

Matthew 16:26

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[0 : 00] I turn with me this morning to the scriptures of the New Testament which we read. And I'd like us to dandle our thoughts around words that come to us towards the end of that chapter 16 of Matthew's Gospel.

So, verse 26, where Jesus speaking to those who would be his disciples, reminding them that there's a cost involved, equally reminds them that there is a reward.

And in that context say something very solemn. He says,

Day was no exception. And when he stood to preach before that large audience, he said this.

He said, I have chosen at this time to handle these words. The words we've just quoted in Matthew 16, verse 26. I have chosen at this time to handle these words among you.

[2 : 12] And that's for several reasons. And he highlighted four reasons why he wanted to preach on this solemn text.

And his reasons are my reasons for us gathering our thoughts around verse 26 this morning. The first reason, all these years ago, John Bunyan stated for preaching on this solemn text was that our souls and their salvation is a wonderfully great thing, he said.

There's nothing more important for any one of us here in church this morning. There's nothing more important for us here in church this morning. There's nothing more wonderful than that.

There's nothing more wonderful than that. And we should never tire or lack excitement at telling men and women and boys and girls that to be a Christian, to have our lives, as it were, in the very palm of God's hand, is the most precious thing in the world.

More important than our houses, our land, our works, our honors. All of these pale into insignificance in the light of the salvation that's to be found in Jesus.

[3 : 55] All of these pale into the light of the salvation that's to be found in Jesus.

Don't know what it is to be found in Jesus. Don't know what it is to walk, as it were, reconciled to God. Knowing the peace of God that factors all understanding.

I wonder how many of you, in that position this morning, have come to church. and you've come to church with the primary objective that perhaps today truth will illuminate itself upon your mind and you will come into that experience for the first time.

I wonder how many of you have it as your great goal in life to come and to taste and see that God is good.

So, the sad reality is, and we could perhaps even suggest figures, maybe one in a thousand, one in five thousand in this vast city, are today passionately concerned that this precious commodity that the Scripture speaks of as their soul, that eternal well-being, is important to them.

[5 : 34] John Bunyan thirdly said he wanted to preach on this text in order that God perhaps would use him that day to throw some light into a dark mine, would use him to bring someone to that place where they would awaken to their need and they would see that without Christ, they continue to live in a world without God and without hope.

And I say the same to you. He also went on to say that he wanted to preach on this text in order that he might deliver himself from the responsibility of anyone's loss.

And I think that's true of any person who proclaims the truth of God. Anyone who mounts the steps of a pulpit to preach the message that God so loved the world that he gave his only beloved Son that whosoever believed upon him would not perish, but have eternal life.

Does so in order that the blood of men and women in the day of judgment would not be upon their hands. And we might only pass this way once.

And therefore, like Bunyan, it is in order that your loss is not my responsibility. We're told that some 180 years after the death of Emperor Chormagne that in the year around 1000 his tomb was

opened by the order of Emperor Otto.

[7 : 44] And when that tomb was opened they found this Emperor Charmagne seated on a throne.

On his head which was now a skeleton there was a crown. around him were all the trappings of his royalty of the pomp that he knew of the prosperity that he experienced.

But they also found in his hand a gospel portion and opened as he had commanded when he was buried.

Opened in Matthew 16 verse 26 pointed towards verse 26 was the bony finger of this great emperor.

What shall it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses his soul? What a solemn image that find that moment must have been for those who were privy to the occasion.

[9 : 12] It still in some ways puts a degree of shiver through your spine. But what it does is reinforce a great significant message that your soul and my soul is indeed worth something.

Sometimes you and I have the great capacity to imagine that we're not worth very much at all. But the reality is irrespective of your age irrespective of your background irrespective of what you do or don't do that which marks you out as a unique individual is not the fingerprints that you've got.

That which marks you out as a unique individual is what the Bible calls your soul or your spirit. It is something that makes you quite unique.

It's that which enables you to communicate. it's that which enables you to love and to be loved. It's that which allows you in the course of the day to deny yourself or not to deny yourself.

To choose to lay down your life for example. If you read some of the records of the historic account of the sinking of the Titanic there are some amazing stories of bravery and heroism and courage which marks out human beings in many difficult situations.

