

The Preciousness of the Soul

by Thomas Watson

The sermon emphasizes the preciousness of the soul, its spiritual nature, and its immortality, and warns against abusing the soul by degrading, selling, poisoning, or starving it.

Scripture: Psalm 139:14, Proverbs 23:5, Isaiah 33:14, Hosea 13:9, Matthew 16:26, Luke 12:20, 1 Thessalonians 4:17, Hebrews 12:23

Topics: "Eternal Soul", "Spiritual Warfare"

Description

Thomas Watson preaches about the preciousness of the soul, emphasizing that the soul is more valuable than the whole world. He delves into the intrinsic worth and immortality of the soul, highlighting its spirituality and its eternal nature. Watson warns against abusing the soul by degrading, selling, poisoning, or starving it, stressing the importance of safeguarding and not losing the soul, as its loss is foolish, irreparable, and results in eternal damnation.

Transcript

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"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?" Matthew 16:26

Every man carries a treasure about with him--a divine soul. And that this jewel should not be undervalued, our Savior here sets a price upon it. He lays the soul in balance with the whole world and, being put in the scales--the soul weighs heaviest. "What is a man profited if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul?"

The world is a stately fabric, enriched with beauty and excellency; it is like a meticulous piece of tapestry, set about with various colors. It is a bright mirror--in which much of the wisdom and majesty of God is resplendent; but as glorious as this world is, every man carries a more glorious world about with him--a precious soul. It would bankrupt the world to give half the price of a soul; it will undo the world to buy it, and it will undo him who shall sell it. If we can save our souls, though we lose the world, it is a gainful loss. But if we lose our souls though we gain the world, our very gains will undo us. "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?"

The words branch themselves into five parts:

1. A supposal of a purchase--"if a man shall gain." The proposition is hypothetical; Christ does not say he shall gain--but puts forth a supposition; it is not a certain purchase, it is only supposed.
2. The purchase itself--the world.
3. The extent of the purchase--the whole world, the world with all its revenues and benefits.
4. The terms of this purchase--he shall lose his soul. Not that his soul shall be annihilated (that would make him happy)--but he shall lose the end of his creation. He shall miss glory--if he shall lose his soul.

The loss of the soul is amplified by two things:

First, the propriety. It is his own soul, that which is nearest to him, that which is most himself. The soul is the most noble part; it is the man of the man.

Second, the irrecoverableness of the loss. "What shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" What shall he give? It is as if Christ had said, "Alas, he has nothing to give; or if he had something to give--yet nothing will be taken for it." The soul cannot be exchanged; there shall be no bail taken for it. "What shall a man give in exchange for his soul."

5. Our Savior's verdict upon this purchase--"for what is a man profited?" It is as if Christ had said, "He will have a hard bargain of it; he will repent of selling it at last. It is but the fool's purchase!"

DOCTRINE: The soul of man is a jewel more precious than a world. All souls are of one price; in this sense that maxim holds true: "all souls are alike." The soul of prince and peasant are equal; and every soul is of more value than a world.

For the illustration of the doctrine there are two things to be demonstrated: First, that the soul is very precious; second, that it is more precious than a world.

1. The soul is very precious. What Job said of wisdom, I may fitly apply to the soul: "Man does not comprehend its worth. It cannot be bought with the finest gold, nor can its price be weighed in silver. It cannot be bought with the gold of Ophir, with precious onyx or sapphires. Neither gold nor crystal can compare with it, nor can it be had for jewels of gold." (Job 28:13, 16-17).

