



Questions Jesus asked (Part 2)

What Good is it to Gain the World but Lose your Soul

Pastor Ted Cunningham

Last week, Travis kicked off a series called *Questions Jesus Asked*. He really started with a very important understanding for us is to make sure we are following the biblical, historical Jesus, not the one we sometimes want to create and form to fit our needs and desires and wants. That's really going to pick up today with the big question we are going to ask, but I just want to start... I've had friends challenge me this year. I have had several pastor friends that went on social media fasts. Many of them took their church on a social media fast. I found out about it on social media, which was kind of weird. But one such friend is Alex Himaya, and he got off social media for a month. I was talking to him at the end of that fast and I said, "Are you going back?" and he said, "I don't know. I can't tell you what it did for my mental health to be off of it altogether."

It challenged me. I didn't go on a complete fast, but I did... I've not scrolled as much. I got back on it for the purpose of this next illustration. But my algorithm and Amy's algorithm are very different. I don't know if you know this, but you are getting played. They want you to be mad and fearful. At 52, my algorithm now is all about health, wellness, and finance. That's all I get and it's getting weird. I was told I'm shortening my life. A lot of posts on this. Shortening my life by using mouth wash. That one hit me the other day. I read that article. I'm killing all the good bacteria. I tried to tell my wife how much I thought this was funny and she was like, "You need to take that seriously."

And then another one... I hope this is going to other people and not just me. Explaining to me how dangerous it is for my health and how I'm taking years off my life sleeping under a ceiling fan. I've been doing this my whole life. I told

Amy... I said “When I die, at my funeral, I want you to get up... people are going to be asking how I died and here’s exactly what I want you to tell them. And with conviction and a tear, and a lower lip quiver, say, “It was the mouth wash and the ceiling fan.” With one last fresh breath, he breathed in that air from the fan and that was it, and he was gone.

Can you say ridiculous? And now, I’m also getting this how much money do you need in your retirement to have enough. As a pastor who is really tired of pastoring, I tune into those algorithm message every day. I want to know. Just so you know, I’m pastoring until I’m 93. But Mr. Wonderful from Shark Tank came on my thread and told me the magic number... Now, you have to watch the motive behind all this too. The magic number is 5 million dollars. If the person you are sitting next to didn’t even flinch at that, they got 5 million dollars.

Again, this isn’t about having this much money... I want you to get what the motive is, because do you know what Mr. Wonderful says. He says, “You want five million dollars so no one can ever tell you what to do again. Okay, are you paying attention to that, follower of Jesus? Live your own live, be your own person, you don’t have to answer to anyone, and 5 million will allow you to do that.

But I want to remind you freedom loving Americans in the room. If you are a citizen of the United States of America, you submit to laws. You understand that, right? Now, we are very grateful to live in a nation... Iran can’t say this this morning, but we live in a nation where if we don’t like the law, we can change them. We have a system. It’s really easy... It’s not easy. But it’s still a system. If you don’t like the law that you live under, you can change it. But you still submit to authorities. If you get pulled over today, or the lights go on behind you, pull over. That’s called submission. You don’t get to do what you want whenever you want. You’re a member of this church. Guess what. You submit to the authority of the church. If you are a Christian, you submit to the authority of God’s Word. This idea of be my own person, live my own live, nobody is going to tell me what to do... Then you go a little bit further. How much of this are you seeing? This demanding of our rights and our ways. Not the laying down of our lives or our ways, but the “I want it my way.” Health, wellness, and finances.

Today, Jesus is going to ask a question and it's a choice. You can choose the world or your soul. It's not both. Here's the question as we go to Part 2. ***What good is it to gain the whole world but lose your soul.*** I'm going to tell you today, don't make that trade. You don't want to get to the end of your life and see everything you lived for and everything you pursued and go, *it was a complete and total waste of time. I pursued everything that the world offered. And by the way, what the world offers, it can't deliver on. It can't give you satisfaction. So, life is all about choices. We're making choices every day. Every choice is a trade. You're trading it for something. Some trade their mental health for clicks, fame, only to exhaust themselves and burn out. Some trade their integrity for the next big deal Only to develop a shady reputation. You've had that subcontractor at your house.*

Some will trade sex for acceptance and love only to have their heart broken. Some trade time to chase success in business only to blink and their kids are now adults and gone. They traded their family for a career or business. I know that's the story for many in this room and across campus and that watch online. Again, this church is not about sending people on guilt trips. This church, what we tell you to do is do not feed your regrets, ask Jesus to redeem your remaining days. If you traded your family for that business or that career and you're still breathing, the Bible is very clear in Ecclesiastes 9: 4 – ***anyone among the living still has hope.*** You can make the most of the time that you have. Maybe you've made a terrible trade for something in your life. Let's just admit it, we've all done it. We had a decision to make and we went with this and we regretted it soon thereafter.

