

The Value of a Soul

Mark 8:35-37

³⁵ *For whosoever will save his life shall lose it; but whosoever shall lose his life for my sake and the gospel's, the same shall save it.*

³⁶ *For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? ³⁷ Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?*

Luke 12:20-21

²⁰ *But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided?*

²¹ *So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.*

Psalm 49: 8-9

⁸⁻⁹ *For a soul is far too precious to be ransomed by mere earthly wealth. There is not enough of it in all the earth to buy eternal life for just one soul, to keep it out of hell. (Living Bible)*

Introduction

If you listen to the radio or television you may hear a variety of ways to protect your computers from hackers, your homes from break-ins, or your cars from car theft. The urgency in the announcer's voice is evident as he stresses the importance of acting immediately to avoid theft of personal property. Anti-theft devices maybe suitable to protect material goods from would be thieves, but, what about the soul? Doesn't your soul need protection as well?

Where are the public service announcements or urgent messages from governments stressing precautionary measures to protect our souls? Does the world know the soul is our most prized possession? Do they understand there is a battle being fought for the soul? What measures should one take to protect the soul? These are questions that believers must consider on a daily basis as we intermingle with an evil world. We do not anticipate announcements from governments (through the media) detailing ways to safeguard our souls because they may not be aware of the forces of evil vying for every soul. They don't seem to comprehend that the soul is in danger of eternal punishment. Since they see no immediate danger threatening their souls...no alerts of any kind have been publicized.

Thankfully, we do not need to rely on the mass media or government officials to caution us about the need to protect our souls from eternal damnation. The Bible helps us understand the significance of a soul, the priority of protecting the soul, and the eternality of the soul. One of the main passages of instructions on keeping the soul is found in **1 Peter 2:11**, **"abstain from fleshly lusts that war against the soul."** His advice is simple -- we are to avoid anything that would damage the soul. If we follow these instructions we need not worry about demonic influences defiling our soul and ultimately corrupting our relationship with our heavenly Father.

Defining the Word Soul?

It is difficult to pinpoint a single definition for the word “soul” because of the variety of ways it has been used in scripture. The Hebrew Old Testament translation for soul is “*nephesh*”, and the New Testament Greek equivalent is “*psuche*” (interpreted as the breath of life.) In Genesis 2:7 **God breathed into Adam the breath of life and he became a living soul.** Before God breathed into Adam, he was lifeless dust -- having no personality, no passions, emotions, desires, etc. When God breathed into his nostrils, Adam became a living soul. The ISBE Bible Encyclopedia defines a soul as a “*living being, life, self, person, desire, appetite, emotion and passion.*” These words describe the soul as the entirety of man – his will, intellect, and emotions – are all combined in the soul, to make the totality of an individual.

The soul is an interesting and complex phenomenon. It is one of the many ways man is unique from all other created beings. The soul is considered more valuable than any man-made possession because the soul is man. The soul differs from all other parts of the body. You possess a heart, a brain or lungs, but man does not possess a soul; **man is a soul.** Many organs in the body can be donated and transplanted, but not the soul. Eventually, our bodies (as we currently know them) will return to the earth (Gen. 3:19) but our souls will remain intact in eternity – with its intellect, emotions, and memory.

The psalmist declared “**my soul longeth for the Lord.**” His desire for God was not limited to his heart or mind. The entire being -- everything within him -- was yearning to commune with his God.

Read these passages to gain a full understanding of the various uses of “soul” in the scriptures:

- Our souls love God (Deut. 6:5, Matt 22:36) and others (Gen 34:3)
- Souls can be discouraged (Ps. 43:5); the soul lusts (Deut. 14:26)
- The soul and spirit can be divided (Heb. 4:12); souls can be “won” (Prov. 11:30); and saved from death (James 5:20)
- We can lose our soul (Matt. 16:26); Satan cannot destroy the soul; only God is able to destroy man’s soul (Matt. 10:28)
- We bless God with our souls (Ps. 103:1)
- God can restore our souls (Ps 23:3); He can satisfy the hungry and longing soul (Ps. 107:9) and keep your soul (1 Pet. 4:19)
- In Matthew 26:38 Jesus described the sorrow of His soul.
- Isaiah 1:14 and Psalms 11:5 reveal what displeases God’s soul.

