

## SERMON II.

*“For what is a man profited, if he should gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or, what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?”*

Matthew 16:26

CHRIST had been pressing the company that were hearing Him, and His own disciples also, to lay out themselves for the truth, at all hazards. In these words that I have read in your hearing, He uses a double argument. The one is, What is a man profited, if he should gain the whole world, and lose his own soul for that worldly gain? The truth is, he is a perfect and an absolute loser. It cannot be told what loss he hath, and how bad a bargain he hath made. The other is, if a man lay his soul as a pawn, or pledge for this, he will not set it free again at his own pleasure. The text says, “Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?”

Now, from these words, I shall hold out to you the following doctrines.

*DOCT. I. The souls of men are highly valued and esteemed by Jesus Christ.*

Christ Jesus hath valued the souls of men at a very high rate; for He hath so computed that He sets the whole world at nought in comparison to one soul. He says, “Though a man should gain the whole world, and lose his own soul, he is a perfect and an absolute loser.” “Thou fool, this night shall thy soul be required of thee.” Christ said this to the man that had enlarged his barns, and had provided nothing for his soul. Christ values the souls of men very much. And,

Here I offer you the following evidences of the doctrine, Christ highly values and esteems the souls of men. And,

1. That glorious contrivance of the gospel speaks forth

what a high esteem God puts upon the souls of men. Great has been the work and business of its contrivance, in order that His will may be revealed and made known to men: all is done with a design to save the soul. And if there were no more to speak of Him than the Bible, it sufficiently shows how He values and esteems the souls of men. He can make thousands of worlds at one word; and yet He has taken much pains in contriving a way how to deal with men's souls, and about that great and glorious business of man's redemption.

2. This also says that Christ values the soul much, that He took on Him our nature, and subjected Himself very low, for such unworthy worms of the earth. None knew how to value the soul except Christ. He knows what it cost Him. In all the great revolutions of the world, He has a principal regard to the soul. There is not an up or down; a dethroning of kings, or protectors,<sup>1</sup> or princes, but it is done with an eye to the good of the soul. He carrieth on some things in order to the good of the souls of men. If there were no more but the keeping up a standing ministry, and the vindication of that ordinance which He keeps up at a great expense, it shows that He values the souls of men at a very high rate.

3. Let us come and take notice of another evidence just at hand. Consider the particular care that He takes of particular persons; even a poor boy or girl. He will be speaking unto them, rebuking, exhorting, comforting, instructing them particularly, and singularly; waiting upon their ups and downs; to ratify the thoughts of their hearts, as if He had no other thing to do; though He has great kingdoms and sceptres besides to rule. All this shows how highly He values the souls of men.

Now what are the reasons of this doctrine? It is not because of any good works we can do unto Him. But,

1st, It is because He values the souls of men, at least comparatively with other things, as more glorious pieces of His handy-work than any other thing in this lower world. These glorious luminaries, the sun, moon, &c., are nothing to the soul. All the pleasant things that you ever saw, even heaps of gold, and silver, and streets garnished with pearls or precious stones, are nothing in comparison to a rational soul. There was never anything made upon earth that bore the image of God so eminently and singularly as the soul. And this is one reason why the Lord values the soul so much; because it doth represent Himself more than any other creature upon earth.

2ndly, The Lord values the soul of man very much, because He carrieth on His work by the soul more than by any other thing. He gives the most glorious displays of His power and mercy, by the souls of men. He proves Himself Lord over heaven, earth, and hell, by the souls of men. And,

3rdly, I may say, the Lord values the soul much, because it is of the highest concernment. And this is one of the reasons God lays so much weight upon it; “For the redemption of the soul is precious, and it ceaseth for ever.”

