

**THE
BON AIR
PULPIT**

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Scripture: *Philippians 3:7-9*

Sermon: *Gaining Through Losing*

I wanted to tell you about a question that a young man asked me. First let me tell you about the young man. He had given his heart and his life to Christ. You could tell that he had done so after thinking about it for a long period of time. He really was sincere. Really wanted to try to do what was right. But the reason that he had come to talk to me was that he began to find, that in spite of his best intentions, in spite of his best commitments, that he was feeling the tug to go back to some of the things he had done before. So this was the question, "Pastor, how can I remain true to the commitments that I have made to Christ?" Now, there are a lot of answers to that question but let me tell you a portion of what I told him. The way in which you can remain true to the commitments that you have made to Christ is that you come to the understanding that what you have in Christ is worth so much more than anything you have outside of him. Hear it again, the way in which you keep your commitments to Christ is that you understand that what you have in Christ is worth far more than anything outside of Christ.

It's wonderful whenever a Pastor can give an answer that is found in the Bible. And that passage of Scripture that I have just quoted is in the book of Philippians, Chapter 3. I wanted to read for you beginning in verse 7. Listen. But whatever was to my profit I now consider lost 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 count all things but loss. I consider them everything outside of Christ. Rubbish. Garbage. That I may be found in him.

My wife and I have had the joy this week of having three of our Granddaughters in our home. On Thursday night we took them over to Ashlawn, Highland, to see the classic Rogers and Hammerstein play, Oklahoma. One of the leading roles in that play is of a girl named Edel Annie. When you first meet her she comes on the stage with her arms entwined with a peddler called Ali Hakim. The friends are all surprised that she looks so friendly with Ali and they turn and they say, "But I thought you were engaged to Will Parker?" She said, "Oh, I am." Her friends say, "Do you love Will Parker?" She said, "I do." "Do you love Ali?" "I do." "Which one do you love?" "Whichever one I am with." And then she starts singing her signature song which is, *I am a girl who just can't say no*. And part of that song goes like this: *I have been told I must not fall in the pit, but when I am with a fella I forget*.

All of us have some Edel Annie in us. All of us make commitments and then we begin to find out we can't live up to them. We begin to say we are going to do something and we don't follow through. And whatever group we are with that's the kind of commitments, lifestyle that we usually try to live. One man said about himself, I am a yard wide but about an inch thick. Simply, I don't have any depth to be able to make commitments and live up to them. Now, like an Edel Annie, many of us are shallow and changeable.

Now the passage of Scripture I read today is about Paul making some choices. Making some decisions. And he said, what I have done, I have been almost like a person who has business investments. And I look at my business investments and I said, this is a loss, this is draining me. I don't want any part of this. And he came to the point where he surrendered his life to Christ because he said, when I have him I have all that I need in God and all I need in this life. He came to understand that when he came to follow Christ he received far much more than he did outside of Christ. It's a story like Jesus told one day about a man who was a pearl merchant. He went around buying pearls. And one day he was introduced to the biggest pearl that he had ever seen in his life. And Jesus said he went back and sold all his other pearls and he pooled his money and he came and bought what he called the pearl that was beyond price. Jesus said, when you come to me you look at all of what you have and you realize that they are very insignificant compared to what you can have in Christ. And Paul said what I came to recognize that in Jesus Christ it was worth giving up everything and anything that I could come to know him.

I had an experience like Paul when I was a sophomore in college. When I was a sophomore I began to realize what God wanted to do in my life and what my life was really all about. Not long after that

a couple of my friends came to me and said we've got big plans for the weekend and we want you to go. Well, I had gone on many of those weekends before and I knew what they involved and I didn't know all of what it meant to be a Christian but I understood I couldn't go on those weekends. So I just turned to them and said, "I am sorry I can't go." Well, they became even more insistent. They began to talk about all the things we were going to do and it was bigger and brighter and I said, "Well, I am sorry I have something else to do and I can't go." Now you understand, as a young Christian I didn't sit in my dormitory room figuring out how I could share with my friends what I was doing was figuring out how I could keep my light under a bushel basket and still yet be friends with everybody. And finally one of them said, "We know you very well and you are hiding something. Come on. Why can't you go?" And I said to them, "Because I have given my life to Christ and I don't think I ought to do that." I remember to this day that encounter and I remember the look on my friends face and finally one of them, not knowing what else to say, turned to me and said, "Oh. I am sorry." It was as though I had shared with him that I had just been diagnosed with terminal cancer. Oh. I am sorry. You see, to him he thought I had given up everything. But what I had found was I had gained everything. And that compared to everything else nothing else really had any value to me. What was all important was that then I needed to give my life to him.