FOR THIS LESSON WE WILL FOCUS ON THE WORTH AND VALUE OF THE SOUL, USING THE PASSAGE FOUND IN MARK, CHAPTER 8, WHERE JESUS COMPARES THE SOUL WITH WHAT THE WORLD OFFERS.

What is Your Soul Worth?

“For what shall it profit a man to gain the whole world and lose his own soul?” or “What shall a man give in exchange for his soul?” Mk. 8:36-37

Throughout His earthly ministry, Jesus often used some form of question while teaching. Rhetorical questions were used to capture His listening audience’s imagination or attention. He asked questions of those who desired to be healed. When confronted by His critics, Jesus skillfully used perplexing questions to confuse them or force them to agree with His teachings. More often than not, Jesus incorporated thought provoking questions into His lessons prompting His

followers to meditate on His words. It is these kind of mentally stimulating questions Jesus posed to His disciples that we will study today.

In Mark, chapter 8, Jesus is busily performing Kingdom work. This chapter opens with Him feeding four thousand people with a few small fish and seven loaves of bread. After this feeding, He travels by ship to the area of Dalmanutha where the Pharisees demand that He call down a sign from the heavens Jesus of course refuses their request. Then the Lord encounters a blind man in Bethesda who requests that Jesus restore his sight.

Towards the end of the chapter, when He is alone with His disciples in Caesarea Philippi, Jesus details the sacrifices one must make in order to become His disciple. Near the end of his teaching session, He makes a statement about losing and saving one's life. Chapter eight closes with Jesus posing a two-part rhetorical question that drives home His point and quite possibly leaves His audience in deep thought.

These verses could be implying that there is nothing this world offers that is more valuable than a man's soul. Or perhaps Jesus was asking if it were possible for you to fulfil your wildest dreams by simply swapping your soul for that one impossible dream, person or experience would you do it? If you were given the chance would you give your soul to the world in order to receive your heart's desires? For many Christians those are some tough questions, because they challenge our allegiance to Christ. If you were offered the job of a lifetime or the man or woman of your dreams, in exchange for your one and only soul, would you have to think about your reply?

Notice in this verse the Lord makes no attempt to persuade us to take any particular path. Instead there is a subtle warning to live our lives with eternity in mind and understand that many of life's choices are linked to our soul's eternal resting place. Rather than plainly stating that one way is better than the other, Jesus allows His audience and us, the readers of the Word, to make the decision for ourselves based on the questions He has posed.

The answer to Jesus' question, from a biblical perspective is clear --- there is nothing on this earth that is of equal, or greater value to one's soul. That is not to say that the world has nothing to offer. The world's attractions are many and they are very alluring and tempting to the flesh. We find in our society a never-ending pursuit of: pleasure, fun, entertainment, acquiring wealth, houses and land, prestige, sexual immorality, etc. These worldly activities are pleasing and at the same time destructive to the soul.

Soul versus worldly pleasures is not an even exchange because all that the world offers is temporal. Silver and gold satisfies for a moment, but the "pleasures of God are forevermore." Silver and gold may aid on this side of the grave, but concerning death...the Bible states **"we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out."** (1 Tim. 6:7). We will take nothing out of this world with us except our soul. It does not matter how much money we possess; there is no amount that can redeem our soul from the eternal fires of hell.

As stated earlier...man does not have a soul, but that man *is* a soul. So when we make the decision to give our soul to God or the world we give away all that we are -- our intellect, emotions, will, appetite, passions, etc. Whatever choice you make your life is no longer your own. You have heard the phrase "he sold his soul to the devil". This is a popular saying with a lot of truth. The choice to "sell one's soul" means to give over to worldly passions. All that you are and ever will be is placed in the hands of the world's system. If you give your life to the world, then Satan becomes your ruler. Your will and appetite becomes whatever Satan desires. Your emotions and passions will be controlled by demonic influences. Your thoughts and choices in life are no longer under your control, you become the property of the one who rules your life and owns your soul. You forfeit Jesus as your Lord and savior and instead become a follower of the world's system that has Satan as its leader.

Trading your soul for the world is an unwise decision. If all you want out of life are a few fair weather friends and some conditional admirers who hang around as long as the money and good times last...then go for it! Dedicate your life to living as the world lives with the usual designer clothes, cars, houses, and large bank accounts!

