

PROFIT AND LOSS

“What shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul?”

Mark 8:36

MANY men have been made bankrupts through inattention to their books. No man ever loses anything by counting the cost, knowing his own expenditures and keeping his debts and credits pretty closely together. But many men have been ruined by attempts which have been suggested by a spirit of speculation and fostered by a negligence of their own concerns, combined with absolute ignorance of their real financial position.

Spiritually, man is a great trader—he is trading for his own welfare. He is trading for time and for eternity. He keeps two shops—one shop is kept by an apprentice of his, a rough unseemly hand, of clayey mold, called the body. The other business, which is an infinitely more vast concern, is kept by one that is called “the soul”—a spiritual being who does not baffle upon little things, but who deals with Hell or Heaven and trades with the mighty realities of eternity. Now, a merchant would be very unwise who should pay all attention to some small off-hand shop of his and take no account whatever of a large establishment.

And he would, indeed, be negligent who should very carefully jot down every trade of the expenditure of his own household but should never think of reckoning the expenses of some vast concern that may be hanging on his hands. But the most of men are just as foolish—they estimate the profits (as they conceive them to be) which are gained in that small corner shop called the body—but they too seldom reckon up the awful loss which is brought about by a negligence of the soul’s concerns in the great matters of eternity. Let me beseech you, my Brethren—while you are not careless of the body, as, indeed, you ought not to be—seeing that it is, in the case of Believers, the temple of the Holy Spirit—to take more especial care of your souls.

Decorate the tenement, but suffer not the inhabitant to die of starvation. Paint not the ship while you are letting the crew perish for want of stores on board. Look to your soul, as well as to your body—to the life, as well as to that by which you live. Oh that men would take account of the soul’s vast concerns and know their own standing before God! Oh that you would examine yourselves! If men would do so, if all of you would now search within, how many of you would be bankrupts? You are making a pretty little fortune with regard to the body. You are doing tolerably well and comfortable. You are providing for yourselves things as you would desire them.

Your mortal body, perhaps, is even pampered and has no fault with its owner. But ask your poor soul how that is getting on and you will find it not a gainer, but in many instances, I fear, a loser. Let me solemnly tell you that if your soul is a loser, however much your body may be a gainer, you have not profited in the least degree. Let me ask you all this question in the name of Jesus Christ, “What shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul?”

We shall divide our text and consider, in the first place the gain a man would get if he gained the whole world. In the second place, the fearful loss if a man should lose his soul. And then, afterwards, we will try to finish up by some practical lesson.

In the first place, WHAT IS A MAN PROFITED IF HE SHOULD GAIN THE WHOLE WORLD? Many Christian people, who do not exactly talk common sense, sum this all up by saying that to gain the whole world is to gain nothing at all. Perhaps they are right but I question if they believe what they assert. They sing just as we have been singing—

*“Jewels to you are gaudy toys,
And gold is sordid dust.”*

And so they are, compared with Christ. But there are some who find unnecessary and absurd, calling jewels “gaudy toys,” and gold “sordid dust.” I have often admired some of my friends, when I have heard them talking about gold as sordid dust. For I wonder why they did not give it to the dustman the next time he came round. If they were to do that, I would not mind going round myself for once with the bell, particularly as it might be rather convenient to us, seeing that we want some of that sordid dust to erect a tabernacle for the Most High.

Many who affect to despise wealth are the greatest hoarders of it. I suppose they are afraid it might injure other people’s hearts and therefore they put it away very carefully, so that others may not touch the dangerous thing. That may be all very kind of them. But we do not exactly appreciate their benevolent intention and should think it fully as kind if they were every now and then to distribute some of it. You hear them saying, very often, that “money is the root of all evil.” Now I should like to find that text. But it is not to be found anywhere, from Genesis to Revelation. I found a text once, which said, “The love of money is the root of all evil.”

But as for the money itself, I can see very little evil in it. If a man will but rightly use it, I conceive that it is a talent sent from Heaven, bestowed by God for holy purposes and I am quite sure God’s talents are not bad ones. My Brethren, it is all foolishness for a man to say that he does not really care for these things, because everyone does in some degree. Everyone wishes to have some of this world. And there really is, in possessing a competency in this world, something considerable with regard to profit. I am not going to deceive you by striking off all the profits and saying you are losers on every point. No, I will go the whole length which any of you like to go with regard to the profit of this world.

