

004: Paradoxes of Soul Salvation

(based on Ch. 3 from The End of the Pilgrimage)

Is your soul being saved?

- It doesn't happen automatically
- now let me clarify that I am not talking about regeneration, that time in your past when you believed on Jesus and received eternal life
- I am talking about the ongoing work of God in your life to sanctify you – to set you apart from sin and to God
- that ongoing work is a cooperative effort between you and the Lord
- the apostle Paul makes that quite clear in:
- **Phil. 2:12-13** Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for *His* good pleasure.

the salvation in this verse is obviously not regeneration, the past tense of salvation

- we don't work that out
- God's gift of eternal life is by faith alone and has likely already happened in your life, seeing that you are listening to this Bible study for believers
- these verses are referring to the present, ongoing work of salvation in your life
- we otherwise know it as sanctification
- it begins the moment you believe and continues on until you meet Jesus
- the goal is to make you more like Jesus Christ
- with respect to that sanctifying work, God ALWAYS does His part in your life to see it through, but are you consistently doing your part?

by the very nature of the command to WORK OUT YOUR OWN SALVATION, we know it doesn't happen automatically, as some theological systems would like you to believe

- it requires moment-by-moment choices on your part to obey the Lord and continue walking with Him
- the Bible refers to this as the salvation of the soul, which SHOULD BE an ongoing work in every believer's life
- but unfortunately, that is not the case
- many believers choose to pursue their own way and resist God's sanctifying work in their lives
- the Scriptures are clear that those who do so will lose their soul at the Judgment Seat of Christ
- does that mean they will lose part of their being, so that they are soul-less thereafter?
- no, not exactly
- let's look at the words of Jesus Christ to determine what this means

Matt. 16:24 Then Jesus said to His disciples, "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me.

- **25** For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it.
- **26** For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?
- **27** For the Son of Man will come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and then He will reward each according to his works.
- **28** Assuredly, I say to you, there are some standing here who shall not taste death till they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom."

This passage is not a warning for unbelievers

- If it were, then Jesus would be preaching salvation by works – and by that, I mean, regeneration by works
- On the contrary, Jesus is speaking to His disciples.
- By extension that includes us.
- they are already believers and so are we
- Jesus challenges us to live for the eternal – the things that we cannot see that really matter – rather than for the here and now.
- If we choose to *save* (i.e., preserve) our soul now — in other words, live to please ourselves — we will *lose* our soul at the Judgment Seat.
- In other words, our soul will not be saved, in the sense of being sanctified.
- All will be lost, consumed, in God's testing furnace.
- *the fire will test each one's work, of what sort it is. (1 Cor. 3:13)*
- On the other hand, if we choose to *lose* our soul now — that is, die to self — then our soul will be saved, i.e., sanctified unto maturity and, therefore, preserved at the Bema, and rewarded by Christ.
- Notice two paradoxes in Christ's teaching.

Paradox #1: Save Now; Lose Later

- Jesus warned of the possibility of eternally-secure believers losing their soul at the Judgment Seat of Christ.
- This does not mean they will be denied eternal life, for they have been regenerated and have received the gift of eternal life
- that cannot be taken away
- Rather, losing one's soul at the Judgment Seat is the equivalent of what the apostle Paul described in 1 Cor. 3:15, *saved, yet so as through fire.*
- It is the prospect of suffering loss, shamefully entering the kingdom with no reward, and no glory.

- The very thought should make us shudder.

Some Bible translations interchange the words *life* and *soul* in this passage, though they are translations of the same Greek word, *psuche* (or *psyche*), which means *soul*.

- Thus, Matt. 16:25 could be read, *For whosoever will save his soul shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his soul for my sake shall find it.*
- What does it mean to LOSE one's soul and to SAVE one's soul?
- Some have mistakenly concluded that to *lose* one's soul is to be sent to hell as an unbeliever
- but that is not what this means
- To see what this really means, we have to examine four indications in the text
- First, this particular Greek word is also translated *lose* and *lost* several times in the New Testament, but does not mean to perish or to be eternally condemned to hell

For example, Luke 15 gives the parable of the man who has one hundred sheep but *loses* one of them.

- The man certainly does not perish, nor does his sheep.
- Rather, he is deprived of his possession, and that is how the word is used in Matt. 16.
- One who does not deprive self of his soul's desires here and now, will be deprived of his soul's desires in the age to come.
- In that sense his soul will be lost.
- On the other hand, one who deprives himself now — by denying self and taking up his cross — his soul will not be lost (i.e., deprived or forfeited), but found (i.e., rewarded)!

Second, Jesus is speaking with His disciples here about the costs of discipleship.

- These are already saved men.
- they have believed on Jehovah as OT Jews on the basis of the blood of the Passover and therefore are regenerated believers
- They don't need to know how to be saved from hell
- They need to know how to *come after* Jesus and *follow* Him.
- Incidentally, following Jesus is a process, not a point-in-time event like regeneration
- Clearly, this passage has nothing to do with the new birth.
- Jesus is teaching here about ongoing sanctification.

