

## THE UPSIDE DOWN WAY OF JESUS

### *“LOSING IS WINNING”*

Matthew 16:24-28

#### Introduction

Last week we began this sermon series, *The Upside Down Way of Jesus.* The teachings of Jesus are countercultural. According to Jesus, you don't strike back, you turn the other cheek. You don't hate your enemies, you love them. Last week we looked at the upside down teaching of Jesus that *Dying is Living.* Today's upside down teaching is *Losing is Winning.*

Winning and Losing is something that we have all experienced. Winning and losing is seen in many arenas of life.

**In sports, one team wins the game and the other team loses the game. In politics, one candidate wins the election and the other candidate loses the election. In a beauty pageant, one contestant wins the contest and all the other contestants lose the contest.**

We congratulate winners and we console losers. We value winning above losing. **This past Monday, President Obama welcomed the New York Yankees to the White House and congratulated them on winning the 2009 World Series. The Philadelphia Phillies, losers of the Series, were not invited to the White House. Sorry Dave! The Phillies visited the White House after winning the 2008 World Series.**

Everyone wants to be a winner or associated with a winner, **unless you are a Cubs fan like Steve Kuehnle and myself. It's been over a 100 years since the Cubs won the World Series. But this may just be our century! The Cubs are known as the loveable losers of baseball.** No one likes to lose. No one enjoys finishing second. Most people accept consolation prizes somewhat reluctantly.

According to our world, winning is what it is all about. But according to the **Upside Down Way of Jesus** losing is where it is at. According to Jesus, losing is winning. When it comes to our lives...how and why we live our lives and how that impacts our eternal lives, losing is better than winning.

**Read Matthew 16:24-28.** Last week we looked at the call Jesus gave to follow Him. Today we are going to see that being a follower of Jesus means that we need to be a loser. According to Jesus, losing is winning.

When it comes to how and why we live our lives, **losing is winning.** Therefore.....

### **1. Followers of Jesus take a different approach to life**

**Jesus said- *“whoever wants to save his life will lose it”.***

So many people in our world try to “save their life” by making it their life goal to gain everything that this life has to offer them. Their primary focus is life is success, pleasure, wealth, material possessions, prestige and power.

Now sometimes these things do come our way and that’s okay as long as it doesn’t consume us, destroy our character and cause us to turn our back on the Lord. But the danger is when we make it the main objective of our lives to win all that the world has to offer.

When we try to be a winner in this way, we end up being a loser. Real life isn’t about the things that world has to offer. Worldly things do not make us happy. They do not bring us any lasting satisfaction or fulfillment.

**King Solomon wrote the book of Ecclesiastes in the Old Testament. Ecclesiastes is Solomon’s spiritual blog, his spiritual diary of how he experimented with life and the conclusions he came to.**

**Solomon wrote that he tried to find happiness and fulfillment in everything this world had to offer. He experimented with wine, women,**

wealth and work. Solomon tried being a winner by the world's standards.

Solomon's conclusion? He was a loser. These things were meaningless. They did not bring him any happiness. They left him empty.

One time a rich young ruler came to Jesus. This man had it all. He was rich, he had wealth. He was young- he had youth and vitality. He was a ruler- power and prestige were his.

And yet something was missing from his life. There was a longing deep in his soul that his wealth, his youth and his status in life could not fill. He needed God in his life. So he came to Jesus to find out what he needed to do to inherit eternal life.

Jesus told him that he needed to sell his possession, give his wealth to the poor and then become one of his disciples. The Scripture says that when the rich young ruler heard what it would cost him to follow Jesus, he went away sad because he had great wealth.

He had it all and yet he had nothing. His wealth did not make him happy. He was sad. His wealth could not satisfy the deepest need of his soul. He was a winner by the world's standards. But spiritually speaking, he was a loser.

There was an article in the *Wall Street Journal* entitled, "Rich, Healthy, and Miserable." It was based on a survey that some sociologists did to determine if making more money really made people happy.