[11 : 02] Of men ensuring that their wives and their children would get into lifeboats knowing full well that the icy waters were going to be their grave.

If the Titanic could be for example a cattle ship it isn't conceivable that the bulls would say let the cows go into the lifeboats.

You can't imagine the cows saying let the calves go into the lifeboats. That which makes you and I capable of such bravery such courage such decision making is again part of what makes us so worth.

The soul is what allows us meditate and reflect on the greatness of our God which allows us to look up into the heavens and know that God is the creator of all things.

It is that which allows us to face the future. It is that which allows us to admire beauty not just in creation but in art, in literature, in music.

[12 : 12] The psalmist whose psalm we just sang in some respects captures it when he wrote in Psalm 8, When I consider the heavens, the works of your fingers, the moon and stars which you have ordained, what is man that you are mindful of, or the son of man that you should visit him?

For you have made him, he said, a little lower than the angels, and have crowned him with glory and honor. Your soul is worth.

Can I suggest to you four or five areas of scripture that remind us just how worth they are?

I think the first area of study for you is to go back to the beginning of the Bible itself, to the creation narrative. And amongst the wonder of all the things that are made there, the greatest wonder of all comes when God takes us as it were the dust of the earth and he makes man.

He makes you and he makes me. But he doesn't just leave us in that state. He makes man unique. And the uniqueness of you and of me is expanded there where we're told he breathed, as it were, the breath of the divine into the depths of the earth.

[13 : 48] And man became, we're told, a living creature. We're told that that is expanded, that he became unique in so far as he is made in the very image of God himself.

And when you're asking what's my soul worth, think long and hard about that act of creation that made man what man is, that made man what you are and what I am this morning.

But there again, another area of scripture is found, I suggest to you, when you come to the cave stable at Bethlehem. it had long been promised that sin would not have the last word in the world that God had created.

It had long been promised that God would send a redeemer. He would come of a virgin in Bethlehem.

He would be a mighty counselor, a mighty God, a great redeemer. And yet you and I, in our minds, can go back to that cave stable in Bethlehem.

[15:14] We can go back and we can peer into the setting and into the sound. We can experience the smells. And we look in and we see two very ordinary people.

and a little vulnerable baby. Mighty God, counselor, prince of peace, but it's only a baby.

What are mysteries in that cave in Bethlehem all these years ago? Part of that mystery is expounded when you and I remember that that little baby is going to become a boy, is going to become a man.

And that little baby is going to bear a name, and that name is Jesus. Why do you want him called Jesus? Because he will save his people from their sin.

And I suggest to you, my friends, that if you're trying to evaluate the worth of your soul, don't just think about creation. Think about that moment in the fullness of time, when to that cave stable in Bethlehem among cattle comes the redeemer of the world, the one that the Father has sent out of amazing love for you and me, out of love that desires, not your loss, but your gain, not your loss, but your salvation.

[16:59] That's when you realize that what makes you unique as an individual is indeed something very valuable. But then you travel 33 years, and you go to Calvary, just outside Jerusalem, and you ask the question what my soul worth.

And I suggest that Calvary, if you study it for a little, you will be reminded of what your soul's worth. Because when you study Calvary, you will observe and you will hear many things.

The two things I think in particular emphasize the worth of our souls. First of all, there is that moment as life ebbs away from the Savior.

That moment in the midst of that eerie darkness that had descended over Calvary, there is the cry amongst other cries that came from the cross.

There is that cry pedaleci, finish. I suggest to you when you think about that cry of Jesus from the cross, that you are reminded of how much worth your soul is.

[18:21] Because in that cry, that cry is saying to you, you are worth my death. In my own body on this tree, I have borne your iniquities, your sins.

I have become your substitute. I have borne the wrath and the anger of God against your sins and my own body on this tree.

That's how much worth you are. Greater love, he said on one occasion, has no manner than this, that one lays down his life for his friends.

You are my friend. What a precious statement that is. But then again, you're still the house.

And you're asking the question, what my soul were. It's worth listening to the very last words that Jesus spoke. What were these?

[19:28] Into your hands hands, I commend my spirit. Did Jesus think much about life and death and beyond?

