

PERSPECTIVE ON LIFE

I. Introduction

- Scripture chosen for today was already selected 05 Feb 2004
- These will sound familiar as we all have heard it from time to time ☺
- Other “familiar” passages from the Lord’s Word will be interspersed
- These familiar passages from scripture form a Perspective on Life that our sister in Christ, Hazel, lived and attempted to inculcate this perspective into all of us here
- I will be quoting from the New International Version of the Bible

II. Perspective I: Mark 8:36

Scripture text chosen by Hazel for today is Mark 8:36 - What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul?

Whenever we read anything from the Bible, the context is important from which the passages were read. Let me spend a moment providing relevant portions of Mark Ch#8 leading up to the text chosen for today.

Mark Ch#8 begins with the feeding of 4,000 men not counting women & children. This was two chapters in Mark after the feeding of 5,000 men, again not counting women & children.

In the middle portions of Chapter 8, Mark covers the healing of a blind man at Bethsaida, Peter’s confession of faith in answer to Jesus’ question, “Who do you say that I am?” Peter answered, “you are the Christ.”

Now toward the end of the chapter, Jesus predicts his death. Peter took Jesus aside and rebuked him, and this is where Jesus responds, “get behind me Satan!” “You do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men.”

This leads up to Jesus calling the crowd to him along with the disciples in verse 34. I now read from verses 34 to verses 38 which is the end of Mark Ch#8:

"If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. 35For whoever wants to save his life[c] will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it. 36What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul? 37Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul? 38If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when he comes in his Father's glory with the holy angels."

III. Gain/Lose Contrast

We could spend hours discussing examples of the contrasts of this text chosen for today. (Don’t worry; we won’t!) However, there are a few notable examples of the contrast between gaining the whole world, and forfeiting your soul.

- Adolph Hitler initially wanted “living space” for Germany, but continued on to eventually control all of continental Europe at his zenith.

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- Alexander the Great started out unifying what we know as Greece, but continued all around the Mediterranean to Egypt and inland all the way to India.
- King Solomon was made by the Lord to be the wisest and richest king of his time as scripture reveals in 1Kings 3:12 - I will give you a wise and discerning heart, so that there will never have been anyone like you, nor will there ever be. 13 Moreover, I will give you what you have not asked for—both riches and honor—so that in your lifetime you will have no equal among kings.

This was done for Solomon at a time in Earth's history when Israel ruled over the critical commercial and political regions of the known world.

Yet what can be said of these three examples?

- Hitler died in a bunker at his own hand about a day before Berlin was overrun by the Russians.
- Alexander died of unknown causes twelve years into his conquest, leaving a divided kingdom, Seleucids and Ptolemeys, that eventually fought against itself.
- Solomon's fate is best summed up in the words of Ecclesiastes 2:10-11 - I denied myself nothing my eyes desired; I refused my heart no pleasure. My heart took delight in all my work, and this was the reward for all my labor. 11 Yet when I surveyed all that my hands had done and what I had toiled to achieve, everything was meaningless, a chasing after the wind; nothing was gained under the sun.

As I interpret this, I see Solomon writing Ecclesiastes in a very depressed state of mind following a life of hedonism that left him out of the favor of God.

IV. Forfeit Consequences

To forfeit one's soul is to forfeit the grace that is already made available to us through the perfect suffering and death of our Lord Jesus Christ. Will any of these people just mentioned be someone you will see in Heaven? I can't say for sure, but the odds are against them being in Heaven. This is true even for Solomon who started out following the Lord, but turned from His word in just about every direction possible. As the writer to the Hebrews mentions in Hebrews 6:4-6

4It is impossible for those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, who have shared in the Holy Spirit, 5who have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the coming age, 6if they fall away, to be brought back to repentance, because[b]to their loss they are crucifying the Son of God all over again and subjecting him to public disgrace.

We can't interview anyone who has forfeit their soul, but we can get a good idea on the consequence of this forfeit from a parable Jesus taught as found in Luke 16:19-31

19"\"There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and lived in luxury every day. 20At his gate was laid a beggar named Lazarus, covered with sores 21and longing to eat what fell from the rich man's table. Even the dogs came and licked his sores. 22\"The time came when the beggar died and the angels carried him to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried. 23In hell,[c] where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side. 24So he called to him, 'Father Abraham, have pity on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water

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and cool my tongue, because I am in agony in this fire.' 25"But Abraham replied, 'Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, while Lazarus received bad things, but now he is comforted here and you are in agony. 26And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, so that those who want to go from here to you cannot, nor can anyone cross over from there to us.' 27"He answered, 'Then I beg you, father, send Lazarus to my father's house, 28for I have five brothers. Let him warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment.' 29"Abraham replied, 'They have Moses and the Prophets; let them listen to them.' 30" 'No, father Abraham,' he said, 'but if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent.' 31"He said to him, 'If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.' "

Our sister in Christ, Hazel, knew the perils of having your heart set on the wrong things of this Age. Another passage she repeated frequently goes along with the chosen text for today. It is found in 1Tim 6:10. I will read from 1Tim 6:6-10 to provide the context. I'm sure you will recognize a portion of this, and it serves as yet another one of those perspectives on life that Hazel had:

6But godliness with contentment is great gain. 7For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it. 8But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that. 9People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction. 10For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.

