Mark 8:36-37 (Andrew Miller) 57787

Meditations on the Grace and Glory of the Blessed God, Perfect and Permanent (8:36-37)

Were we to judge of the comparative value of the soul and the body from what we see around us, we should surely come to the conclusion that the body is much more valuable than the soul; so little attention is paid to the one and so much to the other. We see, on every hand, far more thought, care, labor, and money, spent on the body than on the soul. It is perfectly right, of course, to care for the body: it is our duty to do so. But the danger of neglecting the soul is all the greater on that account. Our greatest snares are daily duties. Just because they are lawful and right in themselves, we seek thereby to keep the conscience quiet under the plea that duty must be attended to. Surely it is right to do our duty; but it is wrong, always wrong, to neglect the soul. If it be neglected, all is wrong, however prosperous we may be in the world Has the soul no claims? Do we owe no duty to it? Many satisfy themselves by attending for a few hours, on the first day of the week, to what is called their spiritual interests, and then devote the remaining six days to their temporal interests. Thus the soul comes in for a very small share of their time and consideration.

But we shall neither rightly understand the worth of the soul nor appreciate its claims, until we have learned its value from the word of Christ. " For what shall it profit a man," He says, " if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" (Mark 8:36, 37.) Here we are plainly taught that one human soul is of more value than the whole world-that if a man were to gain the world and lose his soul, he would be an infinite loser.

The soul is spiritual and must exist forever, either in a state of perfect happiness or the most awful misery. The world is material and must pass away; but the soul will never pass away. It is immortal, it will never die. No, never-never die! It may, alas! be eternally separated from the living God, which is called " the second death;" but it can never cease to exist. Either the Father's house of many mansions or the burning lake must be the everlasting abode of every immortal soul, and of the body, too, after the resurrection. It is this consideration that makes the soul so precious, that gives it such a value to the compassionate heart of Jesus. No one could tell the worth of a soul as He could. He had counted the cost and paid the ransom price of its redemption.

And now, observe, the soul being spiritual and immortal, nothing will meet its need that is not both perfect in its nature, and permanent in its duration. Besides, the soul has to do with God, and nothing will suit Him that is not as perfect as He is Himself. The soul, being immortal, must have an everlasting portion. But where, you may ask, are we to find this character of blessing for the soul? Certainly not in this world. Vanity, decay, and death, are written on everything down here. There is nothing perfect-there is nothing permanent. Nothing can be found " under the sun " that will meet the need or satisfy the desires of one human soul.

In the Book of Ecclesiastes, we have the record of human experience, with reference to this world, on a large and magnificent scale; and the result proved that all is vanity and vexation of spirit.

" Vanity of vanities," saith the preacher, " vanity of vanities; ALL is vanity. What profit hath a man of all his labor which he taketh under the sun?" (Chap. 1:2, 3.) So long as we seek happiness under the sun, we shall not find it. Solomon was a wise man and a great king He tried and proved everything that " could be supposed capable of rendering man happy." (See chap. 2.) He tried mirth and pleasure, wisdom and folly. He made great works, builded houses, planted vineyards, gardens, orchards, and trees of all kinds of fruit. He got singing men and singing women, silver and gold in abundance, and the peculiar treasure of kings " So I was great," he says, " and increased more than all that were before me in Jerusalem; also my wisdom remained with me. And whatsoever mine eyes desired I kept not from them; I withheld not my heart from any joy: for my heart rejoiced in all my labor: and this was my portion of all my labor. Then I looked on all the works that my hand had wrought and on the labor that I had labored to do: and, behold, all was vanity and vexation of spirit, and there was no profit under the sun." Verses 9-11.

So long as the heart of any one is seeking rest, satisfaction, or happiness in this world, it will surely be disappointed. The result in every case must be bitter disappointment, for it can only reap from such a soil, " vanity and vexation of spirit." The heart of man is too large for this world to fill. Its capabilities are too vast for all that is under the heavens to satisfy. And yet how eagerly many are chasing after the fleeting phantoms of time, to the entire neglect of the solemn realities of eternity! But supposing that every desired object were reached, and all possessed, what would be gained? Only a deeper sense that all is vanity-that it is not in the power of earthly good to fill up the aching void within. All worldlypleasures, amusements, indulgences, and gratifications, leave the soul more thirsty than ever: they cannot satisfy. Excitement is the right name for worldly pleasures-take that away, and they would prove a most burdensome task. They only increase the painful sense of want, with an intensified desire, which makes the poor neglected soul thoroughly miserable. There is a worm at the root of every gourd, and a thorn in earth's fairest flower.

The portion, dear reader, which thy soul needs is not to be found within the wide range of nature. Solomon could not find it under the sun, and " what can the man do that cometh after the king?" There is nothing perfect, there is nothing permanent, that has its spring in this sin-stricken world. Oh! what a poor, hollow, worthless thing the world appears in the light of this plain truth! It only excites the feverish thirst of the soul, but cannot quench it. A greater than Solomon found it to be " a dry and thirsty land where no water is." 0 reader! think of this! This is a true testimony. There are no living waters in this world. There is no life, no food, no rest, no joy, for the soul, beneath the throne of God, where Christ is now seated. Husks you may have, if you can buy them, but the price is your soul.

