

THE VALUE OF ONE SOUL

Gary McDade

The Lord taught his disciples to see the value of one soul. He said to them, “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?” (Matt. 16:26). The gospel record shows that many times Jesus spent time trying to reach one person. Examples include the leper he healed, the centurion whose servant he healed, the certain scribe and another disciple whom he taught the price of following him--all from Matthew 8. Philip, Nathanael, Nicodemus, the woman at the well, the certain nobleman at Capernaum whose son Jesus healed, and the impotent man Jesus healed, all appear in the opening five chapters of John’s gospel. The Lord wants “all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth,” and that means sometimes devoting time to teaching one person (I Tim. 2:4).

Individuals are introduced to Jesus Christ through his word. The apostle John wrote, “And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth” (John 1:14). Later, the Lord himself taught in prayer, “Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word” (John 17:20). When as disciples of Christ time is taken to encourage another person to read and study the Bible, realization of the value of one soul is becoming apparent in the life of that disciple. Leading another person to Christ may take place when an invitation is extended to have a personal Bible study, to listen to a radio program or television program that faithfully proclaims God’s word, to read a Bible tract, to attend a service of the church, or to take a Bible correspondence course. So much confusion and misinformation exists concerning religion that simply talking to people about what the Bible says should prove refreshing to most people.

Christians devote much of their lives to studying the Bible for two reasons. One, Christians study the Bible in order to present themselves approved unto God. Paul admonished, “Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth” (II Tim. 2:15). Two, Christians study the Bible in order to instruct others. Peter wrote, “But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear” (I Pet. 3:15). The better the Christian knows the Bible the better equipped he is to live acceptably before God and to teach others about Christ. A basic motivation for the

effort is knowledge of the value of one soul, and the knowledge of the soul at stake begins with that of the disciple of Christ.

Jesus' statement in Matthew 16:26 implies that one soul is more valuable than the whole world. Recently an effort was made to illustrate how much money a billion dollars is by showing that if a person could live long enough to spend \$1,000 per day and did so every day since the time of Christ to the present, he still would not have spent the billion dollars. All the money and everything of value in the world does not equal the value of one soul because the Lord's statement implies that one soul is more valuable than the whole world. How high among personal priorities, then, should be the care and keeping of the soul? How highly regarded, then, should be the soul of another that is likely struggling in ignorance of the will of God revealed in the Bible? Jesus sent his disciples into all the world preaching and teaching the gospel (Matt. 28:18-20; Mark 16:15-16; Luke 24:44-47). They were uniquely equipped to understand the value of one soul.