

Great Questions of the Bible: “What Shall a Man Give in Exchange For His Soul?”

We continue our series today with another great question of the Bible. It’s a question that cannot be answered in the affirmative, and it brings the lives that you and I are now living into very sharp focus. May I ask: What are you living for? In other words, what is the ultimate goal and purpose of your life? Are you like many who are mindlessly drifting through life from day to day with little thought of anything but the cares of that particular day? Or do you have a financial goal? Maybe your ultimate objective is to be wealthy or famous, or to achieve something great in the eyes of the world. Maybe your goal is to just make the most out of life and be happy, whatever that means to you.

Well, Jesus has a question for you.

Matthew 16:24-26 “Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it. For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?”

Now, no matter where you are along the road of life, I hope you’ll pause for a few minutes with me today, and think about this very convicting question from the Lord Jesus Christ: *What shall a man give in exchange for his soul?*

We, in the United States, are very rich by the standards of nearly any other culture. Consequently, we place a great deal of emphasis in our culture upon material possessions and the accumulation of *things*. Now, money is not an evil thing, nor is it wrong to be rich. If a man honestly comes by his gain, he can thank God for being able to do so, and he can even use a portion of his wealth to help other people and advance the kingdom of God. It’s the love of money that is the root of all evil, the apostle Paul once declared. The tragedy is that, more often than not, in the pursuit of earth’s elusive wealth, we become poor in the things that all of us could and should be rich in.

In our text, Jesus calls people into a life of discipleship. Notice how He describes it:

Matthew 16:24 “Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.”

He didn’t say, if any man will sit and let God do something to or for him; discipleship means I *come after* or *follow* the Lord. And not live for self or for selfish gain, but *deny self, and take up his cross*. That is, the cross of sacrifice, suffering or deprivation.

Matthew 16:25 “For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it.”

Whosoever will save his life, meaning living for the here and now and for things that are temporary; *whosoever will lose his life*, meaning giving up things that could be held in our hands now, for the sake of eternity and for Christ. Well, what did Jesus mean by that?

This is one of the famous paradoxes of Jesus. If you would gain life, you must be willing to lose your life. And if you would gain life here, then you forfeit the life that is to come. That's what Jesus is teaching. You can choose pleasure and ease, maybe wealth and/or popularity here, and forfeit eternal life, OR you can place your faith and hope in the world to come by sacrificing your life here and now for the sake of Jesus Christ. Now, which will it be for you and for me? Jesus goes on to warn us:

Matthew 16:26 "For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?"

Jesus is talking about how we value things in life. You know, we give great concern about material things: investments, savings accounts, retirements, accumulation of property...But, at the very same time, we show very little interest in eternal things. Isn't that foolish? It's not foolish to be wise in how you manage your money, and it's not necessarily foolish to lay plans for our financial futures. But, isn't it strange that we value those things to the point that we obsess over them? We think everything hinges upon those things. We insure our property and even our lives, and we're very urgent and very careful about that. Yet, we don't insure our eternity. We worry about retirement thirty years before we get there, but we face eternity thinking that we'll worry about that when we get there. Isn't that strange? Jesus said that it's the other way around.

The Lord's question implies that your soul is the most valuable possession that you hold, not your body. You know, in the United States, we spend more than \$3 trillion a year on healthcare. That's about \$10,000 each person, to try to live longer, is basically what it amounts to. We want to stay longer here on this earth, and there's nothing wrong with that, necessarily. But, we put a lot of value upon the physical body.

Matthew 10:28 "And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell."

You know, your money isn't the most valuable thing that you have. Remember what Peter told Simon the sorcerer.

Acts 8:20 "But Peter said unto him, Thy money perish with thee, because thou hast thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money."

At least sixteen times in the last decade, Bill Gates was declared the richest man in the world, worth nearly \$80 billion. That's difficult for me to fathom, having that kind of money! Yet, if he were to die today, you would have more money than him; he won't take his money with him.

