

LOSS AND GAIN ON MY TRIP

If you were wondering why there was no midweek message last week it was because we were away on vacation. We flew to Las Vegas last week for a five-day holiday. Before we went, I met up with a friend who has gone to Las Vegas many times in order to get some insights from him about this city I had never visited before.

One of the things he shared with me is how Las Vegas is a city that is designed for people to lose. When he said this, he was referring to gambling in the casinos. I do not gamble so I was not worried about losing in this manner in Las Vegas. However, my friend's advice became a reality for one person I met at a show we attended on Friday night.

As we awaited the beginning of the show, I started up a conversation with the gentleman seated beside me who happened to be from North Carolina. He shared with me how earlier that day he lost \$300.00 at the casino. But, his loss in Vegas did not end there. Afterwards he went to a nearby Walgreens to purchase a few things he needed. When he pulled out his wallet to pay, he did not realize somebody in the store was watching him closely. He shared that when he put his wallet back into his pocket, he did not zip it up like he normally does.

The person who was watching him must have seen this because as this man made his way back to the hotel he was pick-pocketed. This was a bigger loss for him than the \$300.00 he lost earlier at the casino because all his identification and credit cards were taken. He admitted that after losing his wallet in this manner, he lost his temper and was not very pleasant to be around that afternoon.

Thankfully, by the time he got to the show, he was in better spirits and actually laughed when his partner said to him, "Maybe the magician tonight will make your wallet reappear!" For this one man, his stay in Las Vegas resulted in losing at the casino, losing his wallet to a pick-pocket, and losing his temper and patience, too. Just as my friend said, Las Vegas is a city designed for somebody to lose.

Just as some people view Vegas as being a place designed to make people experience loss, many view the idea of following Jesus in the same way. One of the reasons people view a relationship with Jesus as one designed to lose might have to do with their interpretation of His words in Mark 8:34-37:

If any of you wants to be my follower, you must turn from your selfish ways, take up your cross, and follow me. If you try to hang on to your life, you will lose it. But if you give up your life for my sake and for the sake of the Good News you will save it. And what do you benefit if you gain the whole world but lose your soul? Is anything worth more than your soul?

One thing about Jesus is He always makes it very clear to everyone what His expectations are when it comes to following Him. Some people would look at Jesus' words here and focus just on the losses involved. They might assume a life following Jesus is designed to experience no pleasure, satisfaction, or joy. While it is true that we make some sacrifices when it comes to following Jesus, what we give up is not meant for us to experience loss but rather to experience gain. Jesus makes it very clear here that the **most important gain we experience in following Him is to save our souls and enjoy the blessed assurance of eternal life both now and always.**

There are so many other gains we experience when it comes to a committed relationship with Jesus:

- we gain by carrying hope from Jesus' promises to us as we face challenges in our lives,
- we gain by following His perfect will for us instead of losing by making poor decisions in our efforts to always be in charge and in control,
- we gain by having a friend, helper, and Saviour always in Jesus,
- we gain by having the Holy Spirit come into our hearts to lead us into all the truths of Scripture,
- we gain by the Holy Spirit developing love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self control in us,
- we gain by serving Jesus in ways that we can bless more people than we can ever imagine.

These are just some of the gains we experience when it comes to a true and committed relationship with Jesus. It is true that we must lose leading a life of self-satisfaction and self-centeredness in order to follow Jesus, but we gain so much more by letting Christ, who knows better than we do what real life is, to guide us on paths that will be best for us.

For five days last week I was on vacation in a city designed for people to lose. I met one person who lost money playing in the casino as well as his wallet and identification as a result of being pick-pocketed. I imagine many more people like him experienced loss in Vegas over those five days. My experience was one of gain in Vegas. My family gained a much-needed vacation. We also gained some wonderful memories from the sights and shows we experienced while there. My other gain came from the power and peace that comes with prayer. During our five days in Vegas, we found ourselves there as Hurricane Hilary was hitting the west coast. While the news was telling us to brace for the worst, I was praying for God to give us His best to help us to leave Vegas safely. When we got to the airport Sunday night our flight was the only one all day that had not been cancelled or delayed. In a city designed for one to lose, we gained peace and assurance knowing God would safely guide us and He did exactly that.

Keep safe and God bless,

Pastor Dean