

Our Most Precious Possessions #1

Jack Smythe was a carpenter living in Australia during the 19th century. He was a good carpenter in demand because of his skillful workmanship. But something began to happen in the mind and heart of Jack that would dramatically change the direction of his life. Jack heard of the gold rush in California, and then he heard that gold had been discovered in his own native land of Australia. The more Jack thought about all that gold out there, the more he dreamt about getting rich overnight, and the more restless he became. Finally, one day, Jack Smythe sold his hammer and saw, and left for Victoria to find gold.

Jack drifted from field to field, sifting sand in streams with pans and digging holes in hillsides with picks and shovels but finding nothing. Finally, tired and discouraged but too proud to return back home, Jack decided to move to the most remote spot that he could find. He had given up on his dream to find gold, he now would eke out an existence off the land for the remainder of his life.

Jack settled in Yambuk, Victoria- a deserted area near an old worked-out gold mine. It was ironic that Jack would settle near an old deserted mine to till the ground. It was also ironic that Jack the carpenter would have to build his last house out of packed mud because any substantial trees were just too far away for Jack to move them to his building site. So, here's Jack Smythe, a shell of a man, having squandered his life's energies searching for gold, now eking out an existence, living on what food he could raise or find, living in a mud house.

Jack Smythe died in 1873. Those who found him said that he probably died of starvation. The house was in such a state of disarray that it was decided to level it to the ground. But as they were destroying the house, someone noticed a sparkle in the crumbled mud-bricks. Could that sparkle be gold? Yes, the assay proved it to be so. The clay that Jack had dug out of the old mine shaft to make the mud-bricks for his house, had been near the beginning of another precious vein of gold in the old deserted mine.

Almost overnight, the deserted mine in Yambuk came back to life again, and remained one of the most thriving gold-mining areas in Victoria for years to come. But the discovery was made too late for Jack Smythe, the skilled carpenter who had left his secure lifestyle to search for precious gold, the man who had finally starved to death unknowingly surrounded by that which he had searched for his entire life.

There are more Jack Smythes in this world than anybody could ever know. People who are looking fervently for that which they consider to be valuable in life, thinking that if they could only find that secret treasure they will finally be happy, totally ignoring their most precious possessions that are very close to them. We would like to take the next Sunday mornings to look at 10 most precious possessions, treasures that should be the most valuable to each of us. They should be most precious to us because they what God considers to be most valuable. And they are available to every single one of us. We begin this morning by looking at perhaps the most precious possession

that we have- Jesus referred to it in Mark 8.

In this passage in which Jesus is speaking to a crowd following him to hear his teachings, Jesus gives a very clear statement concerning the most precious possessions that every one of them had.

READ Mark 8:34-37

MK 8:34 Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. ³⁵ For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it. ³⁶ What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul? ³⁷ Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul?"

There is one possession that each of us has that is most precious to us. It is our eternal life principle, our soul, our psychai in the Greek language. This psychai is found 4 times in these 4 brief verses. It is translated *life* 2 times in verse 35, and it is translated *soul* in verses 36 and 37. It is the very same word in the original Greek- psychai, our life, our soul, our inner eternal being.

What is this psychai? Colin Brown, the Greek scholar, says of this term: "If we examine this development in the meaning of psychai, we find that the word has 3 areas of meaning: a. the sense of the basis of life, life itself; b. the inward part of man; and c. an independent soul, in contrast to the body."

So the psychai or life or soul that Jesus spoke about here, was our inner, immaterial part. It was that which gave life to his mortal body. It is difficult, if not impossible, to fully describe it, but we know immediately when it is no longer there. If you have ever been with a person who has passed from this earthly state in physical death, you know exactly what I am talking about. You can tell when the psychai leaves this earthly tent. There is more than just a change in color, there is a complete change in appearance. I have had the privilege of being at the bedside of a dozen or so people at the very moment when they entered their eternal state. The last was my own mother last September. I knew the moment my mother had left this earth and entered heaven. Her body remained before me. But she was gone. The psychai had left the earthly tent.

In the national museum that is in Washington D.C., there is a display entitled "The body of a person weighing 154 pounds." Within that display is a series of glass containers. 2 are jars of water, many are filled with chemicals potassium, sodium, phosphate of lime, calcium, many others, there are several other bottles of gases, hydrogen, oxygen, nitrogen. The bottles in the display are given in the exact proportion found in the body of the average human being. But nobody in their right mind would actually call those bottles in the display an actual person. For a combination of chemicals doesn't make us a person. There is the soul that is necessary in a person being a living human being. A hundred dollars could buy all of the raw products, chemicals, that compose the human body. But the human soul is priceless, it is the most valuable possession that a person has.

Jesus said that that psychai, that life, that soul, that every person possesses, is his or her most precious

possession, worth more than this entire physical world.

