

Perspective

Text: Mark 8:34-38

May the God who has so richly blessed us in the past, continue to shower us with his grace and mercy in this new year. Amen.

Dear Fellow Christians, having again reached the end of yet another year of earth's existence, it is both fitting and beneficial to take a backwards glance – sort of a "year in review" look at the year now past, but to do so from a Christian perspective, and to thereby also gain direction for the future.

The godless also do something similar, but from a very different perspective and therefore also with a very different result. Every year, for example, they publish a list of the rich and famous who died during the year just ended. The title is usually something like: *"Those we lost this past year."* Only God can, of course, know if any on that list died in the Christian faith, but if you take those who have died at their word, then "lost" is indeed the right word. There is no joy or hope in reading a list of those who died professing their rejection of Jesus as their Savior, only sorrow – together with a renewed appreciation for the question Jesus asks each of us in our text for this morning: ***"For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul?"*** More tragic and pitiful still is the fact that no one even comes close to gaining ***"the whole world."*** In fact the claim to fame for most (that which secured their place on the list) is mostly just pathetic and depressing. This year's list included a couple of rappers, a drummer in a rock band from 50 years ago, actors and actresses, sports figures, comedians, and politicians.

These are just a few from a very long list. What is striking here is that suddenly every single one of them is seen from an undertaker's point of view -- without makeup, expensive clothes, money, and jewelry. In death they look no different than any other sinner. And they *were* no different, for every single one of them lived and died in desperate need of a Savior – just like you and me. Death has that effect. It strips away the outward façade and forces us to consider what is true and real and lasting.

In considering the year past as we enter a new year this morning, we seek to be both warned and encouraged. In other words, we seek to gain a refocused *perspective* – the ability to view the world around us with the understanding and wisdom of God's enlightened children. The text that will guide our study this morning is found in the 8th Chapter of Mark's Gospel:

^{ESV} **Mark 8:34-38** *And calling the crowd to him with his disciples, he said to them, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. ³⁵ For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it. ³⁶ For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul? ³⁷ For what can a man give in return for his soul? ³⁸ For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him will the Son of Man also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels."*

This is God's Word. Thank him for it. Treasure it accordingly. To prepare our hearts to study this inspired Word of God, so we pray, ***"Sanctify us by Your truth, O Lord. Your Word is truth. Amen."***

As different as the people were in age, in how they lived, and in what they accomplished, all on that list of the "famous departed" died. Unless Jesus comes first, we all must pass through that door. No matter what we are working on at the time or what we are trying to accomplish, this is one appointment that all must keep. The living typically avoid this obvious yet sobering truth, but with Christians it ought to be different. We know Jesus as our Savior. Not only is that all the preparation we need to die, it is also the secret to making the most of our earthly lives here on earth, before our Lord calls us home.

If you want some great insights here, and especially if you haven't read it in a while, do yourself a favor and read the Book of Ecclesiastes as one of your goals in the New Year. The book is especially relevant to our culture today. Solomon, writing several thousand years ago, explained what life was and is like for the rich and famous. He was in a unique position to do so. After he became king, Solomon indulged his every passion and desire. He had both the money and the power to do whatever he wanted – so he did. His conclusion? The good life isn't as good as you imagine. In fact, it's empty, futile, and meaningless.

Yet life on earth doesn't have to be that way. In chapter 12, the last chapter of the Book, Solomon reveals to us how to make the most of our lives here on earth – critical information from one who has been there, done that. His advice is, first, remember that life is short, and second, remember that service to our Lord is all that really matters. Not only do we have no idea how much time we will be given on this earth, our physical and mental abilities deteriorate over time. In Verse 1 of Chapter 12 Solomon wrote: ***Remember your Creator in the days of your***

youth, before the days of trouble come and the years approach when you will say, "I find no pleasure in them."

When you are young, old age isn't even on your radar. First, 40 seems old; then 50, then 70 and 80. The marker keeps getting moved until the inevitable happens: you are old. The golden years are often not so golden. Life becomes more difficult. Solomon describes the strong men who are now stooped over, their youth and vigor gone – wasted on trivialities and on that which cannot last. In the end, time always wins.

