

WHAT SHALL IT PROFIT A MAN, IF HE GAINS THE WHOLE WORLD?

Matthew, when he was converted and called into the service of the Lord, gave up his job as a tax collector. And others who were called gave up the simplest of things, even scriptural things to follow Christ, such as fishermen. But I wonder if there is any passage of scripture that is more fitting of the society we see today as what we read in Mark 8:36, and how fitting it is as we observe society and how people behave, and what their object in life is, and what their motive is. There is nothing else besides doing extensive reading. One thing that I have always done: I like to analyze people as I observe them. Not by talking to them in trying to get information from them, but by just observing how they behave and act under certain circumstances.

We are studying the ultimate question in Mark 8:36: "For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world, and forfeit his life [in the eternal kingdom of God]?"

Beloved, it is a sad proof of our evil and corrupt nature, that our Lord Jesus Christ should have thought it necessary to use such language and to ask such a question. We should always take notice, as we should, to whom He was speaking to. He was preaching to His own people -- to the children of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, to the nation which for fifteen hundred years he had alone enjoyed the privilege of knowing the true God.

He was not instructing ignorant heathen, but Israelites -- to whom pertained the adoption and the glory and the covenant, and the giving of the law and the service of God and the promises; and yet behold Christ deals with them as if they still had to learn the first principles of religious knowledge or true relationship with God.

"For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world -- and that is what man is out there to do, or to get as big a chunk as he can lay his hands on -- and forfeit his life (or lose his own soul)?" But I believe it is sadder, and far more deplorable, that at the present hour, 2,000 years after Jesus died for man, it should still be necessary for a minister of the gospel to urge upon you and everyone else, the very same words. What would it profit you to gain success, riches, fame, degrees in this world, but in the end lose Eternal Life?

Who indeed, would have thought it possible that we should be obliged to remind you that the care of the soul is the one thing needful -- needful for all; no exceptions, for the rich, because of their temptations; for the poor, because of their trials; for the old, because death is close at hand; for the young, because life with all its allurements and follies is before them, and they can never have a more convenient season to care for your eternal soul?

I remind you that although men and women have different abilities and some prosper and some face failures here on earth, they have one thing at least in common: they ALL have immortal souls; they must all give account of themselves at the Day of Judgment. No exceptions.

And yet, the Bible says "hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth:" we are obliged to tell you, who consider yourselves Christians, all this. I am obliged to warn all that their eternal fate is at stake. Take notice what I am about to say, and listen to my evidence.

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I appeal, then to your consciences, to reflect on whether I am not telling the truth, in Christ, when I declare my belief that the greatest number of baptized persons are living just as if this world was their permanent home and resting place, and the things of this world are their main object in life -- as if there was no such text as Hebrews 9:27.

It says there, and I wonder if people read their Bibles carefully "it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment."

It is as if the Lord Jesus Christ had never come down on earth, to preach, suffer, die and rise again for the human guilt; as if the Holy Bible was just a beautiful book, a thing to be admired and respected more than studied. The average person, yes, even Christians, live today as if churches and ministers were convenient enough for keeping people in order, but were not really witnesses of truth and messengers of glad tidings to a lost and ruined creation.

Have you noticed that when worldly people meet a friend on the street, in a store -- and that is why I said, I observe people everywhere I go; I study their faces to see whether they are happy or sad, I study their habits, and how they react to other people -- when worldly people see a friend in the store, they ask about their health: "How have you been, have you been feeling well?" Or they will ask: "Have you had the flu this past winter?" and "How is your sickness?" As we know, true Christians don't ask such questions. Rather we pray for God to deliver and protect the people in the society from such attacks of the devil, because we have a Blood-Bought right through the Substitutionary Redemption and Atonement Work that the Lord Jesus Christ completed at Calvary to claim and receive deliverance, healing and victory.

But I have never overheard or met true Christians or anyone else who made a point of inquiring about his brethren's soul probably because the brother or sister might be offended or think he was trying to be scripturally proud; and yet we are told plainly in the Bible, that the body, comparatively speaking, is vile and perishable, but the soul, on the other hand, is precious and eternal!

Men and women seem to go blindly forward with all their focus on this earth and all their interests are confined to this life here on earth. One generation after another is struggling to get ahead in this world, but take note how few indeed appear to care where they shall be found in the next world!

As I said, I am a student of human behavior; I observe people, their talk and actions, I take note of their actions and reactions in situations. I see how they cope; I observe their behavior in a calm and peaceful environment, as well as when they are faced with a stressful problem. I especially study the life habits of those who claim to be true Christians, not to try to find fault with them, but to learn from my observations.

Over and over again, I am shocked at the number of persons who are "Church goers," and who I know claim to be Christians, and yet drink, watch sinful, immoral and wicked TV programs, subscribe to immoral magazines, attend "rock" concerts, (which includes many so-called Christian-rock), attend stadium or Broadway shows, attend movies, even on a regular basis, and their conversation is entirely taken up with worldly things.