Why is our soul our most precious possession? Notice with me 3 reasons that Jesus gives for the immeasurable value of our souls.

1. Our soul is most valuable to us because of its personal nature. My soul is me and I am my soul. Your soul is you; you and your soul are one. You noticed that Jesus changed from a mere impersonal article to a personal pronoun when contrasting the world and the soul, didn't you? *What good is it for a man to gain **the** whole world, yet forfeit **his** soul.* Our souls are our most precious possession because we are so personally attached to them.

Throughout human history, every generation of people has been tempted to value other commodities as more precious than their souls. In Christ's day, power, prestige, human respect were among the most valued commodities. The Roman Empire had been built upon the foundation of raw strength and power. That value structure that appealed to the sinful nature had filtered down into every area of life. Even the religious leaders of Christ's day were most interested in prestige and human respect and power. Jesus, time and time again, criticized the Pharisees and Scribes because their religiosity was external, done for the praise of men, performed for people's applause and respect, rather than being done solely for the honor and glory of God. The Pharisees and Scribes rejected Jesus Christ as the Messiah even though he taught God's truth and performed confirming miracles because Jesus was a threat to their religious system- they thought they would have lost their positions of prestige, they thought they would have lost their power if they would have acknowledged Jesus as the Messiah. In the final analysis, the Pharisees and Scribes valued power, prestige and human respect more than they did their own souls.

Today, there are different emphases, of course, but the bottom line is still very similar. Pleasure, recreation, material possessions, ease of living are very valuable commodities in our nation today. Our technologies have introduced unprecedented ease to our lifestyles. We have many pleasures to enjoy, and time and money to enjoy them. Many people in our nation today are living for the pleasures of life. If Jesus were to stand before them as he did the rich, young ruler in Luke 18 and say, "You lack one thing, sell everything you have and give it to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, and follow me," most would walk away sadly as he did, not willing to sacrifice their riches for the welfare of their souls.

We must realize that God has given to us our life as our most precious possession. Everything else out there in the world is not ours- it's God's. And Satan along with the lust of the eyes tempts us to covet the things around us. He tries to motivate us to spend all of our time and energies stockpiling as much as we can. But it doesn't matter how much we stockpile, it will never be ours. It is **the** world- it is **his** life. The only thing that we will ultimately possess is our lives, our souls because God has given that to each of us. Our soul is most precious to us because of its personal nature- there is nothing that we identify with more than our life, because my life is me.

2. But secondly, notice that Jesus indicates the value of our souls as he compares the soul to the world. Our

souls are our most precious possession because our soul is more valuable than the entire world.

READ Mark 8:36

³⁶ What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul?

Now I believe Jesus picks out the greatest gain imaginable here on this earth in order to compare it to the value of the human soul. Roman Emperors had sacrificed untold quantities of financial and human resources to gain the world. Now Jesus stands in the midst of this world-wide empire- which really wasn't as world-wide as they thought because there were still vast territories in the far east that had thriving, independent identities- and Christ says one soul is worth more than this entire world.

Now why would Christ make such a claim? Jesus knew a single fact that put a whole new perspective on life. That fact was the temporal nature of this world. Every person is born into a world that has existed for countless years and passes from a world that from all appearances is going to exist for countless years. From our individual perspective, we are not in a position to even guess how old the world is or how long this world will continue to exist. Our most brilliant scientists differ in their estimations of the earth's age by billions of years. So it is perfectly natural for us from our limited perspective to be like the old Indians thinking that the mountains are eternal.

But God has a different perspective. And Jesus Christ being the second person of the Godhead shared in this perspective. Christ has existed from eternity past, the Bible says. He created all things- so he knows exactly how old the earth is and how relatively new this earth is. And Jesus Christ knows what is going to happen in the future. He knows that this earth is going to pass away out of existence one day. He already knows the exact time when this earth is going to be completely destroyed by fire according to 2 Peter 3:7. Jesus also knows the eternal nature of every human being for He created us in his own image and breathed into us the never-ending life of God. Christ knew that every person born was born to live eternally. This earthly body, of course, would wear out and die, but the psychai, the soul, the life principle, would go on living and living forever. You see, we don't have that perspective, for from our perspective the earth around us appears to be far more stable and permanent than people who come and go while the earth stays on. But from Christ's eternal perspective, life is not as it appears to be to us. Therefore, Jesus could say that one soul was more valuable than the entire world, because one soul is eternal, while this entire world is temporary.