The soul is the glory of the creation. The soul is a beam of God; it is a sparkle of celestial brightness, as Demascen calls it. There is in the soul, an idea and resemblance of God, an analogy of similitude of God. If David so admired the rare texture and workmanship of his body (Psalm 139:14-15: "I am fearfully and wonderfully made.") If the cabinet is so curiously wrought, what is the jewel! How richly and gloriously the soul is embroidered! It is divinely inlaid and enameled. The body is but the sheath. Daniel 7:15: "I was grieved in the midst of my body." In the Chaldean version it is "in the midst of my sheath." The most beautiful body is but like a velvet sheath; the soul is the blade of admirable metal. The soul is a sparkling diamond set in a ring of clay. The soul is a vessel of honor. God Himself is served in this vessel. The soul is the bird of paradise which soars aloft; it may be compared to the wings of the cherubim; it has a winged swiftness to fly to heaven. The soul is capable of communion with God and angels. The soul is God's house that He has made to dwell in (Hebrews 3:6). The understanding, will, and affections are the three stories in this house. What a pity it is, that this goodly building should be rented out--and the devil become

a tenant in it!

The preciousness of the soul is seen in its intrinsic worth and in its estimative worth.

The soul has an INTRINSIC worth, which appears in its spirituality and its immortality. The soul is a spiritual substance. It is a saying among the ancients, "Our souls are tempered in the same mortar as the heavenly spirits." The soul is spiritual in three ways: in its essence, its object, and its operation.

The soul is spiritual in its essence. God breathed it in (Genesis 2:7). It is a spark lighted by the breath of God. The soul may be compared to the spirits of the wine; the body to the dregs. The spirits are the more pure refined part of the wine--and such is the soul. The body is more vulgar; the soul is the more refined, sublimated part of man. Do not mistake me when I say the soul is spiritual, and that it is beam of God. I do not mean that it is of the same substance with Him, as Servetus, Osiander, and others have held; for when it is said that God breathed into man the breath of life, they erroneously thought that the soul, being infused, conveyed into man the spirit and substance of God, which opinion is absurd and sinful. For if the soul should be part of the Divine essence, then it will follow that the essence of God should be subject not only to change and passion--but, which is worse, to sin, which would be blasphemy to assert. So when we say that the soul is spiritual--we mean that God has invested it with many noble endowments. He has made it a mirror of beauty, and printed upon it a surpassing excellency. The sun shining upon crystal conveys its beauty, not its being.

The soul is spiritual in its object; it contemplates God and heaven. God is the orb and center where the soul fixes itself upon. The soul moves to God as to its rest. Psalm 116:7: "Return to your rest, O my soul." He is the ark to which this dove flies; nothing but God can fill a heaven-born soul. If the earth were turned into a globe of gold, it could not fill the heart; it would still cry, "Give, give." The soul being spiritual, God only can be the adequate object of it.

The soul is spiritual in its operation. Since it is immaterial, it does not depend upon the body in its working. The senses of seeing, hearing, and the rest of those organs of the body, cease and die with the body because they are parts of the body and have their dependence on it. But the soul has a nature distinct from the body; it moves and operates of itself though the body is dead, and has no dependence upon or co-existence with the body. Thales Milesius, an ancient philosopher, called the soul "self-moveable." It has an intrinsic principle of life and motion, though it is separate from the body. Thus you have seen the soul's spirituality.

The preciousness of the soul also appears in its immortality. There are some who say that the soul is mortal; indeed, it would be well for those who do not live like men--if they might die like beasts. But, as one well observes, it is impossible for anything of a spiritual, uncompounded nature to be subject to death and corruption. The souls of believers are with Christ after death (Philippians 1:23).

Oecolampadius said to his friend, who came to visit him on his death-bed, "Good news! I shall be shortly with Christ my Lord." And the devout soul shall be forever with the Lord (1 Thessalonians 4:17). The heathens had some glimmerings of the soul's immortality. Cicero said that the swan was dedicated to Apollo because she sings sweetly before her death; by which emblem they intimated the joyfulness of virtuous men before their death, as supposing the Elysian delights which they should always enjoy after this life. And we read that it was a custom among the Romans, when their great men died, to cause an eagle to fly aloft in the air, signifying hereby that the soul was immortal and did not die as the body dies.

The soul's immortality may be proved by this argument: That which is not capable of being killed, is not capable of dying. The soul is not capable of being killed. Our Savior Christ proved the minor proposition, that it is not capable of being killed. Luke 12:4: "Fear not those who kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do." Therefore the soul, not being capable of being killed, is not in a possibility of dying. The essence of the soul is spiritual: it has a beginning--but no end. It is eternal. The soul does not wax old; it lives forever, which can be said of any other created thing. Worldly things are as full of mutation as motion, and, like Jonah's gourd, have a worm eating at the root.

