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LOSS AND GAIN,

OR

THE WORLD AND THE SOUL.



In the questions of loss and gain which agitate the minds of men, it is to be feared that these words of the Saviour receive far too little attention :—" Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life, shall lose it; but whosoever shall lose his life for my sake and the gospel's, the same shall save it. For 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?" Mark viii. 34—38.

Here is a question of loss and gain. What, then, is included in the gain of the world?

It includes the gain of its *riches*. To gain the whole world is to gain all its possessions; its lands; its merchant-dize; the sheep of its pastures; the cattle of its thousand hills; its mines and its railroads; its storehouses, palaces, and dwellings; its gold and silver; its brass, copper, and iron; all that is known by the name of riches. Whatever constitutes wealth, is included in the gain of the whole world. It includes the treasures of the sea as well as of the land, the wealth of commerce and manufactures, as well as of agriculture, arts, and trade.

The gain of the whole world is the gain of its *honours*. Its titles of distinction must meet in its possessor. To him

must belong the honours of place and of power. Before him the honourable of the earth must bow ; and kings and princes must be his humble servants. Whatever titles ambition has sought—whatever honours pride, and cupidity and folly have striven to gain—must all be his who has secured the possession of the whole world. The incense of a thousand millions must be offered to him, while he disposes of place, and office, and power, of thrones and kingdoms, at his will.

To gain the whole world is to gain all its *pleasures*. He who can command the treasures of the world and its honours, must have at hand the means to gratify every earthly desire. If he wants delicious food, he may choose from the productions of every clime. If he delights in hearing music, this may be gratified, for instruments and musicians are obedient to him. If the view of the works of nature and of art ministers to his happiness, in this, too, he may be gratified, for a tour of the world would be but a pleasure excursion over his own possessions. He may smell all sweet odours ; he may taste all good things ; hear all sweet sounds ; see all pleasant sights ; feel all pleasant sensations ; he may revel in both intellectual and sensual delights, and drink to the full of whatever the men of this world call pleasure.

And this would be a great possession—the whole world ; all its riches, honours, and pleasures. This is the gain ; and it is no trifling matter. How many would rejoice to gain the ten-millionth part of it ! But what is the loss ?

The loss of the soul ! In this we are all interested, for our own souls are to be saved or lost. What then is implied in the loss of the soul ?

It does not imply its annihilation. The soul is immortal. It shall live for ever. Annihilation is a term which does not belong to its vocabulary, for life and immortality are brought to light in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Nor does the loss of the soul imply its eternal separation from the body. A separation of these two constituent parts of man takes place at death; but the separation is not eternal. The slumber of the body in the dust is not an eternal sleep—"all that dust shall rise." The time will come when these constituents of man shall be again united to be separated no more. Companions here, they shall, after that union, be companions for ever. The dead shall be raised up, and the loss of the soul is the loss of the body too. When the soul is lost, the whole man is lost.

The loss of the soul is its separation from God and all holy beings. It is not so separated from God as to be independent of him; he still upholds it in existence, for it is as true of devils and of all the lost, as it is of us who inhabit this world, that in him they live and move and have their being. But the lost soul is separated from God as to all enjoyment of him. It is separated from the life of God. It is banished from his presence—from his gracious, not from his essential presence, for God is every where, in hell, as well as in heaven; and no doubt it is a sense of his presence, in part at least, which makes hell what it is. The lost soul can not enjoy the presence of God; it can not endure his presence. Nor can it enjoy the society of any holy beings. It is separated from the enjoyment of God and from the society of every holy intelligence in the wide universe; and its companions are the vicious and the abominable, the unholy and the unclean, congregated in one vast throng within the brazen, burning walls of hell!

The loss of the soul is its separation from happiness. The soul was made to be happy—happy in the enjoyment of God and in those holy employments which are agreeable to his will and to its nature. Sin has caused a divorce, even in this world, between the soul and these enjoyments; and when the soul is lost, it is cut off from every kind and degree of happiness. Now there must be in this a sense

of loss, absolutely appalling. All that happiness which the soul was made to enjoy—all that felicity for the fruition of which our spiritual natures were adjusted, and every chord of sensibility so nicely strung—is lost; and from it the soul is separated for ever. Banished from happiness, and yet forbid to die! Divorced from happiness, and wedded to misery!