What use then can we make of this doctrine? God loves the soul so much, and we value it so little. It holds forth this unto us:

That we differ exceedingly in our thoughts from the Lord. He hath put an high esteem on the soul, and we do not esteem it much. And therefore it holds out our disconformity unto Him; since He values the soul so much, and we value it so little. But you will say, “I value the soul very much, and will do anything for it.” Well, if ye will put a high price upon your souls, it will appear. And,

1st, Try whether ye have any serious thought concerning

your souls. Do ye value your souls much, who have never a thought of them to see in what case and condition they are, and what will become of them in the end? Dare ye say, in the sight of an all-seeing God, that ye had serious thoughts of your soul, and what would become of it in the end? If ye dare not say that, your value for your soul is a fancy indeed. And I pose you all, this day, that hear me, if ever you had deep thoughts concerning your soul's case and condition, answer me to that. You that cannot answer in the affirmative, ye are not far from the wrath and vengeance of God. Ye that cast your souls at your heels, and undervalue them, and spend more time and pains on the poor perishing things of the world, would ye be called Christians? Nay, rather limbs of the devil, worldly worms, and moles of the earth.

2ndly, Do ye value your souls much, who make no endeavours for your souls. Ye can tell every year how far your labour is advanced at such a time; that you have now got your oat-seed, or your barley-seed into the ground. But what have ye done for your soul? Surely everyone must give an account unto the God of heaven for their souls. I dare boldly say, that some of you lay more weight on six or seven steps of a rig's end to sow a little flax seed on, than ever you did upon your precious and immortal souls.

3rdly, Do ye value your souls much, when for a thing of nought, for a very little, or frivolous thing, ye will venture upon the wrath of God; when ye will swear and profane the name of the Lord for a thing of nought; when ye will lay down your soul against twopence; as if I were to throw down my gold ring, and play it against a few pennies Scots. And so you venture upon, the wrath of the Almighty for a trifle.

4thly, Another evidence of it is given, when other things come in competition with the soul. Here is something that

concerns the soul; there is something that concerns the world; I will refer it to your own conscience, which gets the first place. Here is a thing that concerns the soul; but ye are called to yoke the plough. Now lay your hand to your heart, and judge ye whether ye value your soul or the world most, and look which of these gets the priority.

5thly, Do ye value your souls much? Ye can hear threatenings concerning the destruction and ruin of your souls, and yet never be affrighted or alarmed. There is no need of greater evidence that thou valuest not thy soul, when thou sayest, "Let threatenings go their way as they came," when thou art never alarmed, nor affrighted, and when thou canst hear thy soul's ruin threatened a thousand times in one day, and never be moved more than the timber or stones of these walls. Thou that dost so hast no reason to think that thou valuest thy soul much, and thou hast need to be laying thy soul's case and condition to heart.

DOCT. II. *Though the soul of man be a precious thing, and much valued by the Lord, yet He hath committed it unto man's keeping for a certain time; and it is the business God has put you upon, to look to your souls.*

But ye will say, "We have no leisure for this." But tell me, when get you time to go about any other business? What is your work? Is it about your soul; or is it about other things? When got ye leisure to eat, drink, and sleep, and to go about your other worldly affairs? Remember that the Lord hath committed the soul to your keeping, as your principal work and business. And,

1st, In some respects, God hath allowed you more time to go about your other business. Yet in other respects, God has allowed you to take more time about your soul's case; much more, at least, than probably you do.

2ndly, Know, there are few in all the world that can give a faithful discharge of their souls as well kept. Look if ye be of the number of those few. But if ye can find no good reasons that ye are of these few, there is little hope of you. Are ye not afraid of these words, "Many are called, but few are chosen." There are but few that enter in at that strait gate, and walk in that narrow way that leads unto life. There are but few to whom God discovers the worth and preciousness of their souls. Ye would do well to remember that a very little thing will wrong or injure the soul. We commonly say, and I wish it were more noticed by us, "That a little thing will harm the eye." But a far less thing will harm the soul. A thought will put the soul out of case for many days. And a wrong word spoken will put the soul out of order, so that perhaps it may never afterwards get the comfort of its peace with God in this life.