The soul has an ESTIMATIVE worth.

Jesus Christ has set a high value and estimate upon the soul. He made it and He bought it; therefore He best knows the value of it. He sold Himself to buy the soul. Zechariah 11:12: "They weighed for My price thirty pieces of silver." Nay, He was content not only to be sold--but to die. This enhances the price of the soul: it cost the blood of God (Acts 20:28). 1 Peter 1:19: "You were not redeemed with corruptible things, such as silver and gold--but with the precious blood of Christ." Christ must die that the soul may live; the Heir of heaven was pawned for the soul of man. What could Christ give more than Himself? What in Himself was dearer than His blood? O precious soul, who has the image of God to beautify you and the blood of God to redeem you! Christ was the Priest, His divine nature the altar, and His blood the sacrifice which He offered up as an atonement for our souls! Now reckon what a drop of Christ's blood is worth--and then tell me what a soul is worth!

Satan values souls; he knows their worth. The king of Sodom said to Abraham, "Give me the people--and take the goods to yourself." So Satan says, "Give me the people." He does not care how rich you are; he does not strive to take away your estates--but your souls. "Give me the people," he says. "You take the goods." What are all his warlike stratagems, his subtle snares--but to catch souls? Why does this lion so roar--but for his prey? He envies the soul its happiness; he lays the whole train of temptation, to blow up the whole royal fort of the soul. Why does he lay such suitable baits? He allures the ambitious man with a crown, the covetous man with a golden apple, and the lustful man with beauty. Why does he tempt you to Delilah's lap--but to keep you from Abraham's bosom? The devil is angling for the precious soul. To undo souls is his pride; he glories in the damnation of souls; it is next to victory to die revenged. If Sampson must die, it is some comfort that he shall make more die with him. If Satan, that lion, must be kept in his hellish den, it is all the heaven he expects to reach forth his paw and pull others into the den with him!

2. Having shown you the soul's preciousness, the next thing to be demonstrated, is that the soul is more precious than a world. The world is made of a more impure lump; the world is of a coarser make, of an earthly extract. The soul is heaven-born, of a finer spinning, of a more noble descent. The world is a great book or volume, wherein we read the majesty and wisdom of Him who made it; but the soul is the image of God (Genesis 1). The soul is a studied piece; when God made the world, it was but, "Let it be," and it was done. But when He made the soul, all the persons in the Trinity sat together at the council table. Genesis 1:26: "Come, let us make man in our own likeness." The soul is a looking-glass wherein some rays of divine glory shine; much of God is to be seen in it. Though this looking-glass is cracked by the fall--yet it shall one day be perfect. We read of "spirits of just men made perfect" (Hebrews 12:23). The soul, since the fall of Adam, may be compared to the moon in its wane, very much obscured by sin. But when it is sanctified by the Spirit and translated from hence, it shall be as the full moon: it shall shine forth in its perfect glory.

If the soul is so precious, see then what that worship is, which God expects and accepts, namely, that which comes from the more noble part of the soul. Psalm 25:1, "To You, O Lord, do I lift up my soul." David not only lifted up his voice--but his soul. Though God will have the eye and the knee, the service of the body--yet He complains of those who draw near with their lips, when their hearts are far from Him (Isaiah 29:13). The soul is the jewel. David not only put his lute and violin in tune--but his soul in tune to praise God. Psalm 103:1: "Bless the Lord, O my soul." His affections joining together in worship, made up the concert. The soul is both altar, fire, and incense; it is the altar on which we offer up our prayers, the fire which kindles our prayers, and the incense which perfumes them.

