

THE IMMEASURABLE VALUE OF A HUMAN SOUL

As you know by now, this morning we began our annual month-long emphasis on missions. Over the next four weeks, great stress will be placed on going, giving, and praying. To be honest, what happens this month sets the pace for our missions efforts for the rest of the year – both at home and abroad.

For a number of you, this is the first time that you have ever been through a missions month. I would not be at all surprised to hear that you question the need, that you wonder about the cause. I can almost hear someone say, why in the world do you collect so much money just to give it away? What is this all about?

In what will be a departure from my typical annual missions message, I want to share with you some thoughts on “The Immeasurable Value Of A Human Soul.” I think that I can prove from Scripture and from the life of the greatest man who ever walked the face of this earth, that no sacrifice is too great if it results in the redemption of one fallen man or woman.

Gordon MacDonald is one of my all-time favorite authors. My favorite book of his is entitled, *The Life God Blesses*. The book talks about the soul and in particular it details the storms of life that threaten the soul. I hardly recommend the book. In the preface MacDonald defines the soul. I want to share with you a few of his thoughts:

- I believe that the soul comes into being at conception. It is not the result of a physical transaction, but it is an event instigated by God.... God breathes the life of the soul into us.
- I believe that the soul, once created, will never die or lose its identity.
- I believe that the soul was meant to be the source of life-giving energy, guidance, conviction, connection with the Creator.
- I believe that the soul has a certain bottomlessness to it. That it is a place within a person that is similar to... outer space. Unfortunately, that limitless inner space has been spoiled or polluted by evil. It needs cleansing, redirecting, "rebooting" if it will accomplish anything like the original intention.
- I believe that the soul was meant to be a dwelling place for God.
- As a Christ-follower, I believe that Jesus died to redeem the soul, and that the effect of this redemptive process is to raise life to a higher plane.

Some 150 years ago, Charles Finney, no doubt one of the greatest evangelists who ever lived, preached two Sunday night messages back to back on the worth of the human soul. In the second of the two sermons, he made the following observation: “But how shall I speak of the worth of the soul? There is no question, on which I ever attempt to speak, which makes me feel so much at a loss, and that not because there is nothing to say, but because there is so much to say; not because the subject is void of interest, but because it is in itself so surpassingly great, so infinite, that I always approach it with the fear of belittling it, rather than at all giving or having anything like an adequate conception of it. Indeed the text which I have read tonight (**“For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?”**--Mark 8:36) is one that I always feel that I dare not preach upon. I never did preach upon it in all my life; because, as I have said, it always seemed to me that all I could say would only belittle the subject, so far does the value of the soul surpass all human conception.”

Like Finney, I too have never devoted an entire message to this subject before this morning. Nonetheless, it is what is upon my heart and I feel that in spite of my own inadequacies, I must address the topic.

AS A RULE, WE TEND NOT TO BE SOUL CONSCIOUS

I believe that I can prove my point.

Be honest now, when you meet a person, how do you assess the worth of that individual:

- Do you look at the clothes that he or she is wearing?
- The car that they are driving?
- Their status, or lack of status, in the community?
- The jewelry that they are wearing?
- The house that they live in?
- Their position in a church?
- Their soul?

I doubt that very many of you gave “the soul” as your answer.

The Bible confirms this for 1 Samuel 16:7 (The *Good News* translation) says, **“But the LORD told Samuel..., ‘God does not see as humans see. Humans look at outward appearances, but the LORD looks into the heart.’”** The word “heart” here does not refer to the ticker that beats inside our chest, rather it alludes to the most important part of a person, that is, to man’s innermost being. I call this part the soul.

James 2:2-4 (*The New Century Version*) adds, **“Suppose someone comes into your church meeting wearing nice clothes and a gold ring. At the same time a poor person comes in wearing old, dirty clothes. You show special attention to the one wearing nice clothes and say, ‘Please, sit here in this good seat.’ But you say to the poor person, ‘Stand over there,’ or, ‘Sit on the floor by my feet.’ What are you doing? You are making some people more important than others, and with evil thoughts you are deciding that one person is better.”**

In both of these passages we see the human tendency to judge people by the externals while ignoring the inner worth or value of the person.

