

Your Precious Soul

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Date: 10 May 2020

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[0 : 00] Well, with the Lord's help, if we could turn back to that portion of Scripture that we read in the Gospel according to Mark and chapter 8. Mark chapter 8, and I'd like us to consider from verse 34 down to the verse Mark 37.

Mark 8 at verse 34, where we're told there, And calling the crowd to him, that is Jesus, with his disciples, Jesus said to them, If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.

For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the Gospels will save it. For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and lose his soul?

For what can a man give in exchange for his soul? What shall it profit a man or a woman, a boy or a girl, to gain the whole world and lose their soul?

When is the lockdown going to be lifted? When are people going to get back to work? When is the economy going to get up and running?

[1 : 18] You know, they are some of the questions which our media is repeatedly bombarding the government with, almost, you could say, every afternoon. And these questions they're being asked, all because there's this difficult balance between death and debt.

There's this difficult balance between death and debt. Because if we lift the lockdown and the coronavirus will start to spread again and the death toll will continue to rise.

But if we remain in lockdown, the coronavirus is contained, but the deaths of our nation continue to rise. There's this difficult balance between death and debt.

And of course, our Prime Minister, we see it all the time. He's repeatedly emphasising that he wants to get this balance between death and debt. He wants to get it right. And he wants to get it right the first time.

Because the last thing our death rate and our debt crisis needs, the last thing it needs is for a second spike in coronavirus cases.

[2 : 23] Because, as you've seen in the past week, the United Kingdom has become, has had or is having the worst death rate in Europe, with over 30,000 deaths.

That's 30,000 souls. 30,000 souls which have entered eternity over the past few weeks because of one disease.

But, you know, our national death rate, it's going up. And it'll keep going up. And not only because of direct COVID-19 cases, but also because of indirect deaths due to, well, due to a reduction of treatments and a reduction of services being available.

You know, my friend, the death rate is rising. And so is our debt. Whether that debt is personal or even national. And as a nation, as we heard the other day, we are in hundreds of billions of pounds of debt.

And as time goes by, there's pressure on the government to favour debt more than death. And to lift the lockdown sooner than we should.

[3 : 32] And, you know, the decision which the government is being faced with is either to suppress this disease or to save the economy. And what they have to decide, what the government has to decide is, well, what's more important?

Souls or sterling? What's more important? Souls or sterling? And, you know, in many ways, that's the same question Jesus is asking this morning. What's more important to you?

Your precious sterling or your precious soul? What's more important to you? Now, I don't want to play down this debt crisis and minimise the heartache and worry that debt is causing people.

But like the government, Jesus here, he's asking an economic question. Jesus is using the language of finance, the language of banking. And he's speaking about profit and loss.

He's speaking about gain and loss. And Jesus is asking us, What will it profit you if you were to gain the whole world and yet lose your precious soul?

[4 : 38] What's more important to you? Your precious soul or your precious sterling? What's more important? Your precious soul or your precious sterling?

And, you know, I'd like us to consider Jesus' probing question here. I want us to consider it under three headings. Because in this passage, we see Jesus calling the crowds, and then we're to be considering the contract and counting the cost.

And there are three headings. Calling the crowds, considering the contract, and counting the cost. So look first of all at calling the crowds. Calling the crowds.

We see that in verse 34. It says, And calling the crowd to him with his disciples, Jesus said to them, If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.

Now, prior to this invitation to the crowds, Jesus had been discussing with his disciples in private, and he had been speaking to them about his identity. Because at the time, there was lots of confusion about the identity of Jesus.

[5 : 50] Some people had said that Jesus was John the Baptist. Other people said that he was Elijah, or just one of the prophets. But then, as we read, Jesus made his discussion with the disciples.

He made it very, very personal. Because he asked a very direct question. Who do you say that I am? Who do you say that I am? And it was at that point that Peter stepped forward, and he made this great confession.

