

“Trading Up”

Luke 12:49-56

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A Dale Murphy baseball card. Growing up, this was the white whale, the elusive item that if I could just find then my life would be complete. I used to purchase Donruss baseball cards at the gas station next to my mom’s work after school because they were cheaper and the odds were I would actually get one of these cards. I think they cost 25 cents a pack, and they even came with gum (which was useless) and I spent every dime I ever got or thought I might get on those packs of cards in the hopes of seeing the great Braves outfielder show up in the middle of my purchase.

And finally the day came. I don’t remember the exact moment or the excitement I felt when I got that card. I just remember that my search was over. I had DALE MURPHY the greatest Brave player that I had ever heard of – granted, my baseball knowledge was very thin, having not realize Hank Aaron was a Brave too.

I remember going to school the next day and showing off my trophy. Some of my buddies ridiculed me because I bought Donruss and not Topps but I didn’t care. I cared that it was a baseball card with Dale Murphy on the front and his stats on the back. And I was so proud. I decided the other kids were just jealous.

And then the offers started. I will give you 10 cards for Dale Murphy. I looked at the kid like he was dumb, but asked, “What 10 cards?” They were trash. I could have spit on them. Not a Brave in the bunch. And then the offers poured in. I will give you a Bruce Benedict for that one – which was tempting because I had a soft spot for the Braves catcher and I didn’t have that card – but, no, I couldn’t let go of my trophy. I will give you a Pete Rose. Nope, don’t even like that guy (that one may have been a mistake). How about a rookie Rod Carew? (Again a mistake – Carew made the Hall of Fame.)

Until I heard these words – I will give you 10 Johnny Bench cards for that Dale Murphy. And he knew he had me. I collected Johnny Bench cards ever since I heard a vague reference to the Hall of Fame catcher in a Bill Cosby routine. I figure if Bill liked the guy, he HAD to be worth something. And these were 10 Topps cards! They were worth something! But I hesitated, remember the trouble I went to searching for this card. And the kid started pulling back the Johnny Bench cards like an expert fisherman – he felt the tug but sometimes you give some line before you reel it in. And then I said it: “Deal!”

I was called stupid at least 10 times that day. But Dale Murphy was traded later, and he was no longer my hero. And Johnny Bench did make the Hall of Fame. And looking back, I can’t help but smile. I had made a trade. And it was the right trade to make.

I have missed many great opportunities for trades in my life. Most of the things I could have gotten good money for now sit in my parent’s attic – along with those Johnny Bench cards – collecting dust and fading.

But one trade I don’t regret is giving up my life for Jesus Christ.

You see, that is what Jesus is speaking of in this passage – and in many more like it. He is talking about the trade-off we have to make to follow Him. One of the grossest inaccuracies you may have heard during your life is that Jesus Christ offers you new life without cost. In a sense that is true, but not really. Nothing worth having comes without a cost. Nothing really valuable doesn't cost dearly.

Jesus told a parable of a man who sold everything he had to buy a unique pearl. Jesus told a story as well of a man who found a field that was unnoticed by many and sold all that he had to obtain it. These aren't simply nice parables or stories. Jesus says the kingdom of heaven is like this. What Jesus offers requires a total commitment, not a partial commitment.

Jesus told story after story about this. Two men want to follow Jesus but have other commitments that seem fair – a man's father was dying and another wanted to say goodbye to his family. Jesus said neither was worthy of following Him. Total commitment.

There comes a moment in each of our lives when we face a kid with 10 Johnny Bench cards who wants our Dale Murphy, and we have to ask ourselves, "Do I really want to make this trade?" Can I live without my family? Can I live without my job, or cable television, or shopping whenever I want, or eating out several nights a week? At what point do we say, "It's just not worth it"?

What Jesus Christ offers us is eternal life ... but. And that is one big but. That maybe the biggest but you ever encounter in a sentence. But ... you have to change your life completely. Or at the very least try your best to live your life like Him. That is a huge thing. And it is meant to be.

I hear people talk about big decisions that changed their life all the time. The decision to get married, choosing a major in college, taking a job, deciding to have children, etc., all make their list. But none of those holds a candle to the decision to make Jesus Christ our Lord.

Jesus wanted us to understand this decision. Many people heard these words of Jesus and left Him, saying it was impossible. I think many people as well stayed with Him, but never really tried to do what He was saying. Luke, in writing Acts, mentions two people who weren't totally committed named Ananias and Sapphira. They weren't bad people, but they lied about their commitment to the early church. The Bible implies it wasn't that they didn't give everything they had that caused the issue but the lying about it. And in that moment, God struck them down. They are the only two people in the New Testament to be struck down by God. This distinction was to be a warning to all of us: be careful about making promises to God you can't keep. That is the warning of Ecclesiastes 5.

And so Christ offers us something incredible and asks for something very valuable in trade. And He is very honest – this will bring you some troubles, but if you think it is worth it, you will never regret your decision.

But I think we do something a little different. It is like another trade I made when I was a kid. I had a cool G.I. Joe toy that shot off four missiles. This other kid had a little G.I. Joe fort. We

made a trade for a week. I liked his fort a lot, but he decided at the end of the week he wanted his fort back. Of course, he had broken my missile launcher, and I would not trade back until he bought me a new one. It wasn't really a trade; more like, he borrowed my toy – and broke it, which I'm still bitter about.

I think we think about our life with Christ sometimes the same way. We want what Christ has to offer, but at the first sign of problems, we want to trade back. Some theologians say God won't take trade-backs. The Methodist Church says, instead, God will let you out of your promise. But it is a serious thing. So many just want God to give His gift for free, but that is the misconception. The new life Christ offers comes at a cost.

God wants our Dale Murphy baseball card – that is, our everything. And He offers it back, in better condition with no catches. But we have to give it to Him willingly, and understand that it really isn't ours anymore; it belongs to God. God has made His offer – for your life, I will give you eternal life. We have to weigh the options. We need to consider carefully the costs. And we must decide what to do. Is what Christ offering us worth it? Or do we think we are better off holding onto what we have? Your choice.