They discovered that when people got a raise, it did make them feel better for about a month, and then almost everyone began to spend up to the level of their new income. It wasn't long before they felt as strapped and uptight and as unhappy as they did before they got the raise.

The article was fascinating in that the author made three suggestions for finding happiness. Two of them were to give more money away and to invest your time serving other people.

When we try to win at life by finding happiness and fulfillment in the things of this life, we end up being losers. That's because of what Jesus said when He gave this warning:

***“Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.” – Luke 12:15***

Real life is not found in what this life offers us. This life will not make us happy. And if we live for ourselves and what this life has to offer we lose eternal life in the process. Trying to be a winner will only make us a loser, twice over.

That's why followers of Jesus approach life differently. We live life the opposite of the world.

Jesus said, ***“whoever loses his life for me will find it.”*** We lose our life in the sense that we don't make this life and what it has to offer our primary focus in life. We lose our lives in that we give our lives up to Jesus. We commit our lives to following him and serving Him.

In this process of losing we win. As we lose our lives for Jesus, we find our lives. We find real life. We find that there is real meaning and purpose to our lives when we serve the Lord. We find joy, peace and contentment. And as we give up our earthly life to God, we receive salvation, eternal life in heaven! As a loser, we become a winner.

**Albert Pujols is the All-Star first baseman for the St. Louis Cardinals. But more importantly, Pujols is a disciple of Jesus Christ. The Pujols Family Foundation he started offers support and care to people with Down syndrome and their families. The Foundation also helps the poor in the Dominican Republic.**

**While speaking to a group of men and boys at Lafayette Senior High School in Missouri, Pujols told them- “As a Christian, I am called to live a holy life. My standard for living is set by God, not by the world. I am responsible for growing and sharing the gospel.”**

**Then after reading Paul's words in Philippians 2:3- "*Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves*", Pujols told the crowd- "One way for me to stay satisfied in Jesus is for me to stay humble. Humility is getting on your knees and staying in God's will, what he wants for me, not what the world wants. It would be easy to go out and do whatever I want, but those things only satisfy the flesh for a moment. Jesus satisfies my soul forever."**

**Albert Pujols is more of a winner off the baseball field than he is on it. He is a winner in life because he voluntarily chose to lose his life for Jesus.**

**Solomon, who tried the world's way and found it didn't work, came to this conclusion:**

***"Now all has been heard; here is the conclusion of the matter: Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man." – Ecclesiastes 12:15***

If we will lose our lives for Jesus, we will end up being a winner. We will find meaning and purpose in this life and we will receive eternal life in heaven.

Losing is winning when it comes to salvation. That's why.....

## **2. Followers of Jesus value their soul above everything else**

**Let's read verse 26 again.**

A person might win the world, but it does him/her no good if they don't have a relationship with God. They lose in the end. They lose their soul.

**This is illustrated by the Parable of the Rich Fool that Jesus told. The Rich Fool was a very successful and very wealthy farmer. His fields yielded such a bumper crop that he had to tear down his barns and build larger ones to handle all the grain.**

**He tried to win according to the world's standards. He said to himself- "You have plenty of good things laid up for many years. Take life easy, eat, drink and be merry."**

**But he ended up being a loser as far as eternity was concerned. God said to him, "You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?" He was a loser because his focus in life was his wealth. He did not make any room in his life for God.**

**We understand that to be true of him because God called him a fool and because of the application that Jesus made at the conclusion of the parable- "This is how it will be with anyone who stores up things for himself but is not rich toward God."**

What is it that you value most? Is it your relationship with God? Or is it something that the world offers you? Earthly things are temporary and they cannot be exchanged one day for your soul. They cannot help you buy your way into heaven.

