

T H E
AMERICAN PREACHER;

OR, A

COLLECTION OF SERMONS

FROM SOME OF THE

MOST EMINENT PREACHERS,

NOW LIVING,

IN THE UNITED STATES,

OF

DIFFERENT DENOMINATIONS

IN THE

CHRISTIAN CHURCH.

NEVER BEFORE PUBLISHED.

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A D V E R T I S E M E N T.

THE EDITORS of the AMERICAN PREACHER, in compliance with the request of a very sincere friend to this work, think proper to explain to the public the true purport of the Fifth Article, inserted in the preface to the first volume. The object, aimed at, is entirely political, and has reference simply to the economy of the UNITED STATES, in furnishing themselves with books as productions of their own, rather than to be dependant on foreign importation. The idea was intended to be sufficiently explained in the last clause of the article—"by encouraging the publications of our own country."

The Editors are so far from an inclination to shut the door against the introduction of literary or religious improvement from any country, that they intend, themselves, in due time, to solicit, and hope to receive CONTRIBUTIONS to this work from all countries where Christianity prevails, and where its Ministers may be disposed to build with us on the foundation already laid.

In execution of the plan, already adopted, as it respects the United States, the Editors would inform their Reverend Brethren of the different denominations of the Christian Church, that the door continues open for the reception of such CONTRIBUTIONS as they may be disposed to make for the promotion of this work.

The whole contribution will be held as a SACRED DEPOSITE, from which this work will be selected, from time to time, in such manner as will be judged to give weight, order, and dignity to the SUCCESSIVE VOLUMES.

On the first day of January next, by the leave of Providence, a selection will be begun for the FOURTH VOLUME, which may be expected out in the course of the ensuing year.

AUGUST, 1791.

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THE VALUE OF THE SOUL.

B Y

JOHN RODGERS, D. D.

One of the Ministers of the United Presbyterian Churches, New-York.

MATTHEW XVI. 26.

For 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?

THE candor with which our Lord treats his disciples upon all occasions, is a high evidence of his sincerity, and no inconsiderable evidence of the divinity of his mission. He not only tells them what they have to hope for, but what they have to fear, if they would be his sincere followers. He states the terms of their discipleship to them with great sincerity, whenever a favorable opportunity offers; nor does he on any occasion flatter their vanity.

An instance of this we have in the verse but one that precedes our text: *Then said Jesus to his dis-*

ciples, if any man will come after me, let him deny himself; and take up his cross and follow me. The necessity, however, of being his disciples, hard as these terms may appear to a secure and profane world, is urged in the next verse, from the danger of neglecting the duty, and the benefits arising from a compliance therewith. *For whosoever will save his life shall lose it; and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it.*

This same duty is recommended and enforced in the words of our text, from the nature of the loss sustained by those who do not thus deny themselves for Christ, take up the cross and follow him. *For 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?*

You will easily perceive, my brethren, our Lord's argument in the text, to induce us to be his disciples, is founded on the inestimable value of the soul. It is of more worth than a whole world. To gain a world and lose a soul, is to sustain an irreparable loss; for *what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?* The mode of our Lord's expression evidently implies, there is nothing that can be given in exchange for a lost soul; and the reason is obvious, because there is nothing in all the world that equals our precious soul in value; no, nor all our world put together, for *what is a man profited if he shall gain the WHOLE WORLD, and lose his own soul.*

Our Lord supposes, in the text, for the sake of illustration, what, indeed, has never fallen to the lot of any one man; that could he possess the whole world, its whole sovereignty and wealth, its whole honors and enjoyments of every nature, and that to the highest degree possible, they would be a vain purchase at the expence of his soul.

What then must be the folly of those who sell their souls for so small a share of any of these?— Who sell them for a thing of nought!

What shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul? Or, what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?

