

# A Solemn Question for Those Who Are Rejecting Christ That They May Obtain the World

by R.A. Torrey

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*The sermon emphasizes the importance of choosing between the world and one's soul, and warns against making a bad bargain by forfeiting one's soul for worldly gains.*

**Scripture:** Ecclesiastes 1:2, Matthew 6:19-21, Matthew 16:26, Mark 8:36, Luke 12:15, John 10:10, Romans 6:23, 1 Timothy 6:7, James 4:4, 1 John 2:16-17

**Topics:** "Worldly Temptations", "Eternal Value of the Soul"

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## Description

R.A. Torrey emphasizes the grave question of what it profits a person to gain the world while losing their soul, urging listeners to reflect on the futility of worldly pursuits that ultimately do not satisfy or last. He contrasts the temporary allure of wealth, honor, and pleasure with the eternal value of the soul, arguing that many sacrifice their true selves for fleeting gains. Torrey illustrates that no one truly possesses the whole world, and even the richest and most honored individuals find dissatisfaction and eventual loss. He warns against the deceptive offers of Satan, who tempts individuals with worldly gains at the cost of their eternal souls. Ultimately, Torrey calls for a choice between the transient nature of the world and the everlasting life offered by Jesus Christ.

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## Transcript

"What shall it profit a man if he shall gain the world, and lose his own soul?" -- Mark viii. 36

That question ought to set thinking every man and woman here tonight, who, because of love of the world is refusing Jesus Christ.

I. Will you please notice in the first place the two things that are contrasted in the verse? The two things contrasted are not the present and the future. The question is not what shall it profit a man if he gain the present and lose the future. That would be an important question. If a man were to gain the fleeting present and thereby lose the eternal future, it would be a very foolish bargain; but that is not the question of the text. The man who loses his soul does not gain the present. It is true he loses the future, the eternal future; but he does not gain the present. The man living in sin, the man living away from Christ, does not get the most out of the life that now is. He gets the least out of it. On the other hand, the man that saves

his soul does not lose the present. It is true that he gains the future, the eternal future; but he does not lose the present. The man whose soul is saved gets the most out of the life that now is. The two things put in contrast are these, the world and the soul, or life- the world, that is, the tangible world and all it contains, wealth, honour, power, pleasure, everything that appeals to the senses, the lust of the flesh and lust of the eye and the vainglory of life (cf. 1 John ii, 16). That is the world. That which is put into contrast with it is the soul or life, the inner, real man. To gain the world is to get all the wealth there is, and all the honor there is, and all the social position there is, and all the power there is, and all the worldly pleasure there is. To lose the soul is to lose your real manhood, to fall short of that for which God created you, to miss the divine image, to have the divine image blotted out and the image of the devil stamped in its place.

To lose the soul is to come short of the knowledge of God, to lose communion with God and likeness to God, to "fall short of the glory of God." Now the question is this, What shall it profit you to gain all that this world has, all its wealth, all its honor, all its pleasures, all its power and lose your true selves, lose that for which God created you, lose communion with God and likeness to God, and the glory of God?

II. For any man to gain the whole world at the cost of forfeiting his soul would be a bad bargain. If one could get the whole world by forfeiting his soul, it would be an idiotic exchange. Why?

1. First of all, because the world does not satisfy. The world never satisfied a human soul. Take wealth. Was ever any man satisfied with wealth? Did any amount of money ever bring satisfaction and lasting joy to any man or woman on earth? You had a man here in England a few years ago who was very successful in making money. He made millions of pounds sterling, but so little did it satisfy him that he jumped overboard from the deck of an ocean steamer and drowned himself. I remember one day that the heir to one of the largest fortunes in the world invited me to dinner, and I went to dinner with him. After the dinner was over he opened his heart to me, and confessed his dissatisfaction with life. All the million - and there were a great many millions that that young man was heir to- did not give him satisfaction and joy.

Did honour ever satisfy any man? I have known men and women in the highest positions of honour in politics and social life, in culture and in all spheres of life, but I never knew a man or woman yet that was satisfied with honour. Does power satisfy any man? Was any king or emperor or czar, no matter how large his power, satisfied with the possession of power? Do the pleasures of life satisfy any man? Does the ball room satisfy? Does the card party satisfy? Does the theatre satisfy? Does the race-course satisfy? Does gambling satisfy? Is there any form of the world's pleasure that satisfies the human soul? How mad then to forfeit your soul to gain money, honour, power, position, glory, pleasure, or anything that this world contains, when we know that they never satisfied anybody.

2. But in the second place it is a mad bargain to forfeit your soul to gain the world, because the world does not last. As the Apostle John says in I John ii. 17, "The world passeth away." How well we know it. Take wealth. How long does wealth last? With many a man it does not last even a few years. A man is a millionaire to-day, and by a turn of the wheel of fortune he is practically penniless to-morrow. I was talking about a man of your city only to-day to a friend of his, and he told me how wealthy this man used to be. But there was a little change in the line of production in which this man was interested, and your country ceased to be the country that supplied that market, and that man's fortune dwindled from millions to practically nothing. I remember when I was a boy, one night we five children were in the sitting room at home, and we asked our father to tell us what his properties were. We were going to figure them up and see how much we were going to be worth when he was gone.

He was rather amused at the idea, and he began to tell us what he thought he was worth; and when he told us of all the possessions he could think of, we all of us added them up, and divided them by five to see how much each of us would be worth when my father saw to hand things over to us. This looked splendid on paper, and I felt quite rich that night; but a financial crash in America in 1873 which affected my father's properties, and little by little, by the year '77, when my father was called away, practically the last vestige of all that he possessed was taken from his hands and he left only a few thousand dollars. And that was mismanaged, and in a few months not a penny was left. All I had was a matchbox and a pair of sleeve-buttons, one of which I have lost, and I don't know what became of the other. "The world passeth away." I thank God that that money did pass away. It was one of the best things that ever happened to me.

Take honors, how long do they last? I remember a man in our country who stood preeminent among the statesmen of America I think beyond all question he was the first statesman of America of his day. He might have become President, but he was a little too much of a statesman to become President. England had an unpleasant experience once with this man's statesmanship, when he represented the United States government at the Geneva Commission on the Alabama claim and carried the day. He was the most highly honoured I think of any man of his day in America, but after a while this man dropped out, and we almost forgot there had been such a man. I remember I was thinking of this man one day, and I said to myself, "I guess so-and-so's dead." I have not seen his name in the papers at all lately," and a day or two afterwards I saw in the papers that the Hon. So-and-so was living in such a street of New York, that he never went out in but sat by his open window looking out upon the passing crowds and thinking of his old-time successes. That man was utterly forgotten, yet at one time he was almost the unquestioned leader of political life in America. In a few months more I took up the paper and read that he was dead, and when he died there was nothing said. He had dropped out of sight. Honour does not last. Take your most honoured statesmen, whose names are in every mouth, no one will be speaking of them or thinking of them a few years hence. "The World passeth away." Suppose honour and money do last until a man dies. How long will they last? Twenty years, thirty years, forty years, possibly fifty or sixty years, and then-gone! One of our wealthiest men in America, the wealthiest man of his day, died. Two men on 'Change in this city, New York, met the next day, and one of them said to the other, "How much did so-and-so leave?" and the other one replied, "He left it all." So he did. Of his one hundred and ninety-six millions of dollars which he was worth, he didn't take one penny with him.

Pleasure, how long does it last? Take the ball; how long does the pleasure of the ballroom last? Somewhere from two to seven hours; then you go home with weary feet and throbbing brain, blaming yourself for having been such a fool. The card party; how long does it last? Oh, two or three hours, four or five hours; and then you will go home with a lighter purse and a heavier heart. The champagne party; how long does it last? A few hours, and you go home with an aching head, a nauseated stomach, thinking what a fool you have been and saying, "I will never be such a fool again." Ah, friends, "the world passeth away."

The joys of friendship; how long do they last, if it is worldly friendship? A few brief years, and then we look into the casket on the beloved form and face and the coffin lid is locked down, and all is over. "The world passeth away." But the soul lasts. "He that doeth the will of the Lord abideth for ever." So I say that to forfeit your soul to gain the world is a mad bargain, for the world does not satisfy while you have it, and it does not last at all.

III. Now, then, if any one here to-night could get the whole world as the price of selling his soul it would be a foolish bargain.; but who ever got the whole world? Who ever had the world's wealth? No one. The

richest man has but small portion of all the world's wealth. Who possesses all the world's honor? The most honored man on earth to-day has but a portion of all the world's honour? Who possesses all the world's pleasure? The greatest devotee Of Pleasure has but a very small portion of all the world's pleasure. Who possesses all the worlds power? The mightiest man on earth has but a small portion of all the world's power. But even if you could get it all, it would be a bad bargain; and what a mad bargain to sell your soul to get so small a portion of the world as any of you are getting!

I asked a man one night at a meeting like this- he looked a bright,, intelligent fellow for a man of his class: "Why are you not a Christian?" He replied, "I am deeply moved and I would like to become a Christian. You have made me perfectly wretched. Yes, I would like to become a Christian." "Then why not become one to-night?" He said, "My business forbids it I would have to give up my position to-night if I became a Christian." I asked what was his business and he replied, "A bartender!" He didn't look it; he looked more respectable. I said, "Will you please tell me how much you get a week for tending the bar?" If I remember correctly it was six dollars, that is 24s.; and that man was selling his soul for 24s. a week. Some of you are selling your souls at almost a cheap a price. I asked another young fellow why he did not become a Christian. He said, "I believe in it, and I hope I may one day.

But I am in a business of my own and I have my best business on the Sabbath; I cannot be a Christian and do Sabbath work." Then I said, "You had better give up your Sabbath work." "No" he said, "I can not do that. It is the biggest day's profit I have in the week." And that man was selling his soul for the profit of one day's business a week.

Why, there are some of you here to-night selling your immortal souls, for which Jesus Christ died, and which shall live for ever, in Heaven and glory, or in hell and flame, for some single form of pleasure. It may be the dance, it may be the @ card party, it may be the horse race, it may be the theatre, it may be some other form of pleasure to which you are a slave, and for one single form of worldly pleasure you are forfeiting your souls. Why, man, you are mad! "What shall it profit a man, if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul?"

Friends, while I am talking here to-night, and offering Christ to you, and salvation in Him, all unseen but none the less present there is another preacher here tonight and that is Satan. He stands right by some of you as you sit in yonder pews, and while I offer you Christ and salvation and life eternal in Him, Satan offers you money, a little larger income in your business, or the social position that he tells you you will have to forfeit if you come out and out for Christ, or some form of worldly pleasure. He says, "Take this. Give me your souls and I will give you money. Give me your souls and I will give you these pleasures that you will have to give up if you become real Christians. Give me your souls and I will give you social position. Give me your souls and I will give you the world." Why, men and women, if he should offer you the whole world, you would be mad to accept his offer; but when he offers to you such a little trifle-the consummate folly of it- that for the little piece of the world you forfeit your soul; you forfeit life eternal for a world that never satisfies and does not last!

I have known many men and women that gave up the world for Christ, that gave up money for Christ, men that gave up much money for Christ, gave up high honour for Christ, gave up social position, high social position for Christ,, gave up pleasures that had been the passion of a lifetime for Christ, but I have yet to find the first man or woman who regretted it, and I have known people who gave up Christ for the world, and when the hour came in which the eternal realities were opening upon them, they bitterly regretted it.

One day in New York City one of the wealthiest men that America ever produced, the first man that established a family name now famous, lay dying, with all his millions in the bank, and with all his railway stock of no use to him. 'And as he lay there, he said, "Bring in the gardener." The gardener was a godly man, and when he came in to see his dying master, the rich man said to the gardener, "Get down, and pray for me." The gardener did so, and when he had finished his prayer, the rich man said,

"Sing, 'Come, ye sinners, poor and needy, Weak and wounded sick and sore.'"

Ah, men and women, a time is coming when we shall no longer see through eyes that are blinded by the glamour of this world; the time is coming when every man and woman here to-night will have the scales taken from their eyes, and face to face with death, face to face with God, face to face with eternity, you will see as God sees. You will say, "What a fool I was to forfeit my never-dying soul to get the world that has not satisfied, and is now slipping out of my grip." "What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?"

The story is told of Rowland Hill, the great preacher. Lady Ann Erskine was passing by in her carriage, and she asked her coachman who that was that was drawing such a large assembly. He replied that it was Rowland Hill. "I have heard a good deal about him she said; draw up near the crowd!" Mr. Hill soon saw her, and saw that she belonged to the aristocracy. He suddenly stopped in the midst of his preaching, and said: "My friends, I have something for sale." His hearers were amazed. "Yes, I have something for sale; it is the soul Lady Ann Erskine. Is there any one here that will bid for her soul? Ah, do I hear a bid? Who bids? Satan bids. Satan, what will you give for her soul? I will give riches, honour, and pleasure.' But stop! do I hear another bid? Yes, Jesus Christ bids. Jesus, what will you give for her soul? 'I will give eternal life.' Lady Ann Erskine, you have heard the two bids -which will you have?" And Lady Ann Erskine fell down on her knees and cried out, "

I will have Jesus."

Man and woman, two are bidding for your soul to-night, Satan and Jesus. Satan offers you the world, the world that does not satisfy, and that does not last. Jesus offers you life, real life, eternal life. To which will you have? "What shall it profit a man, if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul?"

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