

November 23, 2025

Last Sunday of the Church Year

“Enduring Profit”

Malachi 3:13-18, Luke 23:27-43

“It is vain to serve God. What is the profit of our keeping his charge or of walking as in mourning before the LORD of hosts?” Yahweh accuses the Jews of speaking this way about 400 years before Christ walked the earth. But that kind of thinking didn’t disappear with Christ. The same question is aimed at Jesus. “What profit is there in keeping Jesus’ instruction and following His call to faith?” The assumed answer is, of course, none.

This is true, at least according to the way that most people define the word profit. When we talk about making a profit we are talking about wealth: money, assets, possessions, toys, the stuff of the world. That isn’t what you get following Jesus.

Look at Him. Prior to His passion, what was His life? Born to peasants. A humble upbringing as his family eked out a living under Roman tyranny and taxation. He enters into His ministry and...nothing profitable. “The Son of Man has nowhere to lay down His head,” He says. A vagabond existence; a ministry supported by the charity of others. And it comes to an end in what we have before us in the Gospel reading today: mocking, torture, naked and crucified. No profit to be seen at all.

And the life to which He calls His followers? Humility. Service. Sacrifice. It’s not just lack of profit; it can mean actual loss, even suffering, even death! It’s no wonder that so many people look at this crucified Christ and turn away. There is no profit to be seen, so they seek it elsewhere than the scandal and shame of the cross.

Even within the Christian church we struggle with this idea of profit. And I’m not even talking about those ridiculous fellows who preach earthly rewards for faith in Jesus. I’m talking about Lutherans. This can be very obvious in our giving to the church. We’re called on to give firstfruits of our blessings, but how often do we reduce it to a cost/benefit analysis and guarding against any infringement on our “profit margin”? There may be some here right now who resent me even bring this topic up. Why is that? Threat to profits?

And it’s not just wealth. It’s our time and focus. What’s behind us putting off prayer and devotion time, attending Bible studies or church activities, even Sunday service? Well, isn’t it that we’d rather spend that time on stuff we consider more valuable to us, aka more profitable? It’s true. We set our priorities based on what we treasure most. Very often the things of the world are more appealing than the things of God.

And where do we choose to aim our minds? What manner of things do you choose to think about when you have the time to just think? Do we stare at a screen? Worry? Daydream? Is it always the distractions or pressures or dreams of this world to which we turn because they’re more “profitable” to our desire of pleasure or a threat to such desires?

I’m not saying it is evil to consider finances or to manage your time and responsibilities or even to think about frivolous things or stare at a screen for a while. The world is where we live now and the worldly has its proper place with us, of course. I’m saying that when it comes to profit/blessing/reward, we have a tendency to rank the worldly way, way too high.

But think about it. When you take your last breath in this life and your body separates from your eternal soul, is all of that earthly stuff still profit, or is it loss? It’s obviously loss! It’s all going away. The old saying is true: you can’t take it with you. None of it lasts. Ultimately, it profits you nothing. The worldly and foolish operate by that familiar adage, “Whoever dies with the most toys wins,” and ignore the truth that “Whoever dies with the most toys is still dead.” There is no profit to be had in death.

But if you stay at the cross, if you follow and seek to imitate the Christ who never sought that which the world calls profit, what is it you receive? You receive what He is purchasing there.

“Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.” You receive the intercession of Christ in the midst of the loss of death. This is exactly what Jesus is doing there on the cross—taking our loss upon Himself. He is taking death—the consequence and curse of our sin and rebellion upon Himself so that the Father will regard this prayer for our forgiveness—and grant us reconciliation and life—enduring profit, if you even want to call it that; it seems like to small and worldly a word to even use for the blessings the Father bestows through Christ.

“He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.” The profit St. Paul writes about is nothing of the world. The profit of belonging to Christ is to receive His enduring kingdom that is not of this world. The profit is to receive, after everything of this world is a total loss in death, life forever; perfect life everlasting.

Like I said, true profit, or maybe better said, enduring profit, is not of this world. This world is like, and I apologize if this memory is painful for any of you, but considering things of this world more valuable and profitable than Jesus is like investing in Enron stock. For you younger folks, Enron was this company everyone thought was the next big thing in energy and for a while all the investors were flying high as the stock soared. But it was all a lie, a Ponzi scheme destined to crash and burn. That’s the fate of this world and those who cling to it. The profits it promises are ultimately a total loss.

And I thought about comparing the Kingdom of Heaven believers inherit to Bitcoin, but that doesn’t work. No earthly metaphor works. It’s all loss. When you recognize that truth the only place to turn has no metaphor; it’s Jesus, the Gospel, the promise that keeps us enduring through this broken life and fallen world to the perfect one yet to come.

“What is the profit of our keeping his charge or of walking as in mourning before the LORD of hosts?”

This silly question should be turned on its head for we who kneel at the foot of Christ’s cross. The question makes it all about us. But the profit isn’t really ours. It’s Christ’s. He looks upon mankind and sees what the Father greatly values—His created people—and redeems us with His life and blood. He is purchasing us back from the loss we cause God in our sin. Look at so many of Christ’s parables—it is God filling the wedding hall, bringing the servants into the vineyard, gathering His sheep. We were lost to death and Satan and hell. In Jesus Christ we are blessed to be God’s gain for eternity!

So in the end I guess it is all about how one defines the word profit. If it’s all about you in the world, then then that is what you’ll receive in the judgment, realizing too late that it has always been a worthless investment, a total loss.

If you recognize that it is all about God’s plan of salvation, His gaining the profit of a holy people redeemed for His eternal possession, this must change how you view this world of loss and your life today in it, even the way you view your own death. You want to be kneeling at the cross. You want to be the object of Christ’s intercession. You want to be the profit for God that is redeemed from the world.

Baptized into Christ, you most surely are, because that’s how God has worked and what He has promised. Lift this truth up in your heart when you are dealing with what is supposedly profitable in life. Remember that you belong to His kingdom forever; here you’re just living among the loss for a bit until the King calls you, who He values so highly, home.

Amen.