Here then is the key: If you want to get the most from life, then serve the Lord, *and do it now*. Don't procrastinate. Do it now, while you can.

It would be interesting if we could have done "exit polling" on the famous people who died in 2022. Obviously, these are people who were considered successful by the world – or they wouldn't be on the list. Was their fame and money worth it? Even if you took eternity out of the equation, how fulfilled and satisfied were they, really?

The lifestyle of wealth, power, and privilege is held up as being better than what God has given you. It isn't. Wealth is a curse more often than it is a blessing. Few can handle it. Yet the devil would have us believe that we would be happier if we had more of what the world considers important. In our text, our Savior directs us to consider the world's ideas from the perspective of eternity. One day, as Solomon put it, ***"the silver cord will be severed", "the golden bowl broken" ... "the dust returns to the earth as it was, and the spirit returns to God who gave it."*** The things of this life will dissolve into nothingness. What then will really matter other than faith in Jesus Christ – both for you and for those you know and love? Looking backwards from the perspective of the grave, again that perfect question from our true Friend and Savior: ***For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul? ³⁷ For what can a man give in return (or exchange) for his soul?***

It's important here that we understand that the benefits of Christianity are not just reserved for the life after this one. It is a gross distortion of what the Bible actually teaches to imagine that we can have joy and contentment either here on earth or later in heaven, *but not both*. Jesus did warn us about inevitable hardships on earth, but he never said that we should expect *only* hardship. In our text he did teach us about the need to ***"take up our cross"*** and to ***"lose our life,"*** but he nowhere says that misery is *all* that we should expect until we are finally rescued by death. What he is teaching us is to look for joys and successes that are different than the world's ideas of those things. This is a major component of the Christian perspective. While it may

sound like sorting all of this out as we go through life is difficult, it really isn't. There's a simple test we can apply, a simple question we can ask ourselves: *"Does this have any lasting value?"* Toward the end of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus put it this way: ***"Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, ²⁰ but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. ²¹ For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."***^{ESV}(Matthew 6:19-21)

Satan has so twisted and distorted the world's perceptions that they consistently get this wrong. They bite and scratch and claw for all the wrong things. They spend themselves on gaining the worthless. They are absorbed with the exact opposite of what God himself promotes. There is incredible joy and beauty also in this life. There is peace and contentment if we will but look where God has directed. Again in the Book of Ecclesiastes Solomon wrote: ***What gain has the worker from his toil? ¹⁰ I have seen the business that God has given to the children of man to be busy with. ¹¹ He has made everything beautiful in its time. Also, he has put eternity into man's heart, yet so that he cannot find out what God has done from the beginning to the end. ¹² I perceived that there is nothing better for them than to be joyful and to do good as long as they live; ¹³ also that everyone should eat and drink and take pleasure in all his toil-- this is God's gift to man.***^{ESV}(Ecclesiastes 3:9-13) Some have summarized this as: *"It's the journey, not just the goal."* While there's some obvious truth in that, to gain a full, God-pleasing perspective on life, we need to add our question: *"Does this have any lasting value?"*

Applying both to the different aspects of our lives, the picture clears dramatically. It's not about accumulating wealth to pass down to our children, it's about providing both their bodily and especially their spiritual needs today, and day by day. Wealth is temporal, souls are eternal. It's about finding joy in the beauty of the world God gave us without worshipping that world. It's about looking at every aspect of our lives from the perspective of eternity. From that vantage point it won't matter if we finished a certain project, but it will matter if I did that project to the glory of God. It won't matter what places I visited or what sights I saw, it will only matter how I served my Lord along the way.