Yes, he did. Did he think about it perhaps more than you and I do? I think yes, undoubtedly. When you and I talk about life, the issues of life, the reality of death, the prospect of what lies beyond the grave.

You know, very often we can be so philosophical. I think this, that, or the next thing. It seems to me that. Should we not listen to the words of Jesus who in his death is so concerned that he commends his spirit to the father.

His friends remove his body from the tree. They take the physical. But Jesus' concern is that which never dies is commended to the father.

But then again, you also find, I think, evidence of the worth of your soul if you go to the cold tomb in which he was buried.

[21:06] You ask what your soul were. And again, there is great mystery in much of God's truth, as there is much revelation.

But you go to the cold tomb three days after he's buried. three days after he was prepared and placed physically dead in that tomb. You go with those who visited it, and what do you find?

You find the tomb is empty. He's not there, for he is risen. Now, I don't know the metaphysics of resurrection, but what I do know and what I do value and what I do treasure are the words of scripture that reminds us that that tomb is empty, again, not to allow sin as the last word, but to assure you and me that that part of you and me that never dies can know the reality of resurrection

hope.

He has brought life and immortality to life through the gospel, through the resurrection. And how incredibly ponyened and powerful is that message to you and me this morning, that our souls are worth something.

You remember what he said in the upper room, I go to prepare a place for you, that where I am, there you might be also. Speaking powerfully into that experience, of what lies beyond the physical death.

[22 : 52] He goes on to say, I am the way, I am the truth, I am the life. Reminding them, as he reminds us still, that he is so concerned for our soul and for our soul's well-being.

do you appreciate that concern of Jesus for yours this morning? But I think another area in which we are reminded of how worth our souls are, our spirits are, is that we project ourselves to the confirmation of all things.

where Jesus is this morning. But he's no longer dead under the Palestinian sky, in a borrowed grave.

He is risen, he has ascended, and he's at the right hand of God, ever making intercession for you and for me. he is in that place that he has gone, as he said himself, to prepare for us.

He's in that place that one day he will come, it will take us to be with him. In that place where he describes as a place where all the former things will have passed away.

[24 : 19] You think about all the bliss and the blessedness and the glory, and the beauty that characterizes what has been revealed to us of God's heaven.

You think of that, and you think of that as God's place for you, and for me, for your soul, for my soul. Isn't it little wonder that we can say our souls are worth something? And why Jesus was so concerned that men and women would not forfeit that for what was the tragedy of so many, not valuing it, not putting a price on it, trading eternal security and destiny for what is temporal, what is limited, what mass ultimately eats and what rust corrupts, what is temporal.

J.T. Ryle on one occasion said this, he said, you go to every culture and civilization and you find that this is so. What is so?

That people so often in foolishness do not value their souls. Their temples and sagodas and funeral rites all speak of the same thing from the time of the pharaohs until today, he wrote.

[25 : 51] They testify to this fact, this consciousness of man, that death never succeeds in snuffing us out. He went on to say, you see an endless struggle about temporal things, hurry, bustle, business, hemming us in on every side.

I can well believe you are sometimes tempted to think that this world is everything and the body is all that is worth caring for. Resist the temptation, he wrote.

Cast it behind you. Say to yourself every morning when you rise, every night when you lie down, the fashion of this world passes away. The life that I love, live is not all.

There is something beside business, money and pleasure and trade. There is a life to come, he said. You are soul as well as body.

And Jesus is saying that here in the context of what he's saying to the disciples. Value it. Don't make the silly mistake of putting too low a price on your soul, for what will it profit a man.

[27 : 10] So he gains the whole world and loses it. I see Ryle went on to say in the context of how we lose a soul.

He said, I'm one of those old fashioned ministers who believe the whole Bible and everything that it contains. I can find no spiritual foundation for that smooth spoken theology which pleases so many in these days and according to which everybody will go to heaven at last.

I believe there is a real devil. I believe there is a real hell. I believe that it is not charity to keep back from men that they may be lost.

Charity, shall I call it that, he wrote? If you saw your child drinking poison, would you hold your peace? charity, shall I call it?