What I propose from the words, by the aids of the Spirit of Grace, is,

I. Consider the value of the soul in a few particulars.

II. The nature of the loss sustained by those, who lose their precious soul.

III. The danger of losing it.

Let us inquire,

I. Wherein does the value of this precious soul appear?

By the soul I mean, that rational and immaterial principle that is in each of us, by which we are distinguished from the brutes that perish, and

become wiser than the fowls of heaven. This soul is the offspring of God. Every soul of the human race receives its being immediately from him, without the intervention of any laws whereby it is propagated. He is in the most proper sense of the term, *the Father of our Spirits*. It is the observation of an eminent divine, that while all other beings were created by a single *let them be, and, lo, they were*, the sacred Trinity is represented as sitting in council on the creation of man. Thus, Gen. i. 26. *Let us make man*. It was not his body that was the subject of this consultation; for there are many bodies in the material universe as curious in their formation, and, perhaps, as glorious in their nature, as the body of man; and which, therefore, would have as justly merited the consultation of heaven. It was this immaterial and precious soul, as united to the body.

But to proceed: The high value of this soul appears,

I. From its *nature and capacity*.

I have just said that it is *spiritual and immaterial* in its nature. It does not consist of such gross and material parts as our bodies do; it is hereby raised far superior to them, and all the material universe, and becomes a partaker of the same kind of being with the angels of heaven; for they are spirits.—*Who maketh his angels spirits*. Yea, more, it is a partaker of the same kind of being with God him-

self, for *God is a spirit*. This, therefore, bespeaks its high dignity and inestimable value.

And from this spirituality of its nature is derived its capacity. It is capable of knowing God; not, indeed, in a perfect manner; for such is the infinite glory of the divine nature and perfections, that he cannot be fully known by any of his creatures. *None by searching can find out God—none can find out the Almighty unto perfection.* But the soul of man is capable of knowing something of the nature, the character and perfections of the Supreme Jehovah—That Jehovah from whom all our happiness, as intelligent creatures, is derived, *whose favor is life, and his loving-kindness better than life.*

This rational soul is also capable of knowing God's works—the sun, the moon, and the stars, which his fingers have framed. It is capable of knowing the various ranks of creatures in their several gradations—“Down from infinite to thee, “from thee to nothing,” Many of these it has ranged into classes, and gone far in explaining their nature and their laws: And O the wonders of wisdom, power, and goodness it has discovered in them! The works of God, both in creation and providence are among those mirrors in which we behold the glory of the divine perfections.

For the invisible things of him, from the creation of the world, are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead.

The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament sheweth his handy-work. Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night sheweth knowledge. But it is this rational soul that enables us to see this glory, and render the honor of it to the great God.

This soul of ours is that also which constitutes us the subjects of moral government. We are hereby capacitated for knowing truth and error, sin and duty, and for rendering a rational obedience to the divine law. We hereby become capable of rewards and punishments; in a word, capable of the whole system of duty, which is due from our race to God, and capable of all its consequent happiness. And this happiness is *eternal* in its duration, as well as *rational* in its nature.—For these souls of which we speak; are in their very nature *immortal*. You have heard that they are immaterial—they have nothing in them that tends to dissolution—they shall survive the ruins of the body—survive this world itself,—especially in its present form—bear date with an unwasting duration, and exist while God himself exists.

This is a property of the human soul of the highest moment to be attended to, and which instamps an infinite value upon it—*it is immortal*. When yonder sun shall have grown dim with age—when the moon and the stars shall enlighten our world no more, these souls of ours shall exist, and flourish in eternal youth. From hence the soul derives its capacity of enjoying God, and of being

happy in his immediate presence *for ever*. And this, too, greatly tends to illustrate the transcendent excellence of its nature.

— And surely that must be highly valuable which is thus *spiritual* in its nature, *immortal* in its duration, and capable of such extensive knowledge usefulness and happiness.

2. The value of the human soul appears from *the price that was paid for its redemption*. This was none other than the blood of the Son of God. — *Forasmuch as we know that we were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from our vain conversation received by tradition from our fathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot.* The apostle calls the price of our redemption the *blood of God*. *Feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood.*

The person who shed this blood was God as well as man. He was that divine person, who, *being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God*. There is not a perfection of the divine nature, however essential to deity, or incommunicable to the creature, but what belongs to him, as well as the Father, and to him in the same sense with the Father. This is he who assumed our nature into a personal union with his divine. How glorious the sight! Deity and humanity conjoined in one mysterious person, and yet so as to

preserve each nature distinct from the other. This was he who fulfilled all righteousness for us, by a life of the most perfect obedience to the precepts of the law. This was the person who hath redeemed us to God by his blood. And did our time admit of considering here the nature of those sufferings our Lord endured previous to his death, and in dying on the accursed cross for us, it would greatly tend to enhance the value of this price in our estimation.