You are the Christ. You are the Christ, the Son of the living God. But as we read, Jesus, he went on in the verses, he went on to explain that he must suffer many things and be killed, and on the third day, rise again.

And then Peter, he rebuked Jesus for saying such a thing. But as Jesus rebuked Peter, he explained that Peter didn't fully understand what it means to follow him.

And so when Jesus calls the crowd in verse 34, he wants to explain what it means to follow him.

And you know, the crowds which followed Jesus, it's something which all of our gospel writers pick up on.

[7 : 00] They're always highlighting that there were crowds that followed Jesus, because everywhere Jesus went, there were crowds that followed him. And all the crowds, they all witnessed Jesus perform miracles.

They all heard Jesus preach. They all saw him move with compassion towards sinners or those who were sick. And human nature being what it is, the crowds attracted an even greater crowd. But you know, for many people, it was easy to just go along in the crowd. It was easy to follow the crowd. It was easy to blend into the crowd. It was even easy to get lost in the crowd.

And for that reason, the gospel writers, they often portray the crowds as something negative.

Because you know, my friend, we have to understand that Jesus isn't into crowds.

Jesus isn't into counting church attendance. Jesus doesn't care about views or likes or shares. My friend, Jesus isn't into crowds, because there are crowds in hell.

[8 : 09] You know, Jesus, my friend, he wants dedicated disciples. Jesus wants committed Christians. Jesus wants serving saints. That's why Jesus is calling this crowd.

And that's why Jesus is calling you this morning. He's calling you to come and follow him, because your soul is precious. But you know, the thing is, you're not sitting in a crowd of churchgoers this morning.

You're sitting at home. And this morning, you can't just go along in the crowd. You can't just follow the crowd. You can't just blend into the crowd.

You can't even hide in the crowd. And you know, my friend, that's why Jesus is personally speaking to you and calling you directly where you are this morning.

He's calling you to come and listen to what he has to say. He's calling the crowds. Because you know, in this crowd, there were those who were committed.

[9 : 12] There were those who were curious, those who were confused, and those who were counterfeit. In this crowd, in Mark 8, there were those who were committed, curious, confused, and counterfeit.

And in many ways, you're somewhere in that crowd, my friend, aren't you? Which one are you, though? Are you committed to following Jesus? Are you a committed Christian this morning?

Or are you curious? Curious to know more about Jesus? Where you have this interest, and this interest, it has been growing for years, maybe. It's growing all the time.

And you would say, well, I'm not committed, but I am curious. Or are you confused? Are you confused about Jesus? Are you confused about his identity? Confused about salvation?

Are you confused about Jesus' relevance for your life today? Or are you counterfeit? Because, you know, Judas was in this crowd.

[10:14] And sadly, Judas thought that by just being in the crowd, that that was enough to please God. But as you know, it's not. That's why Jesus is calling the crowds, because he wants to explain what it means to follow him.

And Jesus says to those who are committed, curious, confused, or counterfeit, Jesus says, if anyone will come after me. That's what he says. If anyone would come after me.

The offer is to whosoever. Jesus is issuing there the free offer of the gospel to whosoever. And he's saying, whether you're committed, curious, confused, or counterfeit, whoever you are, if you'll follow me, you'll be saved.

And you know, the word whosoever, I love that word. The word whosoever is probably one of the most beautiful words in the Bible. You know, all we have to do is consider the most well-known verse in the Bible, and we see that word there.

John 3.16, for God so loved this world that he gave his only begotten son that whosoever, whosoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

[11:32] Whosoever. Which means that there's no one except from this call to come and follow Jesus. It doesn't matter who you are or where you are this morning or what you've done, whether in the past or even in the present, whether you're committed, curious, confused, or counterfeit, the wonder of the gospel is that Jesus is urging you to come and follow him.

My friend, the call is to whosoever. And that call includes everyone. Everyone who hears the message of the gospel this morning and even everyone who can't hear the message of the gospel this morning.

The call is to whosoever. It includes everyone and it excludes no one. Which means that it includes you. It includes you.

