

"Everything (and Nothing) to Lose; Nothing (and Everything) to Gain"

Text: John 9:1-7, 13-16, 39-41

Grace, mercy and peace be yours from our Savior-God – and may each of you truly comprehend the incalculable value of such gifts. Amen.

Dear Fellow Christians, Hollywood has become quite reliable of late, reliable in that it can be depended upon to produce little or nothing of any real value. Its favorite themes are nearly always the very worst of human thoughts and emotions. In addition to its new favorite word, it can also be relied upon to create and promote some extraordinarily dumb expressions – gems like *"I can take care of myself!"* and *"I promise I will protect you!"* This morning we are going to examine another – an expression that is literally never true for anyone : *"I've got nothing to lose"*. Since everyone has *something*, it's demonstrably true that no one has *nothing* to lose.

This morning we are going to examine a section of Scripture that tells of a man who undoubtedly believed he had nothing to lose, when in fact he had *everything* to lose. We are also going to be introduced to some characters who believed they had nothing to *gain* in connection with Jesus, when in fact they had *everything* to gain.

The text that will teach us more about this particular topic this morning, as well as a wealth of other valuable truths, is found in John's Gospel, the Ninth Chapter:

^{ESV} **John 9:1-7,13-16,39-41** *As he passed by, he (Jesus) saw a man blind from birth. ² And his disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" ³ Jesus answered, "It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be displayed in him. ⁴ We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming, when no one can work. ⁵ As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world." ⁶ Having said these things, he spat on the ground and made mud with the saliva. Then he anointed the man's eyes with the mud ⁷ and said to him, "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam" (which means Sent). So he went and washed and came back seeing. ¹³ ¶ They brought to the Pharisees the man who had formerly been blind. ¹⁴ Now it was a Sabbath day when Jesus made the mud and opened his eyes. ¹⁵ So the Pharisees again asked him how he had received his sight. And he said to them, "He put mud on my eyes, and I washed, and I see." ¹⁶ Some of the Pharisees said, "This man is not from God, for he*

does not keep the Sabbath." But others said, "How can a man who is a sinner do such signs?" And there was a division among them... ³⁹ Jesus said, "For judgment I came into this world, that those who do not see may see, and those who see may become blind." ⁴⁰ Some of the Pharisees near him heard these things, and said to him, "Are we also blind?" ⁴¹ Jesus said to them, "If you were blind, you would have no guilt; but now that you say, 'We see,' your guilt remains.

This is God's Word. This is where God has promised to meet with us, to calm us, to comfort and assure us. To prepare our hearts to meet here with our God, and to humbly learn at his feet, so we pray, **"Sanctify us by Your Truth, O Lord. Your Word is truth!"** Amen.

You are all probably familiar by now with the false inference that plagued even Jesus' own men in our text. Since the man was blind, even Jesus' own disciples automatically assumed that his handicap had to be a result of God's punishment. Since he was *born* blind, the only thing they wondered was whether the parents or the man himself had caused the punishment. Jesus here teaches us to look for no such correlation. Tragedy strikes the good and the bad, Christian and unbeliever. God alone knows why. God alone possesses the wisdom and capacity to understand the whole, big, impossibly complicated picture. In the case of the man in our text, only Jesus understood that this man was born blind for a particularly unique reason.

Think about that for a bit. Does it seem overly cruel to you that God would allow this man and his parents to suffer for so many years *just for that moment in time recorded in our text*? Sometimes the question itself is the problem. Ask it a bit differently: *"If even one soul was brought to saving faith and thereby rescued from eternal torment by the healing of this man born blind, would anyone here consider a lifetime of blindness too steep a price to pay for something like that?"* We can actually gain more insight if we ask the question from a little different perspective: *"Would you be willing to have someone else suffer in that way if that is what it took to open your eyes and to rescue you from an eternity in hell?"* Obviously it is only the Word that converts and saves, but the question opens an interesting window into our own hearts, doesn't it? It's a disturbing tell as to how well we are doing in connection with the Second Table of the Law: **"And thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself."** Most of us would consider it fairly reasonable and well worth it for *someone else* to be afflicted so that we could come to know our Savior and be brought to faith. We tend to pause when the suffering is ours and our neighbor is the beneficiary.

Jesus saw the big picture. Always. He disabused his disciples of the notion that either this man or his parents were being punished, and then revealed to us a truth far too valuable to miss: **"It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be displayed in him."** Remember that we are not supposed to be idle spectators here but active participants. Our goal is not to be entertained but instructed. These words from our Savior will therefore prove most helpful to us if we take them in and make them our own. Things happen to us in this sin-broken world that we will never be able to fully understand, but these words from our Savior can help – if we allow it. How fortunate the man in our text truly was to be able to serve as that which displayed **"the works of God."** You and I will most likely never know if or when God is giving us that privilege, but we certainly have the terrible power to abandon that role. We do that whenever we fail to accept what God allows into our lives with grace and humility. Most of you have probably seen this. You've probably seen Christians display extraordinary humility and perseverance in the midst of terrible suffering – and then reflect all praise or glory back to their Savior-God. What a rare and priceless gift and example.