God's eye is chiefly upon the soul. Bring a hundred dishes to the table, and He will carve none but this; this is the savory meat He loves. He who is best--will be served with the best. When we give Him the soul in a duty, then we give Him the flower and the cream. By a holy chemistry we distill out the spirits. A soul inflamed in service is the cup of spiced wine, and the juice of the pomegranate (Song of Solomon 8:2), which the spouse gives Christ to drink. Without the worship of the soul, all our religion is but bodily exercise (1 Timothy 4:8), which profits nothing. Without the soul, we give God but a carcass. What are all the papists' fastings, penance, and pilgrimages--but going to hell in more pomp and state? What are the formalist's prayers, which even cool between his lips--but a dead devotion? It is not sacrifice, but sacrilege; he robs God of that which He has a right to--his soul.

If the soul be so precious, then of what precious account should ordinances and ministers be? Ordinances are the golden ladder by which the soul climbs up to heaven; they are conduits of the water of life. Oh, how precious should these be to us! They who are against ordinances, are against being saved.

And of how precious an account should ministers be, whose very work is to save souls. Their feet should be considered beautiful. Their labors should be precious. They labor with God, and they labor for your souls; all their sweat, their tears, and their prayers are for you. They woo for your souls, and oftentimes spend their lives in the suit.

Their liberty should be precious. If indeed you see any of them who are of this holy and honorable function, either idle or ravenous; if they do not divide the Word rightly, and live uprightly--censure them and do not spare them. God forbid I should open my mouth for such! In the law, the lips of the leper were to be covered; that minister who is by office an angel--but by his life a leper, ought to have his lips covered; he deserves to be silenced.

A good preacher--but a bad liver, is like a physician who has the plague: though the advice and prescriptions he gives may be good--yet his plague infects the patient. So though ministers may have good words and give good prescriptions in the pulpit--yet the plague of their unholy lives infects their people. If you find a Hophni and Phinehas among the sons of Levi, whose unholy life makes the offering of God to be abhorred, you will save God a labor in ejecting them. But be sure you distinguish between the precious and the vile; while you let out the bad blood, have a care to preserve the heart-blood; while you purge out the ill humors, do not destroy the spirits; while you are taking away the snuffs, do not eclipse the lights of God's sanctuary. It is a work fit for a Julian to suppress the orthodox ministry and open the temple of the idol. The Romans sacked the city of Corinth, and razed it down to the ground for some incivility offered to their ambassador. God will avenge the affronts offered to His ministers (Psalm 105:15). Oh, take heed of this!

If souls are of such infinite value, how precious should their liberties be, whose very design and negotiation is to save souls! (1 Timothy 4:16; Jude 23)

Application

Exhortation. If the soul is so precious, take heed of abusing your souls. Socrates exhorted young men that they should look at their faces in a looking-glass, and if they saw they were fair, they should do nothing unworthy of their beauty. Christians, God has given you souls that sparkle with divine beauty. Oh, do nothing unworthy of these souls; do not abuse them.

There are four sorts of people who abuse souls:

1. They abuse their souls who **DEGRADE** their souls. Such people set the world above their souls. "Who pant after the dust of the earth" (Amos 2:7). This is as if a man's house were on fire, and he should take care to preserve the lumber--but let his child be burned in the fire.

Such people make their souls servants to their bodies. The body is but the brutish part, the soul the angelic part. The soul is the queen-regent, who is adorned with the jewels of knowledge and sways the scepter of liberty. Oh, what a pity it is that this excellent soul shall be made into a vassal and be put to grind in the mill, when the body in the meantime sits in a chair of state! Solomon complains of an evil under the sun in Ecclesiastes 10:7, "I have seen servants upon horses, and princes walking as servants upon the earth." Is it not an evil under the sun to see the body riding in pomp and triumph, and the soul of man, that royal and heaven-born thing, as a slave walking on foot?

2. They abuse their souls who **SELL** them.

The covetous person sells his soul for money. It is said of the lawyer, "He has a tongue that will be sold for a fee." So the covetous man has a soul that is sold for money. Achan sold his soul for a wedge of gold. Judas sold his soul for silver, and cheap at that! For thirty pieces of silver he sold Christ, who was more worth than heaven, and his own soul, which was more worth than a world! How many have damned their souls for money! (1 Timothy 6:9-10) If you mix these earthly things with your souls and let them lie too near you, they will in time consume and undo your souls.