Some of you made a terrible mistake trade for something that has left you empty, isolated, lonely, angry or hurt, and you now live in the pain of trading your soul for worldly things. You do not want to get to the end of your life and realize you made a terrible trade. You don't want to be in that hospital bed with seconds left on the clock going *I didn't not make a good trade.*

What good is it to gain the world but lose your soul.

We want to look at three things today that you and will trade for following Jesus. And I'm going to tell you, Don't make the trade. Every song we have been singing today is all about following Jesus and what it costs and what it takes. these three things will keep us from following Jesus.

The first one is the **love of the world**. the love of the world keeps you from following Jesus. Everything that the world offers, we go after it. we want it. the Bible is clear in 1 John 2: 15 – ***Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in them.*** We have a choice to make.

It's interesting that Jesus said, when you follow me, the world is going to hate you. we say it all the time around here... That's not a challenge for you believer to go looking for people to hate you. it's just submitting to the Lordship of Jesus christ, and following Christ and following his word will make people hate you. and for some of you in this room, it's your own family that has turned against you for following Christ. We are going to be hated by the world, but why is it we so easily and so quickly pursue the things of the world. so, what we will do... We'll think in our mind maybe we're not even thinking this consciously. But subconsciously we're going *I want everything the world gives me, but I also want Jesus. So, I go to woodland hills on Sunday, and I get my little shot of Jesus. But I want to go out and spend the rest of the week doing everything and accepting everything that the world gives. I want it all.* And Jesus is telling you today you can't have it all. You have to choose. Don't love the world or anything in the world.

So, let's just look at this list for just a second. We're going to see this today. As you see this list of what the world offers us... I want to make it clear, money, whether you have five million in your account or five bucks I in your account, money is not the issue. It's the love of money. We're going to look at that in the third point to be very clear.

But some of us have traded for this right here and the chasing of the buck. You've been greedy to get rich. You've been arrogant in your wealth. You are holding on and trusting in wealth more than you are God. We want status. We want prestige and we want position. Some of you won't take a job until you know what the title is. You love titles and you want that and you want to be known for that. You want to be able to put that on your card with all the letters or acronyms behind it. We want acceptance. We want people to like us, but Jesus said, if you follow me, they hated me Jesus said. So, don't be shocked when they hate you too. If you follow me, you are going to receive the same type of push back that I have and will continue to receive. We want comfort. That's half my algorithm. We're going to

make your 50s and sixties pretty pain free, Ted. It ain't happening yet, but I haven't bought their stuff. I get this all the time. I don't want you to learn this theology in the last seconds of your life when you're just praying for an easy, suffering free- final moment. You've not been promised a suffering-free life, but we want comfort. The world offers us comfort. We want safety. Unless you grew up in the 80's, your parents didn't care much about that. We want pain free, easy, I'm not really going to take any risk type of life. The world offers us all of this. And here's what happens. When you become a Christian and you really start to study and understand your bible, you realize the things of the world are not what we are to be pursuing. I don't even think we mean to do this, but... we don't make a trade, what we say is I still want all this, I'm just not going to take it from the world, I want to follow a Jesus that will give me all this. And what we do is we start painting the picture of Jesus we want. We start forming Jesus how we want.

I love hearing all the stories about revival breaking out around our country on college campuses, but every time I see it my first thought is I hope they are falling in love with a Biblical, Historical Jesus, not one they are crating. Not one that just feeds their emotions, but that truly is following after Christ.

Kyle Idleman, a pastor I deeply respect from Southeast Christian Church... he'll be joining us next summer for a family reunion series. He just wrote a book called *The Missing Messiah*, where he addresses this. The forming Jesus in our image to give us what we want, on the terms we want, we want to follow him on our terms and here's what he says in that book: The Jesus of modern western Christianity isn't the Messiah the first Christians knew. He goes on to say, and I think he makes some great points and he's very fair. He doesn't cherry pick things. His research is very balanced in this.