I shall only observe, at present, that they include all the agonies of Gethsemane—all the insults he endured from thence to Mount Calvary, and all the exquisite anguish of the cross, until he cried, *It is finished*, and gave up the ghost. But all this, my brethren, serves to illustrate the high value God sets upon that soul which he hath redeemed at so expensive a rate. Would God give the Son of his love to all that ignominy, suffering and death, to redeem a thing of nought? Verily no.

3. *The display of the perfections of God, exhibited in the plan of saving lost souls, through Jesus Christ, tends greatly to illustrate the value he puts upon them. This plan was laid from all eternity. Then it was the sacred Three concerted and covenanted with each other respecting this important business, and each person in the adorable Trinity took his part in the divine design, and engaged for its execution in the fulness of time.*

Thus it was, God loved us with an everlasting love. *I have loved thee with an everlasting love; therefore, with loving-kindness have I drawn thee.*— But what was it they deliberated upon? Whether they would save lost sinners? No, this was graciously fixed. It was the *way*, the *manner* of doing it, so as to secure the honor of God's moral government, and exhibit the glories of the divine character in a proper point of light. The proposals of mercy and claims of justice would *seem* to oppose each other.

Mercy was inclined to save the sinner, while justice insisted upon his death, as the proper demerit of his sin.

Holiness too had its claim upon the sinner, and absolutely forbid his salvation, unless conformed to the divine image; while truth insisted upon the execution of the threatening of the law on the transgressor. But in the plan of saving men through Jesus Christ, all these several claims are answered, and gloriously harmonize. God can now *be just, and the justifier of him who believeth in Jesus.*

The *mercy* of God is illustrated in that the sinner is saved. The *justice* of God, in the satisfaction made by Christ's obedience to the precepts of the law, and his suffering its penal sanction, in the manner you have just heard, as the sinner's surety. His *holiness*, not only by the obedience of our Lord's life, which, indeed, is one of the brightest

displays ever made of it; but also by that purity of heart and manners, to which this plan of salvation recovers us, by the agency of the spirit of grace. His *truth* is illustrated, by the full execution of the threatenings of the law, in all their dread extent, though not on the sinner's own person, yet on the person of his surety; and his *faithfulness* in the fulfilment of his promises to the divine Mediator, and to every true believer in and through him; while the *wisdom* of God shines with distinguished lustre, in concerting and executing a plan that unites all these *seemingly* jarring interests; a plan that so fully provides for securing and illustrating the divine honor, and the saving of lost men. Thus, *mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other.*

From this brief sketch you see what a mirror of divine glory the plan of our salvation through Jesus, Christ, is. Here, *we all with open face behold, as in a glass, the glory of the Lord.* Here, *the light of the knowledge of the glory of God shines in the face of Jesus Christ.* But what is all this about? Whose salvation are the three persons of the adorable Trinity thus planning and executing? That of fallen angels? No; that of *human souls.* It is their salvation which exhibits this glorious display of the divine perfections and character. And O, in what an important point of light does this set this soul of man! How inestimable its value, about whose salvation not only every person in the Trinity, but

every attribute of the divine nature, is thus, some how or other, employed, and in and by which it is glorified!