Jesus is calling you to come and follow him. And notice Jesus says if anyone would come after me. Jesus doesn't say if anyone would come to a place of worship.

He doesn't say if anyone would follow a preacher. Jesus doesn't say if anyone will say a certain prayer. No, no. Jesus says if anyone will come after me.

[12:47] Therefore, my friend, you must come to this Jesus. This Jesus who's revealed to you in the gospel. This Jesus who loves us with an everlasting love.

This Jesus is the one that you must come to individually and personally and you must seek him with all your heart because he's the one who's calling the crowds and he's calling you to come and follow him.

And he's calling you. Why? Because your soul is precious. Your soul is precious and Jesus wants you to know that your soul is precious.

Now, before we go any further, I want to say that you can't ignore Jesus calling the crowds. crowds. You can't dismiss Jesus calling the crowds.

You can't reject this fact that Jesus is calling the crowds. You can't say, well, if I'm going to be saved, I'll be saved, and there's nothing I can do about it. You can't dismiss Jesus calling the crowds because, you know, my friend, that statement that I hear so often, if I'm going to be saved, I'll be saved, and there's nothing I can do about it.

[13:58] You know, I don't read that in my Bible. I've never read that in the Bible because Jesus never said, stay where you are. Jesus never said, wait for the bright lights.

Jesus never said, wait to listen to the voice from heaven. Jesus never said, wait until you're good enough or old enough or know enough to come and follow me.

No, my friend, Jesus said, whosoever will, let him come unto me. And, you know, that's what the gospel says. The gospel repeatedly says, come, look, listen, ask, seek, knock.

The gospel is full of imperatives which compel us to come. Which means, my friend, this statement, if I'm going to be saved, I'll be saved and there's nothing I can do about it, that's nonsense.

The gospel says, you must come. You need to come. The gospel says, you have to come because Jesus is calling you, to come. He's calling the crowds and he's issuing this call to whosoever.

[15 : 09] Whosoever will, let him come. You know, the offer is as wide as possible. The offer is as wide as possible. Whether you're religious or not, whether you're good or bad, male or female, rich or poor, young or old, whosoever.

The offer is as wide as possible. But then Jesus makes it as narrow as possible. Because by calling the crowds, Jesus says that we need to be considering the contract.

By calling the crowds, Jesus says we need to be considering the contract. That's what we do secondly, considering the contract. we'll read again in verse 34.

And calling the crowd to him with his disciples, he said to them, if anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospels will save it.

You know, after calling the crowds, Jesus explains what it means to follow him. And he does that by telling us to consider the contract. Because, you know, what should be blatantly obvious to us is that we don't dictate the terms and conditions of what it is to follow Jesus.

[16 : 38] We might think that we can follow Jesus on our own terms. We might think that we can live according to the conditions that we set. We might think that we can do things our own way.

But Jesus says here, he sets it out for us, plainly and simply, he says, that's not what it means to follow me. Because if you want to follow me, then you must deny self.

My friend, in order to be a disciple of Jesus, you must deny self. Because denying self is about removing yourself from being the priority and focus of your life.

Denying self is about abdicating the throne of your heart where you make all the decisions and you dictate what happens. Denying self is literally giving yourself up.

My friend, denying self is about surrendering your will. It's about submitting your life. It's about bowing your knee. It's about confessing your sin and it's about committing your life to King Jesus.

[17 : 45] And that's not easy. that's not easy. Because whether we like to admit it or not, we all love self.

And we all want to look after self. And we all want to make self the priority. We don't want anyone to dictate the terms and conditions upon our life.

Because we want to be the kings and queens upon our own lives and upon our own hearts. But my friend, our sin, our sin has so deluded us into thinking that we don't need Jesus in our life.

Maybe not today. Not just now. That's what our sin tells us. That's what Satan tells us. Not today. Tomorrow. But you know, Jesus, he knows our heart. And Jesus knows our sin.