But where, you may again ask, are we to find the needed, suited portion for the soul? Let the Spirit of Truth answer. " He, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price." And again, " In the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto ME

and drink." (Isa. 55:1-3; John 7:37.) Nothing can be plainer than these passages. Christ Himself is the life and food of the soul. "And Jesus said unto them, I am the bread of life; he that cometh to me shall never hunger, and he that believeth on me shall never thirst." (John 6:35.) Here, and here alone, the soul of man will find eternal rest. He is the only perfect and permanent good of the soul. But He is above the sun. He has gone up on high. We must believe in Him, and through believing, come to Him where He is. We must rise in spirit-in heart, above the sun, to find the spiritual blessings which our souls need. " He that hath the Son hath life." We must possess Himself as our wealthy portion. Oh, have you found your way to Him 2 Are you occupied with Him 2 Can you now say-just now-" Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee"? Christ not only fills, but overflows the soul which is occupied with Him alone.

The contrast between a person who is seeking happiness in the world, and one who has found it in Christ, is strikingly presented in the book of Ecclesiastes and the Song of Solomon. (See Sol. 1:1-7.) In the latter, the believing soul is with Christ Himself, and that is everything. In His presence there is fullness of joy. It is not as in Ecclesiastes, an endless variety of things, but a living Person, the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ. The heart not only believes truth, but it loves a Person. The blood of the cross having met all the need of the conscience, the Person of Christ meets all the need of the heart. This is the summing up of the Christian's creed-the blood of Christ for the conscience, and the Person of Christ for the heart. And oh! what confidence, rest and joy the believer has in Him, speaking of the bride in the Song of Solomon simply as a believer in Jesus. " Thy love," she can now say, " is better than wine." Wine is the symbol of human joy, the joys of earth, but all that the heart now desires is to know and enjoy more of the love of Jesus. For it has found that the blessed realities of His faithful love are sweeter and better far than all it ever found here below. This is the only source of true happiness to the soul, the only spring of real joy. But observe, further, there is not a word here about sin, forgiveness, or justification; neither was there anything said about these things by the father to the prodigal. Why is this? Is God indifferent to sin? Oh, no! Far from it. It is intolerable to His being. But these questions were perfectly settled, for every believer, in the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. So that when the prodigal returns he is not blamed, or charged with anything, but met by all the affections of the father's heart. Surely, if sinners believed this, they would not be so unwilling to return to their heavenly Father. Judgment was spent on the cross: the wrath of God was poured out there, and sin was dealt with and put away, according to the glory of God. He had something to say to Christ about the prodigal's sins, but nothing to the prodigal himself. When the sinner returns to God, in the name of Jesus, he comes before Him in all the value of His work, and that so fully answers for all his sins, that God the Father says nothing about them. True, the sinner himself may be deeply exercised about his sins, and fully confess them, and very right that he should do so, but the blood of Jesus cleanses us from all sin, and fits us to be " in the light, as he is in the light."

And now, the poor heart is free in the presence of God, and occupied with Jesus there. It can now say, " The king hath brought me into his chambers." (Ver. 3.) It has learned his wondrous love. It has tasted its sweetness. It is at home with the King in his chamber. Oh! what joy can be compared with this? Every other attraction loses its power when I am here. What are all the varieties spoken of in the book of Ecclesiastes compared with this place of perfect and everlasting joy? They all dwindle into utter insignificance, now that I have found the perfect and permanent good, " Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, and today, and forever." (Heb. 13:8) When the heart is occupied with Christ Himself it can relish nothing else. In Ecclesiastes the heart was too large for its portion; in the Song of Solomon the portion is too large for the heart-its cup runneth over. To know that the presence-chamber of the King is my eternal happy home, is joy unspeakable and full of glory.

But oh! a strange feeling passes over my spirit, and whispers, " Is there any other place for souls besides this?" Oh, yes! The truth must be told. There is another, and only another; and that is, the burning lake of fire. " Oh, solemn thought!" And know thou, that every child of Adam must be in one of these two places forever and ever, Oh, reader! reader! which is to be thine, the chamber of the King or the lake of fire? The highest place in heaven or the lowest place in hell? If Christ be the desired object of thy heart, thou art with Him already, in His chamber. Rejoice, then, in thy portion. " Rejoice in the Lord alway: and again I say, rejoice." But, oh! if the world be thy portion here, the lake of fire must be thy place forever. Oh, be warned of thy danger ere it be too late! Hast thou no thought, no concern, no care, for thy precious soul? Jesus says it is of more value than the whole world; and wilt thou sell it to Satan for the pleasures of sin. which are but for a moment? Wilt thou barter away the ineffable bliss of heaven for the gratifications of earth? Oh I ponder the bent of thy heart and the ways of thy feet. If thy foot be lifted in the direction of the world, stay! put it not down. Oh, stay! turn round! Let thy back be on the world, and thy face to Jesus. Oh! let the uplifting of thy heart be unto Himself. Believe in Him; trust in His finished work as the ground of acceptance in God's sight. His precious love has long kept the door of mercy open for thee-yes, for thee! Why linger outside? He still says "Come;" "yet there is room." Enter, this is the " door" that leads to the chamber of the King-to His presence, to His heart, to the Paradise of God, to the eternal blessedness of heaven.

" And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that. is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely." Rev. 22:17.

" He! ye thirsty, parched, and fainting, Here are waters, turn and see;To the thirstiest, poorest, vilest-Without money, all is free.Thirsty sinner,Drink, and stay not, 'tis for thee."

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