

“Trade Your Soul?”
Mark 8
March 8, 2009

You want to hear a terrible joke? A single lady was asked for her favorite verse of scripture. She said it was Matthew 16:24, “If any man will come after me, let him . . .”

She was referring, of course, to the verse in Matthew’s Gospel that reads like this in the King James Version: “Jesus said to his disciples, ‘If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.’”

Mark records this same teaching. Peter had just proclaimed that Jesus was the Messiah. Then Jesus explains how the Messiah must suffer and die and then be raised after three days. However, that went totally against Peter’s beliefs about the Messiah as a victorious general sent by God. So Peter rebuked Jesus!! The verb rebuke is used when silencing demons! It was a horrifying thing for any student to speak thusly to his or her teacher! No wonder then Jesus had to respond so harshly to Peter! Jesus was chasing away evil with his words. “Get behind me Satan!”

Jesus insisted that being a Christian is neither comforting nor easy: If any want to become Christ’s followers, they must first:

- Deny themselves—Is this a call to asceticism or a call to temper self-will and self-indulgence?
- Take up their cross—What does it mean to take up one’s cross? Is there a different cross for each person?
- Follow me—Following Jesus is a discipleship issue that involves both *being* and *doing*. *Being* like Jesus and *doing* the works of Jesus are both integral parts of discipleship.

Why is it necessary to suffer? I want to be sedated!

“I Wanna Be Sedated” by The Ramones

Twenty-twenty-twenty four hours to go I wanna be sedated
Nothin' to do and no where to go-o-oh I wanna be sedated
Just get me to the airport put me on a plane
Hurry hurry hurry before I go insane
I can't control my fingers I can't control my brain
Oh no no no no no

Twenty-twenty-twenty four hours to go I wanna be sedated
Nothin' to do and no where to go-o-o I wanna be sedated
Just put me in a wheelchair get me to the show
Hurry hurry hurry before I go loco
I can't control my fingers I can't control my toes
Oh no no no no no
Twenty-twenty-twenty four hours to go...
Just put me in a wheelchair...
I wanna be sedated

If we pray hard enough, won’t God spare us suffering?

Does God will us to suffer?

Mark wrote after the fact—Christians were suffering because of their faith.

“Fidelity to Jesus brings persecution, because the disciples live in an age that is contrary to God.” (NIB)

“The coming of the kingdom upsets normal human views of power.” (NIB)

Gee, it’s a good thing that no longer applies to our time, isn’t it?

Then Jesus goes on to challenge his disciples with this question—for what would or could you trade your soul?

What would make you lose your faith?

What would tempt you to deny your faith?

Sometime back a young man put his soul up for sale on eBay, the Internet auction site. Adam Burtle, a University of Washington student, sold his soul for \$400 before the listing was removed and he was suspended from the site. "Please realize, I make no warranties as to the condition of the soul," he wrote. "As of now, it is near mint condition, with only minor scratches. Due to difficulties involved with removing my soul, the winning bidder will either have to settle for a night of yummy Thai food and cool indie flicks, or wait until my natural death."

EBay has blocked similar auctions in the past, but somehow Burtle's offer slipped through. The bidding started at 5 cents. Burtle's former girlfriend bid \$6.66 but she was overtaken in the final hour of the auction when a Des Moines, Iowa, woman bid the price of Burtle's soul to \$400. "I don't think she's going to be able to collect on my soul, to be honest," Burtle said, adding he didn't intend for the ad to be taken seriously. "I was just bored, and I'm a geek," he added. "So anytime I'm bored, I go back to my Internet." (The Associated Press, 2001 ("The World's Worst Bargain" by King Duncan)

My guess is that over the centuries many people have sold their soul for many reasons. But "What good is it," asked Jesus, "for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul?"