And Jesus knows that our soul is precious. That's why he calls us to follow him by considering the contract. And Jesus sets the terms and conditions because he knows what's good for us.

[18 : 51] You know, we don't set the terms and conditions. We can't follow Jesus on our own terms. We can't live according to the conditions that we set and do things our own way. No, Jesus says the terms and conditions are that you must deny self.

The terms and conditions are that you're in or you're out. Because you can't be half in and half out. My friend, you can't have one foot with Christ and one foot with the world.

You can't feed off the word and flirt with the world. No, it's all or nothing. You're in Christ or you're out of Christ. You're saved or you're unsaved.

You're found or you're lost. You're safe or you're in danger. You're on the narrow path or the broad road. You're walking in the light or you're walking in darkness. You're a sheep or you're a goat.

You're heaven bound or you're hell bound. My friend, you can't have a foot in both camps. You can't go on halting between two opinions because there's no middle ground.

[19 : 54] There's no fence sitters. There's no compromise with Jesus because he sets the terms and conditions. And the terms and conditions are that you must deny self.

You must surrender your life. You must submit your will. You must bow your knee. You must abdicate the throne. You must confess your sin and you must commit your life to Jesus Christ. That's the terms and conditions which Jesus sets. Whosoever will, let him come to me. But these are the terms and conditions. You must deny self.

You must deny self. But more than that, the terms and conditions which Jesus sets are that we deny self and also die to self.

Die to self. He says, if anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it.

[20 : 57] But whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospels will save it. My friend, following Jesus is a matter of life and death.

because the terms and conditions are that if you don't die to self, you will never experience eternal life. It's a matter of life and death.

If you don't die to self, you'll never experience eternal life. And you know, when Jesus said that in order to become one of his disciples, we must deny self and die to self by taking up his cross and following him, you know, this was one of the most startling things that Jesus ever said.

And for us reading it, well, we might not think much about it. But you know, in the first century, when Jesus said these words, the cross wasn't just a piece of jewellery or a figure of speech.

The cross was a symbol of submission. The cross was a symbol of submission. The cross was a symbol of Rome's power and authority. The cross was an emblem of the Roman empire's domination and oppression of Israel.

[22 : 10] The cross was this visible act of Rome's terror because crucifixion was the most excruciating form of capital punishment. The cross was a sign of cruelty and pain and shame and death.

But not only that, when someone took up their cross, they would have to publicly carry their cross through the streets all the way to their place of execution and death.

But you know, this act of carrying the cross had signified your submission to Rome's power and Rome's authority over your life. And yet here is Jesus and he's issuing this same symbol and he's issuing it in order to signify that the ultimate submission that's required in order to be his disciple is to take up your cross.

But Jesus says it's not submission where you confess Caesar as Lord. That's not what it is to save your precious soul.

No, Jesus says taking up your cross is a submission where you confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. And you know, with such an extreme symbol of taking up your cross, Jesus was affirming that in order to be his disciple, we must be prepared to endure trouble, pain, suffering, conflict and even death.

[23 : 39] Because my friend, you know, if we will not carry the cross, we shall never wear the crown. If we will not carry the cross, we will never wear the crown.

Is that not what J.C. Ryle said? I've mentioned him the last three weeks. The same quote just keeps going round in my head. A Christianity that costs nothing is worth nothing.

A cheap Christianity without a cross will prove in the end a useless Christianity without a crown. My friend, if we will not carry the cross, we shall never wear the crown.

You know, my friend, we need to be cross bearers and not merely cross wearers. Because, you know, there are too many people today. They want the crown without the cross.

They want religion without repentance. They want blessedness without brokenness. They want salvation without the Savior. They want church without commitment. They want heaven without holiness.

[24 : 40] But, you know, by considering the contract and the terms and conditions which Jesus has set, he sets it out that you must deny self and you must die to self.

And, you know, by his help and grace, you're able to do it not only once, but daily. Because, you know, Christianity and following Christ is not this one-time act of submission.

