

Sermon [on "Eternal Life"]

Taken from *Selections from the Religious and Literary Writings of John H. Boccock* (Richmond, Va.: 1891).

"For what shall it profit a man if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul." -- Mark viii. 36

Our souls, as we here see, *may be lost*; and that is a loss which the gaining of the whole world would not make up to us. Our souls are worth more than the whole world. They are worth so much,--

I. Because they are *immortal*.

There may probably be prophecies of immortality within our souls themselves, in their own desires and longings after a life higher than this, and their hopes, aspirings, fears and forebodings of things in eternal scenes. To a pure eye there are analogies of man's immortality around us: in the resurrection of the spring from the death of winter, in the upspringing of wheat from the dead grain, in the rise of the butterfly from the worm, and in the fact that other things, which seem just as death seems, are but changes and advancements to other stages of being.

But is in the Bible, and by the voice of God, that *life and immortality* are brought to light. There we learn clearly and fully that this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this *mortal must put on immortality*. The righteous souls at the judgment shall go away into *life eternal*. The wicked shall go away into *everlasting punishment*. The gift of God is *eternal life* through Jesus Christ our Lord. *This is the promise* that he hath promised us, even *eternal life*. That, being justified by his grace, we should be made heirs according to the *hope of eternal life*.

The New Testament especially, infinitely stretches the value of the soul by showing plainly that it will exist forever in eternal happiness or eternal misery. Our souls are, therefore, worth more than the whole world to us, because when the world and everything in it besides man shall be burned up and taken away, then the soul will have an eternity before it to go on existing, in heaven or in hell. Our souls must live forever and forever in happiness or in misery.

II. Our souls are worth so much on account of their *powers of enjoyment*. It is enough to fill us with astonishment to think of the great joy which, according to the word of God, the gospel pours into the human soul. When a soul enters heaven, it is said to enter into the *joy of its Lord*. When the prophet Isaiah spake beforehand of the diffusion of the gospel among men, he said that *everlasting joy should be upon their heads*; the kingdom of God among men is righteousness and peace and *joy in the Holy Ghost*. Along with the gospel the Spirit of God comes and dwells in the spirit of man, and three of the fruits of that Spirit are love, joy and peace. The Apostle John writes to the churches *that their joy might be full*. Jude says that those to whom he writes are to be presented faultless before the *presence of Christ's glory with exceeding joy*. St. Paul tells the Philippians that *the peace of God which passeth all understanding shall keep their hearts and minds through Christ Jesus*. And Peter, speaking of the bond of union between Christ and his people, says, "Whom having not seen ye love, in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice *with joy unspeakable and full of glory*." And the Spirit of God puts into the rapt and glowing lips of St. Paul a prayer for Christians, that Christ may dwell in their hearts by faith,

that they, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth and length and depth and height, and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God. And the same apostle tells us that a certain process of discipline to which the souls of God's people are subjected in this world works out for them *a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory* in heaven. These are the brightest pictures of joy that are to be found in any books of poetry or books of prophecy or books of imagination--and much more, books of fact to be found in this world. There is no joy of this earth that can go higher than *joy unspeakable* and full of glory. And in reference to that glory with which the *joy is full* there is no glory known below which exceeds *a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory*. Man is capable of these enjoyments, of which fish and beast and bird are not capable, because man is gifted with an immortal soul. A man's soul is, therefore, of great value to him. It is of so much value that the gain of the whole world would not make up to him the loss of his soul.