I hope I get to meet the man in our text in heaven some day. You have to admire how he handled the Jewish rulers when they called him in for questioning after he was healed. The following exchange is particularly telling (verses from this section but not included in our text for this morning): ***So for the second time they called the man who had been blind and said to him, "Give glory to God. We know that this man is a sinner."*** ²⁵ ***He answered, "Whether he is a sinner I do not know. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see."*** ²⁶ ***They said to him, "What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?"*** ²⁷ ***He answered them, "I have told you already, and you would not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you also want to become his disciples?"*** ²⁸ ***And they reviled him, saying, "You are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses."*** ²⁹ ***We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where he comes from."*** ³⁰ ***The man answered, "Why, this is an amazing thing! You do not know where he comes from, and yet he opened my eyes."*** ³¹ ***We know that God does not listen to sinners, but if anyone is a worshiper of God and does his will, God listens to him."*** ³² ***Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a man born blind."*** ³³ ***If this man were not from God, he could do nothing."*** ³⁴ ***They answered him, "You were born in utter sin, and would you teach us?" And they cast him out.*** (John 9:24-34)

The "rest of the story" is that after being "cast out" (excommunicated) by the Jews, Jesus found the man and revealed himself to him as the Savior, after which we hear those best of all possible words: ***Jesus heard that they had cast him out, and having found him he said, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?"*** ³⁶ ***He answered, "And who is he, sir, that I may believe in him?"*** ³⁷ ***Jesus said to him, "You have seen him, and it is he who is speaking to you."*** ³⁸ ***He said, "Lord, I believe," and he worshiped him.*** (John 9:35-38)

Sometimes knock-offs (fakes or forgeries) don't matter. Sometimes they do. History is full of stories where counterfeit works of art hung in the most prestigious museums for decades before they were discovered to be forgeries. The question that then begs to be asked: ***"Did it really matter? If the paintings were that good that they fooled experts for years, who really cares?"*** We see the same sort of thing today. Could anyone here tell the difference between a genuine Rolex and a good imitation? A \$35,000 Louis Vuitton handbag and a \$25 knock-off? Who, with the naked eye, could tell a good man-made stone from a genuine diamond? The real problem only comes if/when the fake is discovered.

Our Savior demonstrated his wisdom by choosing a man for this miraculous demonstration that no one could ever doubt. This was not only a man *born* blind, he was a man known to all in the community. By choosing this man, Jesus performed a miracle whose authenticity no one could ever question. When today's "faith healers" are discovered to be frauds, irreparable harm is done to the Christian faith they claimed to represent. Jesus was anything but a fraud – and his mission was to demonstrate to the world that he was very different from those who had come before and from all who would come after. He therefore found a man who, probably even in his own eyes but certainly in the eyes of the world, had nothing to lose, but who Jesus saw as having both everything to lose and everything to gain.

We know that this man was born blind, and as such he was an outcast in his society. The people recognized him as a beggar they had regularly seen around town. To society then, he was worthless – a parasite that produced nothing. He only took. Since life to the godless is all about getting the most out of this life, they regarded the man as worse than worthless – unless and until he could regain his sight and start producing. Again, Jesus saw him differently. He saw a valuable, precious human soul in need of rescue. He saw a man who

believed he had nothing to lose by going to Jesus, but who in fact had everything to gain.

The man more than likely believed that if only he could receive his sight, all would be well. Jesus knew he had an infinitely more desperate need. He needed a much different kind of "sight" – coincidentally the very *sight* that Jesus came to give. In Jesus' own words: **"For judgment I came into this world, that those who do not see may see, and those who see may become blind."** This was a paradox or riddle that obviously perplexed the Jews. They were just perceptive enough to know that Jesus was somehow referring to them as among those who were "blind". From our text: ***Some of the Pharisees near him heard these things, and said to him, "Are we also blind?"*** Again Jesus answered them with a paradox they were unable to grasp: ***"If you were blind, you would have no guilt; but now that you say, 'We see,' your guilt remains."***

Jesus' paradoxical statements reflected the irony he saw all around him. Those that thought they had everything, in reality had nothing. Jesus was condemning them for placing their confidence in their own "owner-provided" righteousness. The blindness he was referring to was the spiritual blindness that afflicts every human being who does not know Jesus Christ. He was referring to their inability or refusal to recognize themselves as destitute sinners in desperate need of a Savior. The blind are those who believe that they themselves can (and in most cases are) doing what needs to be done to earn heaven. They therefore believed they had nothing to gain from Jesus, when in fact they had everything to gain. They also had nothing to lose because what they had was less than nothing.

Christians have been given "sight" that the world will always regard as blindness. Yet we can still lose sight of that which we once knew. We can still drift, and we therefore – until we are called home – still have *everything* to lose. On the other hand, when it comes to the things of this world, we truly have *nothing* to lose. Nothing material in this life lasts, which means that failure to accumulate "world stuff" should never concern us. In that sense we have nothing to lose because nothing here will survive Judgment Day. This life is all about the life that is to follow. When we know Jesus as Lord and Savior, we have eternal life – and therefore we lack nothing of any lasting, eternal value. We have absolutely everything we need.