When Paul begins to talk about commitment to Christ, what he began to understand is what he had in Christ. He began to understand all of the treasures that had been granted to him. And the way in which Paul was able to stay true to those commitments is that he understood that what he had in Christ had no comparison to what we have outside of Christ. And what he did in that passage of Scripture is he began to tell you the three great treasures that he had that to him were so valuable that nothing else could compare. The first one that he said to him, he said I can be found in Christ. The first word he understood was Christ had done something for him so wonderful that he couldn't get over. If you have ever been to the city of Rome and ever done the tourist things, they will take you by a monument called the Sacred Steps. What people believe about those steps is that they were the ones that led up to Pilate's living quarters in Jerusalem. They believe that Jesus walked up those steps to be condemned by Pilate that he walked down those steps to go out to be crucified. I don't know whether that is true or not, I'm just telling you what people believe. Somebody got those, picked them all up, took them to Rome and there they are. I began to notice, however, that everyone was doing something that I wondered what they were doing. The steps were very high. And people were just lined up and they would get to the steps and they would get on their knees and on their hands and knees they would start going up the steps. And they would stop and I could tell that they were praying and saying things and I stood there for a long time. Some of them would even take 30-45 minutes to an hour to get to the top of the steps. And then they would start back down, doing the same thing, coming back down. And I turned to my guide and I said, "What are they doing?" He said, "They are praying." I said, "No I understand that, but what are they doing?" He said, "Look at the plaque at the foot of the steps." So I went over and this is what it said. *Anybody that climbs up these steps and says their prayers, they are released from 500 years of purgatory.* You understand, I am not making fun of these people that are going up the steps. If you believed that you would climb up those steps too.

But let me tell you something far greater than that. Let me tell you that the Bible teaches that Jesus came to die for your sins and that when you give your life to him all of your sins are forgiven. That you can have a new peace with God. You can have an assurance of a relationship with him. You can have a hope that when life ends you are going to be with him. You can have a joy of coming to have a relationship with Jesus Christ. And what Paul understood was that what he had found in Christ was something so wonderful of what Christ had done for him, he had brought he and God into a right relationship. And when he understood that treasure he said, well there is nothing else anywhere that can compare to it.

You see, that's the reason when you open your hymnal you just find song after song that says things like this, *I will cling to the old rugged cross, I will lay everything else down and I will cling to it.* Or you begin to sing, *when I survey the wondrous cross on which the prince of glory died, my richest gain I count but lost and pour contempt on all my pride.* You begin to recognize that what you have in him is so wonderful nothing else compares to it. And that is the reason that you have come to worship today. The word worship means worth ship. It means something is so worth something to you that you are willing to take time on Sunday and come to worship him. And the reason you are here is that you recognize that what you have received in him is so valuable that nothing else can compare to it. Second thing he said, the treasure I have in him. He said, I want to know Christ. Now let me tell you, know is not in the head. The word know here is the same word as the verse of the Bible that said this, Adam knew his wife. What Paul said was, what I wanted to have and what I have in Christ is I have a daily relationship with Him that is so

intimate that it is almost like a husband and a wife. And what I have is not some facts in my head, I have a relationship with a Christ who is with me in every experience of my life. Every day I wake up he is there for me. Every difficulty he is there to walk it with me. Every time temptation comes he is there to give me strength. Every time I become frightened he is there to give me calm. I have a relationship with him and he said, what I understand is that every day he is with me.

I started to tell you how many years, but you know the main thing we can get it confused but I just say to you I have been married over 40 years. That covers me. I stood at the front of a church in Jackson, Louisiana and the door opened and there came the most beautiful girl I had ever met. And we've been together over 40 years. I tell you, that was a wonderful, wonderful ceremony. But it doesn't compare to waking up for over 40 years with a person that I love. But I want to tell you something far greater than that. Far more than being married for over 40 years and being with someone is that more than 40 years ago at an aisle of a church I gave my heart to Jesus Christ and to walk with him has been the most wonderful experience of my life. He has always been there for me, always sustained me, always strengthened me, I understand that is a treasure that can't compare with anything else.

I don't know whether you have read a passage of scripture over in Hebrews lately and if you have your Bible you will want to turn to Hebrews, Chapter 13. The writer of Hebrews is talking about how can you be free from the insidious enemy of all of us which is greed or materialism. All of us get tied into things. All of us sometimes work too much to try to get more things. Some of us find our significance in how many things we have accumulated. It's interesting to me that Jesus spoke more about things and your relationship to money than any other subject except how to get right with God. He understood how insidious it was. So the writer of Hebrews is talking about that now and he is talking about don't be in love with money but I want you to notice what he said was the cure. Let me read for you beginning in verse 5. Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have. Now if I were writing this and I was trying to impress that upon people what I would say is something like this. If you spend too much time at the office you don't have time for your family. You can invest your life in things but they are going to pass away. See, I can think of all kinds of things, but I want you to notice what the writer of Hebrews said. Look at what he said. Because God has said, what is the cure for not falling in love with money. I will never leave you, I will never forsake you. You know what the cure for not only the love of money is but the cure of love of anything that is wrong. The assurance that you have a treasure in Jesus Christ that is worth more than any money in the world. And what it is, is a relationship, day by day with Jesus Christ. And once you recognize what you have in him, what's a few paltry dollars? Nothing can compare to the daily walk of being with him. He said the third thing. The next verse says, the third treasures I recognize that I become like him. Here are the treasures: Christ has done something for me. Christ walks with me. And I am becoming like him. Let me show you how that works. I am a worrier. I can worry about things that I ought not worry about and sometimes I even worry because I am worrying. But I've gotten better. And let me tell you the reason I've gotten better. There is a passage of scripture that Jesus said, do not be concerned about tomorrow. Live for today. Seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness and I will give all the things that you have worried about, I'll give them to you. And you know what I have found? I have found I don't worry as much as I used to. And whenever I began to claim that promise I say, thank you God, I don't have to spend my life worrying. I can spend my life trusting in you. This is confession time.