In fact, just the opposite is true. This world and the things of this world can keep us from getting into heaven. And Jesus told us what one of the biggest rivals to God is when He warned:

***"No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money." – Matthew 6:24***

One of God's biggest rivals and one of the biggest dangers to our souls is money and material possessions. **In the Parable of the Sower, Jesus taught that one of the things that will choke the Word of God out of our lives is the deceitfulness of riches.** The apostle Paul wrote:

***"For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs." – 1 Timothy 6:10***

Now Paul did not say that money was evil. Nor did he say that having a lot of money was evil. Some Christians with a lot of money do a lot of good as they give generously to the Lord's work.

But it was the love of money that is evil. And you don't have to have a lot of money to be in love with money. In that same passage in 1 Timothy, Paul gave a warning to those whose desire it was to get rich. Poor people can be in love with money.

It's ok to have money and material possessions. The danger is when we love those things. The danger is when we make money and material possessions our primary goal in life. It's okay to possess things as long as those things don't possess us.

**During the economic crisis of last year, a new phrase entered our vocabulary. "Toxic assets". Toxic assets are one of the factors that contributed to the trouble that a lot of banks got into.**

**The toxic assets were the mortgage loans that the banks gave out to homebuyers. With the mortgage foreclosure crisis, many of those loans became liabilities to the banks, because the houses that secured the loans decreased in value below the amount of the loan.**

**When those assets became harmful to the banks' bottom lines, they were no longer assets. They became liabilities. They became toxic assets.**

Money and material possessions are assets that we all have. But when they mean more to us than our relationship with God...when they stand in the way of our relationship with God...our assets become toxic assets. They hurt our spiritual bottom line, which is the salvation of our souls. That's why the apostle John wrote what he did:

***"Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him." 1 John 2:15***

We must not love money, material possessions or anything else this world has to offer. We must not let anything in this world become more

important to us than our relationship with God. Because, if we do, we stand in danger of forfeiting or losing our souls.

That's why, as followers of Jesus, we are willing to lose our lives. We lose our lives so that we don't lose our souls. One thing that will help us to stay on track spiritually is our third point:

### **3. Followers of Jesus maintain an eternal perspective**

#### **Read verses 27 & 28 again**

The reason why some people make this life their priority is because they think that this life is all there is. So they decide to make the most of it and get the most out of it.

But according to the *Upside Down Way of Jesus*, there is more to life than this life. This life is just preparation for the next.

Eternity is coming. One day Jesus will return. A judgment awaits us. Jesus will deal with us according to how and why we have lived our lives here on earth. Jesus promised:

***“The man who loves his life will lose it, while the man who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life.” – John 12:25***

If a person loves his life more than Christ, then he will lose his life in eternity. He will experience eternal death. But the person who loses his life for Jesus will receive eternal life in heaven.

It's that realization about eternity that will motivate us to keep on losing our lives here on earth so that we can win in the end.

**I had walked life's path with an easy tread,  
Had followed where comfort and pleasure led;  
And then by chance in a quiet place  
I met my Master face to face.**

**With station and rank and wealth for goal,  
Much thought for body but none for soul,  
I had entered to win this life's mad race-  
When I met my Master face to face.**

**I had built my castles, reared them high,  
Till their towers had pierced the blue of the sky;  
I had sworn to rule with an iron mace-  
When I met my Master face to face.**

**I met Him and knew Him, and blushed to see  
That His eyes full of sorrow were fixed on me;  
And I faltered, and fell at His feet that day  
While my castles vanished and melted away.**

**Melted and vanished; and in their place  
I saw naught else but my Master's face;  
And I cried aloud: "Oh, make me meet  
To follow the marks of Thy wounded feet."**

**My thought is now for the souls of men;  
I have lost my life to find it again  
Ever since alone in that holy place  
My Master and I stood face to face.**

Are you losing your life for Jesus? Will you lose your life now so that you can win in eternity? Perhaps you need to lose your life for Jesus for the first time this morning. You can give up your life by believing in Jesus, repenting of your sin, confessing your faith and being baptized into Christ.

