

The Worst Form of Failure
(Matthew 16:24-28)

Our subject for this lesson is The Worst Form of Failure, and I take that subject from the words of our Lord in v. 26: “For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?”

In Jesus’ widely known and loved Sermon on the Mount, He referred to many subjects that concerns the pattern for righteous living. And one of those subjects was “anxiety.”

He said to the disciples, “... Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment? Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap. Nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they? Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature? And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: And yet I say unto you, That even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to day is, and to morrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith? Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you. Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof” (Matthew 6:25-34).

Now the background for our text begins in Matthew 16:13 and runs through Matthew 16:23. And our text verse is v. 26 where Jesus said, “For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?”

The great missionary William Carey once said, “I’m not afraid of failure. I’m afraid of succeeding at things that don’t matter.”

Now there are a lot of things in life that we do, there are a lot of things in life we could succeed at, but we come to realize there are very few things that actually matter. They’re very few things that will make a difference to the world and to the people we care for.

I think one of the great tragedies of getting older is to look back over our life and see that we have succeeded in all kinds of lesser things, but we have failed at the greater things – the things that are important to life. I think there will be a lot of dads, a lot of moms, a lot

of grandfathers, and a lot of grandmothers, that will be setting around one day in their older age and reflect back on their life and will have more regrets than anything else.

Just think how many people have gone to the grave with extravagant wealth and all kinds of nice possessions but with a broken marriage and with children who barely know them – staggering.

I recently read of a man who had built a huge house (10,000 sq. feet) for his wife and himself to have parties with their friends. The kids apparently weren't important anymore – they had raised them, they had educated them, and now it's our time to enjoy our success and relive our youth.

But all of a sudden their marriage ended, the wife left and now the man was living alone in a ten thousand square foot home. By one measure the man succeeded – he had a giant home and an amazing car and the wealth to support it all. But by more important measures he had failed. And by those measures he had nothing. The article said, "He was wealthy but destitute all at once. He was an object of envy but an object of pity."

Now let me make something clear: It's not that lesser things are always bad. Some lesser things are actually very good. It's just that they are, by definition, lesser things. They are not matters of first importance.

There is an order to life and we all know that sometimes those lesser things can look so attractive. They can be so distracting. They can keep us from giving attention to the things that matter far more. Succeeding at the lesser things at the cost of the greater things is its own form of failure.

It's like Jesus said, "... what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?"

People are so tempted to throw away all the big things to succeed at the lesser things. We can't deny it: Succeeding at lesser things at the cost of the greater things is the worst form of failure. How will life after death greet you? Will it be heaven or will it be hell? How do you know? What matters most to you in life? What matters most to God? Can you honestly say that you are living for the glory of God, or for the glory of self?

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