Third, if the means of salvation from hell were denying self and taking up one's cross, then salvation would be by works, not of faith alone.

- However, salvation IS by faith alone.
- Denying self and taking up one's cross are works that a believer carries out daily in the Christian life through the enabling power of the indwelling Holy Spirit
- Fourth, v.27 ties soul-salvation to the time when Jesus will *reward each according to his works*.
- Some say that is a reference to the Great White Throne Judgment when the dead are judged *according to their works*, Rev. 20:12.
- However, Jesus gives a clear indication in vs. 27-28 as to which judgment is in question.

27 For the Son of Man will come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and then He will reward each according to his works.

- **28** Assuredly, I say to you, there are some standing here who shall not taste death till they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom.”
- The Son of Man coming *in the glory of his Father* (v. 27) is equated with the Son of man coming *in his kingdom* (v. 28), and that is an obvious reference to the millennial kingdom that is preceded by the Bema, a judgment for believers only.
- Adding further credence to this view is Jesus' prediction that some standing there (whom we know to be Peter, James, and John) would not die until they would see Jesus coming in His kingdom.
- Contextually, this is a reference to the transfiguration, which is fulfilled just six days later, recorded in Matt. 17
- Jesus gives His inner circle a glimpse of His glorified, kingdom body.

In summary, losing one's soul has nothing to do with going to hell

- It is being deprived of the soul at the Judgment Seat.
- It is suffering loss (1 Cor. 3:15) rather than receiving rewards. It is entering the millennial kingdom without glory, not being able to fully enjoy the incredible wonders of the age to come, and consciously regretting that more spiritual choices were not made in this life.
- The paradox of Christ's teaching is that believers lose their soul at the Judgment Seat by *saving* it here and now, in this life ...
- that is, by refusing to deny self, take up their cross, and follow Jesus.
- Instead, they cater to self, avoid hardships and pay lip service to following Jesus, not counting the cost of discipleship.

In the parallel passage in Luke 17, Jesus precedes His discussion of saving/losing one's soul with an admonition:

- *Remember Lot's wife, (Luke 17:32).*
- It is important to remember that this Old Testament woman was righteous (she was a believer), as her husband Lot, and because of her righteous standing before God, she was also delivered from Sodom.
- But despite the warnings of the angels, she turned and looked back, and instantly became a pillar of salt.
- She gained the world (*saved* her soul), and thereby forfeited her soul.

Lot's wife is a metaphor for believers who *lose* their soul by *saving* it.

- What a tragedy it would be for God's children to live for themselves now, in this fleeting, vapor-like life, only to discover at the future Judgment Seat of Christ that they had forfeited many eternal blessings God had intended for them.
- Would it be worth it?
- Jesus warned on several occasions of the consequences
- Now let's look at the second paradox, which is the opposite of the first:

Paradox #2: Lose Now; Save Later

- Those who *lose* now will *save* later.
- How does one lose now?
- **Matt. 16:24** Then Jesus said to His disciples, "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me.
- we find three ways that we must lose our soul NOW, if we would save it later
- That is the essence of discipleship.

- Of course, there is a price to pay, here and now, but the rewards later will be worth it all
- **deny self, take up your cross, and follow Jesus**
- these are the COSTS of discipleship that, if heeded, result in tremendous REWARD in the future
- we will discuss all three, but let's begin with the last one: following Jesus

Coming after and *following* imply continuation, an ongoing process.

- That obviously cannot refer to the initial salvation of one's spirit, that is, regeneration
- Rather, *coming after* and *following* are what God expects AFTER one has been saved initially by believing
- It is the sanctification process that continues for those who cooperate with God
- But I must re-emphasize: following Jesus doesn't happen automatically
- you must choose to follow Jesus – every day of your Christian life

God will never force you to progress in sanctification.

- He may bring pressures to bear (i.e., discipline, Heb. 12), but ultimately God has left us with the choice to follow or not.
- As He does His part (Phil. 2:13), we must choose to do our part (Phil. 2:12), by ongoing decisions of faith, to cooperate with Him.
- Thus, Jesus warns of the consequences of not following, while clearly defining the costs and the benefits (rewards) of following.
- In other words, our Lord is encouraging His children to do a cost-benefit analysis and determine that it is worth it!

- Not to mention, as the apostle Paul points out, it is our *reasonable service*, Rom. 12:1.
- so we have seen the importance of following Jesus
- what does it mean to DENY SELF?

This involves restraining the passions of the soul.