4. *The provision God has made for the recovery of this soul to his image, and a capacity of enjoying him as his portion, is a further evidence of its high value: He has given us the sacred scriptures, as a rule both of faith and manners. We are here taught all that is necessary for us to know and believe, to the saving of our souls. We are here taught the whole compass of our duty to God, our neighbor and ourselves. Taught, that denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world. Thus, all scripture being given by inspiration of God, is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness; that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto every good work. And in this respect, among others, the law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul; the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple. And you will please carefully to observe here, that the truths contained in the sacred scriptures, are the great means chosen and appointed by God for effecting our personal holiness. To this accords our Lord's prayer for his disciples.—*Sanctify them through thy truth; thy word is truth.**

It is for the same end the ordinances of the gospel are instituted. This is one great end of the sabbath, and all its appointments. It is, that we may, by these, hold an intercourse with God while

in this life, and thus be trained up for holding the most delightful communion with him in glory.— We read, that *faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.* That *faith* by which our hearts are purified, made like God, and we trained up to a meetness for the inheritance of the saints in light. For the same gracious purpose has God appointed the gospel-ministry, which is represented by the apostle, as among the richest of our Lord's ascension-gifts. *When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men. And he gave some apostles, and some prophets, and some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man; unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ.* But I must not omit adding here, that as all these were but means, and, therefore, could not effect any thing in themselves, God has provided the holy spirit for rendering them effectual. This is the part he assumed in the plan of our redemption. Hence he is styled *the Spirit of Holiness*; and we are said to be *saved by the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost, which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour*; and this great work is elsewhere styled, *the Sanctification of the Spirit*, because of his agency in effecting it. But O! the rich variety of influences the spirit sheds on his people, for this purpose, and the rich variety of graces he forms in them! But does not all this bespeak the value of the soul, for

whose sanctification and happiness this glorious provision is made? Yes, surely.

5. *The nature of that happiness which God has provided for the human soul beyond the grave bespeaks its high value. It is a happiness derived from the immediate presence and enjoyment of himself; a happiness that flows from the most clear, distinguishing and enlarged views of the perfections, the character, the government, and Christ of God. There we shall no more see, as through a glass, darkly, but face to face; we shall no longer know in part, but we shall know even as also we are known.*

The precision and extent of the knowledge of the redeemed of the Lord in glory is expressed, Rev. xxii. 4. by *seeing God's face. And they shall see his face.*

It is a happiness that arises from the most perfect conformity to God, in point of moral purity. The spirits of just men are, in that state, made literally perfect; holy as God, who hath called them, is holy. That which is in part is for ever done away, and that which is perfect is now come.

This knowledge of God and conformity to him, are the sources of that enjoyment of him which consummates the happiness of the redeemed of the Lord. For there, in that world,—in that blessed state, *God himself will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, their God.* So the words lie in the original. Rev. xxi. 3. (i. e.) *God himself will be with them, exhibiting and manifesting himself unto them, as their supreme*

bleſſedneſs; in all the ways that the ſeveral powers of the ſoul, now arrived at the fullreſt maturity, both in a natural and moral view, can poſſibly receive or enjoy him.

This is that happineſs which Chriſt has purchaſed for us; and which he has prepared and taken poſſeſſion of in the name of his people. *Whither the forerunner has for us entered, even Jeſus, made an high-prieſt for ever, after the order of Melchizedec.*

Thus it appears to be a happineſs that is derived to us from God *through Chriſt*, and which is enjoyed in the ſame heaven of glory he inhabits.— One of his laſt petitions for his people was, *Father, I will that they alſo whom thou haſt given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which thou haſt given me.* And him the Father always heareth.

Once more, it is a happineſs of the ſame kind with that which the human nature of our Lord himſelf enjoys. The redeemed of the Lord become at laſt, *heirs of God, and joint heirs with Chriſt.* From all which it appears to be a moſt *perfect* and an *everlaſting* happineſs—a happineſs equal to our higheſt capacity of enjoying, and that for ever.— But all this beſpeaks the value of the ſoul, which is capable of this happineſs, and for which it is prepared at ſo expenſive a rate, by a wiſe and a gracious God.