LOOK WITH ME FOR A MOMENT AT THESE PICTURES – POWERPOINT (Breaded Lady, Older woman in wheelchair, Homeless man, Pope John Paul 2, A black gentleman and an Asian friend, Madonna, President Bush, Handicapped child from India)

Which one of these people is most valuable?

Which one is the least valuable?

If you answered the question, then what did you base your answer on?

Again, the tendency is to value or devalue people simply by what we can see and by what we think we know about the individual. This morning’s message is meant to challenge us look beyond the visible to the invisible – to the human soul.

I recently finished reading the powerful book *Everybody’s Normal Till You Get To Know Them* by John Ortberg. He addresses this issue of human value in one of his chapters. Please listen:

I thought of this tendency we have to divide people the last time I was on a plane. The first-class people were served gourmet food on china and crystal by their own flight attendants; those of us in coach ate “snacks” served in paper bags with plastic wrappers. The first-class passengers had room to stretch and sleep; those of us in coach were sitting with a proximity usually reserved for engaged couples in the back row of a movie. The first-class passengers had flight attendants bring them moist Towelettes for comfort and personal hygiene; those of us in coach had to sit and stew in our facial sweat.

On almost every flight, once the plane is under way, a curtain gets drawn to separate the two compartments. It is not to be violated; it is like the Berlin Wall or the veil that separated the Court of the Gentiles from the Holy of Holies in the temple at Jerusalem. The curtain is a reminder throughout the flight that some people are first class and some aren’t. Those who

aren't first class are not to violate the boundary. They can't even see what's going on behind the other side of the curtain.

On my recent flight, a voice came on the intercom system a few minutes into the flight, telling us that because of new security measures, the attendants were not allowed to fasten the curtain. But the airline wanted all of us in the Court of the Gentiles to know that we were not allowed to use the facilities in the Holy of Holies, even though there was one restroom for eight people up there and two restrooms for several hundred of us (mostly children under six who had been drinking jolt Cola the whole flight) on the other side.

Let the curtain stand for a tendency deep inside the fallen human spirit—the tendency to *exclude*. In the act of exclusion, we divide the world up into "us and "them."

Of course, the "us'es" have value, the "thems" don't.

Notice with me some of the terms that we use to divide ourselves from one another:

- Young people are either jocks or preps, skaters or hip.
- Christians are either Catholic or Protestants.
- Politically we are either Republican or Democrat.
- Then too, we are single or married,
- Young or old,
- Black, brown, yellow, white, or red.
- We are either public school, Christian school, or home school,
- Packers or Bears.

Again, I want to quote John Ortberg: "By definition, every society includes people who connect, who belong to one another. Yet every society includes people who feel left out, who don't get chosen at recess, whose invitations to dance get turned down, who get blackballed and cold shouldered and voted off the island. We exclude others because of pride or fear or ignorance or the desire to feel superior."

Who of us has not at one time or another been the one left out? Maybe you will relate with the boy in this video clip from the movie, "The Sandlot." **(SHOW VIDEO CLIP)**

Whenever we pick and choose, whenever we divide up into our little cliques, we tend to state, as if by some great unwritten law, that my group is better than your group, my people are better than your people, in short, I am better than you. Isn't that really what comes out in the story that we just watched?

The point is, when we fail to be soul conscious, when we fail to judge by the heart, we open ourselves up to pride, to factions, and numerous other errors.

Jesus asked in Matthew 16:26, **"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?"**

Here the Lord places His value on the human soul. In short, your soul, my soul, everyone's soul is worth more than all the world – in the eyes of Almighty God.

LETS LOOK NOW AT THE THINGS THAT MAKE THE SOUL SO INFINITELY VALUABLE.