Jesus obviously had the right perspective, yet consider that he led a life that the world would have labeled unsuccessful – an utter failure. He chose poverty over riches. He surrounded himself with the poor and the outcasts rather than the rich and famous. His greatest achievement took

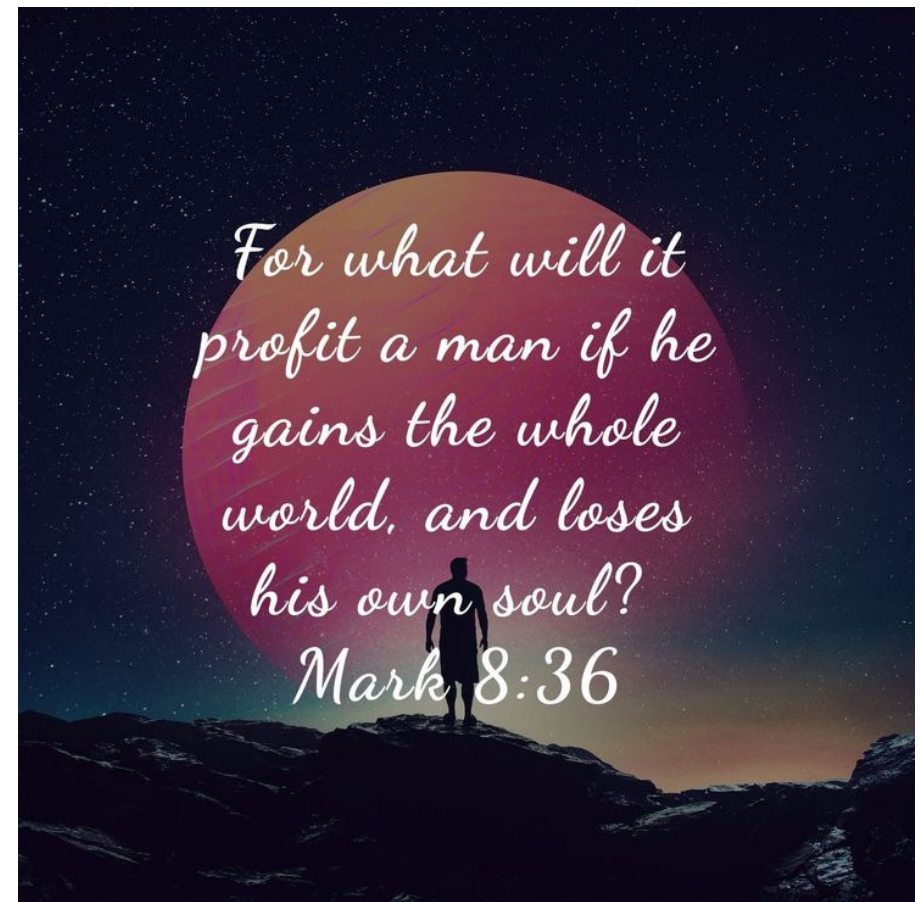
place on a cross, where he allowed himself to bear the full brunt of Divine justice and wrath over against sin – to pay what we owed. The world doesn't get this, but this is, in fact, the true measure of our Savior's greatness. He came to conquer our enemies for us, so that we can have an existence that is beyond the grasp of even the world's wealthiest unbeliever. His greatness is revealed in his mercy, and the success of his time on earth in his sinless life and innocent death, which won our redemption and forgiveness.

As you pause to look backwards on this day, don't just look at the year past or even at your entire life. Look at Jesus' life and death. He was more than just a perfect example. He is the reason for the hope that is in us. He is the basis for our peace and comfort, our unending joy and confidence. The One who paid the debt for our sins can be trusted to preserve us in the year ahead. Serve him with joy. Amen.

ESV **Isaiah 63:7-9** I will recount the steadfast love of the LORD, the praises of the LORD, according to all that the LORD has granted us, and the great goodness to the house of Israel that he has granted them according to his compassion, according to the abundance of his steadfast love. ⁸ For he said, "Surely they are my people, children who will not deal falsely." And he became their Savior. ⁹ In all their affliction he was afflicted, and the angel of his presence saved them; in his love and in his pity he redeemed them; he lifted them up and carried them all the days of old.

ESV **Galatians 4:4-9** But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, ⁵ to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. ⁶ And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" ⁷ So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God. ⁸ ¶ Formerly, when you did not know God, you were enslaved to those that by nature are not gods. ⁹ But now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how can you turn back again to the weak and worthless elementary principles of the world, whose slaves you want to be once more?

ESV **Mark 8:34-38** And calling the crowd to him with his disciples, he said to them, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. ³⁵ For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it. ³⁶ For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul? ³⁷ For what can a man give in return for his soul? ³⁸ For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him will the Son of Man also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels."