6. *The reward God promiſes and confers upon ſuch as win ſouls to Chriſt, beſpeaks their high value.—*

They, who are brought home to God, shall be a crown of glory, and a fruitful source of consolation, in the day of Christ, to those who have been the means of their conversion. *For what, saith the apostle, is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Are not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming? For ye are our glory and joy.*

It requires no small share of wisdom and sagacity to discharge this great trust aright; for *he that winneth souls is wise.* But for their encouragement God promises, *That they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament, and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever.* Many and great are the difficulties which lie in the way of the faithful minister's proper discharge of his office; but these rewards are hung up before him as a prize at the end of his course, to encourage him to diligence—to zeal, and to faithfulness in his work. And even, *though Israel be not gathered, yet shall he be glorious in the eyes of the Lord.* But surely God would not so highly encourage the taking pains to save souls, and thus reward them, even when they may prove unsuccessful, unless these souls were of infinite value in his sight.

7. *The joy which the conversion of a soul to God occasions in heaven, is no inconsiderable evidence of its high worth in their estimation.*

Our Lord expressly assures us, Luke xv. 7, *That there is joy in heaven over one sinner that repenteth.*—And so important is this truth, and so worthy of our attention, that it is repeated verse 10, *Like-*

wise, I say unto you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth. And to illustrate and confirm this interesting truth, he gives us the instructive parable of the Prodigal Son, in the subsequent part of the chapter. The joy of the father on the return of his son, which concludes the parable, is beautifully illustrative of the divine and heart-felt pleasure, which the sinner's return to God through Christ spreads through the whole heavenly world—angels and spirits of just men made perfect.

On the other hand, the conversion of souls is matter of chagrin and mortification to the hosts of hell. And to this, as its true source, are we to ascribe those many and cruel persecutions, of one kind and another, that have been raised against the faithful ministers of Jesus, in the different ages of the church.—Whatever may be pretended, it is because they are the instruments, employed by God, for rescuing souls from the snare of the destroyer. And this malignity of satan against them is increased by their being successful in this great work.

Thus the joy of heaven, and the chagrin of hell, upon the sinner's conversion to God, unite in illustrating the value of the human soul.

8. *The solicitude and activity of both worlds, heaven and hell, about the soul of man, bespeaks its high worth.*

The one is engaged for its salvation, and the other, with all its accomplices, is intent upon its ruin.

Heaven is engaged for the salvation of the human soul. Agreeably hereto, God has laid a plan for our recovery, as you have already heard under a preceding particular. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, each one bears his part therein; and this plan has been not only laid, but executed and revealed in the sacred oracles, and the great blessings it contains are daily applied to the souls of men, in the administration of the gospel and its ordinances.

God is in Christ reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation.

Christ, in his mediatorial character, is daily carrying on the great work of our redemption. *Him hath God exalted with his right hand, to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins. Who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us.*

The Holy Spirit is continually employed in recovering depraved men to the divine likeness.—The angels of heaven are also employed in the same blessed work. *For, are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation.*

The ministers of Christ too are engaged in the same glorious business. They are *ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us, we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God.*

Pious friends have their hearts set on the same great end, the salvation of the souls of those who are dear to them. For this they instruct them, advise them, pray for them, and weep over them. In a word, all heaven, and all its allies, are employed in the same important work, that of saving souls.

And on the other hand, all hell is busied in destroying precious souls. Hence the devil is stiled our *adversary. Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary, the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour.* His business, his daily employment, is to defeat, to the utmost of his power, the gracious designs of God, upon our lost world. In this he is aided by many powerful accomplices. *For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.* He is also assisted by thousands of our degenerate race, who enlist under his banner, and powerfully aid him in all his infernal designs, in a variety of ways, I may not stay to enumerate.

But why all this solicitude and activity to save, or to destroy the human soul? Verily it is, because it is a prize worth the contending for; a prize worthy the struggles of heaven and hell!

And are these the souls that men in general esteem such things of nought?—About the future happiness of which they are so perfectly indifferent? What folly! What madness! And are there not some of you, my brethren, thus indifferent about your souls? Wholly unconcerned about what becomes of them after death? What sayest thou, conscience? And is this rational? Do these souls, these precious souls merit no more attention than you bestow upon them?—And tell me, ye sons of riot and profaneness, are your stolen pleasures, or your avowed debaucheries, a sufficient compensation for the loss of your rational, immortal souls?—I appeal to your understandings—I speak as to wise men, judge ye.—I leave the decision with your judgment and consciences; but remember, you are to decide for an eternity. AMEN.