Your most valuable things are not your clothes. I read that the most expensive dress in the world costs \$30 million. And it's not only the women: the most expensive suit that a man can buy costs more than \$892,000. And someone will spend that kind of money for a suit of clothes. Yet, what does the book of Ecclesiastes say?

Ecclesiastes 5:15 “As he came forth of his mother’s womb, naked shall he return to go as he came, and shall take nothing of his labour, which he may carry away in his hand.”

Money, clothes, houses, lands, cars, jewels, gadgets...they’re all exciting, but ultimately worthless, you see. Jesus says there is something that we possess that outshines and outlasts ALL of those things.

Matthew 6:19-21 “Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.”

The treasures of the soul never fade, break down, become obsolete or lose their value. Your body will one day grow sick and old and, finally, die, if it doesn’t meet some tragic demise in the meantime. And when you die, your body will eventually go back to the dust from which it came. Your possessions--no matter how many you may hold or how much they may be worth—will eventually lose their value. But the value of your soul is immeasurable! Why is that? What is the soul, and what make it so valuable?

First of all, there is the intrinsic value of the soul. That is to say, your soul is valuable because of what it is. The soul is the inner man.

Genesis 2:7 “And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.”

So, physically, we are made of dust. But, dwelling within this mortal coil that God fashioned is an immortal being. When God breathed into that mortal creation the breath of life, the Bible says that “*man became a living soul.*” God also said that He made man in His own image.

Genesis 1:26 “And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness...”

That is, man is MORE than just an animal life form; he bears the image of God. Not in that he looks like God, but in that he is a moral, rational, spiritual being. Whether you accept the dichotomous or trichotomous view of body, soul and spirit, what we DO know is this: man is more than just a fleshly being. The Bible affirms that beyond the shadow of a doubt. There is something beyond, or something that transcends man’s body. The Bible describes that as his *spirit*. The scriptures teach that the soul of man has the power to think (**Proverbs 23:7**); that the inner part of man has the power to reason (**Mark 2:8**); that it has the ability to love (**Matthew 22:37**). The Bible teaches that that soul or spirit is immortal; that is, it will live forever. When Jesus drew a picture of the final judgment, He described the hosts of earth divided before Him, some on the left and some on the right, and He said this:

Matthew 25:46 “And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal.”

When the ancient patriarch, Job, was suffering so horribly, death became appealing to him. It appeared as an escape to him. One reason it was so appealing was that he believed in the eternity of man.

Job 14:14 “If a man die, shall he live again? All the days of my appointed time will I wait, till my change come.”

When you read that in your modern translation, there is a question mark, so we think of Job as questioning that. However, scholars tell us that the question mark was erroneously placed there by translators, and that, instead, Job is making a declaration—not an interrogative. He is declaring, not asking, *If a man dies, he will live again*; meaning that Job, who lived long ago, in the most ancient period of earth’s history, understood that there is something beyond the grave.

That alone puts life in a totally different perspective. If, as the atheist alleges, we are merely a mass of molecules, the product of a combination of chemicals that has just highly evolved, then why does anything really matter? I mean, ultimately, that’s what it comes down to. Why would we value life? What would make life meaningful?

But, if there’s an *eternal purpose* behind life, if a man lives forever in either bliss or punishment, that changes everything. It’s a question of such great consequence. No wonder Jesus asked the question in our text.

Matthew 16:26 “For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?”

Then, there is the estimative value of the soul. God not only created the soul, but He places a high price upon it. He demonstrated what your soul is worth in giving Jesus, His Son, to die for it.

I Peter 1:18-19 “Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers; But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot:”

You weren’t redeemed with the vain and trite things of earth. The high price that heaven paid shows the divine estimate that God places upon the souls of men, whom He created.