For the lost soul is doomed to self-reproaches. Conscience even now is no easy tenant of the human breast. Perverted, blinded, and seared as it often is, it yet causes the sinner many an anxious thought and dark foreboding. But in the future world it will be incapable of being hushed by any false or erroneous views, by any considerations of interest or advantage. It will then speak out, and according to truth; and it will take in, at one retrospect, a whole life of sin—an abused gospel, a rejected Saviour, a resisted and grieved Spirit. Writhing under the reproaches of a torturing conscience, the lost soul will feel that it is more tolerable for Sodom than for it.

To lose the soul is to suffer the torments of hell; not only the loss of happiness and self-reproaches, but the wrath of God superadded—the positive infliction of torments. To impress upon us the greatness of these torments, they are illustrated by the most exquisite suffering and anguish with which human nature is acquainted. A single spark of fire falling on our flesh puts us in an agony. What then is a lake of fire? And what is it to dwell in devouring fire? Whatever other idea this language may be intended to convey, one thing is clear,—that as fire causes the greatest pain of any thing with which we are acquainted, so this language is designed to impress upon us the solemn and awful truth, that the torments of hell shall be the greatest which our minds can conceive, or our natures endure. These are the portion of the lost soul—the undying worm, the unquenchable fire, the second death—eternal dying!

For the soul once lost, is lost for ever. Its miseries shall never end. The wicked go away into everlasting punishment; the smoke of their torment ascendeth for ever and ever; the wrath of God abideth on them. Matt. xxv. 46. John iii. 36. Rev. xx. 10.

Such is the gain—the world! Such is the loss—the soul, the whole man! Now as to the profit, strike the balance and see! What shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?

This may be decided by considering the comparative value of the world and the soul; for we shall find that the loss exceeds the gain not only, but also includes the gain; and hence when the soul is lost, there is nothing which a man can give in exchange for his soul. Hence it is an irreparable loss—a loss which, if once incurred, can never be made good. The gain is loss, if the whole world be gained, and the soul be lost.

What shall it profit? Nothing! For the loss far over-balances the gain. Nor is this all; for what is gained is also lost in the loss of the soul. If the soul be lost, all is lost. In that case the body returns to the dust and sleeps there till the resurrection; and the lost soul takes up its abode in the pit of despair, till the last trump gives the signal for its reunion with the body, when both are driven away from the judgment into everlasting sorrow. What will it avail then to have had the possession of the world here? What can the lost soul enjoy of the riches of the world, of its honours, of its pleasures? Nothing! It is as miserable as if its possessor had lived in poverty and died of want, and a thousand times more! For he who loses his soul, loses every thing with it, the world and all! Hence the gain is loss, if one gains the whole world and loses his own soul, for he loses the world with his soul.

Besides the soul far exceeds the world in value. What is the world, with all its riches and honours and pleasures,

in comparison with the soul? Put the soul in one scale of the balance, and the world with all it contains in the other, and the soul would far outweigh it all. Who can estimate its value? Who can tell its worth? It possesses intelligence and sensibility; it is capable of an indefinite degree of knowledge and of happiness or misery. Shall we measure its worth by the knowledge it may acquire? But who can tell the attainments it may make as it moves onward in endless progression? As there shall be no period to its existence, so there can be no limit to its acquisitions. Shall we measure the worth of the soul by its capacities of enjoyment? But who can tell what it may enjoy as its faculties and powers expand through undying ages? Shall we try to estimate its worth by what it is capable of suffering? But who can take the gauge of the misery it may endure? Measured, then, by its own capacities of knowledge, of happiness, or of misery, the soul exceeds in value all our powers of computation. Shall we estimate its worth, then, by the price paid for its redemption? But here we are lost at once, and surrounded by infinity. It is a mistake to suppose that the multitude to be redeemed rendered it necessary for the Redeemer to be what he is and do what he did; a mistake to suppose that the value of Christ's sacrifice must be in proportion to the number to be redeemed; for the Redeemer must have been the same, and his sacrifice the same, had there been but one soul to save; and an atonement sufficient for one, is, of necessity, sufficient for any number—sufficient for the whole world. The worth of a single soul, therefore, may be estimated by the price paid for our redemption. That price was the blood—the life—of the Son of God; a price of infinite value, because measured by the dignity of him who paid it. If then you can comprehend the infinite worth of the atonement, you may also comprehend the worth of the soul; but if you shrink back appalled from the attempt to measure the value of

the Redeemer's sacrifice, then, also, be astonished at the infinite value of that immortal spirit which dwells within you, and for which this sacrifice was made !