III. Our souls are worth so much on account of their *powers of suffering*.

Those who know not god and obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ shall, in consequence of the immortality of their souls, be punished with *everlasting destruction* from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his power. A process of destruction shall go on upon them which will be an everlasting process of destruction. There shall be *weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth*; for their *worm dieth not, and their fire is not quenched*. Sin is such a deadly poison that when it gets hold upon the substance of a soul it *bites like a serpent and stings likes an adder and eats like a cancer*. These are esteemed among the most painful modes of death. These are the ways in which the punishment of sin in the future world are set forth in the Bible. If we take along with them the thought that in the future world, if they once begin, they must endure forever and forever; if we multiply each of the agonies of a guilty conscience by endless years; if we consider well the decisive words of the Lord Jesus, that their worm *dieth not* and their fire is *not quenched*, we can see enough to show us that a man's soul is worth more to him than the world. If he loses his soul and gains the whole world, the gain of the whole world will not make up to him the loss of his soul.

IV. GOD'S ETERNAL LOVE of our souls shows that they are worth more than the whole world.

"God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. God surely did not love the sins of this world, for he once destroyed the inhabitants of the world by water on account of their sins, and he will again destroy the world by fire on the same account. He surely did not love the mere *material* elements of the world, or the mere *bodily* part of man, as to give his Son to die for us; for all the material elements of this world, except so much of them as may have been connected with human souls, as the bodily tabernacles of those souls, will be consumed by fire when that day of the Lord shall come.

On that day *the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat; the earth also and the works which are therein shall be burnt up.* And if God's love for this world was connected with the material elements of it, beautiful as they are, and rich as they are in the wonderful proofs of his handiwork, he would not thus burn them up as soon as the immortal spirits of men, and the renewed tabernacles of those spirits, spring up into the air, and leave this world.

Nor did God love this world of sinners as a world of sinners, and because it was a world of sinners, for "God is angry with the wicked every day; if he turn not he will whet his sword; he hath bent his bow and

made it ready; he hath also prepared for him the instruments of death." And when he looked upon the old world and saw that "the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually," such was the hatred of sin in the holy mind of God that "it repented the Lord that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him at his heart; and the Lord said, I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth;" and he did for their sins destroy that whole generation, leaving but one righteous man and his family.

It was not because it was a world of sinners that God so loved this world; nor because it was a world of beautiful material workmanship, fearfully and wonderfully made; but it was because of the *immortal spirits* which inhabit the bodies of men in this world. It was because the soul of man is immortal, and has power to be happy and full of glory to all eternity, and has power to be forever in woe and anguish, that God so loved the world as to give his only begotten Son to die for it. It was the *soul* of man upon which the love of God was fixed. "For the redemption of the soul is precious, and it ceaseth forever." It was the soul of man, Jehovah's breath, lying in his sight weltering in sin and woe, condemned and dying, yet a priceless jewel capable of feeling the love of God, and of reflecting his glory, and capable of wearing a bring and burning crown of reflected glory in heaven. It was that soul of man on which the love of God was fixed with pity and purposes of mercy and of salvation before the foundation of the world. We may see the worth of our souls in the love of God flowing out towards them from eternity in spite of sin, and may so learn that if we lose our souls, the gain of the whole world would not make up the loss.

V. The Son of God coming from heaven, and taking human flesh and dying for our souls, shows their great value.

It was not to save the material universe from being burned up in the conflagration of the last day, nor was it to save the body of man from being stricken by the scythe of death, and spread out in the grave as a repast for the earth-worm, that Christ Jesus came into this world, but it was to *redeem the souls* of sinners from the condemnation of *eternal death* under which they lay.

The Saviour went about doing good to the bodies of men, healing the sick and cleansing the lepers, to show his compassion and to give vent to the tender pity he felt for the lost estate of man and all his woes. But his main occupation on earth was casting out devils, forgiving the sins and undoing the spiritual bonds of guilty souls, as a physician of souls. And his mighty miracles in feeding the thousands, and in speaking to and stilling the waves and the winds, and in raising the dead to life, though they were works of mercy in themselves, yet they had a deeper meaning by far than mere mercy, for they were done to prove the consent of the treating power in heaven to the main great work which he had in hand--to die as the *Redeemer of the souls* of men. The language of the miracles to the hearing ear was the same as the language of that articulate voice itself once heard speaking immediately from the courts of heaven, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." I give my sanction to his redeeming work.