I'll tell you something else I do. I sometimes get angry. Sometimes I get in circumstances and sometimes I get with people and I get angry. Somebody asked me one day, "You are from South Louisiana, do you know how to make that Jambalaya stew?" I said, "Well, not really, but I'll tell you what I've got, I've got a recipe for stew you can't believe. Somebody crosses me, I'll stew for a week." I mean I got a stew. You know what I found? I read the words of Jesus one day and he said if somebody hits you on one cheek why don't you learn to roll with the punches and instead of always sitting around figuring how you are going to get back with somebody, why don't you just thank God for what you have. And I have found that that old acid that was in my system that was literally eating me up, I have found that most of it is gone. And I have sat at the end of the day when somebody would do something and I ought to be angry and I find that I am not and I say, "Thank you God, that I am beginning to understand how I can become more like you." And sometimes one of my sayings is, "I'm in such a hurry to do things I just forget people around me." But sometimes I remember the story of the Good Samaritan. And I remember about a priest and a song director who were so busy getting down to the church that they forgot about the person on the side of the road. When I remember that, I stop and I help and I realize that what I have planned is not nearly as

important as what God has planned for that day. And I just deal with that and when I get finished, I say, "You know, that was the best thing I did all day long." One of the best things I did was when I got out of myself and I started thinking about other people. I tell you what begins to happen when you begin to walk with him. You remember Sir Longfeld and the Holy Grail? Sir Longfeld the Knight who said what I want is the cup, the Holy Grail that Jesus drank out of the last night of the Lord's Supper. Now, you will remember that he went all around the world looking for the Holy Grail, never could find it. He came back at the end of his life, poor, health broken. Couldn't find it! And on his way back to his house a beggar met him and the beggar said, "Do you have something I could eat?" Sir Longfeld reached into his little bag and he had one little crust of bread and he reached out and he gave it to the beggar. And the beggar then said, "Now, do you have something to drink?" And he took his old beat-up cup and he went down to the stream and he got some water and he came back and he handed it to the beggar. And when the beggar took that old beat-up cup in his hand the beggar changed and he realized it was Jesus. And the old beat-up cup was the Holy Grail. What I found is that the more I walk with him, everything I looked for elsewhere I didn't find but whenever I start trying to live like him I began to see him in places I had never seen him before. And I began to find that my old beat-up cup becomes the Holy Grail. You see, I have understood in all of these years that what I have in Christ is worth far, far more than what I have outside of him.

I would like for you to take the hymnal in front of you and turn to page 550. Look down at the bottom of that page, it tells you who wrote the words and who wrote the music. The person who wrote the words you don't know. The person who wrote the music everybody in this room knows. That is George Beverley Shea. George Beverley Shea, I am told, was the first man in America who received a million dollar contract to cut records. He was trying to decide whether he was going to do that or whether he was going to be a Christian Gospel singer. His Mom was one of those who used to put little poems and notes all around where he would run into them and one day when he was playing on the piano his Mom put those words in front of him. And George Beverley Shea sat down at the piano and wrote the music to those words. You will notice George Beverley Shea is now 91 years of age and every time there is a Billy Graham Crusade there is one song that George Beverley Shea sings. *I'd Rather Have Jesus Than Anything* this world affords today. I started off by quoting to you a question that was asked me, I end by asking you a question. Could that song be the motto of your life? Could you really say this morning, I had rather have Jesus than anything this world affords today. Pastor, how in the middle of a world with all kinds of temptations, and all kinds of pulls and all kinds of things in my life that don't want to be obedient to God. Pastor, how can I live for Christ and be true to my commitments? When you come to realize that what you have in Christ is worth far more than anything outside of Christ. Can you sing, *I'd Rather Have Jesus Than Anything?* There are people in this room today who need to sit down and put it on the scales and say everything is loss compared to what I can have in Christ. I want to give my life to Christ. There are Christians in this room today who have been just kind of sitting back wondering. This is the moment for you to step forward. This is the moment to make the big decision to say, "He means more to me than anything. I want to be a part of this church. I want to help others. I want to take my stand for Christ today."