What then is left in this world to gain? Possessing faith in Jesus Christ as we do, what else is there that has any lasting, eternal value? Souls.

Human souls enslaved to sin and Satan, and those souls are all around us. The Holy Spirit has removed our spiritual blindness, but part of what that now enables us to see is the mass of wandering human beings who don't yet know their Savior. We, therefore, who now lack nothing, still have much to gain, for our God has indentified ***"making disciples of all nations"*** as our life's work. So as you thank your God for bringing you to saving faith, take these closing words of our Savior home with you this morning: ***"We must work the works of him who sent (us) while it is day; night is coming, when no one can work."*** While you and I now *lack* nothing, we are surrounded by those who truly *have* nothing. Amen.

ESV **Isaiah 42:14-21** For a long time I have held my peace; I have kept still and restrained myself; now I will cry out like a woman in labor; I will gasp and pant. ¹⁵ I will lay waste mountains and hills, and dry up all their vegetation; I will turn the rivers into islands, and dry up the pools. ¹⁶ And I will lead the blind in a way that they do not know, in paths that they have not known I will guide them. I will turn the darkness before them into light, the rough places into level ground. These are the things I do, and I do not forsake them. ¹⁷ They are turned back and utterly put to shame, who trust in carved idols, who say to metal images, "You are our gods." ¹⁸ Hear, you deaf, and look, you blind, that you may see! ¹⁹ Who is blind but my servant, or deaf as my messenger whom I send? Who is blind as my dedicated one, or blind as the servant of the LORD? ²⁰ He sees many things, but does not observe them; his ears are open, but he does not hear. ²¹ The LORD was pleased, for his righteousness' sake, to magnify his law and make it glorious.

ESV **Ephesians 5:8-14** For at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light ⁹ (for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true), ¹⁰ and try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord. ¹¹ Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. ¹² For it is shameful even to speak of the things that they do in secret. ¹³ But when anything is exposed by the light, it becomes visible, ¹⁴ for anything that becomes visible is light. Therefore it says, "Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you."

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The Fourth Sunday in Lent – March 19, 2023

The Opening Prayer by the Pastor

The Opening Hymn – 7 (Red Hymnal)

"As We Begin Another Week"

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 42:14-21) This reading is a lament for the fallen people of Israel. It is best read as the Lord himself is speaking in verses 14-18 and Isaiah speaking in verses 18-21. We are here taught that although the message and the promise that were given to the Jews were good and right, they themselves rejected that message, and Isaiah describes the result as utter tragedy.

The Psalm of the Day – Psalm 23 (Page 36) (Brown Hymnal)

The New Testament Lesson: (Ephesians 5:8-14) We are here once again reminded of just what it was from which we were rescued by our merciful God, which was slavery to sin and Satan. By God's grace, through faith in Jesus Christ, we have now been freed from that tyranny, washed clean, and declared to be heirs of eternal life. We must still, for a time, remain in the world, but now we are to be *in* the world, but not *of* the world. We can enjoy all of God's blessings with thanksgiving, but we are never to allow those temporal blessings to overshadow that one thing needful.

The Confession of Faith -

The Apostolic Creed – page 15. (Brown Hymnal)

The Pre-Sermon Hymn – 721 (Brown Hymnal)

"Cross of Jesus, Cross of Sorrow"

The Sermon – Text: John 9:1-7, 13-16, 39-41 (Printed on the back page)

"Everything (and Nothing) to Gain; Nothing (and Everything) to Lose"

The Offertory – (Supplement page 16 insert)

The Post-Sermon Hymn – 389 (Stanzas 1-4) (Red Hymnal)

"Not What These Hands have Done"

The Prayers of the Day

The Benediction

The Closing Hymn – 48 (Red Hymnal)

"How Blest Are They Who Hear God's Word"

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 and around the world. 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 (27) Average (40) Wednesday (30)

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	-5:45 p.m.	– Confirmation Class
	-7:00 p.m.	– Midweek Lenten Service
Next Sunday	-9:00 a.m.	– Sunday School and Bible Class
	-10:00 a.m.	– Worship Service w/Holy Communion
	-11:15 a.m.	– Fellowship Hour

CLC News – Pastor Neal Radichel is recovering from a serious heart attack. He is expected to make a full recovery. Pastor Luke Bernthal is considering the call to Messiah of Eau Claire. Peace Thru Christ of Middleton has decided to reopen its school and has called Mrs. Leah Ude, a member of Messiah of Eau Claire.

ILC Academic Aid – Students planning to attend ILHS or ILC for the 2023-2024 school year are reminded that the deadline to apply for academic aid is May 1. Even if you do not plan to apply for aid, please let Pastor Roehl know if you are planning to attend ILC next fall.

The Season of Lent – Our special Lenten Season midweek services continue this Wednesday at 7pm.

Member Contact Sheet – Copies of the updated Member Contact list are available on the mailbox table. Please help yourself to as many copies as you might find useful.

Music Festival – Our first (hopefully annual) Music Festival is scheduled for Sunday, May 7. The service will include a greater focus on worship through music. For more information, and especially if you wish to participate, please see Sandy Roehl or Hope Mayhew.