USE. Now, ye should be making your peace with God; for ye know not if ever ye shall get another day after this. Yea, there is a day appointed when the Lord will take back again the souls of men; "o fool, this night shall thy soul be required of thee." There shall be no delay. It shall be taken from thee this same night. As thou doest, so shalt thou receive according to thy works. If thou hast dealt well with thy soul, the Lord shall deal well with it also. And if thou slightest it, He will slight it also. And do not think that because the soul is a precious thing, and the Lord values it much, that He will not assign such a precious thing unto eternal torment. No, He shall not regard that much. He has thrust many a soul as precious as it into hell already. Therefore, think not so. Oh, then, will ye bethink yourselves? What reckoning can I make with God for my soul? I ask in reality, "What account can ye give to God, if He should require an account of you before ye sleep this night?" Can ye not answer? Are ye speechless? And how much more shall ye be speechless when God shall put that question unto you, and shall command you to be taken and bound

hand and foot, and cast into hell-fire, "Where the worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched."

DOCT. III. *The Lord cares little for the world.*

He values the souls of men much; and we value them little. He values the world little; and we value it much. Although a man should gain the whole world, and lose his own soul, he is but a fool, and he hath made a very bad bargain. Christ values the world very little. I offer you these evidences of the truth of this doctrine.

1st, When Christ was in the world, He made a very mean purchase of it for Himself. He had not where to lay His head; and sometimes He could not command a drink of water therein. He made a very poor purchase of it to Himself. "The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head."

2ndly, He usually gives least of it to His dear friends and followers. I do not say but some who have much of the world may be gracious folk; but ordinarily God gives least of the world to His own people. Where ye will get one rich man that is godly, ye will get ten that are atheists. "He hath not chosen many mighty men of the world, not many wise men, after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called."

3rdly, The Lord has given a considerable portion of the world unto His avowed enemies, who fight against Him, and improve it against Him. He gives much of the earth to profane atheists, profane beasts, and renegades, who are His avowed enemies; for "the earth is given unto the wicked."

4thly, And ere long He will set it in a flame, He will burn it up with fire. The earth is, as it were, withered already, and ready for burning. And what makes the Lord care so

little for the world? “The earth also and works thereof shall be burnt up.” But what are the reasons for this doctrine?

It is because by man’s transgressions it is made subject unto vanity “For the creature was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of him who hath subjected the same in hope.” All things are properly diversions from God, from the living God, and there is not a dumb beast, but it is for man’s sake plagued of him, and so made subject unto vanity.

For USE of this doctrine, as I said formerly; it points out a disconformity betwixt God and us. And we differ very much from Him in regard that He values the soul so much, and we esteem it so little. He values the world but little, and we esteem it very much, and care for perishing things, even trifles of the world. But ye will perhaps say, that ye do not value it much. But this will appear in these few things following.

1. A man values that much on which he spends his strength voluntarily, and with complacency and delight. Ye say the world pulls the life out of you. But yet ye suffer it to do so willingly, and with delight.

2. A man does that most willingly on which the affection of his heart is most bent. And do not your hearts run out most after the things of the present world? Hence your fear, love, hope and delight run out after a present world. What makes you glad and cheerful, but something in the world that prospers, and is going well with you? And what makes you afraid, or sorry? Is it not because the world seems to frown upon you?

3. This proves that you value the world much, that ye will not take a rebuke, but will eagerly follow on in the pursuit of it, although it has failed you often, and given you many



a disappointment; and although the Lord has blasted that which ye have been following after.

4. A fourth evidence is, That ye will venture to lose the friendship of God for a very frivolous thing. Ye will venture to wrong the God of heaven for a little worldly enjoyment. But I go no further at present, only I shall notice these two things following:

(1.) Although the soul be very precious, yet we value or esteem it very little: and although the world be a poor ambulatory thing, we put a very high price or esteem upon it. And,

(2.) Although your souls be threatened with utter ruin on that account, yet ye are not afraid, which shows that ye care not much for them. You cannot be put off the cutting and carking cares of this world, even though God has corrected you, and given you as it were, over the finger ends for them. And yet do your best ye cannot take delight in serving God half an hour. Look then to your souls in time; slight them not; otherwise God will slight them, if you mind them not in time. “For what is a man profited, if he should gain the whole world and lose his own soul? or, what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?”

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Footnotes:

1. This sermon seems to have been preached about the time of Oliver Cromwell.