He asked college students this question as he studied and researched for the book. What features or attributes would you want in your ideal spiritual leader? What are you looking for in a spiritual leader or a spiritual mentor.

Here are some, not all, but some of the answers they received. The college student said, I'm looking for a guide who helps me figure out my life.

A figure who gives me hope but doesn't demand too much. Someone to meet my needs but doesn't make demands. Someone who understands I mess up, but they are not going to make me feel guilty. I need someone to give me spiritual guidance without all the religious rules. I need a mentor who helps me become my best self.

We get that a lot. Like, become the best version of yourself. Someone who focuses on love and acceptance, but not judgment. I'm looking for a spiritual figure who helps me achieve balance and success in life.

Kyle says, "They didn't want a spiritual leader who points them to a kingdom and a higher standard. They weren't looking for a faith that demands allegiance, surrender, obedience, or sacrifice. They didn't want a king. They wanted a consultant. They weren't seeking the Lord. They wanted a coach. But then he asked this question... and this is on all of us. He said, "Can you blame them? Isn't this the Jesus we marketed to them? Isn't this the Jesus many of them were raised on with all the happier, healthier, sermons they heard in the church growing up? Can you blame them for looking for this? This is precisely the Jesus who we marketed to them. A Jesus who meets their needs, secures their afterlife, but doesn't command their devotion or transform their world.

Jesus came for a far greater purpose than to advance your career, ease your anxiety, and make you happy, healthier, and wealthier. The transactional gospel has produced a transactional Jesus who offers heavenly benefits with minimal earthly disruption. Let's sit in that for just a moment. We want a Jesus who saves us, who rescues us from hell, but doesn't really mess with our life here upon this earth. Maybe today we start following Jesus in a way that gives major earthly disruption.

This week, I reached a point where I'm studying this and reading this and I'm going *Lord, disrupt it all*. I go back to ministry years and years and years ago. We go back to when we started and the motives we had and the emotions we had around the whole thing. When it was smaller, it was one on one with people. Then God does a work and things grow, but you can't keep up with everybody's name, you can't keep up with everything going on. And there are times I'm like, *Lord, Disrupt it*. disrupted what people are thinking and their thoughts. Make it

about following you, not just our comfort and coffee on Sunday. By the way, I love coffee, but there is way more to it than that. That's part of our fellowship and I love it, but we need Jesus to disrupt earth for us. We placed him in our shopping cart along with our lifestyle choices and personal preferences. We've accepted his offer of eternal life someday. We will take eternal life, but we also want his role to be personal cheerleader, life coach, therapist, political ally, and success guru while we wait.

Kyle asked this question... I think it's a question we all need to ask this morning. *Are you willing to meet the real Jesus even if he doesn't match the version you've created?* Are you willing to meet and follow the real Jesus. Because the love of the world will keep you from following him. The love of self keeps you from following Jesus.

I want to be really clear here where we are going. We are now getting to the big question of the morning. Not talking right now about self-care. Amy says sometimes I get on this to where you think my health doesn't matter at all. No, I get that you need to take care of yourself but for the purpose of being healthy to serve others and pour into others, but we are going to talk now about denying yourself to follow Jesus. The love of self keeps you from following Jesus.

Here's what Jesus says in Matthew 16: 24 and 5. He said to his disciples, **whoever wants to be my disciple...** And then the language here is ***whoever wants to come after me and follow me and call me their Lord, must deny themselves and take up their cross.*** And you can't have one without the other. If you are going to take up your cross, you have to deny yourself. Denying yourself comes with a cost in order to take up your cross and follow Jesus.

I was thinking this week, and it's been in my thoughts for a couple of weeks now. As conflict broke out in the Middle East, I just think about the soldiers, which is really the mindset we are all supposed to have when it comes to following Jesus. You get up and you go in to battle with no thought of self-preservation. Obviously, there is safety equipment, and I get all of that. But you have a task and you have a mission, and for some already it's cost them their lives. Do you think when the deputies ran into the woods in the middle of the night under the cover of

darkness that they were thinking I just need to do whatever I can... no, they went in with what they are called to do.

Any time I think about someone risking their life, giving their life for someone else, this is what it means to deny yourself and follow Jesus.

In verse 24, **to take up your cross**. Now, understand in the Roman Empire, convicted criminals were forced to carry their cross to the place of their execution. And here's why that image was so important to the Roman leaders. They wanted to parade their full of shame and suffering and embarrassment and all that. They wanted to parade them through the street so that people could see them carrying this cross and here's what that image meant. This person who broke the law, they, are now submitted to it. They wanted everybody to see that so it would change behavior.