Thirdly, we see the value of the soul in the fact that it is irreplaceable. Let’s think about the proposition that Jesus puts before us in the text. *What if a man gains the world, and loses his soul?* What would that mean? Well, if I gain the world—amass ALL of the wealth and worth of the material universe. Have you ever thought about how much that would be, merely from a material standpoint? The History Channel aired a special program a few years ago about the value of planet earth. It was quite interesting. They looked at diamonds and gold, water and lumber...all of earth’s other resources. And they added all of this up and concluded that our planet is worth just under \$7 quadrillion (\$6,873,951,620,979,800). If you could have all of earth’s money, according to the 2013 Global Wealth Report by Research Institute, you would have about \$241 trillion (\$241,000,000,000,000). Just to put that in perspective, if you had that amount in dollar bills and stacked it up, one mathematician said that that stack would reach over 2/3 of the distance from here to the moon!

Yet, if all of that was yours, what have you gained? Jesus says that you've gained something that won't satisfy. And the wise man concurred.

Ecclesiastes 5:10 "He that loveth silver shall not be satisfied with silver; nor he that loveth abundance with increase: this is also vanity."

How true that is! The man who loves silver is never satisfied with the amount that he has. Have you ever met a rich man who was satisfied? I didn't ask if you've ever met a rich man who was happy, or who's proud of what he's earned, or who enjoys spending what he's made or who enjoys his lavish lifestyle. That's not what I'm asking. Have you ever met a rich man who was *satisfied*? I haven't. Every rich man I know is always trying to make more money. That's what he's good at and that's what he does. Ultimately, that's his passion.

Don't we all think, no matter how rich or poor we might be, *if I only had...this or that, I'd be satisfied*. But, we never are. Alexander the Great conquered the world then wept because there were no more worlds left to conquer. Solomon was one of the wealthiest men in history. The half hasn't been told about his wealth, his wisdom or his works. Yet this wealthy king admitted that he sought happiness in all of these things he'd accumulated, but ultimately said that it was "*vanity and vexation of spirit*" (**Ecclesiastes 1:14**). You see, if you gain all of the world, you're gaining something that will never satisfy you. If you gain all of the world, you're gaining something that will eventually perish.

I John 2:17 "And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever."

The world that you gain becomes a dangerous and disappointing master.

I Timothy 6:6-12 "But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and raiment let us be therewith content. But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows. But thou, O man of God, flee these things; and follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness. Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, whereunto thou art also called, and hast professed a good profession before many witnesses."

Jesus illustrated the vanity of "living for things" when He told the haunting parable of the rich farmer.

Luke 12:16-21 "And he spake a parable unto them, saying, The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully: And he thought within himself, saying, What shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my fruits? And he said, This will I do: I will pull down my barns, and build greater; and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods. And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry. 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? So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.”

In all of his preparations and gaining of the world, he wasn't doing anything about his soul. He gained the world, but he lost his soul.

You may lose material things, but you've not lost everything. You may lose your house in a fire. I know a family who lost two homes back to back in fires. It's horribly devastating. But homes can be rebuilt. You may lose what you have in the stock market, but wealth can eventually be re-earned or replaced, and even if it's not, it's just money.

But, if there is an eternity, if we are created in the image of an eternal and transcendent God, if we will stand before Him in judgment when this life is over, and if we will spend eternity somewhere—either in His presence or in hell fire, then, friend, if you lose your soul, you've lost everything. EVERYTHING. You won't take your wealth, the things that you accumulated in this life, and if you lose your soul when you've left all of that behind, what do you have?

Jesus told about a rich man who died and went to hell and was in torment (**Luke 16**). There is no indication in scripture that his suffering was temporary. Lazarus, on the other hand, was comforted in paradise, and he'll enjoy the bliss and comforts of heaven throughout eternity. Friend, if you miss that for mere things and pleasures on earth that don't last, what have you gained? *What shall a man give in exchange for his soul?* That's a question you can't answer. What is worth losing your eternal soul for today? Won't you surrender to the Lord Jesus and live for Him, and it'll be worth it in the after awhile.