The ambitious person sells his soul for honor. Alexander the sixth sold his soul to the devil for a popedom. What is that honor, but a torch lighted by the breath of people, and with the least puff of censure blown out! How many souls have been blown into hell with the wind of popular applause!

The voluptuous person sells his soul for pleasure. Heliogabalus drowned himself in sweet water. Just so, many drown their souls in the sweet perfumed waters of pleasure. Plato calls pleasure "the bait that catches souls." Pleasure is a silken halter, a flattering devil; it kills by embracing.

3. They abuse their souls who **POISON** their souls. Error is a sweet poison. Ignatius calls it the invention of the devil. A man can as well damn his soul by error as by vice--and may as soon go to hell for a drunken opinion as for a drunken life.

4. They abuse their souls who **STARVE** their souls; these are they who say they are above ordinances. But surely we shall not be above ordinances, until we are above sin. The apostle said that in the blessed sacrament we are to remember the Lord's death until He comes (1 Corinthians 11:26), that is, until Christ comes to judgment. How then can any omit sacraments without a contempt and affront offered to Christ

Himself? If Paul and the apostles, those giants in grace, needed the Lord's Supper to confirm and nourish them, much more do we need such holy ordinances who have but an infant faith. But Satan likes these fasting days; he would have men fast from ordinances. If the body is kept from food, it cannot live long.

If the soul be so precious a thing, take heed that you do not lose your souls. What a loss it is will appear in these two things:

1. It is a FOOLISH loss to lose the soul. "You fool, this night your soul shall be required of you!" (Luke 12:20) It is a foolish loss to lose the soul, and that in a three-fold respect:

First, because there is a possibility of saving the soul. We have time to work in; we have light to work by; we have the Spirit offering us help. The soul is like a ship laden with jewels; the Spirit is a gale of wind to blow. If we would but loosen anchor from sin, we might arrive at the port of happiness.

Second, it is a foolish loss, because we lose the soul for things of no value. Worldly things are infinitely below the soul; they are nonentities. Proverbs 23:5: "Cast but a glance at riches, and they are gone, for they will surely sprout wings and fly off to the sky like an eagle." The world is but a bewitchery; these things glisten in our eyes--but at death we shall say that we have set our eyes on that which is not. Now to lose the soul for such poor inconsiderate things is a foolish thing. It is as if one should throw a diamond at a pear tree; he loses his diamond.

Third, it is a foolish loss for a man to lose his soul, because he himself has a hand in it. Is it not folly to give oneself poison? A sinner has his hands saturated in the blood of his own soul. "Your destruction is of yourself!" (Hosea 13:9). "They lay wait for their own blood" (Proverbs 1:18). The foolish sinner nourishes those lusts which kill his soul; the tree breeds the worm, and the worm eats the tree. Would it not be folly for a garrison to open to the enemy which besieges it? The sinner opens to those lusts which war against his soul (1 Peter 2:11), and this is a foolish loss.

2. It is an IRREPARABLE loss to lose the soul. Other losses may be made up again; if a man loses his health, he may recover it again; if he loses his estate, he may get it up again. But if he loses his soul, this loss can never be made up again. Are there any more saviors to die for the soul? As Naomi said to her daughters, "Are there yet any more sons in my womb" (Ruth 1:11)? Has God any more sons? Or will He send His Son any more into the world? No! Christ's next coming is not to save it--but to judge it. Christian, remember you have but one soul, and if that is gone--all is gone. "God," said Chrysostom, "has given you two eyes. If you lose one, you have another. But you have but one soul, and if that perishes you are quite undone." The merchant who ventures all in one ship, if that ship is lost, he is quite bankrupt.

3. The loss of the soul is an ETERNAL loss. Once the soul is lost, it is lost forever. The sinner and the furnace shall never be parted (Isaiah 33:14). As the sinner's heart will never be emptied of sin--so God's vial shall never be emptied of wrath!

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