Jesus now takes this and says, this is the death I am going to die and if you want to follow me, this is about submitting to me, not yourself, not your ways, not what you want you want, what you're looking for, and your desire. Sometimes we think about that verse of he will give us the desires of our heart. Are the desires of your heart his desires? Sometimes we take that world list, and we think those are my desires so now I'm going to come to Jesus he's going to give me all of this. No, it's about denying ourselves.

Verse 25 Supports that. **Whoever wants to save their life, will lose it.** for whoever wants everything that the world gives and wants the comfort and the ease and the safety, they are going to lose it, but whoever loses their live turns from that will find it, in other words will have eternal life.

So, let's go back to that world list for just a second. We're wanting from the world, acceptance, glory, fame, the clicks, the likes, we want comfort, we want safety, but what does the cross bring. If you're going to take up your cross, Jesus is saying you are going to take all this on. You're not going to get acceptance; you are getting opposition. Taking up the cross means people are going to hate you. You're going to get shame. These people were hung on crosses naked. The shame that can come with the cross. The suffering. This was an excruciating death. This wasn't a fast death. This was a slow excruciating painful death. And ultimately death, not our safety. Jesus is saying, you come to me and follow me, are you

prepared to take all of that on? That's why this passage is the most essential passage for discipleship in the four gospels. This is Jesus saying this is the cost of following me. will you pay this price.

And then Verse 26 – is the question Jesus is asking today, and it's a rhetorical question. You remember when you were in elementary school learning what rhetorical questions were. Basically, with a rhetorical question, the answer is in the question. So, when the question is asked, you just return it to the teacher in the form of a statement. So, let's look at the question. *What good will it be for someone to gain the whole world yet forfeit their soul?* The answer is very simple. There is nothing to gain from the whole world. if you go for the whole world and you get to the end of your life... and you've known people that have done this. They got to the end of their life and everything the world had to offer they achieved. Yet we are still missing something. They traded their soul for the whole world.

Or *what can anyone give in exchange for their soul?* The answer is nothing. You cannot buy your way. There's nothing you can do to earn eternal life. There is nothing you can do to buy your way out of hell. It is a gift of God, through Christ Jesus, and that's the gift if you're choosing that today, and you choose to follow Jesus, you are choosing to deny yourself, take up your cross and follow Him.

Paul gives us an example of this in two verses; we see this whole point illustrated. He said, ***but whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What's more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus, my Lord for who's sake I have lost all things.*** He is living this out in real time.

So, today, if you came in here with nothing, you should leave full of joy knowing if you have Jesus, you have everything. He is all you need. You should still go to work tomorrow. You need to eat. But he says, I've lost all things. I'm here broke... think about what the disciples have gone through. Think about what Paul went through. You can list all the suffering that they endured and it's sitting hungry imprisoned, I think about this. I have Christ. I have everything.

He says, ***those things of the world, I consider them garbage that I may gain Christ. Not only do I have nothing, but I have Christ. I want more of Christ. Don't make the trade. You have Jesus, you have everything.***

The love of money will keep you from following Jesus. ***Going back to the first part of that list I mentioned at the beginning. 1 Timothy 6:10 – for the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil*** so get that squared away in your theology. Money is not evil. Whether you have five million or five bucks in here money is ***not the*** issue. It's the love of money that gets people into all sorts of trouble. Some people eager for money have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.

Go down a few verses to verse 17 of 1 Timothy 6. ***Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant in order to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. There it is. Just don't get it backward. You can have nice things.***

Eat your food with gladness, drink your wine with a joyful heart for now God favors what you do. You can eat and enjoy what has been provided to you, but don't pursue that and forget about Christ. Don't enjoy and receive the blessings and forget the one who gave them to you. Don't lose sight of your priorities. We don't worship creation, we worship the creator, but he richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. ***Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, to be generous and willing to share. In this way, they will lay up treasures for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age and look at this. If this is how you choose to live, denying self, freeing yourself from the love of money,*** they may take hold of the life that is truly life. And my friends, that life is in Christ. Understand he gives you everything and you give your life to him, you take up your cross and follow after him, receive the blessing, enjoy the blessings that he gives you, but he is truly your life, not the things of this world.

