



THE VALUE OF YOUR SOUL
Mark 8:36
Luke 12:13-21

Today's scripture lessons are tough – but important – texts for us to consider as we live out our faith in 2009. It is easy for us in the hustle and bustle of life (even at Garden Spot Village) to allow the important questions of life to be pushed aside – crowded out – by trivial pursuits. While Trivial Pursuit is a fun game to play for an evening – it is not a way of life for us to build and establish our lives on. Our Lord makes it clear that 'your soul is too valuable for this approach to life.

Arthur Miller wrote a play called “**The Price**,” in which a middle-aged couple is reminiscing. Life had turned out to be a disappointment. They thought they had it all mapped out. They knew what they wanted to do, the academic degrees that they needed, and the goals seemed clear; but it never happened. In the play, the woman says to her husband, “Everything was always temporary with us. It's like we never were anything. We were always just about to be.” There is a high price to pay for this orientation to life.

It is as though Jesus could hear the voice in the back pew, “Preacher, make it plain.” How would you respond if you heard this frightening one-line sentence addressed to you by the Lord himself: “**This night your soul is required of you.**”? It came unexpectedly. No further preparation was granted.

Jesus said that your soul is worth more than the rest of the world put together. He asked in **Mark 8:36**, “What shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?” I know it is almost impossible for us on Monday morning at 6:00 a.m. when the alarm clock rings to grasp what is meant by the “whole world.”

For this means not only the physical world or the geographical world. It includes the financial, the business, the scientific, the intellectual world; it means the whole nine yards. Jesus said that the soul (your soul) is worth more than all of this combined. This is why your soul is so important and even beyond the power of Wall Street to calculate.

I have four points to share for your consideration today.

FIRST, YOUR SOUL IS VALUABLE BECAUSE OF ITS ETERNAL QUALITY.

In **Ecclesiastes 3:11** the Bible teaches us that ‘God has planted eternity in the human heart.’ God has designed us to live for eternity. You and I learned long ago in 9th grade health class that one day our hearts will stop beating. As Rick Warren reminds us, “That will be the end of your body and your time on earth – but it will not be the end of **you**. Your earthly body is just a temporary residence for your soul. The Bible calls your body a ‘tent’ – but refers to your future body as a ‘house.’ Your relationship to God on earth will determine your relationship to him in eternity.”¹

Many people have knowledge, but they don’t have wisdom. The Bible says, “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.” Knowledge without God and without wisdom is like a bomb ready to explode. That’s one of the major problems in 2009. We have created technological giants, but moral and spiritual infants. We lack the wisdom to use our knowledge for the betterment of humanity. As Martin Luther King, Jr. would often share, “**We may have guided missiles but we still have misguided men and women.**”

There is something so deep inside of human beings that the sciences of psychology and medicine, like Thomas Moore in his book **CARE OF THE SOUL**, are just beginning to admit are as important to our survival as a people.

It is called the soul or spirit. They think they have discovered something new – the Bible knew it 4,000 years ago.

We, unfortunately, tend to put all of our emphasis on the body with its pleasures and its physical appetites. In the 23rd Psalm, when King David was on the run for his life – he only asked God for one thing to be restored – his soul. His riches were of no value to him – only God and his soul. The soul works like a magnet – pulling all the pieces of our lives into a unity – a totality. We anchored ourselves into God’s origins and God’s intentions.²

Yes, it is unfortunate that our God-given identity is under assault every day. We live in a culture that has replaced the soul with ‘self.’ This reduces people to customers and consumers.³ I need to be reminded every week that I am a ‘soul.’ I need to sing “**Bless the Lord, O my soul – and all that is within me – praise God’s holy name.**”

SECOND, THE VALUE OF YOUR SOUL CAN BE MEASURED BY SATAN’S DESIRE TO CONTROL IT AND RENDER IT USELESS.

The Lord Jesus Christ did battle with Satan a number of times, but it is most graphically portrayed in **Matthew 4:1-11**. Even Jesus, the Son of God, acknowledges the reality of the Evil One. He reminded us that the devil is the prince of **this** world. The devil only has a short time left and is greatly at work in this universe. He is after your soul. Paul says in **Ephesians 6:12**, “We are wrestling powers and principalities of darkness in high places.” As important as bread, miracles, and power were – God was primary. We don’t negotiate.

We learn in Genesis that God created a perfect world. God and humankind were in perfect harmony with each other. God never meant that there would be suffering, war, famine, and even death itself.

But Satan came. He was one of three mighty angels in the kingdom of God. However, he rebelled against God and God literally had to throw him down from heaven. Ever since that moment, there has been a battle going on for the control of your mind, your body, and ultimately your soul. To worship means to acknowledge the power, authority and control of someone over your life. Satan literally wants to have your soul. This is why Jesus did not bow down to him.

Jesus always pictured Satan as an enemy, battling and bidding for the souls of people. Yes, from the tempting experience of Adam and Eve in the book of Genesis, to the book of Revelations where Satan is now pictured as the “**Accuser of the brethren.**” Yes, unless Jesus Christ and his shed blood is your defense attorney, you will always lose that trial and battle. Never, never forget that the powers of darkness are interested in your soul. As a matter of fact, that is all they are interested in. All else is just trivial pursuit for the powers of evil.

