

What Will It Profit?

Joe Slater

“Whoever desires to follow Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel’s will save it. For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses his soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?” (Mark 8:34-37).

We usually look at profit in terms of money or other material wealth. Jesus indicates that we need to look far beyond that! Everything material, including our fleshly body, is temporary. You can accumulate vast earthly wealth, but you can’t keep it. Don’t believe me? Stick around a hundred years and see!

Of infinitely surpassing importance and value is that spiritual part of you called your soul. Jesus teaches three things relative to it:

First, each and every person has a soul. Sometimes “soul” refers to the entire person, body and spirit. But Jesus uses the term specifically of the inner spiritual person. “Fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in Hell” (Matthew 10:28).

Second, that soul can become lost. Jesus’ parables of the lost sheep, lost coin, and lost son illustrate this sad fact.

Finally, even if you amass every bit of the world’s wealth, but you exchange it for your soul, you have made a horrible, disastrous bargain. Surely the account of the rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16) highlights this.

Businesspeople like to make a profit. Christians should too! *“Godliness is profitable for all things, having promise of the life that now is and of that which is to come”* (1 Timothy 4:8).

Victory In Humility

“For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the faith God has distributed to each of you” (Romans 12:3 NIV).

In this call for humility, might there be an autobiographical backstory in Paul’s pre-Damascus past? I don’t know, but there are reasons to think so. He was born in Tarsus, one of the Roman world’s greatest learning centers. He was born a Roman citizen. However, he was raised in Jerusalem and was a prized student of the great rabbi, Gamaliel (Acts 22:3). He told the Galatians (1:14) that he was advancing beyond many of his own age. In Philippians 3, he gives his glowing resume in the Judaism of his day, concluding with, *“...as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for righteousness based on the law, faultless”* (Philippians 3:4b-6 NIV).

In hindsight, Paul could see that he was terribly wrong but arrogantly, never in doubt – until, that is, the risen Jesus confronted him. On the road to Damascus, Saul of Tarsus was humbled—not defeated, but humbled. Looking back, Paul could say that those things that filled him with such pride were only refuse compared with the Christ, under whose feet he would now learn!

Arrogant Saul could count his accomplishment in the funerals and grief he had caused. But humbled Paul, victorious Paul, could see countless Jews, Gentiles, slaves, free, men, and women saved by the Good News only a humbled servant of Jesus could proclaim. Only those humble enough to allow the power and strength of the Lord to flow through them could serve as Paul did.

So, it is for us. With Jesus, being humbled is not being defeated! It is to be made what God intended for us to be and to be the person through whom His grace and gifts can flow!

--Tim Kelley (Littleton, CO) adapted

ASSESSING ASSEMBLING

Ever since I started public preaching I have occasionally felt the need to address the matter of assembling together. It has always bugged me a little (or maybe a lot) that I don’t think I get the point in my mind across to the listeners. I try to emphasize devotion to the Lord, appreciation of His graciousness, and the value of worship; but sometimes all people seem to get is, “you need to come to church more.”

Not coming to church, or, to put it in Biblical language, forsaking the assembly, is a bad habit (Hebrews 10:25). God has instructed us otherwise, and we put ourselves in the wrong when we willfully neglect assembling.

Now there are Christians who need to own up to the sin involved in making excuses for not coming to worship with the church. But it needs to be understood that assembling regularly is not a cure-all or a substitute for other neglected aspects of Christianity. Assembling is sometimes (and perhaps rightfully) considered to be a spiritual thermometer, a good indicator of one’s spiritual health. But, of course, this is not its primary design. The assembly is to be a time of special devotion to and adoration of the Lord, as well as a time of fellowship with the Lord’s people. Anything other than this is merely peripheral and secondary.

What makes assembling right or wrong, good or bad, is why one is there and what is done while assembled (or why one is not there and what is done otherwise). Just “showing up” certainly doesn’t mean everything. It is obviously a good start in the right direction, but a great deal more must follow from hearts filled with faith and love.

Isn’t it time for us to assess both our pattern and purpose in assembling?

David Holder (via Conifer, CO)