It's to be a daily act of submission where you put Jesus first in everything. You give him the priority in your life. You give him the glory that he deserves. And in all things, he is to get the preeminence.

My friend, when you deny self and when you die to self, you're to go where he calls you to go.

You're to do what he calls you to do. You're to serve where he calls you to serve.

Because when you deny self and when you die to self, you're to surrender your life. You're to submit your will. You're to bow your knee. You're to abdicate the throne of your heart.

[25 : 44] You're to confess your sin and you're to commit your life to Jesus Christ. My friend, when you deny self and die to self, you're to take up your cross and follow Jesus.

Follow Jesus. And you know, my friend, it's when you wholeheartedly make that commitment to Jesus Christ that you'll be able to make the confession of the Christian.

I know what Paul said in Galatians 2 verse 20. I am crucified with Christ. Nevertheless, I live. Yet not I, but Christ lives in me.

And the life that I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me. You know, is that your confession today?

Is that your confession? That's what Jesus wants to know. Are you willing to deny self and die to self? Because your soul is precious.

[26 : 49] Your soul is precious. That's why Jesus is calling the crowds. And that's why you need to be considering the contract and counting the cost.

Which is what Jesus says lastly. He says we're to be counting the cost. Counting the cost. We'll read again in verse 34.

Calling the crowd to him with his disciples. He said to them, If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it.

But whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospels will save it. For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul? For what can a man give in return for his soul?

For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of whom will the son of man also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his father with the holy angels?

[27 : 50] How much will it cost you to become a disciple of Jesus Christ? Jesus says it will cost you everything. It will cost you everything.

Because as Jesus has explained, in order to be his disciple, you must deny self and die to self. And of course denying self and dying to self, it means loss.

In order that you may gain salvation through Jesus Christ. And as we said earlier, Jesus is asking an economic question here. He's using the language of finance because he's talking about profit and loss.

He's talking about gain and loss. And Jesus is saying that if denying self and dying to self means loss, in order that you may gain salvation, then he says, well, what will it profit you if you were to gain the whole world but lose your soul?

What will it profit you if you were to gain the whole world and lose your soul? And as you know, the word gain means to acquire something you don't have.

[29 : 06] And the word loss means to lose something that you do have. Therefore, in Jesus' question about the economy of heaven, he's asking, what's more important to you?

Your salvation or your stuff? What's more important to you? Yourself or your soul? What would you rather gain?

Would you rather gain your salvation or your stuff? Would you rather lose? What would you rather lose? Would you rather lose yourself or your soul? And you know, in many ways, Jesus' question, it's a rhetorical question because the answer, my friend, is so obvious, is it not?

It should be so obvious because if you want to follow Jesus, if you want to be his disciple, if you want to be a Christian, then your salvation will be more important than your stuff.

And your precious soul will be more important than yourself. my friend, if you want to follow Jesus, if you want to be his disciple, if you want to be a Christian today, then you'll want to gain salvation rather than gain stuff.

[30 : 19] And you'll want to lose self rather than lose your soul. Because as we've said throughout, your soul is precious. Your soul is precious.

And Jesus is asking you today, think about this. Think clearly, logically, and wisely about this.

And he's saying, where will the prophet be if you seek to gain self and stuff, but in the process you lose salvation and your soul?

There's no prophet in that, Jesus says. And Jesus, you know, he's asking us, are you seriously going to gamble your salvation and your precious soul for the sake of stuff and for the sake of putting yourself first?

Are you seriously going to take the risk of neglecting your salvation and neglecting your soul, losing your soul, your precious soul? Are you seriously going to lose all that just for temporal prosperity and pleasure and power?

[31 : 34] Because, you know, what eternal benefit, what eternal profit will that be for you if you have all the wealth and all the security and the loveliest family and all the closest friends?

Nothing wrong with any of these things, but Jesus is saying, what profit will any of it be to you if you spend your life neglecting salvation and you lose your precious soul in hell?