1. GOD'S STAMP IS UPON IT

Genesis 1:27 (*The New King James Version*), **"So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them."**

In God's eyes, we are each gifted with a touch of Himself. Each one of us carries within ourselves the eternal, holy breath of God, the Creator. We are not merely flesh and blood. We are all image-bearers of the Living God.

Genesis 2:7 (*The Message*) adds, **“GOD formed Man out of dirt from the ground and blew into his nostrils the breath of life. The Man came alive—a living soul!”** Although man’s physical body was made from the dust of the ground, our soul is God-breathed. It is a product of some divine CPR! This soul, therefore, is not of this world and will one day leave this earthly tent and return to the God who made it.

- Why do we hate abortion?
- Why do we abhor prejudice between races?
- Why do we love our enemies?
- Why do we refuse to make fun of the less fortunate; the sick and the needy?
- Why do we give to missions and the cause of reaching a lost world for Jesus Christ?

Because we hold to the immeasurable worth of each and every human soul.

The souls of the unborn, the elderly, the widowed, the mentally handicapped, the unattractive, the physically challenged -- from conception to the grave -- all have the stamp of God upon them!

Christian author and radio commentator Chuck Colson says being made in the Image of God means that we find our ultimate identity and worth in reflecting our Creator. Therefore, men, women and children created in the Image of God should be respected, regardless of their mental capacity, physical ability, faith (or absence of faith) or social position. The earthly container that temporarily holds this priceless, sacred soul is the human body. Therefore, the human body is sacred and should be held in honor and respect; not violated, abused or harmed.

It is the soul of man, again the portion of ourselves made in the Image of God, that allows us to be in relationship with God. It is the human soul -- not our money, not our status, not our automobiles, not our worldly stuff -- that will survive the fires of judgment day.

2. THE EXAMPLE AND TEACHINGS OF JESUS

Lets look at Luke 15:1-10, **“Then all the tax collectors and the sinners drew near to Him to hear Him. And the Pharisees and scribes complained, saying, “This Man receives sinners and eats with them.” So He spoke this parable to them, saying: “What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he loses one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness, and go after the one which is lost until he finds it? And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing. And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and neighbors, saying to them, ‘Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost!’ I say to you that likewise there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine just persons who need no repentance. Or what woman, having ten silver coins, if she loses one coin, does not light a lamp, sweep the house, and search carefully until she finds it? And when she has found it, she calls her friends and neighbors together, saying, ‘Rejoice with me, for I have found the piece which I lost!’ Likewise, I say to you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.”**

Here we see three distinct groups:

- The Scribes,
- The Pharisees,
- The sinners and tax collectors.

Each had their own little rank in society. At the top of the pecking order were the Scribes and the Pharisees. It was their practice to write off as worthless any so-called sinner who happened to have the misfortune of getting in their way. Sinners were seen worthless and unworthy beings.

Jesus decided to deal with this sinful arrogance by sharing with these self-righteous religious leaders two parables. A parable, you may recall, is an earthly story that carries a heavenly meaning.

The two stories were intended to teach the Scribes and Pharisees as well as each one of us here today the value of each and every sinner as well as the energy that should be expended in an effort to find them.

- The man left his flock of 99, when out in the night, out into the elements, in order to regain the one straying sheep.
- The woman lit a lamp, scoured her house, and searched diligently, until she found the one coin that was lost.

When the shepherd found the lost animal, he rejoiced and threw a party. When the woman found her coin, she had thrown quite a shin-dig herself. In like fashion, the Lord rejoices and throws a party over ONE single solitary soul who comes to find grace!

Jesus summarized His feelings quite succinctly when he said, **“Likewise, I say to you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.”**

Did you ever stop to think of what this means to you personally?

- It means that the angels rejoiced when you repented and came to faith!
- It means that you are known in heaven.
- It means that you are not only known, you are valued, highly.

While here, let me point out...

- There is no rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who earns a million dollars.
- There is no rejoicing over one sinner who gets that big promotion.
- There is no rejoicing over one sinner who wins the lottery.
- There is no rejoicing over one sinner who wins the Super Bowl.
- There is no rejoicing over one sinner who becomes President of the United States.