If you saw a blind man tottering towards the edge of a cliff, would you not try to stop? Away, he said, with such false notions of charity.

[28 : 18] Let us not slander that blessed grace by using its name in a false sense. It is the highest charity to bring the whole truth before men.

It is real charity to warn them plainly that they are in danger. It is charity to impress upon them that they may lose their own souls forever in hell.

How do we lose our souls, is it not? I think we can lose our souls simply through neglect. You think of all the times you pamper, and all the ways you pamper the outward, the physical. the exercise, the diet, the gym visits, all the things you do to make sure the outward part of you looks good, feels good, appears good.

But how many of you, my friend, really take it serious that you have something more than just the physical, you have the spiritual dimension? And how much care do you take of that?

[29 : 35] Are you like the Welsh businessman who had two shops? You couldn't call one of them a shop, it was too big, but he had one little shop, a little post office in the Valley of Wales.

And he had another mega store in Regent Street in London. Five people an hour sometimes passed through the doors of the little shop in the Valley.

Thousands passed through the doors of the shop in Regent Street. In the little valley, a shop in the valley, he had one member of staff.

He had hundreds in Regent Street. In this little shop in the valley, there was a counter for a post office business, there was a fridge for some bits and pieces of frozen food, and two or three shelves for groceries.

This man spent more time and more energy worrying about the little shop in the valley than the major store in Regent Street to the point where he endangered the profitability of the big one.

[30 : 45] Why did he make that mistake? He made that mistake because he neglected what was important, really important. His priorities were wrong, and isn't it the same with you and me so often.

We can neglect our souls and so lose them. I hope you're not doing that here in Aberdeen this morning. Someone suggests we can murder our souls.

We can murder them. Jeffrey Thomas. I think when this was quoted, he was obviously in full flight in the context of a sermon.

But he was making a point. He said they fill their minds with television, with television watching. The worst sorts of programs dull in their minds with inanity and soaps.

They fill their bellies with alcohol, their lungs with nicotine smoke, their veins with heroin, and their nostrils with blue vapors. Their talk is adultery and fornication, dishonesty, greed and deceit and easy money.

[31 : 52] And then he says this, all those things are a band of bandals whose one aim is to destroy your soul and mine. We can murder our soul.

We can poison our soul. You think of all the things that we imbibe, all the choices that we make, all the lies that we listen to, all the superstitions that we embrace, all of them so often, soul killers.

We can starve our souls. How do we do that? Unfortunately, it's good to see so many in church this morning. But where's the rest?

Why aren't all the seats in Aberdeen not filled this morning? why when people look around the churches of Aberdeen this morning, why do so many wonder where so many are instead of in the house of God?

We starve our souls, don't we? Neglecting to give ourselves the opportunity to hear the Word of God preached, taught, shared. We neglect it.

[33 : 12] We neglect it. Yes, sometimes even sitting in church, switching off when ministry begins, thinking about tomorrow, thinking about what's got to be done, thinking about this afternoon, thinking about a whole variety of things, rather than thinking about the truth of God that's coming through your mind and through your heart.

And I ask you, my friend, this morning in church, very seriously, I ask you, are you in danger of losing your soul? I ask you not to smugly sit there or cynically sit there and think, oh, just another rant from an evangelical, preacher.

I want you to take seriously not my words, but the words of Jesus. What shall it profit you if you gain the whole world?

Whatever that world that you imagine is the whole world, what will it gain you? If you can put your arms around all of it, and yet come to that moment which is appointed for you as it is for me, because it is appointed unto man once to die and then the judgment.

What will it profit you when you come to that day of judgment? Having gained whatever you perceived was the whole world, you stand before the judge of all the earth, and he asks you, where is your wedding dress, where is your wedding gown, where is your wedding clothes?

[34 : 53] Would you be speechless? you know, the imagery of a lost eternity is horrific. What will the reality be like?

The reality of that imagery that's spoken of as a place of the undying worm as our companion. the destination of a lost soul that the scriptures speak of where the fires are not quenched and where there is darkness and despair and wretchedness forever.

you contrast that. You contrast that to the words of God, to the soul that has appreciated its worth, to the soul that has availed itself of the blood of Jesus Christ that cleanses us from all sin.