

**PARK HILL UNITED METHODIST CHURCH
SECOND SUNDAY IN LENT
“THE RESOURCES OF FAITH”
REV. JOHN L. THOMPSON
March 8, 2009
Mark 8:31-38
8:45 & 11:00 A.M. Services**

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 the King James Version of Matthew’s Gospel that reads like this: *“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. It reads like this in the New International Version of the Bible: *“If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it. What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul?”*

You may recall sometime back that a young man put his soul up for sale on eBay. His name was Adam Burtle. He was a student at the University of Washington. He sold his soul for \$400 before the listing was removed and he was suspended from the site. This is what he wrote; **“Please realize, I make no warranties as to the condition of the soul. 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. But in the final hour

of the auction a Des Moines, Iowa, woman offered the winning bid of \$400 for Burtle's soul. Burtle admitted that he didn't intend for the ad to be taken seriously. He said, **"I don't think she's going to be able to collect on my soul, to be honest. I was just bored, and I'm a geek. So anytime I'm bored, I go back to my Internet."** (1)

Maybe it's possible to surmise that over the centuries many people have sold their soul simply and solely because they were bored. ***"What good is it,"*** asked Jesus, ***"for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul?"***

The universal search for the smooth and easy way is futile. To be human is to live in both bright sunshine and dark shadows. Even our spiritual journeys involve perplexing ups and downs. The resources of faith do not change the ambiguous nature of human life, but assure us that God is ever with us in love and power. There is a spiritual side to our universe. **We do not live in a world that is simply material.**

Over a decade ago Madonna sang a song called **"Material Girl."** The chorus says, **"We are living in a material world . . . And I am a material girl . . ."**(2) Madonna has said that this is the one song she most regrets recording. Material Girl became her nickname. She has also said if she had known this, she probably would have never recorded it.

Well, it stuck and she has had to work very hard to get people to quit thinking of her as a material girl. But let's face it; many people do live as if this is only a material world. Bernie Madoff has lived that way for years. He used what was known as a Ponzi scheme to build an empire on stolen money. Although under house arrest, he is arguing that his wife should be allowed to keep nearly \$70 million worth of assets held in her name, including the Manhattan apartment where he is under house arrest, while the people he bilked out of their life savings should get nothing.

Not long after Jesus, a Roman emperor named Nero, 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 cranky, 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. (3)

It happens. People seek after wealth, they seek fame, they seek sensual pleasure, they seek every means of escape, but if they do not seek God, if they live only in a material world, they never attain satisfaction.

King Charlemagne lived from 742 to 814 A.D. He conquered much of Western Europe, including France, Switzerland, Belgium, the Netherlands, parts of Italy, Germany, Austria, and Spain. Everywhere Charlemagne's troops went, they spread education and the Christian religion. His rule unified and stabilized much of Europe, making him one of the most powerful rulers in history. Yet, in spite of all of Charlemagne's power, he arranged at his death to have his body displayed with his hand resting on our verse for today: ***“What good is it, for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul?”*** (4) Charlemagne knew such an exchange was a bad bargain indeed. This is more than a material world.

The Bible reminds us that we are more than material beings. We are created in the image and likeness of God. I see evidence of that each time I pray with someone before going into surgery. I see evidence of it when I visit with someone coming out of surgery. I see it evidenced in the lives of people who show love, hope, peace, and joy and a host of other positive emotions. We can all witness the evidence of these emotions if we are willing to push the boundaries of our intellect. Just because we cannot see love doesn't mean it doesn't exist. We know it exists. We've seen love in action right here in Park Hill Church.

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.
(6)

Because we were created in the image of God there is something divine within us. Esau sold his birthright for a pot of stew (Genesis 25:24-34). Some are willing to make that same bargain even today.

In Romans 8, Paul asks, “If God is for us, who is against us?” Well, ultimately it doesn’t matter who is against us, because nothing can separate us from the love of God. When you have faced the worst possible things that can happen, take courage, because nothing can separate us from the love of God.

Faith in God is relational, not circumstantial. We trust in God’s unconditional love, not God’s preferential treatment or God’s arbitrary protection. People of faith in all ages have found that the assurance of God’s love has sufficed for every need. Trusting in God’s unfailing love can strengthen us in our ordeals, encourage us in our grief and loss, and inspire us to live in hope. Secure in God’s love, no threat need overpower us, no danger defeat us. ***“In all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.” (Rm 8:37)*** Spiritual strength comes from courageously struggling with life’s challenges and enduring by trusting in God’s power and presence. If God is for us, it matters little who is against us.

I would love to be your pastor. I would love for this to be your church. Come grow your spirit with us. If God is for us, all will be well!

1. The Associated Press, 2001.

2. http://www.lyricsfreak.com/m/madonna/material+girl_20086925.html

3. <http://www.illosaurus.com/>

4. William Beausay II., *The Leadership Genius of Jesus* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1997), p. 45.

6. Anthony P. Castle, *Treasury of Quips, Quotes and Anecdotes for Preachers and Teachers*. (Paperback - Jul 1998)