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The First Sunday after Christmas – January 1, 2023

The Opening Prayer by the Pastor

The Opening Hymn – 123 (Stanzas 1-4, 8) (Red Hymnal)

"Our God, Our Help in Ages Past"

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

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

The Old Testament Lesson: (Isaiah 63:7-9) Our first lesson today reminds us that the time following the reception of gifts ought to be the natural and automatic time for giving thanks. The greatest of all possible gifts has been given to us in the person of Jesus Christ, who has rescued us from our sins. As we continue to enjoy the peace and comfort of the birth of our Savior, we also want to continually give thanks to our Savior God, who has been so good to us.

Psalm of the Day – Psalm 32 (Projected)

The New Testament Lesson: (Galatians 4:4-9) Paul here outlines the great gift we have been given through Jesus Christ – freedom from the slavery of sin, hell, and Satan. God himself freed us from the evil that had held us captive, and he did so by sending Jesus. This reading reminds us that now we not only know God, he knows and loves us! Who would ever want to go back to the old ways of sin, slavery, and unbelief?

The Confession of Faith -

The Apostolic Creed – page 15. (Brown Hymnal)

The Pre-Sermon Hymn – 98 (Stanzas 1-2, 4-5) (Red Hymnal)

"Of the Father's Love Begotten"

The Sermon – Text: Mark 8:34-38 (Printed on the back page)

"Perspective"

The Offertory – (Supplement page 16 insert)

The Post-Sermon Hymn – 120 (Stanzas 1-4) (Red Hymnal)

"Help Us, O Lord, Behold We Enter"

The Installation of the 2023 Church Council

The Prayers followed by the Lord's Prayer

The Closing Hymn - 120 (Stanzas 5-6) (Red Hymnal)

"Help Us, O Lord, Behold We Enter"

Silent Prayer

Welcome! - We warmly welcome any visitors worshipping with us this morning and invite you to join us each Sunday at this time. We are glad you are here! **To our Visitors seeking Holy Communion** – In obedience to God's Word, we practice "Close Communion." This practice stresses both our concern for others, not wanting anyone to receive the sacrament to their harm (1 Cor. 11:27-30) and the importance of unity in confession and faith (1 Cor. 10:16-17). For this reason we ask that anyone who has not established this unity through membership in a CLC congregation please meet with the pastor to discuss this Scriptural doctrine before communing. This is a practice that we follow out of love and concern for you, and out of obedience to God's Word, not in judgment of anyone's Christian faith.

Attendance – Sunday (48) Average (36)

This Week at St. Paul:

Today	-9:00 a.m.	– Sunday School and Bible Class
	-10:00 a.m.	– Worship Service
	-11:00 a.m.	– Fellowship Hour
Wednesday	-6:00 p.m.	– Confirmation Class
Next Sunday	-9:00 a.m.	– Sunday School (No Bible Class)
	-10:00 a.m.	– Lay Worship Service
	-11:00 a.m.	– Fellowship Hour

CLC News – Luther Memorial of Fond du Lac has called Pastor Andrew Schaller.

Church Council Installation – The members of the 2023 Church Council are scheduled to be installed during the service this morning. The 2023 Council officers are: Mick Johnson – President, Timothy Meyer – Vice President, Phil Pfennig – Secretary, Keith Mantz – Treasurer, Gary Miller – Financial Secretary, Mark Johnson – Trustee Coordinator.

Pastor Out of Town – Pastor Roehl is scheduled to be out of town next weekend, leaving Thursday and returning the following Monday. As a result, there *is* Sunday School scheduled for next Sunday morning, but *no* Adult Bible Class. Two of our laymen will conduct the Sunday service.

Lutheran Spokesman – A reminder that we receive an extra copy of the CLC publication *The Lutheran Spokesman* each month. Most months it goes unused. Feel free to take it home if you do not currently subscribe, or give it to an acquaintance that might benefit. We also receive an extra copy of *Daily Rest*.

Recovering – Daniel Olvera, the son of Pastor Juan Jose Olvera, is recovering in the hospital after successful surgery. Please pray for the Olvera family.