knows you better than you know yourself. He wants you to take up that cross, even if it is heavy and you have to exert some of yourself to carry it, to die to yourself to carry it knowing it is Jesus who is really carrying the weight.

Jesus was going to be with the disciples as they went out in to the world after He was gone. It is said that all but John died an "unnatural" death. Some died gruesome deaths when they could have kept their lives, denied Jesus and yet they stood firm in the face of death as those martyrs we will pray for later. Yes, they face physical death but as Jesus says, the physical suffering and death is nothing compared to the great gain of eternal life in Him.

Jesus asked that of the disciples and He asks that of you and I as well. He promises that there will be a gain and that gain will be so much greater than we can imagine that we should anticipate it as much as those kids looked forward to Disney on ice a few years ago.

We think of the great gain we are going to receive in the end and yes, the gain we will have even here as we get to experience those the Lord places in our lives as they too understand what we know to be the greatest gain in life and that is the sure hope of life we, and all who believe will have when this life is over.

We receive great gain but we must not forget someone else who has received great gain in taking up their cross. That person is Jesus. We may not think of Him getting great gain but what was the reason He went to that cross, willingly, desiring to do what He did? He thought it would yield great gain.

If He wouldn't have gone to that cross then what would have happened to all who lived? All would have found themselves in hell. There would have been no one to live with Him and the other two persons of the Trinity forever in the new heaven and earth.

Yes, He created mankind the pinnacle of His creation. He thought it would be great gain for Him to rescue mankind for Himself. He thought it so great that He was willing to suffer and die for you and all mankind. A two fold great gain for us all.