

## Gaining Christ

Sunday, February 16, 2020 at The First Congregational Church of Marshalltown,  
Iowa

Scriptures: Philippians 3:8 Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ...

### Introduction

There's a parable that the Lord Jesus told about a man who found a great treasure hidden in a field. This treasure was so valuable that the man was willing to sell everything he had in order to buy the field. One way to interpret the parable is to identify the treasure as us. Jesus Christ was willing to give up everything for us. The Book of Hebrews mentioned that He despised the shame of the cross for the joy set before Him. I suspect that we-the church throughout the ages-are the joy set before Him. But the parable can be interpreted another way. In this interpretation the great treasure is Jesus Himself, and following Him has cost people everything, and they have found that it was still worth it to follow. This passage highlights that truth.

What kind of knowledge is the knowledge of Christ?

This kind of knowledge is that of personal acquaintance, which was priceless to the Apostle Paul. I suspect he referred to his encounter with Christ on the way to Damascus, but also his ongoing relationship with Christ in prayer. In order to experience the excellence of Jesus as Lord, you have to be willing to have a lord, someone who has authority over you, to whom you swear allegiance and obedience. It was that kind of knowledge that buoyed the Apostle when he wrote this epistle from a dirty, dank jail cell. Christ brought him through everything, and he had given up everything life had to offer him.

Know also that it is worth it.

Years ago, I sat in the Chapel at my alma mater as a student during one of the bi-weekly required chapel services, and listened to one of the best sermons I've ever heard. The fellow who spoke was an older man (I think his name was Howard Stegmann) who had spent years in the mission field and he reflected on the disparaging words the religious leaders said of Jesus as He hung on the cross: "He saved others, Himself He cannot save." Those religious leaders were trying to mock Jesus but the preacher saw a deeper meaning in the words. He noted that following Christ sometimes involve sacrifice, and the Christian sometimes has to give up all they hold dear in this life in order to follow. He spoke of his mother, also a life-long missionary, who grew up as part of a very wealthy family. While the parents may have held to some form of nominal Christianity, they did not approve when their

daughter announced that she wanted to be a missionary. That was for others, they reasoned. Their daughter was to get an excellent education at one of the top colleges of the nation, marry into a family of wealth and social prominence like their own, and work among the social elite of their city (I think it was Philadelphia). When they could not persuade her, they threatened. They warned her that if she entered the mission field they would disown her. They would not support her financially in any way. They would forbid her to contact her siblings, or anyone else in her family. They would deny her all the aforementioned pleasures and opportunities. They would close the gate to the estate and lock it. If she packed her suitcase and left for the mission field, they wanted her never to return. She would be dead to them.

She packed her suitcase and left. Years later, her son would ask her if she ever had any regrets and she confessed that sometimes she became very lonely for all her family and friends that she left behind. He mentioned to us, sitting in that chapel that day that she was an example of "saving others sometimes means that you cannot save yourself". She gave up a loving family and a charmed life for the mission field, because that was how she was to follow Christ. The price she paid was dear and painful, but, he finally said, it was worth it. If she had to do it all over again, she would and she would make the same choice.

Application: This is a note copied from the Spirit Filled Life Study Bible: "Understand that no personal achievements earn spiritual position. Do not be afraid to lose everything in your quest to know Christ. Make "knowing" Christ your main goal in life. Know that this quest always involves sacrifice and unselfish living." This is worth losing everything. That is the second and very comforting application to me. People have lost everything to follow Christ and they faced losing everything with no regrets.

### Conclusion

Following Christ often involves sacrifices. Some, like the Apostle Paul and the mother of Howard Stegmann, lose everything they hold dear. Christians in different parts of the world face the same sacrifices today. It required commitment to follow Christ, but people over the ages have followed Him and even those who lost everything in the process still say it was worth it. Christ is like that treasure in the field; He is worth giving up everything in order to gain Him.