THIRDLY, THE VALUE OF YOUR SOUL IS MEASURED BY GOD’S CONCERN AND WARNING ABOUT ITS DESTINATION.

We read in **II Peter 3:9**, “God is NOT willing that any should perish, but that all should come to REPENTANCE.” In **Romans 5:1-8** we read, “God shows His love towards us, that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.” He became the new Adam. As by a man came death – so by a man came life. Jesus Christ is known in the Bible as the second Adam, the One who would lead us once again in the right direction to the right destination.

The only time some folks think about eternity is at funerals, Easter Sunday, or Memorial Day – then its back to the old grind again.

The Bible makes it clear that only a fool goes through life unprepared to answer the questions our Lord asks of us today. You need to think more about your soul and its direction or the lack thereof.

Dr. James Dobson tells the story how in his college days his goal was to become the college’s tennis champion. He achieved his goal. He was so proud when the trophy was placed in a prominent position in the college’s trophy case. A few years later someone mailed that wonderful trophy to him. They had found it in a trash can when the school was remodeled. Dr. Dobson said, “Given enough time, all your trophies will be trashed by someone else.”⁴ Only that which is done for Christ will last. Knowing this prepares you to build an eternal legacy. Never doubt your significance – you are significant because Christ died for you.

It was said of Marilyn Monroe after her death that she had everything to live with – but nothing to live for. It was all exterior – no anchor to hold onto.

FOURTHLY, THE VALUE OF YOUR SOUL IS MEASURED BY THE GREAT PRICE FOR ITS REDEMPTION.

The Bible boldly declares in **I Peter 1:18-19**, “For as much as you know that you were not redeemed with corruptible things as silver and gold – but with the precious blood of Christ as of a lamb without blemish.” Christ died to set free our souls to love and serve the Father in Spirit and in truth.

It was very disheartening when my own father slowly began to lose his memory and health through the ravaging disease of Alzheimer’s. However, I never worried for a moment about his soul. The loss of one’s soul is the greatest tragedy.

We learn so graphically in **Luke 12:20** that what matters most at the moment of death is not the condition of our barns, our bank accounts, but the state of our souls.

Maybe the real issue confronting America today is not that our barns and banks are too small, but that our souls are impoverished. Greed is a virus that has entered the bloodstreams of so many – like the swine flu – to almost pandemic proportions – and Wall Street is still giving out record bonuses for less than sterling performances.

Only the Bible warns us about this deadly infection. Building bigger barns does not leave much energy for the time-consuming work of loving our neighbor – let alone our God.⁵

Yes, the Bible often reflects the tension between God’s forgiving love and God’s call to reform in the light of impending judgment. As modern-day Christians, we are more likely to focus more on God’s love rather than God’s judgment.

To ignore the judgment of God is to do so at your own peril. On the eve of the great 1938 New England hurricane, a man living in the Stamford, Connecticut area decided to fulfill a long-standing desire. He walked two miles to a department store in downtown Stamford and purchased a very fine barometer. Delighted with his purchase, he hurried home and proudly hung it on his wall.

However, what he saw made him angry. The barometer reading indicated “**hurricane.**” Convinced he had been sold a defective piece of equipment, he walked all the way back and handed the barometer to the clerk and snorted, “Fine barometer you sold me. I put it up in my house and what do you suppose it registered? ‘Hurricane.’”

The clerk replied, “No problem, sir. We’ll gladly replace it with another one.” Again the man headed for his home with his barometer; however, when he arrived, he discovered that his home had been blown away.

The warning of God is found in this biblical story. It is reliable, trustworthy, perfect and unchanging. Those who try to second guess it or exchange it or replace it, or improve upon it are courting disaster. The Word of God is that each one of us may need to repent or reform. In the Apostles' Creed it reminds us that our Lord comes to judge the living and the dead.

John Wesley, after his preaching missions, gathered the converts and seekers into what we call 'class meetings.' The very first question asked at each gathering was, "**How is it with your soul?**" I wonder if – before and after every one of our Sunday School class meetings – we should ask the same question. Your soul is too valuable to give to anyone except God. I hope this preacher has made it plain to you today.

Amen and amen.

Reverend Eric S. Ritz

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PASTOR'S NOTE: This sermon was preached at the 10:30 a.m. service on May 3, 2009, and at the 8:30 a.m. service on May 17, 2009.

ENDNOTES

¹ Rick Warren, **THE PURPOSE-DRIVEN LIFE**, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 2002, page 37.

² Eugene H. Peterson, **CHRIST PLAYS IN TEN THOUSAND PLACES**, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co, Grand Rapids, MI, 2005, page 37.

³ Peterson, *ibid*, page 38.

⁴ Rick Warren, **THE PURPOSE-DRIVEN LIFE**, page 33.

⁵ Eugene H. Peterson, **TELL IT SLANT**, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co, Grand Rapids, MI, 2008, page 62.