

"Yours to Lose"

Text: Luke 14:25-35

May the love of God the Father fill you with wonder; may the sacrifice of God the Son fill you with gratitude; and may the indwelling of God the Holy Spirit fill you with faith, hope, and confidence. Amen.

Dear Fellow Christians:

Maybe you've heard the expression – or some variation thereof – that something *"is yours to lose."* I've heard it used for a football team, for example, that is holding a commanding lead going into the fourth quarter. The term has always puzzled me, in part because I don't really understand it and in part because it sounds so negative. The only time that the term is used is when a person or team is winning. Why would we say "theirs to lose" in that circumstance? Why not say, "Theirs to win"? Wouldn't that be both more positive and more indicative of present circumstances?

So what exactly is the psychology of the term – not just what it means but what it implies? The term itself seems to be a window into our natural pessimism. In most of our minds, success forebodes imminent failure. In other words, most of us tend to think that the fact that things are going well doesn't mean they will probably continue to go well; it means things are going to start going very badly. Admit it. How many of you have looked at how well your life is going - how blessed you are - and thought, *"Something is going to go really, really wrong any day now."*? It's something that seems to be hardwired into many or most of us. Good portends bad. Wealth comes just ahead of poverty. Success is usually spoiled by failure. Happiness comes just before great sorrow.

Guilt probably plays a role here. Christians recognize that we have it far better than we deserve, so we naturally assume that the "wrong" of our success or happiness will soon be "righted" by failure and sorrow.

The same sort of pessimism tends to creep over into our faith life. Who here trusts himself to stay the course and continue on the narrow path to heaven? Who here feels he deserves heaven? Everyone knows that the answer to the second question is "no one." The problem is that that is also the answer to the first question. No one can be trusted to keep himself in the faith – because no one can. That power, that ability, rests with God the Holy Spirit alone. Are there things we can do to access the Holy Spirit's power and ability? You're doing just that right now, as you are every time to make use of God's Word in its various forms or venues.

The obvious problem is that although we don't have the power to keep ourselves in the faith, we do have the terrible power to throw it away. In that sense, heaven is "ours to lose." But is pessimism warranted? Is it good and right for us to assume we will soon fail because we are now succeeding?

Our text for this morning deals with this very subject, but in a more subtle way than first meets the eye. In fact what first here meets the eye tends to sadden and discourage most who read it – at least most who read it without understanding. We pray this morning that our God would grant us the necessary wisdom, understanding and comfort as we study his words in Luke's Gospel, the 14th Chapter:

^{ESV} **Luke 14:25-35** *Now great crowds accompanied him, and he turned and said to them, ²⁶ "If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple. ²⁷ Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple. ²⁸ For which of you, desiring to build a tower, does not first sit down and count the cost, whether he has enough to complete it? ²⁹ Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him, ³⁰ saying, 'This man began to build and was not able to finish.' ³¹ Or what king, going out to encounter another king in war, will not sit down first and deliberate whether he is able with ten thousand to meet him who comes against him with twenty thousand? ³² And if not, while the other is yet a great way off, he sends a delegation and asks for terms of peace. ³³ So therefore, any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple. ³⁴ ¶ "Salt is good, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? ³⁵ It is of no use either for the soil or for the manure pile. It is thrown away. He who has ears to hear, let him hear."*

These are God's Words. In great awe and humility we acknowledge this fact and seek to sit attentively at the feet of these words and both learn the lessons and gain the benefits that our God intends to make ours. To this end we pray: **"Sanctify us by your truth, O Lord. Your word is truth."** Amen.

Did you find yourself discouraged by our text? Anyone here keen on the idea of *hating* those closest to you – your parents, spouse, siblings, and children? Does the idea of hating your life itself hold appeal to you? Are you now eager to go out and give away all of your earthly possessions? Didn't Jesus say, **"So therefore, any one of you who**

does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple."? The sad picture flashed in my mind of the rich young man who turned away from Jesus because he loved his wealth too much to give it up. You remember the parable:

The young man said to Jesus, "All these (commandments) I have kept. What do I still lack?" ²¹ **Jesus said to him, "If you would be perfect, go, sell what you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me."** ²² **When the young man heard this he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.** (Matthew 19:20-22)

Is that me? Is that you?

Didn't our text for this morning sound like Jesus was saying just that to every single one of his followers, and that if you weren't really ready and willing to give up all that you love, all that you own, all that gives you pleasure in life, you had no share in Christ? Who then can be saved?

Some have taken comfort here from the fact that the word translated here as "hate" routinely means "to love less." That would mean that Jesus isn't commanding that we harbor the sort of hatred toward those we love the most that typically comes to mind, but that our love for God himself should still be greater. This understanding is supported by other sections of Scripture, like Matthew 10:37-38: **(Jesus said,) "Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.** ³⁸ **And whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me."**

So is that the solution here? Is that how we numb our guilt and move on from these passages and the disturbing message they first seemed to convey? *"Okay, so we are supposed to love God above all things. I'm pretty sure I do, for the most part, so it's all good."*

If that is, in fact, what we get out of this text, we have no share in Jesus because we have no *need* for Jesus. If we are doing a good job of keeping the first and hardest table of the law – **"Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy hearts, soul, mind, and strength"** – then we're well on our way to not needing Christ.