"...All I can 'pay back' to God or others or myself is *who I really am.*" (Richard Rohr)

How could we possibly trade who we really are for anything? How could we settle for being an empty shell, soulless? Paganini, the great violinist, came out before his audience one day and made the discovery just as the applause ended that there was something wrong with his violin. He looked at it a second and then saw that it was not his famous and valuable violin, but a cheap substitute. He felt paralyzed for a

moment, then turned to his audience and told them there had been some mistake and he did not have his own violin. He stepped back behind the curtain thinking that it was still where he had left it, but discovered that someone had stolen his violin and left this old secondhand one in its place. Paganini remained back of the curtain for a moment, then came out before his audience and said: "Ladies and gentlemen, I will show you that the music is not in the instrument but in the soul." And he played as he had never played before; and out of that secondhand instrument, the music poured forth until his audience was enraptured with enthusiasm, and the applause almost lifted the roof off the building, because the man had revealed to them that the music was not in the machine but in his own soul. (Anthony P. Castle, ed., "Go Tell Everyone," in *Quotes and Anecdotes for Preachers and Teachers*, p. 207. Cited by Fuller, Gerard, O.M. I. *Stories for All Seasons* (Mystic, CT: Twenty-Third Publications, 1996), pp. 128-129.

Not long after Jesus taught about gaining the world and forfeiting one's soul, there lived a man named Nero. You've heard his name before, as in "Nero fiddled while Rome burned." That may be apocryphal, but we do know that this Roman emperor lived in glorious splendor. He commanded that gorgeous porches a mile long be built around his palace. The ceiling of his banquet hall was equipped at great expense with hidden showers that lightly sprayed perfume upon all who came to visit him. His crown was worth a half million dollars, and his mules were shod with silver. Whenever he traveled, a thousand chariots accompanied him, and he refused to wear the same garment twice no matter how costly and beautiful it was. Taxing the people unmercifully, he was able to pay extravagant sums of money to anyone who could devise new methods of entertaining him. Yet with all his riches and splendor he was a peevish, gloomy, dissatisfied man. The immense wealth he had amassed could not satisfy his soul. In spite of having every

pleasure this world can afford, Nero took his own life.
(Illusaurus)

Take away everything—your income, your house, your pick-up, your guns, your horses, your clothes, your guitars, all your body parts—and what are you, who are you? You are still a holy child of God, made in God's image.

And who are you if you claim to be a Christian? A holy child of God, made in God's image, who has decided give your life for the sake of others. A chip off the divine block! One whose very strength is based on your willingness to suffer for Christ.

"I know a man who came to me as his pastor, saying how deeply concerned he had become about some of the practices at his workplace. He detected a clear pattern of how some people were promoted, and some were not promoted, purely on the basis of their race, the color of their skin. His boss repeatedly passed over some workers who performed well and were a credit to the company, because they were not of the same race as the boss.

"As his pastor, I urged him carefully to broach this subject with his boss. He ought to see if there were others in his company who shared his concern. He ought to be careful how he accused his boss of racial discrimination. He ought not to come across as "holier than thou" or self-righteous.

"He followed my advice and eventually confronted his boss.

"A month later, he was unceremoniously fired. He couldn't get a job for nearly a year, due to his boss' bad opinion of him. When he finally got a job, it was not as good a job as he once had." (William Willimon)

"The cross Jesus invites his hearers to take up refers not to the burdens life imposes from without but rather to painful, redemptive action voluntarily undertaken for others."
(Interpretation)

The reality for most of us Christians in this country is seldom a life and death matter. "We think giving our all to the Lord is like taking a \$1,000 bill and laying it on the table—'Here's my life, Lord. I'm giving it all.' But the reality for most of us is that Jesus sends us to the bank and has us cash in the \$1,000 for quarters. We go through life putting out 25 cents here and 50 cents there.... Usually giving our life to Christ isn't glorious. It's done in all those little acts of love, 25 cents at a time." (Fred Craddock)

Brother, sister, can you spare a quarter? Amen