Many attend church services merely as a “duty;” it makes them think that by attending church, that makes them Christians; others attend because they think there is merit and they will get “good marks” in God’s Books.

I feel it is my duty as a Minister to try and lay open to you the first foundations of true relationship with God. I shall place side by side the world and the soul, and then we shall compare their respective values, and then, after that, you choose to lose your own souls (which God forbid), you shall not be able to say that I did not at least attempt to give you fair warning.

May the Holy Ghost convince us all of the importance of this subject, and give us new hearts, for Christ’s sake! What then shall I say of the things of this world, the things that men and women cherish, lust for, cheat and lie to get; the things that men and women value above all else -- money, houses, land, clothes, food, drinking, learning, honors, titles, pleasures, successes, and the rest? You only have to listen to the news for five minutes or read the headlines from the newspaper to learn their worldly interests.

As a spokesman of God’s Word, what shall I say concerning these things? I shall say two things: First, they are all really worthless: capable, no doubt, of being turned to a good use, for remember, the Bible states that all creatures of God are good, if sanctified by the Word of God and prayer.

I mean this: let us suppose from the list I have just read that they are in themselves able to make you really happy, you are woefully deceived. If any unconverted person could have just as much as he wished of every earthly good thing, he would still find in a very short time that he was not one whit happier than he was before.

Did you ever read about the winners of the giant Lottery Jackpots, where they inherit millions of dollars, almost without exception it has devastated them in one way or another! The people that I have been referring to in our lesson, they are all comfortless without a new heart and a living faith in Christ Jesus.

Now you may think that I am mistaken, but let me tell you many a rich man has tried the experiment, and can bear witness that the case is true. Many a person could tell you that he seeks out everything which money can purchase, he passes his life in a constant round of amusement and excitement, going from one pleasure to another, and yet he must confess that “peace of mind” has been like a shadow or “will-o’-the-wisp,” always before his eyes, but never within his grasp.

And if this does not convince you, just read the book of Ecclesiastes, and there you will find the deliberate opinion of the wisest man that ever lived – I mean Solomon -- and you will see that he put the question to the proof in his own case; and what do you think was the result?

Let me quote: “Vanity of vanities,” saith the preacher, “ALL is vanity.” Let us read more of what Solomon had to say in Ecclesiastes 2:1-11, a book often overlooked. The heading is Vanity of Self Indulgence

“I SAID in my mind, Come now, I will prove you with mirth and test you with pleasure; so have a good time [enjoy pleasure]. But this also was vanity (emptiness, falsity, and futility)! ²I said of

What shall it profit a man if he gains the whole world? - 3 -

laughter, It is mad, and of pleasure, What does it accomplish? ³I searched in my mind how to cheer my body with wine--yet at the same time having my mind hold its course and guide me with [human] wisdom--and how to lay hold of folly, till I might see what was good for the sons of men to do under heaven all the days of their lives. ⁴I made great works; I built myself houses, I planted vineyards. ⁵I made for myself gardens and orchards and I planted in them all kinds of fruit trees. ⁶I made for myself pools of water from which to water the forest and make the trees bud. ⁷I bought menservants and maidservants and had servants born in my house. Also I had great possessions of herds and flocks, more than any who had been before me in Jerusalem. ⁸I also gathered for myself silver and gold and the treasure of kings and of the provinces. I got for myself men singers and women singers, and the delights of the sons of men--concubines very many. ⁹So I became great and increased more than all who were before me in Jerusalem. Also my wisdom remained with me and stood by me. ¹⁰And whatever my eyes desired I kept not from them; I withheld not my heart from any pleasure, for my heart rejoiced in all my labor, and this was my portion and reward for all my toil. ¹¹Then I looked on all that my hands had done and the labor I had spent in doing it, and behold, all was vanity and a striving after the wind and a feeding on it, and there was no profit under the sun."

I don't even think the average Christian knows where Ecclesiastes is in the Bible, let alone study and learn from it.

Next, I would say that all the things of the world are perishable. The brother that was just interned this past week had many hobbies, many interests, went to many shows with his hobbies and so forth, he did not take anything with him; not one of those things, they are still here on earth, just like everything else you have or I have will be here when you go or I go.

Surely, this does not require any evidence. You must have seen with your own eyes that none of the things I have mentioned are sure, lasting, permanent, incorruptible, and to be depended on.

Money and property may be lost; health may fail; friends may be deceitful; and unless we can make a covenant with death and hell, we ourselves may suddenly be cut off in the midst of our days and hurried to our last account! Oh, let us never forget the Parable of the Rich Fool.

Luke 12:16-20: "Then He told them a parable, saying, The land of a rich man was fertile and yielded plentifully. ¹⁷And he considered and debated within himself, What shall I do? I have no place [in which] to gather together my harvest. ¹⁸And he said, I will do this: I will pull down my storehouses and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain or produce and my goods. ¹⁹And I will say to my soul, Soul, you have many good things laid up, [enough] for many years. Take your ease; eat, drink, and enjoy yourself merrily. ²⁰But God said to him, You fool! This very night they [the messengers of God] will demand your soul of you; and all the things that you have prepared, whose will they be?"