Obviously such a thing is not possible. A general rule of thumb is that if you find yourself comfortable with the law, you are not reading it rightly, or you are being grossly dishonest or delusional with yourself.

The fact is Christians routinely make the same mistake in understanding our text for this morning that we make when we read the Sermon on the Mount. As in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus in our text is not teaching us how we can *really* keep the law – not just superficially but really keep it – the deeper lesson he is teaching us is how utterly *impossible* it is for us to do so. He wasn't teaching us what more we needed to do, but to despair of achieving the perfection required and to look instead for a Savior. He was also disabusing the masses that were then following him of their false ideas about following that Savior.

We need to dig into this a bit deeper, beginning with our text's message concerning the keeping of the law. How do we know that Jesus isn't here telling us what we have to do to be *real, true* Christians? How do we know that he isn't really telling us to hate our loved ones and give away everything that we own? How do we know that any other explanation isn't just greedy, wishful, delusional thinking on our part?

The first answer is that the Bible never contradicts itself. God never encourages hatred toward anything that is good. In fact the 4th Commandment says just the opposite. God's Word also teaches us to enjoy and receive with thanksgiving his blessings, but to keep material things in their proper place in our lives. He tells us to pay our bills, pay our taxes, and to eat the fruit of our labors – all of which would be impossible if he were here requiring us to give away all of our worldly possessions.

So just what is he telling us? That we need to learn to give up on self and to acknowledge not just our need for a little help, but for a Savior to rescue us from certain failure. This is the spiritual level on which Jesus always operates. This is what it means to **"renounce all that you have."** Jesus isn't all about making us better people; he is all about saving us. We can't be saved if we believe we can or are *saving ourselves* by our own goodness or obedience.

Our Savior is further here teaching us to make a sober evaluation of what it really means to be a disciple of Jesus Christ, and, even more importantly, recognize that in and of yourself, you don't have what it takes for that either. Not even close.

In our text Jesus lists two examples: building a tower and going to war. Both are to represent discipleship. Is his point here "Don't build the tower" or "Don't go to war" and instead seek a compromise with the

approaching enemy? In other words, is he telling us to give up on following him because we can't "afford" it, and instead to make peace with the world and try to have it both ways – *in* the world and *of* the world? Obviously not. He is, again, teaching us that we are never – and can never be – the supplier of any good thing. Jesus alone supplies the goodness that pays for our sin debt. The Holy Spirit alone gives us the desire and strength to walk not according to our sinful passions but according to the new man that he has created within us.

That means that while two individuals might do (or attempt to do) exactly the same thing, the motive makes all the difference in God's eyes. The one attempts to keep the law and follow his Lord because he thinks he is earning his way to heaven. Jesus in our text is saying, "*Count the cost and give up on self. You don't have what it takes to do that.*" The other, trusting that Jesus already died to pay for all of his sins, seeks to keep the commandment and follow his Lord because that is what he is – a follower of Jesus Christ – and simply because that is what Christians do. His life is not a payment, it is a thank you. That man, rather than the other, will always have enough to build his tower or fight his war because God, not self, is the supplier of all that he needs.

Jesus finally uses salt as the ultimate example of how right it is for Christians to be what they are created to be, and to do what they are created to do. Salt's purpose is to flavor all that it touches. Given that, salt obviously becomes absolutely useless if it loses its saltiness. Disciples of Christ are created to share the message of Jesus Christ with the world. That is more than just what we do, it is what we have been created to be. Given the fact that "***to live is Christ and to die is gain,***" we pray that our God would provide us not only with our sin payment – which he in fact already has – but also with the courage, strength, and dedication to actually do what we were created to do as ambassadors for Jesus Christ.

Salvation is ours through faith in Jesus Christ. Is it ours to lose? Keep your eyes on Jesus Christ. Trusting him for all that you need, the victory that you could not possibly win on your own is already yours. Amen.

Scripture Readings

^{ESV} **Deuteronomy 30:15-20** "See, I have set before you today life and good, death and evil. ¹⁶ If you obey the commandments of the LORD your God that I command you today, by loving the LORD your God, by walking in his ways, and by keeping his commandments and his statutes and his rules, then you shall live and multiply, and the LORD your God will bless you in the land that you are entering to take possession of it. ¹⁷ But if your heart turns away, and you will not hear, but are drawn away to worship other gods and serve them, ¹⁸ I declare to you today, that you shall surely perish. You shall not live long in the land that you are going over the Jordan to enter and possess. ¹⁹ I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse. Therefore choose life, that you and your offspring may live, ²⁰ loving the LORD your God, obeying his voice and holding fast to him, for he is your life and length of days, that you may dwell in the land that the LORD swore to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give them."