If it is considerable I will admit its greatness. If you think it possible to make a fine thing of this world, I will grant it, if you like. And after having admitted that, I will ask you. “Will it answer your purpose to gain the whole world, in the largest sense of that word and yet lose your own soul?”

Now, I will try, if I can, to add your bills up for you and strike a balance. We will suppose a case which must very seldom occur, in fact, which never has occurred. There never was a man who gained the whole world. Some have been monarchs of almost all the known globe. But it is remarkable, if you look at a map of the ancient world, how little their territories were, compared with the whole globe. Indeed they have not much greater than those of modern monarchs. It is but a small portion of the world that was known to the ancients. And even then no man possessed it all. But to put this question somewhat in a point of view wherein the thing might be possible I think there are three or four cases in which a man may be said with some reservation to have gained the whole world.

In the first place, a man who has power over extensive empires may be supposed, in some measure, to have gained the whole world. Take, for instance, ALEXANDER. I cannot bring you a fairer specimen of a man having possession of the whole world than he. He could say of his dominions that although they had their limits, he did not know the nations who were able to bound his territories. He could travel thousands of miles without arriving at the boundaries. He had at his foot millions of armed men, ready to avenge his quarrels and uphold his banner. When he rose to fight, he was invincible. When he stood in his council chamber, his will was law. In his service thousands were slain, but at his summons, an equal number gathered round his standard.

Alexander, I summon you! What do you think – is it worth much to gain the world? Is its scepter the wand of happiness? Is its crown the security of joy? See Alexander’s tears! He weeps! Yes, he weeps for another world to conquer! Ambition is insatiable! The gain of the whole world is not enough. Surely to become a universal monarch is to make one’s self universally miserable. Perhaps you think there is very much pleasure in having power. I believe there is. I do not think any man who has any power over his fellow creatures will deny that it is gratifying to his fallen nature. Or else, why is it that the politician seeks for it so continually and toils for it days without number and wastes the sap of his life in midnight debate?

There is a pleasure in it. But mark you, that pleasure is counterbalanced by its anxiety. Popularity has its head in the clouds but its feet are in the sands. And while the man's head is among the stars he trembles for his feet. There is an anxiety to increase his power, or else to maintain it. And that anxiety takes away much of the enjoyment of it. Lord Bacon has justly compared those who move in higher spheres to those heavenly bodies in the firmament which have much admiration but little rest. And it is not necessary to invest a wise man with power to convince him that it is a garment bedizened with gold. It dazzles the beholder with its splendor, but oppresses the wearer with its weight.

I do verily believe that the winning of the whole world of power is, in itself, so slight a gain that it were fair to strike the balance and say there is little left. For even Alexander himself envied the peasant in his cottage and thought there was more happiness on the plains among the shepherds, than in his palace amongst his gold and silver. Oh, my Friends, if I were to compare all this with the loss of the soul, indeed you might be startled. But I leave it to strike its own balance. I say that to gain the whole world is but little—and especially when we are sinners against God. And, moreover, if an empire over the world entails that fearful responsibility which will not allow the eyes to slumber, or the heart to cease its throbbing. If it puts into the hand the power of committing gigantic crimes and if those gigantic crimes like ghosts haunt men's midnight slumbers, the gaining of power over the whole world is a loss instead of a gain, even considered in itself.

There is another way of gaining the whole world, not so much by power, but by something next door to it, namely—riches. CROESUS shall be my specimen here. He amassed a world of riches, for his wealth was beyond estimation. As for his gold and his silver, he kept little account of them and his precious stones were without number. He was rich, immensely rich. He could buy an empire and after that, could spend another empire's worth. Perhaps you think that to be immensely rich is a great gain. But I believe that to be enormously rich is in itself far from desirable. Ask Croesus. Dying, he exclaimed, "O! Solon, Solon."

And when they asked him what he meant, he replied that Solon had once told him that no man could be pronounced happy until death. And, therefore, he cried "O! Solon, Solon," for the misery of his death had swept away the joys of his life. Such is the slaver of great riches. Such are its anxieties. And such, too often, is that miserly avarice which wealth does beget—that the rich man is often a loser by his wealth—even apart from the loss of his soul. Many a man would be happier if he had walked the pavement in rags, than if he rode through the streets in his chariot. "Many a heavy heart rides in a carriage," is an old saying, but a marvelously true one.

Well said the poet—

*"If you are rich, you are poor;
For like an ass, whose back with ingots bows,
You bear your heavy riches but a journey,
And death unloads you."*

Suppose a man's wealth to have been gained dishonestly—then I pronounce it a terrible and infallible curse to him. In itself it constitutes a plague apart from a world to come. My Friends, estimate that gold at what price you like. I say if you were to put the soul as a debt against it you would find that there would be a fearful loss. But even apart from that, I believe that to gain a world of riches would be a loss in itself, at least to most men.

There would be few men living who would be able to steer the boat of pleasure through a sea so thick with weeds. The less a man has the better, so that he comes within the moderate competence which every man may desire. Agur was right, when he said, "Give me neither poverty nor riches." Great wealth is certainly no great gain.

But there was another man who gained the world in a higher sense. His name was Solomon. His treasures were not so much those of wealth or power, (though he had both), as the treasures of

wisdom and the pleasures of the body. Solomon had all things that could delight the mind, please the eye and charm the body. He had but to speak and music chanted the sweetest air that Israel's psalmody could give. He had but to lift his finger and noble armies followed him and treasures were spread beneath his feet. The wines of every vintage were quaffed from his bowl and maidens gathered from every clime awaited his command. He was master over men—he was lord.

He enjoyed all kinds of delight, every sort of pleasure. He mingled in his cup all that flesh calls Paradise, all that men dream of happiness. There was nothing which Solomon did not try. He ransacked the world to find joy. He was a wise man—he knew where to search for earth's happiness and he found it. Solomon, what did you find? O, Preacher! Open your lips and tell us—"Vanity of vanities, all is vanity." Thus says the preacher. Oh, my Friends, if we could have all the pleasures of the flesh we desire, I question whether they would be, in themselves, a profit.

But of this I am certain—that compared with the loss of our soul, it would, indeed, be a dreadful loss. I think that if many of us could indulge all the pleasure of the body we desire, we should destroy our bodies and actually waste our happiness. Many a man has hunted his pleasures too fast to win them. Many a racer has lost the prize by overstraining in the contest. And many a man might have had more pleasure, even to the body, if he had been more moderate in seeking it. He is a fool who grills a pound of butter. He grills himself away by too fast pleasures and wastes his life till it is gone and there is nothing left of it.

Ah, if you could have all the world of sensual delights and if you had all the wisdom of men, apart from the grace of God to restrain your pleasures, I believe you would find them to be a dead loss. And I will affirm the words of the text, great winnings are but little gains. They are great to look at but they are very small when you get hold of them. This world is like the boy's butterfly—it is pretty sport to chase it—but bruise its wings by an overly earnest grasp and it is nothing but a disappointment.

But, my Friends, if there is little profit in this world by these magnificent gains I have mentioned and in these extreme cases, what shall it profit a man, if he does not gain the world and should lose his soul? Put the question this way—What shall it profit a man, if he lose this present world and the next too? What shall it profit a man, if he gain but a small portion of this world—and this is the most that we may expect—and yet loses his soul? I have sometimes thought with regard to the rich man, "Well, such a man has a portion in this life. But with regard to the poor man, I cannot see what there is to make him happy if he has not something better to look to when he dies."

I have seen the weary callous-handed sons of toil often oppressed and down trodden as they are by their masters and I have thought, "Oh, poor souls, if you cannot look to another world, you are of all men the most miserable. For you do not get either world. You go trudging along, just like a pack-horse, without the hope of a secure place in which you may rest at last." The rich man, at least, makes as much as can be made of this world, little as that is, apart from grace. But the poor man makes the least of this world and then he goes from poverty to damnation—from his squalor to perdition—and from his poorhouse and his rags to the flames of Hell.

What a horrid state to have such an existence—to live in this world a life of misery and to find a starving existence to be only the preface and the prelude of a more doleful and fearful life hereafter. Oh, what shall it profit you, if you gain a little of this world and lose your own soul?

Now, I have only cast up accounts for this life. But what will it profit a man, when he comes to die, if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul? There he lies dying—he has no God to console him. Bring to him his heaps of gold. What? Do they not still the throbbing of your heart? What? Cannot your bags of gold ferry you across the Jordan? What, man? You have lived for your heaps of "glittering wealth"—will they not live with you? Will you not take them with you to Heaven? No, he shakes his head—for hoarded wealth is but of little use to help a man to die.

You have heard of a sailor, who, when the ship was sinking rushed into the cabin, broke open the captain's chest, extracted all the money he could—tied it in a belt round his waist—leaped into the sea and sank, thus hurrying himself before his Creator with the witness of his sins about his loins. Oh, it were a bad thing to die with gold so gained. And do you think gold will do you much good, however you may have come by it, when you lie on your last couch? No. You must bow to inevitable death, in spite of all your riches. And if you gain the whole world's applause or fame, can that help you on your dying bed?—

“Jesus can make a dying bed

Feel soft as downy pillows are.”

But how little will the applause of man seem, when you come to die? Oh, I sometimes think, what poor fools we are to value ourselves by what our fellow creatures think of us. But oh, when we come to die, we shall not care about the din and noise which have followed us all our lives. What will fame and honor be when we are in the last article? Bubbles! Can souls feed on bubbles? No, we shall then despise such vanities. We shall say, “Fame! Cease your trump. Let me die alone. For alone must I hear the trump of the archangel. You babbling fame, I hate you, for you do but disturb my slumbers and wake me in my bed.” Oh, there will be no gain in wealth, or power, or pomp, or fame, when we come to die—they will profit a man nothing, if he lose his own soul.

And what will it profit a man in the Day of Judgment, if he has gained the whole world? Suppose he comes before God's bar clothed in purple, with a crown upon his brow. There the diadem attracts no attention. I see whole hosts of men gathered before God's white Throne. But monarchs and their slaves are mixed indiscriminately. Princes and peasants stand upon a level there and I see no distinction. God says, “Depart, you cursed,” and the monarch is damned. Or he pronounces, “Come, you blessed,” and the monarch is saved. But the same voice speaks to each one. If they are saints, there is a voice of joy lifting them to their home.

And if they are lost, the voice of denunciation sends them to their appointed doom. Ah, There will be no profit to man, in all he has achieved, when he comes before God's judgment bar. Suppose him standing up to tell his Maker, “Lord, I had a deal of fame on earth. They stuck me up on the top of a column, to bear all weathers and they called that glory, to be gazed at by fools, or to be admired by the populace. And, O Lord, will you send such a man as I am to perdition?” “Oh,” says Justice, “what care I for your statue? What care I for your fame? If your soul is not saved, if you are not in Christ—with all your statues and all your fame—you shall sink to perdition.”

For these things count not in the Day of Judgment. Men shall stand alike there. All shall be level. If Christ has saved us, we shall be saved. But if we are out of Christ, great and mighty may we be—the sentence shall be as impartial to the rich as to the poor.

Once more—what will it profit a man, when he gets to Hell, if he has gained the whole world? Profit him, Sir? Profit him? It will be the other way. In ages long ago a monarch went to Hell. Whenever he had entered a city, nobles saluted him and monarchs did him reverence. When he went to Hell, it was known he was come. There, in their several dungeons, lay the monarchs whom he had chained and dragged at his chariot wheels. There were the men whom he had slaughtered and whose nations he had cut up, root and branch. And when he entered into Hell—lying on their beds of fire and looking on him with scorn—a thousand voices shouted, “Aha! aha! Are you become like one of us?”

Then he found that the more glory he had on earth, the more hot was Hell. And while as a common sinner, if he had received a Hell, he found that as an extraordinary sinner and a great one, Hells rolled on Hells, like waves of the ocean over his guilty head. He found himself the worse for all his greatness. Go, wicked, rich man—heap up your gold—maybe it shall be turned to brimstone one day and you shall swallow it. Go, man of fame—blow the trumpet, or bid others blow it. The breath of fame shall fan the coals of God Almighty's vengeance. Go, man of power and get to your dignity—the higher your flight, the greater your fall—when you shall be cast down from your loftiness and shall lie forever to howl in perdition. Having gained all this, you have gained nothing at all.

II. We have summed up, then, the first point—it is but little to gain the whole world. Apart from religion there is very little in it. But now we come to the contrast—that is, THE LOSING THE SOUL.

I shall request your attention for a brief period while I endeavor to dilate on that—to lose the soul, my Friends—to lose the soul! How shall we tell what it is to lose the soul? You can conceive how fearful is the loss of the soul in three ways. First, from its intrinsic value. Secondly, from its capabilities. And thirdly, from its doom, if it is lost.

You may tell how serious it is to lose the soul from its intrinsic value. The soul is a thing worth ten thousand worlds. In fact, a thing which worlds on worlds heaped together like sand upon the sea shore could not buy. It is more precious than if the ocean had each drop of itself turned into a golden globe—all that wealth could not buy a soul. Consider! The soul is made in the image of his Maker. “God made man,” it is said, “in His own image.” The soul is an everlasting thing like God. God has gifted it with immortality and therefore it is terrible to lose it. Consider how precious a soul must be when both God and the devil are after it.

You never heard that the devil was after a kingdom, did you? No, he is not so foolish. He knows it would not be worth his winning. He is never after that, but he is always after souls. You never heard that God was seeking after a crown did you? No, He thinks little of dominions, but He is after souls every day—His Holy Spirit is seeking His children. And Christ came to save souls. Do you think that which Hell craves for and that which God seeks for, is not precious? The soul is precious again, we know, by the price Christ paid for it. “Not with silver and gold,” but with His own flesh and blood did He redeem it. Ah, it must be precious if He gave His heart’s eyes to purchase it. What must it be to lose your soul?

But it is also precious because it is everlasting. And that brings me to note—(I am running over these points, you can enlarge upon them at home)—that the soul is precious, on account of its capabilities. Do you see, up there, that starry crown? Do you mark there that Throne, with the palm branch at its foot? Do you see that pearly-gated city, with its light brighter than the sun? Do you mark its golden streets and its thrice happy inhabitants? There is a Paradise which eye has not seen, which outvies dreams and which imagination could not picture. But if the soul is lost, it is all lost. We see many lost things advertised. Now if a man’s soul is lost, let me advertise what he has lost. He has lost a crown, he has lost a harp, he has lost a throne, he has lost a Heaven, he has lost an eternity.

When I consider how happy a soul may be, it appears to me to be a tremendous thing for it to be lost, even though it should gain the world. In fact, I cannot set the world in contrast. It is as though I should measure the Alps by a mole-hill. I cannot tell you what size the world is, if you give me for its standard a grain of dust—nor can I tell you Heaven’s worth, if you only allow me to value it by a world. Oh, Sirs, because the soul is capable of Heaven, its loss is a dreadful and terrible thing.

But consider, lastly, where the soul must go to that is lost. There is a place, as much beneath imagination as Heaven is above it. A place of murky darkness, where only lurid flames make darkness visible. A place where beds of flame are the fearful couches upon which spirits groan. A place where God Almighty from His mouth pours a stream of brimstone, kindling that “pile of fire and of much wood” which God has prepared of old as a Tophet for the lost and ruined. There is a spot whose only sights are scenes of fearful woe, there is a place—I do not know where it is, it is somewhere—not in the bowels of this earth, I trust—for that were a sad thing for this world to have Hell within its bowels.

But somewhere, perhaps in a far off world there is a place where the only music is the mournful symphony of damned spirits. Where howling, groaning, moaning, wailing and gnashing of teeth make up the horrid concert. There is a place where demons fly, swift as air, with whips of knotted burning wire, torturing poor souls. Where tongues, on fire with agony, burn the roofs of mouths that shriek for drops of water—that water all denied. There is a place where soul and body endure as much of infinite wrath as the finite can bear—where the inflictions of justice crush the soul,

where the continual flagellations of vengeance beat the flesh. A place where the perpetual pouring out of the vials of eternal wrath scald the spirit and where the cuttings of the sword strike deep into the inner man.