What profit will that be to you? What profit, my friend, if you gain everything, if you gain the world but lose your soul?

And, you know, if our current situation should teach us anything, it should teach us something I've repeated to you again and again, life is uncertain, death is sure, sin is the cause, but Christ is the cure.

And, you know, that's all we're seeing today. Life is uncertain, death is sure, sin is the cause, but Christ is the cure. And, you know, my friend, I don't know how many times death is going to speak to us as communities.

[32 : 50] I don't know how many times death is going to speak to us as a nation. I don't know how many more precious souls are going to enter eternity before you wake up to the reality that you need to give attention to your soul.

You need to give attention to your soul. My friend, you need to start showing a concern for your precious soul because life is uncertain, death is sure, sin is the cause, but Christ is the cure.

And the thing is, Jesus, he promises to you rest for your soul. Jesus promises to you to be the anchor of your soul. Jesus promises to provide security for your soul.

If you'll only surrender your life and submit your will and bow your knee and abdicate the throne of your heart and confess your sin and commit your life to Jesus Christ today.

O my friend, take up your cross and follow him. Follow him because what will it profit you to gain your stuff and to gain self and yet lose your salvation and lose your soul?

[34 : 13] O my friend, take up your cross and follow Jesus. Follow Jesus. And so we've seen calling the crowds, considering the contract and counting the cost.

And Jesus is asking you this morning, not in amongst the crowds, not hiding behind the crowds, but Jesus is speaking to you, my friend, personally.

And he's asking you directly, what's more important to you? Your salvation or your stuff? What's more important to you?

Self or your soul? What will it profit a man or a woman or a boy or a girl if they were to gain the whole world but lose their soul?

My friend, I hope and I pray that you will come and answer Jesus' question by surrendering your will and submitting your heart and bowing your knee and confessing your sin and committing your life to this Jesus by denying self, dying to self and taking up your cross and following him.

[35 : 43] May the Lord bless these thoughts to us. Let us pray together. O Lord, our gracious God, we give thanks to thee that Jesus speaks to us in the gospel and that he speaks to us personally, that he speaks to us firmly, but he speaks to us out of love.

He moves towards us with compassion and he has this longing for us to be saved, knowing that we are those who are sinners and that he has the solution to our sin.

He has the remedy to our ruin. He has the cure to our chaos. And Lord, we pray that we would turn to him, we would come to him because the call is to whosoever.

And Lord, that we would consider what he is saying, that we must deny self, we must die to self, we must bow the knee and commit our life to King Jesus because he promises to us salvation, he promises to us security for our soul.

Help us then, we ask, that whoever, Lord, whoever is hearing the gospel today, that thy word would not return empty, but accomplish the thing where to thou descend it.

[37 : 06] Lord, bless us then, we pray. Go before us, we plead, for we ask it in Jesus' name and for his sake. Amen. Well, we're going to bring our service to a conclusion this morning and we're going to sing the words of Psalm 63.

Psalm 63 in the Scottish Psalter, a wonderful psalm that speaks about seeking God and the longing to know the Lord.

So we're singing Psalm 63 from the beginning down to the verse marked five. Lord, thee my God I'll early seek, my soul doth thirst for thee, my flesh longs in a dry parched land, wherein no waters be, that I thy power may behold and brightness of thy face, as I have seen thee heretofore within thy holy place.

So Psalm 63 from the beginning down to the verse marked five, to God's praise. For thee my God I love thee see, my soul doth part for thee, my flesh bless declaration the sun hide through thine turn to mother■■■■■ God's heart hide què sung hide thine heart high heart The brightness of thy face

As I have seen thee near before And then thy holy place Since better is thy love than mine My lips be great shall gain I in thy name will lift my heart As of God come rest my life If crown her sun will lift

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[40 : 02] O unblet fire, my soul shall fail it be.

Then shall my heart with joy for them take places unto thee.