I want to end by sharing a personal story, one that Amy and I have been talking about quite a bit about the last couple of weeks.

I now can say he is my favorite politician. I used to say it was Ronald Reagan, but now it's this guy right here. Ben Sasse. He's as good as they come. He would make a fantastic president. Some of you are going, are you getting into politics right now? Yep. He's one of the most brilliant individuals I know, a Harvard Grad, Yale grad. He Went to high school with my wife at Fremont High. I always love that. Harvard, Yale, and Fremont High in Nebraska.

He served as a United States senator for Nebraska for eight years. After that he went to be the president of the University of Florida. If you ever google Ben Sasse, some of the best clips you'll ever see coming out of the United States Senate are him in committee meetings. One of my favorite ones is where he's at the far end and he takes the time that's been allotted not really even to address the issue going on in committee, but he goes, I would like to take this time to remind my colleges how a bill becomes a law. He takes us all back to Junior High and teaches us how a bill becomes a law. I've not heard a politician explain how government works better than Ben Sasse. He gets it and he understands it.

In December, he was diagnosed with stage four pancreatic cancer. At 53 years old, the doctor says he has 90 days to live. I want to encourage you to go to this interview. He's not dressed like a politician. He's dressed like a farmer from Nebraska. This is at the Hoover Institution. If I was told I had 90 days to live, I would come and give you one last sermon probably and then spend the rest of my time with my family. I'm thinking that's what I would do. Ben has turned it on. He's in clinical study at MD Anderson. He has cancer in every major organ, tumors up and down his spine. When you watch this interview, he's struggling and wrestling through it. He gives an hour-long interview explaining how government works, as he is hyped up on morphine and he's still clear as can be.

If I'm ever way hyped up on morphine, you want to tune into that interview, but for very different reasons. It's interesting to watch. The interview is very professional, very stoic, but he's asking Ben questions and Ben just says, for me, it's all about redeeming the time I have left. He says the storehouses we build won't last, but human souls will. And then he kept quoting this and this is why I love it... To live is Christ, to die is gain. I think that's why he was voted in by Nebraska to be their Senator. He's the most censured Senator in Nebraska. A secure is when your party gives you an official reprimand. That means he didn't

fall in line with a party. When his party went away from this, Ben said, no I'm not going that that way.

We need more politicians like that, ones that don't fall in line with a party.

Take up your cross and follow "Christ. Prioritize him. Sometimes, my party is going to go that way, other times it won't. The interviewer says, "With the clock ticking, why are you still doing so much? He says, "I've just learned at this point in my life, what is most important and what's not important at all. And then he made this statement and I hope you sit with this all week. He said, you can play a lot of basketball in the last 60 seconds."

I've been to a lot of NBA basketball games where these guys make millions of dollars a year. They don't even really put their heart into the first half. It's interesting to watch. They are out there and it's almost like there are warming up. By the third quarter they turn it on. The most exciting basketball I've ever watched takes place in the last couple of minutes.

I'm looking around the room at a lot of people who are in their last 60 seconds. Some of you are in your last quarter. Some of you are in the third quarter. Some of you, the game just started. You're in the first quarter. To live is Christ to die is gain. Don't get to the end of your life and say, I have made a terrible trade. I went and did everything the world offered. I wanted everything the world offered. Get to the end of your life and let your family be gathered around you and say, "Jesus is real. He is the son of the most high God. I put everything on him, and I'm going to be with him now." And you tell your kids and your grand kids. The buzzer is about to go off on me, but you live your life, play hard, not for the world, but for Christ. Make sure you are on the right team. Deny yourself, take up your cross, and follow him

I'm going to ask that you bow your head and as we close our time, there are some that are making a terrible trade right now. And your week is all about the world and Sunday you give an hour for Jesus. I'm asking you to stop making that trade today. Repent of the worldly things that you've been seeking and the life you've been living to seek power, prestige, the pursuits of this world and not following Christ and taking up your cross. Repent of your sin. You've never placed faith in Jesus, that today would be the day that you would repent of your sin confess with

you mouth Jesus is Lord, believe in your heart that he's been raised from the dead that you would be saved

Father, that this church would truly follow Jesus, denying ourselves, taking up our cross and following him. May this church be a church that reflects the love of Christ in every thing that we do for one another in this church and those outside of this church.

Thank you for the continued blessing that you pour upon this church. we all this authority of the name of Jesus, amen.