- the soul is comprised of mind, emotions, and will
- or we could say, thoughts, feelings, and volition
- Because of indwelling sin (Rom. 7:17, 20), the soul must be checked to keep it from ruling your spirit
- If left to itself, the soul will trump the spirit and lead your entire being
- The result will be carnality in your life
- God's will is that YOUR spirit, where HIS Holy Spirit resides, be in the lead — spirit directing soul and soul directing body, *in that order*.

let me put it this way:

- Every person is comprised of spirit, soul, and body.
- When the Holy Spirit fills a child of God, that believer's spirit leads the soul in righteousness.
- The body follows along.
- This is a rightly ordered life in which the soul is being saved.
- However, a believer that is not Spirit-filled will submit to fleshly appetites, putting the body or soul in the lead, which is out of God's order.
- to deny Jesus, then, involves setting aside personal desires and ambitions, and renouncing rights.
- This qualification for discipleship goes against the grain of our natural desires and passions.
- Even after becoming regenerated, self is very much alive and well, desiring to be catered unto.

- But self must be subjected in order for Jesus to be Lord of one's life.

The Holy Spirit always produces balance in the lives of believers by helping us to divide rightly and apply the Word of God.

- He will lead away from indulgence, on the one hand, and from asceticism, on the other.
- His way is moderation and temperance, control of self, as we depend on the Spirit for enablement.
- The problem for most Christians is typically indulgence — loving the world — the lusts of the flesh, the lusts of the eyes, the pride of life.
- These will all pass away, but the one who does the will of God will abide forever.

Constantly abiding in the vine is the opposite of routinely indulging in the world.

- Do you love shopping? Eating? Clothing? Possessions?
- Personal pampering and comforts? Sensuality?
- Entertainment? Relationships? Technology?
- Fill in the blank with whatever your flesh loves and craves.
- It has to go in order for the soul to be saved.
- Another realm to be renounced is a high and lofty opinion of one's self, typically at the expense of others.
- Oftentimes, self manifests in the form of contentions (in its many varieties) —
- sarcasm, insults, verbal exchanges, derogatory speech, clamor, slander, physical fighting, etc.
- The source of all contention is pride and selfishness.
- **Prov. 13:10** By pride comes nothing but strife.

- **James 4:1** Where do wars and fights *come* from among you? Do *they* not *come* from your *desires for* pleasure that war in your members?
- **James 3:14** But if you have bitter envy and self-seeking in your hearts, do not boast and lie against the truth.
- **James 3:15** This wisdom does not descend from above, but *is* earthly, sensual, demonic.

Wouldn't it be a tragedy to forfeit rewards at the Judgment Seat because self could not be conquered?

- One of the glorious benefits of being believers is that we have the Holy Spirit living within –
- and, according to 2 Peter 1:4, He provides everything necessary for us to be participants in His divine nature and thereby escape the world's corruptions through lust
- We can be sanctified in our everyday soul life, to the extent that we depend on the Spirit to live the Christ life.
- that is, cooperating with God in such a way that the life of Jesus shines through
- Denying self demands a high price.
- The stakes are raised even higher in the next requirement of discipleship: taking up your cross

A cross is an instrument of torture and death.

- Jesus willingly took up His.
- He chose to leave Heaven's glories, lay aside His divine prerogatives, and take on human flesh.
- He chose to endure the horrors of crucifixion, knowing it was the will of the Father.
- In **John 10:17**, He said:
- "I lay down My life that I may take it again. No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself."
- **John 4:34** Jesus said to them, "My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to finish His work."

- He wants us to be willing to take up whatever He has taken up for us in the way of suffering and perhaps even death. The apostle Paul prayed,
- **Phil. 3:10** that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death,

In Luke 9:23 Jesus specified that our cross needs to be taken up *daily*.

- However, it is important to clarify that a "cross" is not something you bring upon yourself — suffering as the consequence of sin or as the result of making foolish decisions.
- A "cross" is some form of suffering that God brings along your path.
- It could be a major financial reversal or a serious health condition or some form of persecution.
- Whatever cross God allows in your life, you must choose to take it up, which means to respond rightly to the crisis.
- **James 1:2** Count it all joy when you fall into various trials,

God promises that His grace *is* sufficient to endure the trial (2 Cor. 12:9).

- Your responsibility is to take up the cross, not chafe at it or lean to your own understanding and try to sidestep it. Notice that "taking up" requires a decision of your will to embrace the cross, which is God's will.
- Again, this is referring to the realm of the soul.
- It does not come natural to us.
- We must choose to take it up.
- Are you actively seeking by the power of the Holy Spirit to lose your soul now by denying self, taking up your cross, and following Jesus?

- It means letting go of that which your soul craves, the pleasures of life, the high opinion of self.
- It means choosing to suffer willingly for Jesus, rejoicing in your crosses.
- If you will deny self and take up your cross and follow Him, your soul will be lost now (with respect to the world), but gained at the Judgment Seat.
- You will receive the true object of your heart's affection: Jesus in all His glory.
- To lose one's soul now is far better than losing it at the Judgment Seat.
- Those who lose their soul at the Judgment Seat will surely regret it.
- Better to lose now and save later.
- I challenge you to THINK ON THESE THINGS!