

McCabe United Methodist Church

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Mark 8:31-38

“It’s Still a Bad, Bad Bargain”

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Did you hear about the lady that was asked what her favorite scripture verse was? She said it was Matthew 16:24, “If any man will come after me, let him. . .”

Well, leaving that behind, the reference was to the verse that says, “If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me.”

Listen to the scripture from Mark 8:31-38.

Sometime back a young man put his soul up for sale on eBay, the Internet auction site. Adam Burtle, a University of Washington student, sold his soul for \$400 before the listing was removed and he was suspended from the site. This is what Adam wrote, “Please realize, I make no warranties as to the condition of the soul. As of now, it is near mint condition, with only minor scratches. Due to difficulties involved with removing my soul, the winning bidder will have to. . .wait until my natural death.”

The bidding started at 5 cents. Burtle’s former girlfriend bid \$6.66 but she was overtaken in the final hour of the auction when a Des Moines, Iowa, woman bid the price of Burtle’s soul to \$400. “I don’t think she’s going to be able to collect on my soul, to be honest,” Burtle said, saying he didn’t intend for the ad to be taken seriously. “I was just bored, and I’m a geek,” he added. “So anytime I’m bored, I go back to my Internet.”(The Associated Press, 2001)

It is probably true that over the centuries many people have sold their soul simply and solely because they were bored. Talk about a bad bargain. Jesus asks, “What good is it, for a man to own the whole world, yet forfeit his soul?”

This brings us to the first thing to note from our scripture - **We do not live in a world that is simply material.** There is a spiritual side to our universe.

Remember a few years back when rock singer Madonna sang a song of praise to Material Girl? The chorus went, [We are] *Living in a material world. . .And I am a material girl. . .* “Material Girl became her nickname. She had to work very hard to get people to quit thinking of her in that light—a material girl. The truth be known, many people in this world live as if this is only a material world.

Not too long after Jesus taught about gaining the world and forfeiting one’s soul, there was a man by the name of Nero. You know, “the Nero that fiddled while Rome burned.” At least we know that he lived in glorious splendor. For example, his crown was worth a half a million dollars, and even his mules were shod with silver. He refused to wear the same garment twice no matter how costly and

beautiful it was. Thus, taxing the people unmercifully, he was able to pay extravagant sums of money to anyone who could devise new methods of entertaining him. Even with all this, he was a gloomy and dissatisfied man. All the wealth that was his was not enough to satisfy his soul. He took his own life.

It happens yet today. People seek after wealth, fame, sensual pleasure, and every means

of escape, but if they do not seek God, they never attain satisfaction. Which is to say, this is more than a material world.

The next thing we need to notice from the text - **we are more than material beings**. As the eminent philosopher Teilhard de Chardin put it so memorably, “We are not human beings having a spiritual experience. We are spiritual beings having a human experience.” Now that may sound New Age, but there is a measure of truth to it - we are spiritual beings having a human experience. To say it another way - we have a soul. Or a better way of saying it is: “We are a soul.”

Some of you may know the story of James Kidd. He was a lonely man who lived on the edge of deprivation. He spent most of his life in a rugged copper mining town in Arizona. Kidd was deeply troubled. On Jan. 2, 1946 he sat down and wrote out his will. Four years later he disappeared and was never heard from again. Authorities responsible for the settlement of his will, sixteen years after his disappearance, discovered that he had left almost \$200,000 for “research for some scientific proof of a soul of a human body which leaves at death.” (Bruce Shelley, *All The Saints Adore Thee*, Baker Books, 1988, p.46)

A lot of research has been conducted to find a spot in the body which they could identify as the soul. There is no such place. However, you can find the soul in the same place as you find love, hope, joy, peace and a host of other positive emotions. None of these emotions however, can be captured in a test tube. Yet we all know they do exist. We have seen love in action. Likewise, just because we cannot find a physical location for the soul within our body does not mean it does not exist.

And so it is, we all have a soul. While some scholars would like to say we are a soul. Our soul is who we really are.

The great violinist Paganini, came out before his audience one day and made the discovery just as the applause ended that there was something wrong with his violin. He looked at it a second and then saw that it was not his famous and valuable violin, but a cheap substitute. He felt paralyzed for a moment, then turned to his audience and told them there had been some mistake and he did not have his own violin. He stepped back behind the curtain thinking that it was still where he had left it, but discovered that someone had stolen his violin and left this old secondhand one in its place. Paganini remained back of the curtain for a moment, then came out before his audience and said: “Ladies and gentlemen, I will show you that the music is not in the instrument but in the soul.” And he played as he had never played before; and out of that secondhand instrument, the music poured forth until his audience was enraptured with enthusiasm, and the applause almost lifted the roof off the building, because the man had revealed to them that the music was not in the machine but in his own soul. (Anthony P. Castle, ed., “Go Tell Everyone,” in *Quotes and Anecdotes for Preachers and Teachers*, p.207)

My friends, don't let anyone tell you that the soul does not exist. We were created in the image of God! While that does not mean that God looks like us. It means there is something divine within each of us.

The soul is who you are. It is what makes you distinctive. You are more than a nose, mouth and a pair of eyes and ears. You have a distinct personality. And even if we could eliminate all your physical characteristics, you-the real you-would still exist. Your soul. We are more than simply material creatures. We have a soul that by the grace of God, even survives the

grave.

The third thing our scripture would tell is - **Jesus says to us, take care of your soul.** Think of it, if your soul is that part of you that survives you after death, it will probably do us well to take care of it. In fact taking care of our soul—the real you—is the most important task you and I have. Think of that!

In December 2005, Al Ginglen, a sixty-four-year-old grandfather of seven robbed a series of small banks in Illinois to cover an ever-deeper financial hole he had gotten himself into. The amazing part was that it was his three grown sons who turned him in after one of the sons recognized his father's picture, taken from a bank surveillance video, on an Internet law enforcement Web site. Al Ginglen's sons turned their father in because he had raised them to do what was right. Yet such is the power of money that he failed to do what was right himself.

(Stephen Arterburn, *The Secrets Men Keep* (Nashville: TN, Integrity Publishers, 2006) p.4-5)

A grandfather who raised his sons right. Yet, sold his soul to get himself out of debt. No, he didn't gain the world in return. He was more like Esau who sold his birthright for a pot of stew.

In contrast, there is another father who tells about his little girl. She was riding in the backseat of their dilapidated Honda Civic when she said, "Daddy, I wish everyone was as rich as we are." (Annette Simmons, *The Story Factor* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 2001) With that kind of attitude, she really was rich there in the backseat of their dilapidated Honda Civic. Yet, it is so easy for us to forget – this is more than a material world, and we are more than material beings. WE HAVE A SOUL! And with that we need to hear Jesus say to us that we need to take care of that soul. Which means we dare not sell that soul for anything. Money, power, sex—don't sell it for anything in this world. Even. Yes, even if you are offered the whole world. Walk away. It's still a bad, bad bargain!