We just had one of those freak snow storms that sometimes occur in Michigan last week. As I preparing this sermon on Wednesday and Thursday, it looked like the middle of January or February outside. This bizarre thought came into my mind. What if someone were to build a gigantic mansion out of snow and ice that was coming down and offer to trade me that mansion for my home. I mean, the wet snow was perfect for packing, building snowmen or snow-forts. What if someone were to build a gigantic mansion out of the snow with a dozen times more square footage than my house, with more amenities than I have now, would I even consider an even up trade? Of course not. It wouldn't matter how much square footage the ice home had, it wouldn't matter how many bathrooms, it

wouldn't matter how modern the kitchen, it wouldn't matter how many amenities it had, it would be foolish to even consider trading my house for it. Who in their right mind would give up their brick or wooden home to live in an ice home for a couple of days until it melted? The luxury of the home is not even a consideration due to the temporary nature of it.

Millions of people are making a decision that is even more foolish than trading for an ice home. They are choosing to squander that which is their most precious possession for things that will never, ever be theirs. They are losing their eternal souls in favor of that which will not even last a moment in light of eternity. They are trying to gain a world that they never can possess, and in the process they are losing their souls- the only valuable possession that they actually do have.

Why is our soul more valuable than the whole world? Because our soul is eternal, this world is just temporary.

3. But there is one final reason that we must see this morning. When a person loses his soul, the loss is irrevocable. That is what is implied by Christ's rhetorical question "what can a man give in exchange for his soul?"

When we lose something here on earth, we can usually get it back if we want it badly enough. We might lose some money in the process, but at least we can get it back. For instance, if a person loses a watch, he can go and buy another watch. And if he liked that specific model of watch more than any other, he can shop until he finds that exact model and he can buy that watch. It will cost him, of course, but he can replace that which was lost.

Now the more valuable an item is, the more difficult it is to replace it. And not just because of its monetary value, but also because of its unique qualities. We speak of some paintings as being irreplaceable. Yes, an artist could try his best to duplicate Leonardo DaVinci's portrait of the Mona Lisa, and there would be somewhat of a likeness, but the genius of the painting could never really be duplicated if the Mona Lisa were to be lost to mankind.

The soul, the most valuable possession that a person has, can never be replaced if it is lost. Once the soul is lost, its loss is irrevocable. *What can a person give in exchange for his soul?* Jesus asked. The obvious answer is nothing. There is nothing in this world that is of equal value to exchange for it. If the soul is worth more than the whole world put together, what could there ever be to exchange for it. If the soul is lost, that loss is irrevocable, there is nothing that can be exchanged for it.

You have something that is of more value than the entire world. I have something of greater worth than anything else in this universe. It is your soul, it is my soul. Our souls are our most precious possessions. Our souls are most precious to us because they are the only thing that we really do possess because God has given them to us. Our souls are most valuable to us because they are all that is eternal in this entire world. Our souls are most valuable because their loss would be irrevocable- we could never replace them or exchange anything to get them back. Once our earthly life ends, the eternal state of our soul is set forever. A person who is wise in this life will have as his highest priority preparing his soul for his eternal state.

How can we have confidence that we are preparing our souls as we should be?

Let me conclude with the answer that Jesus gives. For Jesus sandwiched this teaching about the value of our souls with some instruction as to how we can prepare our souls for eternity.

READ verses 34, 35.

"If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. ³⁵ For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it.

READ verse 38:

³⁸ If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when he comes in his Father's glory with the holy angels."

The first step in preparing our soul for eternity is to accept Jesus Christ into our lives as Savior and commit our lives to follow him as his disciple. Those who are too ashamed to be followers of Christ here on this earth, those who would rather identify themselves with the temporal values of this life, will find that they receive the same treatment from Christ in the future. Those who identify themselves with Jesus Christ as followers of his and who are willing to apparently lose their life now by giving it totally in service to him will find that more importantly he will identify himself with them in the future.

Alexander the Great was impressed with the brilliant mind of the philosopher Diogenes. So appreciative of the philosopher's insights was Alexander that he came to Diogenes one day and offered him anything that he wanted. *Whatever you ask, I will give it to you,* Alexander offered to Diogenes. Immediately, the wise philosopher asked for this request: *one little portion of eternity.* Alexander was taken back- he had assumed that the philosopher would ask for riches or land or for some position. *I can't give you a piece of eternity,* Alexander answered, *for that is not in my power. I don't have that as a gift to give to you.* Diogenes immediately replied, *If you don't have the gift of eternity, then why are you taking such pains to conquer the world, when you can't be assured that you will have one minute to enjoy it?*

Diogenes was a pagan philosopher, but he knew more about the value of the soul than most others in his day. If the soul is lost in eternity, than nothing else really matters much at all here upon this earth. For everything else that we experience during our lifetime is just a blink of the eye in light of eternity. The most precious possession that we have is our soul. And the wonderful truth of God's word is that, unlike Alexander, the Christian can be assured of his eternal state. The Bible reveals God's truth to us so that we can know that we have prepared our soul for eternity. Are you prepared for eternity this morning?