If Christ had come to be a mere Redeemer of the material elements from the bondage of corruption, he would have gone about the fields plucking up weeds and briars and thorns; he would roamed about killing the poisonous reptiles of the world, fulfilling the low heathen idea of Hercules as a redeemer of matter and a deliverer from mere material evils; or he would have ascended into the fields of ether, like a new Titan, among the whirling planets of the sky, and he would have forced back the march of the earth in her orbit from that path in which she has been walking since her inhabitants were sinners, and in which she encounters the heat of summer, and the scorching fire of fever, and the sirocco and the tornado, and in which she encounters the snow and the ice and the chill blasts and the temporary death of

winter, and he would have impelled her again into the path in which she rolled in the days of the paradise of old, in which eternal spring smiled over her borders and the sweetness of even-temperature and the blessedness of perpetual youth and health were enjoyed by her inhabitants. But great as these things would have been, they were not the things that brought him down from heaven to earth. The *souls* of men were in thick darkness in relation to their spiritual concerns and in relation to the way in which a sinner may be restored to the favor of God. When he came into the world "the people which sat in darkness saw a great light, and to them which sat in the region and shadow of death light is sprung up." He declared of himself, "I am the light of the world; he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life." "I am the resurrection and the life." "I am the way, the truth and the life." "In him was life, and the light was the light of men."

The souls of men lay under a heavy *load of guilt* also, which they had heaped up by despising and breaking every principle of the law of God, and the justice of that law which drew its mighty force and power from the just and holy bosom of God, thundered terribly over men's heads, and sent out its forked lightnings, and threatened soon to smite and sweep away their souls with the arrows of destruction. The main great work of Jesus Christ was to bear in himself man's heavy load of grievous guilt, taking the place of man at the bar of heaven's justice. Realizing more than the old fable of Atlas with the heavens upon his shoulders, he bore those heavier things than even the roof and ceiling of the heavens themselves, the wrath and curse of insulted law and justice, the wrath and curse of the God of justice, which was due to human guilt. In thus bearing our sins and carrying our sorrows in his own body on the tree he took away their power over our souls. Satan, like lightning, fell from heaven. Sin was conquered and retreated. Death, it is true, seemed to be victorious for a short time. He held the Saviour for one day and a part of two others locked fast in his once mighty and terrible arms. But on the third morning death himself was conquered. The seeming victory of the grave over him was soon turned into a complete and real victory of his over the grave. When he had thus died for sin and risen from the grave, the work which he came on earth to do was accomplished. And although we must believe that some mighty deliverance of some kind was wrought out even for the material world by his awful vicarious sufferings, because we are informed by inspired authority that the "creature itself also (that is, probably the material creation,) shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God;" yet when that death and resurrection were accomplished, the main thing which was secured by them was the eternal salvation of the souls of men. The curse of justice which bore upon human souls, and would have sent them down to hell, was taken out of the way, being nailed to the cross, and then the *mighty principle* of divine government came to be acted on, and the mighty proclamation to be everywhere made that "whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have everlasting life." The value of the soul of man "*glances itself*", and is exhibited in the mighty mediatorial work of Christ, in his deep submission, his mighty agonies, his lowly and painful death, his sleep in the grave, and his eternal wearing about him of wounds received in the work of saving souls. The mediatorial but glorified person of Jesus Christ is said by the author of the Book of Revelation to exhibit itself in heaven, down to this very day, as a "Lamb that had been slain," bearing the wounds which were received on Calvary as the price he paid for man's redemption. And as those wounds will be a memorial of the mighty and evil power of sin, to be seen by the inhabitants of heaven to all eternity, so they are now, as we see them by the eye of faith, a memorial to us of the value of our souls, and of the great price that was paid by the Divine Sufferer for the salvation of our souls from sin which he offers to our acceptance.