But there **IS** rejoicing when a sinner repents and is born again.

If the angels in heaven - and indeed the Son of God himself - values each and every sinner who repents and comes to faith, how could any of us think any differently?

Back now to Luke 15. Please remember how the Scribes and Pharisees felt about the **“tax collectors and sinners.”** They had no time or space for them in their lives. Then too, they were upset with Jesus because He dared “dirty himself” with such refuse: **“This Man receives sinners and eats with them.”**

These religious leaders excluded people due to their ethnicity (Gentiles), gender (women), physical problems (lepers), or practicing what were called "despised trades" (the rabbis' list included tax collectors, dung collectors, and pigeon keepers). The outcasts were considered defiled, and to associate with them would defile the righteous. These Scribes and Pharisees believed that the essence of spiritual maturity lay in excluding people.

And yet, if the truth be known, Jesus seemed most drawn to the very people that these others excluded. He ministered to...

- The poor lepers,
 - The blind beggars,
 - The morally challenged,
 - A less than ethical tax collector,
 - The demon possessed,
 - A Roman soldier,
 - A Samaritan with running sores, and another Samaritan woman with serial husbands,
- It is no wonder that Jesus gained the reputation of being a **“friend of sinners”** for that is exactly what He was.

Jesus, who was sinless and innocent, did not condone sin. But that is not even the issue. The issue is, in spite of His own personal holiness, Jesus associated with the outcasts; he spoke with them, touched them, ate with them, loved them. No one was so far down the social ladder that He couldn't or wouldn't reach down and lift them up. No sinner, no soul was without value to Him.

Once Mother Teresa was teaching a young member of her community who came from a well-to-do family how to care for the poor and dying on the streets of Calcutta. She said that when you see people on the streets, filled with disease, disfigured by sores, covered with maggots, touch them very gently with great love and delicate care, the way a priest handles the elements of holy mass, for Jesus is there in the distressing disguise.

As the German Theologian Helmut Thielicke wrote: "Jesus gained the power to love harlots, bullies, and ruffians ... he was able to do this only because he saw through the filth and crust of degeneration, because his eye caught the divine original which is hidden in every way -- in every man!

When Jesus loved a guilt-laden person and helped him, he saw in him an erring child of God. He saw in him a human being whom his Father loved and grieved over because he was going wrong. He saw him as God originally designed and meant him to be, and therefore he saw through the surface layer of grime and dirt to the real man underneath. Jesus did not identify the person with his sin, but rather saw in this sin something alien, something that really did not belong to him, something that merely chained and mastered him and from which he would free him and bring him back to his real self. Jesus was able to love men because he loved them right through the layer of mud."

3. JESUS DIED FOR SOULS

Romans 5:8 notes, "**But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ DIED for us.**"

1 Corinthians 6:20 (*Weymouth's translation*) therefore notes, "**...for you have been redeemed at infinite cost.**"

Why were we redeemed at infinite cost? I submit to you that God saw infinite worth in each and every human soul!

God did not affix a **DOLLAR VALUE** on you or me. Buying us with cash or some precious commodity would have been too easy. You see, "**The Earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof.**"

- He owns the cattle on a thousand hills.
- He has gold enough to pave the very streets of heaven with the stuff.
- He has pearls so large that He is able to make gates out of the things.
- He has so many diamonds, rubies and other precious gems that He uses them like concrete. They are simply foundation stones in glory.
- He owns furs, mansions, and millions and millions of acres of timber and billions and billions of barrels of oil and gas reserves.

God is not at a loss when it comes to money.

But no amount of money would be sufficient to purchase you and me back from death and sin. Again, the Scriptures were plain. To buy us from off the auction block of Satan's slavery, God would have to give up His Son to death by crucifixion. That was the value that He Himself set for every man, woman, boy and girl.