^{ESV} **Philemon 1:1,10-21** Paul, a prisoner for Christ Jesus, and Timothy our brother, To Philemon our beloved fellow worker -- ¹⁰ I appeal to you for my child, Onesimus, whose father I became in my imprisonment. ¹¹ (Formerly he was useless to you, but now he is indeed useful to you and to me.) ¹² I am sending him back to you, sending my very heart. ¹³ I would have been glad to keep him with me, in order that he might serve me on your behalf during my imprisonment for the gospel, ¹⁴ but I preferred to do nothing without your consent in order that your goodness might not be by compulsion but of your own accord. ¹⁵ For this perhaps is why he was parted from you for a while, that you might have him back forever, ¹⁶ no longer as a slave but more than a slave, as a beloved brother--especially to me, but how much more to you, both in the flesh and in the Lord. ¹⁷ So if you consider me your partner, receive him as you would receive me. ¹⁸ If he has wronged you at all, or owes you anything, charge that to my account. ¹⁹ I, Paul, write this with my own hand: I will repay it--to say nothing of your owing me even your own self. ²⁰ Yes, brother, I want some benefit from you in the Lord. Refresh my heart in Christ. ²¹ Confident of your obedience, I write to you, knowing that you will do even more than I say.

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The 16th Sunday after Pentecost – September 4, 2016

The Opening Prayer by the Pastor

The Opening Hymn – 227 (Red Hymnal)

"Come Holy Ghost In Love"

The Order of Service – Supplement page 12ff. (Brown Hymnal)

The Scripture Lessons: (Printed on the back page of this bulletin)

The Old Testament Lesson: (Deuteronomy 30:15-20) As they entered the Promised Land, God set before the Children of Israel the clearest of choices: A) Keep me as your God and obey my commandments and I promise to make you prosper, or B) turn to other gods and ignore my commandments and I will visit you with my wrath and condemnation. Even in the material, secular world the Jews could not keep this covenant. How much less can man hope to earn *heaven* by his actions?

Psalm of the Day: Psalm 146 (Brown Hymnal page 41) (Read responsively)

The New Testament Lesson: (Philemon 1:1,10-21) As Paul here pleaded with Philemon to charge him (Paul) with any debt incurred by what the runaway slave Onesimus had done, so too we thank Jesus for making the same request of God the Father in our behalf. With his perfect life and innocent death, Jesus said to his Father, "Let me pay for whatever they owe."

The Confession of Faith -

The Apostolic Creed – page 15. (Brown Hymnal)

The Pre-Sermon Hymn – 342 (Red Hymnal)

"Chief of Sinners Though I Be"

The Sermon – Text: Luke 14:25-35 (Printed on the back page of this bulletin)

"Yours to Lose"

The Offertory – (Supplement page 16 insert)

The Post-Sermon Hymn -277 (Red Hymnal)

"I Heard the Voice of Jesus Say"

The Offering followed by the Prayers

The Benediction

The Closing Hymn – 605 (Verses 1 & 5) (Red Hymnal)

"The World Is Very Evil"

Silent Prayer

Welcome! - We warmly welcome any visitors who might be with us this morning and invite you to join us every Sunday at this time. St. Paul is a congregation in fellowship with the Church of the Lutheran Confession (CLC) – a conservative Lutheran synod with churches and missions throughout the United States, as well as Canada, India, and Africa. We are glad you are here. Thank you for letting us share the Word of God with you. Please record your visit in our Guest Book, and come again!

Attendance - Sunday (44) Ave (48)

This Week at St. Paul:

Today	-10:00 a.m.	– Sunday Worship Service
	-11:00 a.m.	– Fellowship/Coffee Time
Wednesday	-6:00 p.m.	– Confirmation Class
	-7:00 p.m.	– Midweek Bible Study
Next Sunday	-9:00 a.m.	– Sunday School and Bible Class
	-10:00 a.m.	– Sunday Worship w/ Holy Communion
	-11:15 a.m.	– Fellowship/Coffee Time
	-6:00 p.m.	– Women's Fellowship Salad Supper

CLC News – Pastor Joel Fleischer has returned the call to Rock of Ages Lutheran, Grand Rapids MI. Faith Lutheran of Markesan WI has called Pastor Nathan Pfeiffer of Trinity Lutheran, Spokane WA. Current vacancies in the Synod include the following: Grace, Fairbanks AK, Shepherd of the Valley, Weslaco TX, Resurrection, Calgary AB, Living Savior, Eden Prairie MN, Mt. Zion, Madison Heights MI, Rock of Ages, Grand Rapids MI, Faith, Markesan WI, Zion, Lawrenceville GA, St. Stephen, Mountain View CA, and a 2nd foreign missionary.

Regular Schedule – Confirmation and Midweek Bible Study are scheduled to resume this Wednesday at 6 pm and 7 pm respectively, with Sunday School and Bible Class next Sunday.

Sunday School Teachers – Three volunteers have agreed to serve as the main teachers for this year's Sunday School: Gary Miller – upper grades, Phil Pfennig – middle grades, Sandy Roehl – lower grades. Please let Pastor Roehl know if you would be willing to serve as substitutes, or speak to the appropriate teacher directly.

Voters' Meeting – A quarterly Voters' Meeting is scheduled for next Sunday, September 11, following the fellowship time.

Salad Supper – The Women's Fellowship's Annual Salad Supper is also scheduled for next Sunday at 6 pm. Please see Cindy Ollenburger for details.