In the great price he paid we can see the worth of our souls, and we may look upon his cross and learn that if we lose our own souls the gain of the whole world will not make up the loss.

VI. The SPIRIT OF GOD coming down from heaven to sanctify and purify our souls, shows their value as they are regarded in heaven when Christ had ascended up to heaven and the day of Pentecost was fully come, and the Spirit of God was to descend upon the earth. This was a part of the plan of salvation. He might have descended upon the minds of men to teach the correct principles of political government, and this would have been of great importance and value, for the political world was just then entering into the iron age of the Roman military despotism. Or he might have descended into the minds of men to teach them the knowledge of science, and this too would have been good, for the age was then swiftly coming on when ancient sciences and arts were about to be lost, and the sciences had to sleep a long sleep in the grave of the dark ages before their modern resurrection came. Or he, the Spirit of God, might have descended to bring mere intellectual gifts, and this would have been a bright thing for the world, for genius was passing away, and second-rate minds were then coming uppermost, and intellectual darkness was seating itself upon Greece and Rome. But the Spirit descended for none of these things. He came to convert and to sanctify *the souls of men*, that theirs might be the blessing of the pure in heart who shall see God. "He came to open their eyes, to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God; that they might receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them that are sanctified, by faith that is in Christ."

He came to give the *new birth* to the souls of men, that being born again, born of the Spirit, they might enter into the kingdom of God; to take away the stony heart, and to give them hearts of flesh; to write God's laws as God's mark upon the souls of men, that they should not depart from him; to take away the carnal mind and the spiritual death that dwells in it, and give the spiritual mind with the life and peace that dwell in it; to be a *spirit of adoption* in the souls of the children of God, giving them an earnest, a prelibation of heaven, bearing witness that they are the children of God, and teaching them to cry Abba Father.

He came down to open the crystal fountain to quench the thirst of the soul, to give it sanctifying grace sufficient for its day and according to its wants, and thus to guide that soul through all the various scenes of life, until it arrive safely on the shores of the blessed Canaan, and at the New Jerusalem in heaven.

In the importance of that errand, which brings from heaven, not only the Son of God, but the Spirit of God, we may read the worth of our souls, and learn that if we lose our souls a gaining of the whole world will not compensate us for the loss:

1. Our souls are *immortal*.
2. They are capable of everlasting happiness.
3. They are capable of eternal misery.
4. God loved and pitied them from eternity.
5. Christ Jesus died to save them.
6. The Spirit of God descends from heaven to sanctify them.

"What, then, shall it profit us if we gain the whole world and lose our own souls?" There are persons who always send the subject of religion away *to wait for a convenient season*; who devote to it the scraps of their time, or else no time at all; who allow it a place only in the refuse corners of their mind. But your soul is immortal, and of too vast importance to be dealt with thus. The angels of God in heaven have a different estimate from you on the subject, for "there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth." If the soul is thus valuable, beware of the things by which men *lose* their

souls.

1. Beware of *secret cherished besetting sins*. "If thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee; for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell. And if thy right hand offend thee, cut it off, and cast it from thee; for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell." Cut away the secret, cherished, besetting sin at all hazards and to the last extremity.

2. Beware of adopting *false hopes* upon presumptuous grounds. "Be not deceived; God is not mocked; whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap. He that soweth to the flesh, shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit, shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting."

3. Beware of being satisfied with anything short of a *renewal of your heart*, a regeneration of your spiritual nature, a putting away of old things, a seeing of all things new, and a showing of your faith by your works. "Except a man be born again he cannot see the kingdom of God. Marvel not that I said unto thee, ye must be born again." "Many shall say unto me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name, and in thy name have cast out devils, and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you. Depart from me, ye that work iniquity." "Without holiness no man shall see the Lord." "If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be anathema maranatha".

4. Beware of postponement and procrastination. On that rock thousands have split. Time is precious. You have none to spare. "And the Lord said, My Spirit shall not always strive with man." "Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation."