

## Soul Food (Part 2)

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Date: 09 August 2020

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[ 0 : 00 ] Now, can we turn back to Matthew's Gospel? In our morning services for quite a long time, now we've been, we're taking a slow walk through Matthew's Gospel.

It's a very important Gospel. It's one of the four Gospels that tell us about the life of Jesus, and it was written by one of his disciples who was Jewish, and he was writing primarily in the first instance to a Jewish audience.

And we've been working our way through Matthew's Gospel. The chapter 16 that Rowan read from earlier, or the section of chapter 16, really is part of a section, because you remember there wasn't chapter divisions originally, that really we find from verse 15 onwards, 14, 15 and 16, sorry.

And it's all kind of interrelated. So I'm going to dip back into something which is connected, I believe, to what we're looking at today.

And I was speaking to Rowan there just after she'd spoken, after she'd read, and she was saying it was Jonah that she had interviewed, which is very interesting, because Jonah does make us think.

[ 1 : 18 ] And Jonah was mentioned in last week's reading in chapter, the earlier part of chapter 16, where the Pharisees and the Sadducees demanded a sign, and Jesus said none would be given them except a sign of Jonah.

Now it's interesting, Jonah was a man of an Old Testament prophet, but he's not a particularly likable character given to us in the Old Testament. He seems to be pretty selfish, as if he's in a sense a reluctant believer.

He's grumpy about God's mercy and grace. He's disobedient, he tries to run away as you no doubt heard. He ended up being suicidal.

The Ninevites, he thought, didn't deserve grace. God was too compassionate, and he was angry, and he was angry inside. And even the miracle of his, in very commiss, his resurrection having been in the whale of the fish for three days, didn't really change his heart.

He was still a reluctant messenger, and it seems that he didn't really understand God terribly well, or maybe he did understand God better than we think, but he didn't necessarily understand himself.

[ 2 : 30 ] And we find in that same story, the pagan soldiers that were going to sail to Tarshish, they were kind of spiritually sensitive. They didn't want to harm him.

They prayed to God for mercy and for help. There was a spiritual insightfulness there. And the Ninevites themselves, this pagan, wild, evil, even according to God's verdict, a wild people, they responded.

And you know, it's the worst sermon ever, really, Jonah's sermon in what he says. He just says, 40 days more, and you're going to be destroyed.

And you do wonder if his doer, ex-blamation or proclamation was because he didn't really want the people to repent. Maybe that was it, but you've got no excuse if you hear a really rubbish sermon, because God even used that to turn the people to himself.

And even then, Jonah's response was anger. He did know about God's grace and the depth of God's grace, and he did have the wrong priorities, so he was more concerned about this vine that grew up and that shriveled away and gave him shade.

[ 3 : 47 ] So much so that even after that, he would say, my life's not worth living. It's sad, isn't it? It's sad how wrong his priorities could be, how negative he could be about grace, how little he could think about God, and the people of Nineveh who needed to be saved.

And it does make us think. It does make us think. I know that previously when we talked about that sign of Jonah, that we looked at it very much in relation to the death of Jesus and the resurrection, the connection between the three days, and that's absolutely valid and important.

But it's maybe broader than that when we come into this section of the passage of Matthew 16 as well. Because possibly today, you're finding the walk of faith equally tough, maybe as tough as Jonah was finding it.

And maybe today you're thinking it would be so much easier not to believe. It'd be so much easier to just be like everyone else and suppress that truth, to be easy on our sinful selves and find it much easier just to love things rather than love God and love other people.

You know, grace and compassion, maybe if you're a Christian today, you're thinking grace and compassion. And it is great, but it's so demanding. It's so tiring to know what I am like and to know that I need God to help me change and to be forgiven.

[ 5 : 19 ] And sometimes we almost want God to be the judge of other people and of the evil that we see around us. And we find mercy is just too much of a leveler.

He just levels us all out. And we find that really difficult. Or maybe it's just that you're battling as well. I think Jonah battled a little bit with who he was.

It must have been difficult not bringing God's message and being unpopular as often the Old Testament prophets were, because we put so much store by our popularity and the way we were liked by other people.

Maybe he sometimes thought God wasn't really that interested in him or didn't care about him at some level. I'm not sure. And he wondered about his own identity, not loved by his own people because of the message, not wanting to go in the inivian and speak to them because he knew that they would potentially reject him and he didn't know what would happen.

So maybe there was a sense in which there was an identity struggle for him as well. And maybe you find that in a different way. Who is interested? Who cares?

[ 6 : 30 ] Does God care? Do other people care? Does the church care? Well, I do actually believe that this passage, that God speaks from this passage into all of this.

And this particular issue, this particular section speaks very powerfully into it. And so, sorry, my mic is bugging me here, but it's okay.

I think it's okay now. We look for God in this passage to speak to us because it's a really powerful section.

There's a connecting theme right through chapters 14 to 16. And here in the passage that Rowan read, we find that Peter makes his great confession of Jesus and veils Jesus a little bit after the woman, the Kedanite woman who also knew who Jesus was.

While having made that great confession, then Jesus goes on to speak about his crucifixion and his need to be raised again on the third day.

[ 7 : 36 ] So what I want to do, now, I'm sure you'll be disappointed with me. I'm not going to spend a lot of time on Peter's confession of Jesus. I'm going to spend most of my time looking at the last section from verse 24, but taking up your cross and following Jesus and what Jesus says there.

Because what Jesus says there reveals how much he knows about us or how much he knows about people, you and me.

And I think that's very important as we consider the gospel message. So the first thing I want to say is that he knows our instinct.

He knows our instinct as people as human beings. In verse 25, he says, whoever would save his life will lose it. Whoever loses life for my sake will find it. Whoever will save his life.

So he knows that we have an instinct as human beings, as individuals for self-preservation. He knows that we want to save our lives.

[ 8 : 34 ] Every single one of us wants to do that. You want to do that and I want to do that. Life matters to us. There's something very, very wrong in our thinking and in our mental condition and maybe our physical condition if we don't want to live.

Isn't that right? Generally speaking, we instinctively recoil from death. We resist aging. We are horrified when somebody, and rightly so, dies when they are young.

We want to keep fit. We do our level best. We avoid danger. We do things that will preserve our lives. We shield a time like this, a time of pandemic, because we have this life instinct within us that we want to preserve our lives.

And Jesus knows that and Jesus speaks into that and there's nothing wrong with that. It's absolutely right that we should do so. He knows that instinct within us that we want to save our life.

And within that, there's the knowledge that our lives are in danger. He also knows what or who we are.

[ 9 : 48 ] In verse 26, he says that great verse, for what will it profit a man, a person if he gains the whole world and four feet or loses his soul? He loses his soul.

And the soul is a very important image and a very important word and concept in the Bible. Interestingly, in the earlier verses where he talks about life, he uses the word life and then he talks about soul and he uses the word soul, but it's the same word.

And he's reminding us that what makes up our life is more than just our physical, material bodies. Our soul is part of that.

And the soul, biblically, is very important. It just defines us as more than just a body, more than just physical. We've got this unique, invisible and cooperative essence of personhood where our body and our soul are fused together, where our soul are being really partners with our brain and our body to make us who we are, our spirit.

That femoral part of us that enables us to worship and to... that is made to be in relationship with God and with one another.

[ 11 : 19 ] I mean, it's a widely defined concept, but it would include image bearing of God.

It would include our consciousness, self-consciousness, our desire and our ability and our need to worship, our moralities, our will, our self, our ego, our ability to have an emotional life, creativity. What is it that makes you, you, your psyche, our love for music, for art, for dignity, for sacrificial love, for exploration, for invention and our quest for meaning.

It all is tied up with who we are as souls, not just bodies. And the Bible makes clear, and Jesus is speaking under the radar here about our souls being immortal, being eternal, being souls that never die beyond merely physical death.

They are never dying, they're never dying part of us. And the Bible speaks a lot about body and soul being together, but also body and soul being divided and separated in death, but the soul goes on to live beyond death.

[ 12 : 44 ] So he knows who we are, and he knows that's an integral part of who we are and what we are, and therefore he's going to speak into that through his word and through his work.

And because he explains who we are, and that speaks to all of us, about all of us, he knows our true value. Again verse 26, for what does a prophet man if he gains the whole world and loses his soul?

And so there's this way in which Jesus is explaining who we are, and our value, our incomparable worth, that suppose we gain, we can't give anything in exchange for our soul living eternally with him.

There's nothing we can do to enable our souls not to die, or our life not to be cursed by sin and not to be separated in death, soul and body.

And if we don't come to terms with who Jesus is and what God made us to do, there's nothing that can make up for that.

[ 14 : 04 ] There's nothing that can heal our souls and make it right with God, because he says there's nothing in this material universe that can enable us to live body and soul eternally, because of sin and because of death.

And that each individual person is worth more than the whole cosmos. The word there for the world is the cosmos. So basically what he's saying, if you give up your, if you forfeit your soul, which is that spiritual part of our lives that is broken and needs to be healed by Jesus Christ, if we forget and ignore that and simply live for this world, for knowledge, for power, for wealth, or for influence, or whatever it might be, then we are forfeiting something that we can never get back and that is much more valuable than anything that we can achieve or do or any relationship that we can have in this life, or anything that we focus our life on.

It is worthless. Now there's a guy just now who owns Amazon and he's called Jeff Bezos and he's worth \$185 billion, roughly.

The record is going to be the first trillionaire. But that is meaningless because my soul is more valuable than that and so is his, because it's the wrong currency.

We can't buy our souls health. We can't buy our souls eternal life with Jesus Christ and God in heaven because of sin. We can't put it right ourselves.

[ 15 : 43 ] Death is too great for us to deal with. And many people just ignore that reality and think life is simply about pursuing material happiness.

Even if we could gain the whole cosmos, it wouldn't change who you are and it wouldn't change who I am and it wouldn't give us our identity, which is meant to be with God, but sin separates from that.

None of these things can enable our souls to be healthy and forgiven and right with God because sin forfeits the life of our soul.

The material world just can't cut it. Now, I was out yesterday in the West Coast of Scotland that glorious day on a boat, a fast boat, going round all the islands, glorious weather, glorious scenery, lots of beautiful seafood, great company.

Is it worth having that for a day and forfeiting your soul? Is it worth pursuing anything, however glorious, any relationship, however deep and meaningful, any wealth, any possessions, and yet ignore God?

[ 17 : 04 ] Do all these things with no reference to God, without thanksgiving to God, without recognizing your need for God? It is utterly and completely worthless because your soul is worth more than all of these things.

And the amazing thing is, if we get our souls healed and right with God, our lives, our being, our whole relationship, if we get that right with God through Jesus Christ, which we'll go into look at in a moment, then all these things will be ours.

In eternity, in the new heavens and the new earth, we will have what is our best experience here now multiplied a million times with Jesus Christ in the eternity that He gives us, and for which we are eternally grateful.

So He knows our true value. And of course, He knows, as I've mentioned, that something is wrong because our souls are and can be forfeited.

We know we can lose our life. We know that death is there. But the Bible recognizes that we also lose and can lose our souls. It's the same word, and there's frustration, isn't there?

[ 18 : 20 ] There's frustration in that, that we have a body and a soul, and in death, body and soul is separated. And we recognize, and many people recognize, and maybe many people who have the most materially and relationally in this life also may sometimes recognize it's dissatisfying.

It is not great because we are fragile and because we grow old and because we can't keep any of it. We can't keep any of it ultimately.

That's a brutal reality. There's a deep absurdity in life. And there's things that are beyond our control, there's physical and mental illness, there's aging, there's self-destruction, there's emptiness, there's dissatisfaction, there's unfulfilled longings, there's broken dreams.

And this world of which we're apart, with all its guilt and shame, reminds us that it can never be all that we had hoped for. And maybe you have many broken dreams today.

So He knows our instinct. He knows who we are. He knows our true value. He knows that something is wrong. And He knows there's only one answer.

[ 19 : 42 ] Verse 21 is a change in the mentality of Jesus with the disciples and with what He says. He says, then He says to them, if anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.

For whoever would lose his life, save his life, whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. So Jesus begins very deliberately to speak about the cross, right after Peter's great confession of him.

And there's an exchange that is going to happen at the cross that Jesus is pointing towards here, and He's reminding us that there's only one way to receive eternal life.

God requires our bodily and soul perfection. And nothing in this cosmos can give us that right relationship with God. Nothing can make us right with God.

And Peter's confession says, oh, you're the Christ. You're the Messiah. You're the Savior. You're the Son of the living God. And that is pointing to, and what Jesus is then pointing to is His death and resurrection, His death on the cross and His resurrection is the only answer to our soul's need, that His perfect life is exchanged for our sinful life.

[ 21 : 06 ] And He takes the death we deserve on the cross and the wrath of God against our sin and against the brokenness that we have. And He pays the price. Now, I know if you've been a Christian for many years, you know this back to front.

But nothing proves the value of your life more than the gospel and what Jesus Christ did for you. Are you concerned about your worth as a person? Are you concerned about your value? Nothing says you're valuable more than the exchange that Jesus worked on the cross for anyone who will come to Him by faith. Jesus says, I love you. And Jesus says, I am the way, the truth and the life. That's why really Sunday night and what we're doing with the evangelistic videos is so important as we seek to reach out to a different and a new audience with that gospel message. Nothing can say that you matter more as a Christian than when you consider the price, the cost of your salvation, the price that Jesus Christ paid to set you free. [ 22 : 24 ] It's at the heart of the whole Bible. It's at the heart of the gospel. It was at the heart of even what happened in Jonah and the Old Testament and the prophecies of the Old Testament that were pointing forward to death and resurrection.

It's the reason for Jesus coming. As Christians today, we can never be ashamed of the cross and we can never think the cross. We graduate beyond it. Jesus says here, He is the one who, verse 21, from that time, Jesus began to show His disciples He must go to Jerusalem and suffer and be killed and on the third day be raised.

There's an imperative about the life of Jesus that is driving Him towards Jerusalem and the crucifixion. He had your life in mind when He said, I must go. He had my life in mind. He had every believer's life in mind. He had everyone in the world's life in mind when He said, I must go to the cross. This is the only way that humanity will not forfeit their souls and lose their souls in the pursuit of merely material living. You're worth more than the cosmos to the Lord Jesus Christ. It speaks of immeasurable cost, immeasurable love.

[ 23 : 48 ] There is no greater love than that. And I know we spend our lives deceived by battles and by our own hearts and by doubting that, by feeling worthless, by doubting His promises, by misunderstanding His love and the infinity of that.

But that is, the reality is, it's immeasurable love and we need to dive into that ocean of His love more and more and more.

Maybe if you're not a Christian today, you're being troubled by the thought of life being more than just something material, that you have a soul that if you don't look for salvation and if you don't deal with your sins, you will forfeit your soul and eternal life and be lost in eternal darkness.

Then can I say there's no greater love that you can know than knowing the love of Jesus who's done this for you. There's nothing greater. There's no greater exchange.

There's nothing that speaks of your worth more than what Jesus Christ has done. Because when we are right with Christ and right with God, we have eternal life.

[ 25 : 04 ] So that even if we lose physical life, you think that losing physical life is the worst thing ever, don't you? And so do I. So much of the time that we cling on to life, our instinct is to hold on to physical life here and now and we think there can be nothing worse than losing our physical life.

But in Christ, our soul is bought back and is no longer forfeited and our soul goes to be with Christ to live eternally reunited on that last great day with our body, a spiritual, renewed, refined, glorified body that will take us into the new heavens and the new earth.

So there is something worse than losing our physical life. Hard though that is to understand and bear and that is losing and forfeiting our soul.

So He knows there's only one answer and my plea for Christians is to remind yourselves of that. We don't graduate beyond it. We need to thank and praise Him for it and live in the light of that every day.

And if you're not a Christian, that you would consider this great exchange that happened 2,000 years ago that has transformed our lives and that we live for, that is recorded in Scripture and that has given us life for our soul as well as our body.

[ 26 : 30 ] So He knows there's only one answer and but He also knows that we struggle. He knows that we struggle. That's the great thing about the Bible. It's a words and all book.

He knows that we struggle and it never gives an unreal picture of humanity. Jonah struggled, didn't he?

He struggled with God's compassion. He probably did understand God but he didn't understand Himself well. He was easily deceived. He believed the wrong things. He was self-absorbed.

Jesus, God still had time for Him. God still gave Him object lessons to remind Him of His character. And Simon Peter, he struggled, didn't he?

He's just made that amazing confession about who you are the Christ, you're the Son of the Living God. And in the very next paragraph, Jesus is calling Him Satan because when Jesus talked about going to the cross, Peter said, no, listen Jesus, that'll never happen to you.

[ 27 : 31 ] I've got you covered. I've got your back here. He didn't understand even though He made that grand confession. So he felt bold enough to tell Jesus that Jesus is wrong.

Isn't that so like us? That we seem to be on the mountaintop spiritually as Christians at one moment and understanding so much. And then the next moment we just can't see it and we are telling Jesus He's all wrong.

We're blessed and then we're kind of cursed. We're under discipline and we just don't get things. We struggle and yet Jesus is so, as He was with Peter, so patient and so gracious and so merciful and so kind because He knows our struggle.

He knows we're dust. He knows that we're not God, even though we try to be God so much of the time. He knows we struggle. That's why He came.

And that's why we need Him every single day. And so with this I finish, He keeps it simple, doesn't He? He always keeps it simple for us. He keeps it simple for Peter and He keeps it simple for us.

[ 28 : 37 ] He said to His disciples, if anyone would come after me, let them deny himself, take up his cross, follow me. That's what He says.

He keeps it simple. Follow me into battle. That's what He's saying. Come after me. Follow me. That's our Christian calling.

He's saying to us in the light of His finished work, the war is already won. Just come with me into the battle. The war is already won.

I've won it for you. I've defeated death. I've paid the price for your sin. Just come into the battle. I'll give you all you need in this battle if you just come after me.

If you just follow me. Now, if you've been a Christian for 110 years, that message doesn't change. He still says, follow me. If you are too sophisticated for that, then I'm saying you're a fool.

[ 29 : 39 ] Because often we feel too sophisticated and we want to move on. But He says, follow me. And He says, take up your cross. That is our daily self denial.

That's what He means by saying, taking up the cross. Get rid of our sinful, destructive self which says, all I need is food and drink. All I need is a party.

All I need is good fun and a good salary and an easy life. And He says, don't forfeit your soul by believing that or don't endanger your soul by believing that.

Deny the destructive, sinful, selfish realities and know your self worth in Jesus Christ. And know true self love in Jesus Christ.

There's nothing wrong with loving ourselves. God commands it by loving ourselves in the right way. With God being first and others being those we serve before we think of ourselves.

[ 30 : 34 ] You are worth it to God. And God is worth it to you. I think that's a great reality we need to consider and a great truth to consider.

We follow Him. We deny ourselves. Why? Because we are worth it to God and because God is worth it to us because of what He's done.

And others are worth it because they're made in God's image because of who they are and because we're called to love them and have the limitless capacity of grace to love ourselves properly, to love God, to love others and to love ourselves properly.

And that today really matters in a world of division and a world of hatred and a world of merciless identity politics. Therein is true freedom.

If we will deny ourselves, take up His cross and follow Jesus. Amen. Heavenly Father, we ask and pray that You would enable us to follow You, to serve You, to remember the simplicity of Your message for the brain boxes, for the really clever people, for the theologically astute, for the spiritually mature and for those who are not blessed with some of these things, for those of us that are not blessed with some of these things.

[ 32 : 12 ] Remind us that the gospel is a great leveler, that mercy is a great leveler, and that we are to be those who deny our sinful selves, take up the cross and follow Jesus.

May we do that today. Help us if we are tempted to run away from these realities, to remind ourselves of what Jesus is. The Spirit drive these truths from the Bible, His living word home today,

that what would it gain anyone who is listening or anyone who belongs to St. Columbus or anyone else, what would it gain any person if they gain the whole cosmos and lose or forfeit their soul by ignoring God and by ignoring Jesus, by turning away from Him and by saying, Jesus, you got it wrong, I know better.

May that not be what we do and we are tempted to do that Lord, forgive us when we are on a daily basis and give us that great sense of worth through the prism of the cross, through the eyes of Jesus and give us a desire to serve you because you are worth it.

Not dragging our feet, not Lord God, forgive us when we do that, drag our feet and grumble and complain and follow you reluctantly like we are taking some horrible green medicine.

But help us to recognize that to taste and see God is the most beautiful food and drink, the most glorious bread and wine.

[ 33 : 52 ] Help us we pray and forgive our sins in Jesus' name. Amen.