If we follow our worldly passions, our eternal future may end like the rich man in Luke, chapter 12, whose priorities were skewed. This man worked all his life and put all of his energy and effort into making money. He lost his life the moment he decided to sit back and enjoy the things he had accomplished. God called the man a fool because he put his hope in riches. He did not get a chance to enjoy his riches. They were of no help to him when his time on earth had ended. He wasn't a fool because he had wealth or because he worked hard to become successful. He was a fool because he was selfish with his earthly possessions. He had little or no regard for God's proper use, management, and distribution of what he had (vs 20-21, 23-24, 28-29, 33-34).

As Christians, we too must take heed to this warning lest we fall into the same disastrous trap. Observe yourself very closely. Jesus warned, make sure that the spirit of greed is not controlling your life, because greed is a detriment to our spiritual growth. The late, great Bishop Nemiah Smith often said in a joking manner; "I have never seen a U-Haul truck attached to a hearse or going to a cemetery." In other words he was saying, you will leave all of your treasures on earth when you die. You will take nothing with you into eternity except your soul. Where you spend eternity depends on the life you lived while on this earth.

Satan's Subtle Strategies

The world is either unaware or has no concern for their souls – mainly because of the endless number of distractions. Ask the average person about their plans for the future. Responses will vary -- from saving for retirement and/or kid's college education, to health care concerns, as well as purchasing burial plots, etc. However, ask the average person about their eternal future. It's unlikely that they will respond with a genuine concern about eternal matters related to their souls. People have little apprehension about eternal destiny because the forces of evil work overtime to eclipse and ensure that God's commands are not perpetuated in the earth (II Cor. 4:4).

There is a subtle, yet consistent scheme to divert individual's attentions away from God. Consider the endless variety of social media sites, and the ever expanding technology on which we can have uninterrupted entertainment via a smartphone or any electronic device at the push of a button. These activities are not all wicked or depraved but they are smokescreens the adversary uses to draw men further and further away from God. One of Satan's goals is to keep people too busy with life to give attention to their eternal future or the care of their souls.

Jesus perfectly illustrates this universal dilemma in Matthew 7:13, ***"broad is the way that leads to destruction and many there be which go in there at."*** (Matt. 7:13). An overwhelming majority of men and women are being lead down the ever expanding road to destruction. This road is wide and broad because there are more who choose this path than there are who choose the unpopular road to heaven. The pathway to heaven is described as "narrow" or a "strait gate" for the few souls pursuing everlasting life. To choose everlasting life means to deny the world's beliefs, philosophies and practices. Sometimes these things are very hard to give up and may have more appeal than living a godly life.

The Eternal Soul

Job 14:14, asks the interesting question ***“If a man die, shall he live again?”*** Those who believe in reincarnation would answer this question affirmatively. Reincarnation is the flawed belief that after we die we will come back to earth as another person or as an animal, or possibly an inanimate object. The hope of reincarnation is that man will receive a second chance at life -- to do it all over again -- just not as the same person they were before. You will not find this erroneous teaching in the pages of scripture. The Bible teaches in Hebrews 9:27 ***“It is appointed unto men once to die and after that this the judgment.”***

Scripture provides information about what happens when we die. Our flesh returns to dust and the spirit goes back to God (Ecc. 12:7). The soul is the only part of man destined to never die. The Bible gives strong implications that this life is not the only life we will live. Paul explains the doctrine of resurrection for all souls in 1 Corinthians, chapter 15. Jesus spoke of a universal judgment day in John 5:28-29 when He said, ***“For the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, And shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation.”*** Revelation 20:11-15 details a time when the sea, death, and hell will give up their dead as both great and small will stand before God to be judged for their works.

So, to answer Job's question, “If a man dies will he live again?” The answer is yes and no. No, the physical man will not live again, after death the physical body will eventually rot and decay until it is nothing but dust. The only part of man that will live on and never die is the soul, the soul will live forever.

If we are unaware that there is another life after this life on earth is done, we will neglect the things of God and find ourselves in a devil's hell, however if we give God our lives, eternal life is ours to enjoy.

The Invaluable Soul

Every soul matters to God. No one is insignificant in His eyesight. The New Testament gospels record Jesus rubbing shoulders with sinners, tax collectors, lepers, those of the Samaritan nationality, Gentile men and women and other outcasts of society. He cares for all souls!