And look at the question,—What shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul ? This clearly implies that the soul is worth more than the world—that it exceeds in value every thing of an earthly nature—and that each man's soul is worth more to him than the whole world. Hence, to each one the gain is loss, if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul ; for he loses more than he gains, yea, in losing his soul he loses himself—his possessions, his happiness, himself and his all !

This, then, is the result of the matter—the loss exceeds the gain, yea, the loss includes the gain ! There is no profit in gaining the world and losing the soul. In attempting to grasp the world, the world and the soul are both lost ! But who feels that his soul is worth more than the world ? Who expresses any alarm that his soul is in danger ! The pit may be opening at your feet, and you feel no alarm ; but let the cry of hard times be made, and a thousand anxious voices are heard on every side ! What are the times to the soul ? Reader, your soul is in danger ! And to seek the world and neglect the soul, is worse than folly ; it is madness ! For the world can never be gained.

The soul may be lost in pursuing the world ; but however eagerly it may be pursued, the whole world can never be gained.

Many are seeking for it, and these divide it among them. The competitors for the prize are numbered by millions, and no one ever secured the whole to himself. The devil once promised it to the Saviour if he would fall down and worship him, and he now promises the same to his deluded followers ; but the world is not his to give, and no man shall ever call it his own ; nor shall any worldling succeed in getting as much of it as he wants.

God never designed it for the possession of one, nor for the complete satisfaction of any man. He designed it not to fill the immortal desires of our nature. He made it for the temporal abode of man, where he might have a season for preparation, and through divine grace become fitted for another state of existence. And we pervert the end of our being, and defeat our own aims after happiness, when we neglect our souls, and bend all our energies to the pursuit of the world. For in that case we chase a phantom, we seek what we can never gain; for the whole world can never be ours, nor can we have enough of it to make us happy.

Besides, if we should gain the whole world, what would we do with it? We could not manage such a possession. We could never enjoy it. It would overwhelm us with care and perplexity, and make us unhappy. If any one man, a stranger to religion and the fear of God, could gain the whole world—could he have at his command all its riches, honours, and pleasures—could he feel that the whole world were his, and yet at the same time feel that he must have the oversight of it and take care of it—he would of necessity be the most miserable man this world ever saw. One might rather choose to be a galley-slave, or to be doomed to the tread-mill for life, than to be the slave of so much wealth. I say this out of no disrespect to the rich, nor because ignorant of the fact that a competent portion of this world's goods may administer both to our comfort and usefulness; but that which is a good servant may be a hard master. Human happiness is not always proportioned to the amount of worldly possessions. "A man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth. The little that a righteous man hath is better than the riches of many wicked. It is often the case that men become unhappy, just about in proportion to the increase of their wealth. And it is very plain that we could not enjoy the whole world if we had it.

But we can never have it. Hence the folly of hazarding the soul in seeking the world. Seeking the world—not the whole world, but a part of it—to the hazard of the soul, is a very common but a very inexcusable folly. Attention to business is not inconsistent with attention to religion. So far from it, religion requires us to be diligent in business. God never made man to be idle; and idleness is almost as criminal in his sight as theft, for if every man were an idler, every man would be dishonest and a rogue—indisposed to earn his bread, he would take it where he could find it. And surely if to have no business, or to neglect our business, is criminal, it is not less criminal to make attention to business an excuse for the neglect of religion, or to seek the world and neglect the soul. Duty is to seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and to subordinate our business to God's service.

For the world is comparatively of little value. We may use it and enjoy it in our way to heaven, to facilitate our progress thither, and to increase our usefulness; but even if we had it all, we could keep it but a little while; we must soon leave it, our bodies return to the dust as they were, and our spirits to God who gave them. We must die!

And the world, if gained, can not ransom the lost soul! The redemption of the soul is precious—costly—and it ceaseth for ever. One price has been paid for it—the only one that can avail. That rejected, and there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins. The soul launched forth into eternity, rejecting the Redeemer's sacrifice, must remain for ever unredeemed. Worlds can not purchase its deliverance from eternal wo. What shall a man then give in exchange for his soul? He might be willing to give all the worlds which God ever made for his release; but all these worlds, if he had them, could be of no avail. He is now a prisoner of despair; and such he must for ever be, for the doors of

his prison-house shall never be unbarred ! The doors are shut !