Now, I must remind you again, **HE SET THE PRICE**. If any bargaining was done, it was simply between Father, Son and Holy Ghost. That was it. Why then did He make our redemption so terribly expensive? **HE WAS SIMPLY ESTABLISHING THE WORTH OF A HUMAN SOUL.**

Matthew 16:26 again asks, "**What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul?**"

Would you sell your soul if in return you could gain the whole world? If your answer was yes, the Lord says that you would be selling out much to cheap. He owns the world -- billions of them. He could have given up a world or two for you, but no. You were worth more than any old world. Christ died to redeem your soul.

I hope by now it has become obvious that there is no amount of money in the world that is worth comparing to even one human being. Not all the gold, silver, platinum and all the precious gems combined could begin to compare with a single human soul in real value.

Our dear Lord Jesus died not just for all sinners (the masses), he shed his blood for each sinner (individual). If our Lord loved each sinner that much, how dare we value any one any less?

I WANT TO CLOSE with another story from the book *Everybody's Normal Till You Get To Know Them*:

In a town called Paradise, California, lived a young man named John Gilbert. When he was five years old, John was diagnosed with Duchenne's Muscular Dystrophy. It is a genetic, progressive, and cruel disease. He was told it would eventually destroy every muscle and finally, in a space of ten more years or so, take his life.

John, in fact, passed away at the age of twenty-five. Toward the end of his life, he needed the help of machines even to breathe. He had only enough strength to move a computer mouse with his right hand.

Each year John lost something. One year it was the ability to run; he couldn't play sports with other kids. Another year he could no longer walk straight, so all he could do was watch others play. Eventually he lost the ability to speak.

John knew something about the pain of exclusion. He wrote that junior high--not surprisingly--was perhaps the hardest era of his life. Junior high is difficult for almost everyone, I suppose. Tony Campolo once said that the old Roman Catholic theology is right, that there really is such a thing as purgatory. It's junior high, a place between heaven and hell where you are made to go suffer for your sins.

But what John experienced was far worse than most of us could imagine. Certain groups of students used to humiliate him because of his condition and because he had to bring a trained dog to school with him. He attended one dance in junior high; it was a disaster, and he never went to another. A bully used to torture him in the lunch room, where there were no supervising teachers, until he was afraid to go to school. No one ever stood up for him; maybe because they were afraid for themselves. "What a silly species we are!" John writes. "We all need to feel accepted ourselves, but we constantly reject others."

But there were other moments in John's life. At one point he was named the representative for everyone with his condition in the state of California. He was flown to Sacramento and was ushered with his mother into the governor's office for a private meeting. Then that night the National Football League sponsored a fund-raising auction and dinner at which John was a guest. The players let him hold their huge Super Bowl rings, which almost extended to John's wrist.

When the auction began, one item particularly caught John's attention: a basketball signed by the players of the Sacramento Kings professional team. John got a little carried away, because when the ball was up for bids, he raised his hand. As soon as the hand went up, John's mother flagged it down.

The bidding for the basketball rose to an astounding amount for an item that was not the most valuable treasure on the docket. Eventually, one man named a figure that shocked the room and that no one else could match.

The man went to the front and collected his prize. But instead of returning to his seat, the man walked across the room and placed it in the thin, small hands of the boy who had admired it so intently. The man placed the ball in hands that would never dribble it down a court, never throw it to a teammate on a fast break, never fire it from three point range. But those hands would cherish it.

John writes, "It took me a moment to realize what he had done. I remember hearing gasps all

over the room, then thunderous applause, and seeing weepy eyes. To this day I'm amazed.... Have you ever been given a gift you could never have gotten for yourself? Has anyone ever sacrificed a huge amount for you without getting anything in return...?"

Yes, John, I needed mercy, grace, forgiveness, acceptance. However each of those items were outside of my reach. Then Jesus came and at a great cost to Himself, He purchased those items and gave them to me – TO ME!

He didn't do this because of what I wore, what I drive, or due to my status in society. He did it out of love. He did He because He truly understood the "The Immeasurable Value of a Human Soul."