It is society's practice to judge people based on externals (i.e., looks, wealth, titles, education, profession, zip codes, etc.) It is probably safe to say we have all judged someone based on externalities or what society deems as important. Or...we may have been the one who was ignored or overlooked because we did not measure up to someone's standards. Every day, people are mistreated, ignored, and made fun of because they look a certain way or lack resources to obtain a so-called “good” lifestyle. **We forget that behind every face (whether considered attractive or not), behind every body-type, behind every wealthy business man or woman and behind every homeless person begging for money on the street corner there is a precious soul.** To overlook people or make them feel unwanted based on looks or societal status is, from God's perspective, wicked and contrary to biblical principles. For the bible states that God is no respecter of person, He rains on the just and the unjust. John 3:16 points out this very fact, that ***“God so loved...He gave His only begotten Son.”***

The attitude of looking down on others frequently occurs in every area of organizations and society. It even reaches into areas of family relationships. Family members are often mistreated and counted as insignificant or worthless if they fail to meet certain standards ranging from higher mental capabilities to outward levels of beauty and societal wealth.

Sadly, even Christians are guilty of rejecting others for superficial reasons, forgetting that the person they reject is a soul in need of salvation. The body of Christ must be more welcoming, looking beyond tattered clothing, as well as a life

abused by drugs or alcohol -- and minister to the dying soul. We will give an account for our lives just as we will give an account of how we treated souls.

Thanks be to God that He does not have respect of persons! Many of us would fail to meet His requirements if they were based on the same standards that we judge others. The popular scripture John 3:16 states **“God so loved the world that He gave....”** There is no mention of God singling out a specific group of people as the only ones worthy to receive His Son’s sacrificial love. The world includes every person who ever lived and who has yet to be born, regardless of ethnicity, appearance, or their income level. Jesus willingly died for us all, because *all* souls are significant in God’s eyes.

Souls are important to God because:

- As the Creator of our souls, God alone has the right to claim ownership of every soul on the earth. **Ezekiel 18:4 records these words: “all souls are mine.”** Since God alone possess the power to give man life or to make men’s souls, it would stand to reason that all souls belong to Him. He alone possesses the authority to set eternal consequences for our actions.
- God is not moved by the exterior of man, He sees differently. **1 Samuel 16:7 states, “God judges persons differently than humans do. Men and women look at the face; God looks into the heart.” (MSG).** Social status or net worth are not factors of influence with the Lord. God looks at the heart of man. He sees what we cannot see: the needs of the person, their sincerity, and the potential they have to live for Him and serve their fellowman.
- All of heaven rejoices, **“when one sinner repents” (Lk. 15:10).**
- Our souls were not redeemed with **“corruptible things...such silver and gold... but with the precious blood of Christ...” (1 Pet. 1:18-19).**
- Christ gifted His church with spiritual leaders to **“watch over our souls” (Heb. 13:7)**
- The church is equipped with gifted individuals who nurture, pastor, teach and proclaim God’s truths to strengthen, encourage, inspire and edify our souls until the body of Christ becomes mature in the knowledge of His dear Son. **(Eph. 4:12)**

Conclusion: A Regretful Choice

Above all else the Lord values souls. He values the soul of man above all the silver and gold the world offers. These perishable items could never have purchased our souls from the slavery of sin. Our souls, according to 1 Peter 1:18-19, were purchased “with the precious blood of Christ”. Only Christ can reconcile a lost soul back to God. That’s how invaluable every soul is in the eyes of God. Joshua 24:15 states, **“choose ye this day whom you will serve”**. Will you live for God or continue to fulfill your selfish desires? Choose carefully because the choice you make today will affect you for all eternity!

Hopefully from this study we now understand that to trade in our God given soul for a life influenced by the beliefs and attitudes of this ungodly world would be an unequal exchange. Man will always be on the losing side of this deal. To forget God and neglect to nurture your soul with the Word of God and through daily prayer is the worse decision we could ever make.

Men and women blindly follow the world believing they are choosing the best things in life, when they fulfill their lusts rather than develop a relationship with God. As men and women of God we must pray for lost souls everywhere. Pray that they will realize they are on the road to hell if they leave this earth without God. Pray that our unsaved families, friends and acquaintances decide to choose God and let go of the world.