Ah, Sirs, I cannot picture this. Within an hour some of you may know it. If your curtain of life be rent in two, some of you may soon find yourselves face to face with lost souls. Then, Sirs, you will know what it is to lose your souls. But you will never know it till then, nor can I hope to set it forth to you. Vain are these words, light are the things I utter. They are but the daubing of a paint to portray and not portray a scene so dreadful, for earth has not colors black enough or fiery enough to depict it. Ah, Sinners, if you knew what Hell meant, then might you tell what it is to lose your own souls.

III. What, then, THE PRACTICAL LESSON with which we finish? If, as most certainly is the case in the most favorable circumstances a sinner loses fearfully by the gain of the world—if he loses his soul—then how absurd it is for a man at any time to sell his soul for a little! There is a man who has sold his soul for half a sovereign. “Where?” you say. Ah, let him answer himself. Many a man has done it. Says one, “I think I should earn two shillings on Sunday by keeping just one of my shutters up in my shop and selling a little.” Ay, fine pay that, to damn your souls for two shillings a week! Another man says, “I think I should get a good situation if I were not one of those Calvinists,” and he leaves off going to the house of God and begins to be a more fashionable religionist. A fine thing that—to ruin your everlasting interest for a good situation!

It will bring you into a bad situation one day. It is astonishing for how little a man will sell his soul. I remember an anecdote—I believe it is true. I had almost said I hope it is. A minister, going across some fields, met a countryman and said to him, “Well, Friend, it is a most delightful day.” “Yes, Sir, it is.” And having spoken to him about the beauties of the scenery and so forth, he said, “How thankful we ought to be for our mercies! I hope you never come out without praying.” “Pray, Sir?” said he. “Why, I never pray, I have got nothing to pray for.” “What a strange man,” said the minister. “Does your wife pray?” “If she likes,”

“Don’t your children pray?” “If they like, they do.” “Well, you mean to say you do not pray,” said the minister, (as I think, not very rightly, no doubt he saw that the man was superstitious). “Now, I will give you half-a-crown if you will promise me not to pray as long as you live.” “Very well,” said the man, “I don’t see what I have got to pray for,” and he took the half-crown. When he went home, the thought struck him, “What have I done?” And something said to him, “Well, John, you will die soon and you will want to pray then. You will have to stand before your Judge and it will be a sad thing not to have prayed.”

Thoughts of this kind came over him and he felt dreadfully miserable. And the more he thought the more miserable he felt. His wife asked him what was the matter. He could hardly tell her for some time but at last he confessed he had taken half-a-crown never to pray again and that was preying on his mind. The poor ignorant soul thought it was the Evil One that had appeared to him. “Yes, John,” said she, “sure enough it was the devil and you have sold your soul to him for that half-crown.” The poor creature could not work for several days and he became perfectly miserable from the conviction that he had sold himself to the Evil One.

However, the minister knew what he was about and there was a barn close by where he was going to preach. He guessed the man would be there to ease his terror of mind and sure enough he was there one Sabbath evening and he heard the same man who gave him the half-crown take for his text these words, “What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul?” “Yes,” said he, “what will it profit a man, who sold his soul for half-a-crown?” Up gets the man, crying out, “Sir, take it back! Take it back!” “Why,” said the minister, “you want the half crown and you said you did not need to pray.” “But, Sir,” he said, “I must pray. If I do not pray, I am lost.” And after some testing by parleying, the half-crown was returned and the man was on his knees, praying to God. And it came to pass that that very circumstance was the means of saving his soul and making him a changed man.

Now I cannot do anything so eccentric as that but I send some of you away with this in your mind—that though you think you could not do so—yet actually there are many of those whom I have here who have sold themselves to Satan by doing something for their worldly profit, which, in the end, must lead to the loss of their souls. Do any of you desire to know how your souls may be saved? Here is the answer—“Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and be baptized, and you shall be saved.” And whosoever among you knows himself to be a sinner, let him take this for his consolation—“Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners, even the chief.” Go away with that, you chief of sinners and rejoice, for Jesus Christ came to save you. May God add His blessing for Christ’s sake! Amen.