People often say don't call nonbelievers or those who reject Christ naughty names, Christ did not mince words: "You fool! This night your soul will be required of you, then whose will those things be which you have provided?" Good question for us to consider this morning? Whose will they be?

Let us pay attention, for we do not read that this man was immoral, he was no evil liver, nor did he steal, lie, or murder anyone. No, not in any way, yet see the conclusion that our Lord draws. There may be times when everything looks bright and sunshiny, but let us not forget the days of darkness, for they shall be many -- the days when you shall say in the morning, "Oh, how I wish to God it were evening," and in the evening, "Oh, how I wish to God it were morning." For the longer you live the more you will feel the truth of Job's words. What did Job say? He said "Man who is born of a woman is few of days and full of trouble. He comes out like a flower and withers; he flees like a shadow and continues not."

There is hope for a tree that is cut down, hope that it will sprout again; but as we read in Job 14: 10, "But a man dies and is laid low; man breathes his last, and where is he?" Such is our world; and now what shall I say of the soul, which people appear to hold so cheap?

First, then, let me tell you that it is the most valuable part of man, because it is the part in which we differ from the animal world. It is that wonderful principle by which God made a distinction between us and the other works of His Hand.

Genesis 2:7 informs us, "Then the Lord God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living soul." It was the soul for which Christ was content to take our nature on Him, and suffer death upon the Cross.

How careless and how little interest we show for our souls. This was the cause which brought Christ down from the right hand of God, to give His own blood as the price of our redemption. Think, I beseech you, what a privilege it must be to have a soul. Have you ever thanked God that you have got a soul capable of renewal, of regeneration, and a soul capable of eternal life?

Oh, if you have not, go down upon your knees this day, and acknowledge the mercies you have received, and your own ingratitude and unworthiness. There is not another more valuable thing concerning the soul: Why? Because it is eternal! This frail body of ours shall one day perish just as our brother's did.

The worm shall feed sweetly on it and just ministers say at funeral services; "ashes to ashes, and dust to dust," will probably be read over the grave of even the fairest and strongest in this church; but the soul shall never perish, and when the earth and all that it contains are burning up, the soul shall enter upon a new state of existence, which shall never change.

When our soul enters this new state of existence, that state will be everlasting life or everlasting fire. Such is the soul, and such is the world; and we should not wonder, with such undeniable facts so clearly before us, that it could be possible to find a man so foolish to cleave to earth and disregard heaven?

This brings us down to the level of the beasts that perish, to call the sword less valuable than the sheath which contains it, and the jewel less precious than the case in which it is enclosed. In Isaiah 55:2, we read as we find these gems in the Bible in such unexpected places,

“Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which does not satisfy? Hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness.”

Now, if the heart of man were less deceitful than it is, such a general argument might be enough: but I must not stop here, for it is not a light matter -- it is your life, remember? Therefore, I must bring to your attention a fact that you cannot prove to be false: I present two very reputable witnesses; who are they? The dying and the dead!

Ask them, if you dare, for an answer to the question, “What shall it profit a man, if he gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?” This is a most sobering moment indeed! Ask that dying sinner; stand by his bedside, and inquire of him, whether it proves a comfortable and supporting thought that he has cared more for the world than he has for his soul. Go ahead ask him!

Perhaps you have never stood by the bedside and watched one die, a man who had never truly repented of his sins, who had never received Christ as His Lord, Savior and Redeemer. Maybe you have never saw the deathbed of one who had never set his feet upon the Rock.

Of all the fearful sights in this world, this must be the greatest, the most fearful, a soul-moving sight, but full of instruction. You see, when the heart begins to beat faintly and the eyes grow dim, when friends are weeping around the frail body lying thin and wasted in his bed, you see the dying moments of one going into eternity.

When all human medicines avail no longer, when all the excitement of worldly pleasure or business is past and far away, when a man lies in his own silent chamber, with nothing apparently between himself and God, when something whispers, as Elijah spoke to King Ahaziah:

“You shall not come down from that bed on which you are gone up, but shall surely die,” in that solemn hour that those words are spoken, beloved, we have no idea how small this earth appears and how broad is eternity!

In that dark hour as death approaches, the sinner’s memory of sins, will become sharp and clear, then how deeply a guilty conscience darkens. You would then hear the dying man acknowledge that his life had been a grand mistake.

You would hear him confess that the care of the soul was indeed the one thing that was needful, and how bitterly would he regret the time he had lost, the opportunities that he had neglected, and the instructions that he had despised. God grant that we may be spared the pain of seeing any loved one or friend depart from this life, under such circumstances!

As you lay aside this sermon, ask yourself: What will I profit if I gained all the successes of this world, but in the end lose eternal life?

We are always glad to give Scriptural advice and counsel to those who desire to write us about their problems, and to remember their requests for prayer in our services.

In addition, we publish sermons on other subjects, which take up in detail teaching on how to deal with God successfully and be delivered out of all our troubles. We will gladly send them to those who desire them for their own use or for others.

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