What folly, then, to seek the world and neglect the soul ! The world gained, the soul lost, how pitiful, how miserable the exchange ! On how many grave-stones might it be written, The soul lost for the world ! The soul bartered, ruined, lost, for a miserable portion of the world ! And in that pit of darkness, where the lost and ruined dwell, on how many foreheads might it be engraven, *The love of the world ruined thee !* And as these words, glowing with infernal fire, met the eye of wretched spirits, how many consciences would speak in tones of thunder, *The love of the world ruined me !* Many a Demas will be there, who cloaked his love of the world under the garb of a religious profession, a fitting companion of a Nero or a Julian ! Multitudes will be there who here plead the want of time—the pressing calls of the world—as an excuse for the neglect of the soul. They loved this present world ; they sought its riches, honours, and pleasures ; they let the calls of God pass unheeded ; and there, where hope can never come, they must reap the bitter fruits of their folly. Oh ! when will men be wise ? God is speaking, let the earth keep silence before him !

Yes, God speaks in times of commercial pressure, when fortunes vanish in a day. He rebukes the love and the pursuit of the world, and the neglect of the soul. He speaks too in the fires and in the floods—in the storms, the shipwrecks, the railroad disasters—the loss of property and of life by sea and on land. In all these things he is teaching us with what ease he can blast every earthly hope and give every earthly possession to the winds ! He is teaching us the folly of seeking the world while we neglect the soul ! And he will be heard ! If we now scorn his voice and shut our ears to his admonitions, he may come still nearer ! War may come—and the battle is not

always to the strong ; victory is where God's arm is ; and he may use one guilty nation to scourge another, and then consume in anger the rod with which he has chastised the objects of his displeasure. And pestilence may be sent, or famine, for God is not at a loss for means and instruments to execute his purposes ; and if men will not listen to one judgment, they may be constrained to listen to another. The pressure may yet reach us, or disease may come near to us—sickness may lay us low ; and when our strength is gone, and death draws near, we must confess the weakness of man and the vanity of earth !

But, reader, why wait for severer rebukes ? Why rush onward to perdition against the admonitions of God's providence, and the still more tender admonitions of his grace ? He speaks with the voice of terror in his judgments, reminding us that he is just ; but in the gospel he speaks in tenderness and love. Here he displays his goodness ; here he utters the kindest invitations ; here he gives the tenderest expostulations and entreaties. Will you not listen to his still small voice ? Will you not let the silver cords of love draw you to the cross ? Shall not love, and mercy, and grace, prevail with you to forsake the world and seek the salvation of your soul ? Or, will you wait till he arises in his anger, and speaks in a voice of thunder, " Because I have called and ye refused ; I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded ; but ye have set at nought all my counsel, and would none of my reproof ; I also will laugh at your calamity ; I will mock when your fear cometh ; when your fear cometh as desolation, and your destruction cometh as a whirlwind ; when distress and anguish cometh upon you !" —Prov. i. 24—33. " For 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 ?" —Mark viii. 36, 37.

YOU ARE GOING THE WRONG WAY.

"You are going the wrong way," said a conductor of a train on the railroad to a passenger, on receiving his ticket. That assertion fell very unpleasantly upon the ear of him who had made the mistake. Still it was not a very serious one. It could be corrected. He was advised to get out at the first stopping-place, and to take the opposite train on its arrival.

"Going the wrong way!" In another sense this is affectinglly true of thousands. It is true of the child who goes not in the way of his parents' commands. It is true of the man who with hot haste is in pursuit of the riches, or honours, or pleasures of earth. It is true of every one whose course has not been changed, who is not running the Christian race. Says the Saviour, "Enter ye in at the strait gate, for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction; and many there be which go in thereat. Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life; and few there be that find it."

All those are going the wrong way who think any of God's commands grievous, who esteem sin a small evil, who see no beauty in Christ, who love this world more than God, who relish carnal pleasures but have no delight in holy worship, who know their duty but do it not, who form good purposes only to break them, who have so good an opinion of themselves that they feel no need of the merits of Christ, who believe that offers of mercy may safely be disregarded, and who know that they are unfit to die, yet are not working out their salvation with fear and trembling.

O turn ye, O turn ye, for why will ye die?
Since God in great mercy is coming so nigh;
Since Jesus invites you, the Spirit says, Come,
And angels are waiting to welcome you home.

Oh! how many are now hurrying on toward eternal death, while they are vainly hoping to reach at the end of their course the New Jerusalem above! "They are going the wrong way." The language of God to them is, "Turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways, for why will ye die?" Turn to-day. Soon it will be too late. Soon destruction will become inevitable.