V. Eternal Regrets

Solomon, the rich man in Jesus' parable, and countless others had/have received their reward in this Age only to have eternal regrets for the wrongs they committed. Hazel would ask, "Is it worth it?" She understood the concept of eternity – an existence without the dimension of time. The three dimensions of this Age are length, mass, and time. But Heaven (and Hell) are two-dimensional in that time doesn't exist; only length and mass. When you contrast 70, 80, or even the 90+ years that Hazel lived – which seemed like a long time – against an existence without time, these amounts of years aren't even comparable to a drop of water in an ocean.

Hazel did know enough about the Lord to know that through Him, she would receive forgiveness for all the wrongs she committed in her life. By the way, we used to call wrongs in life, "sin". This forgiveness is necessary because God the Father will have nothing to do with sin. We see that already in Genesis Ch#3, the third chapter of the entire Bible, where in verses 23 & 24 we read:

23 So the LORD God banished him from the Garden of Eden to work the ground from which he had been taken. 24 After he drove the man out, he placed on the east side [e] of the Garden of Eden cherubim and a flaming sword flashing back and forth to guard the way to the tree of life.

No one is allowed into the paradise that we were banished from due to that original sin. It has been this way ever since our first parents, Adam & Eve, sinned. Now before you put all the

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blame on Adam & Eve for your inability to get into Heaven, keep in mind that we all sin daily, and were never received or needed training on how to sin. It's in our nature to sin and we do a mighty good job of it!

This, however, is the beauty of our Lord Jesus! Jesus came to reconcile us with the Father, who was the one who ordered all sinners out of paradise, AND no sinners to be allowed in ever again! Jesus reconciled us by atoning for that first sin we inherited when we were conceived, and all the sins we have committed since that time. Paul writes in Rom 5:19

For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous.

Let me say it again, because this is extremely important. Jesus not only died for that original sin that we inherited, but also for each and every sin that you have committed: past; present; and the ones you will still commit before you die! In the Old Testament times (the Old Covenant), many sacrifices had to be made to atone for the sins of the people. These sacrifices were done after the priest first atoned for his own sins. However, in the New Covenant, Jesus fulfilled the Law by sacrificing Himself once and for all so that all the sins of the world are atoned for. And Jesus was in position to make this offer, because he was without sin. And rest assured, this perfect sacrifice made by Jesus was done that one time on Golgatha, and that sacrifice is the only one necessary. As the writer to the Hebrews mentioned in Heb 10:18

And where these have been forgiven, there is no longer any sacrifice for sin.

Furthermore, Paul writes in Rom 8:1-2

1Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus,[a] 2because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death.

VI. Religious Training

Hazel learned this as an adult confirmand. She was confirmed at Concordia Lutheran Church in Benedict, ND in 1936 at 20 years old. As she recounted her confirmation experience to me once, she was attending instructions classes, pregnant with Marian, but nonetheless learning!

Hazel also learned something way back then that gives us the hope that we will someday be reunited with her in Heaven. It is that classic hallmark of Lutheranism found in Eph 2:8-9

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— 9not by works, so that no one can boast.

Our salvation doesn't depend upon what we think or feel on any given day. Our salvation is found in what Christ has done for us!

Hazel believed this so much that it was incumbent upon her to train her children, grandchildren, and even great-grandchildren in the ways of the Lord. All of us in this room can remember Hazel insisting that we learn what was assigned to us from the Lutheran Catechism. I can remember coming home for lunch from Longfellow Elementary School and having to recite the memory work assigned by Sunday School or Catechism Class for that week. This is a faithfulness to teaching the Lord's word similarly described by the Apostle Paul in his 2nd letter to Timothy where we read:

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I have been reminded of your sincere faith, which first lived in your grandmother Lois and in your mother Eunice and, I am persuaded, now lives in you also. Lois and Eunice took it upon themselves to educate Timothy in the ways of the Lord, and Hazel followed that example with us all. Praise be to God for this faithfulness! We now know the Lord because she was the first to introduce us to the Lord.

VII. Final Thoughts

So what should we take from all of this? Hazel was a believer in God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit – Three distinct persons in one God. She knew about her original sin, and her subsequent sinfulness. She also knew the grace of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, who though He knew no sin, took upon Himself all sin so that we are cleansed from that sin. We therefore can obtain the promise of our Lord found at the beginning of John Ch#14:

1"Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. 2In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. 3And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.

Let's examine where she is at this very moment, where all who accept Christ and have gone before us have taken up residence:

1Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. 2I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. 3And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. 4He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away."

I entreat you to read the entire chapter of Revelation 21 to not only understand the conditions of Hazel's new residence, but also a description of the vast wealth & glory that is there – a wealth & glory that the Apostle Paul writes in Romans 5:15

18I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.

This wealth & glory is available to all of us here who are still in this veil of tears. It was Hazel's greatest gift given to us; that we would come to know and develop a personal relationship with Christ so that we will have eternal life. It is her life we celebrate today and live out the legacy of her faithfulness, so that we too will be with her and the Lord for eternity.

Let us now end this examination of scripture by singing praises to our Lord in words of the Common Doxology:

Praise God from whom all blessings flow;
Praise Him all creatures here below;
Praise Him above ye heavenly host:
Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost! Amen.