

THE LOSS OF A SOUL.

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What does the Bible mean by the "loss" of the soul? Does it mean an utter annihilation? I find no such idea expressed on any page of Holy Writ. But I do discover that it is lost to God's service when it is given up to selfishness; it is lost to holiness when it is without God and without hope. If I see the wreck of a gallant vessel on a beach, I say at once: "This ship is lost." The broken fragments of the timbers and the tangled mass of spars and cordage may strew the strand. They are not annihilated; yet the ship is lost. For the purposes for which that vessel was built, for all beauty and usefulness, it is ruined. So, if my soul be perverted from God's service, from purity, and from the hope of Heaven, it is a ruined soul. To continue in this condition through eternity would be an eternal "death."

If the owner of a garden allows it to be overgrown with nettles and Canada thistles, he may well say that his garden is a dead loss. When a human soul grows such weeds as selfishness, and covetousness, and pride, and unbelief, and enmity to Christ, it is a lost soul. A future continuance of this condition would not be Heaven; it would be hell. But if that garden were cleansed of its weeds, and made rich with vegetables and fruits and fragrant with flowers, it would be saved. Precisely this process of rescuing a human heart and human life from the worthlessness and wickedness of sin, and devoting it to the obedient service of God, is what is signified. Unless the soul is thus converted, it cannot enter the Kingdom of Heaven. King Charles the Stout sent a messenger to Notke, a pious abbot, to enquire how he should save his soul. The messenger found the abbot working in his little garden. "Tell His Majesty," said Notke, "to do just what I am doing. Tell him that he

must pull up his vices, and begin to grow such graces as God requires."

The foremost duty of every one of us is to save our souls. To gain the whole world would be a wretched equivalent for the loss of a good conscience, the favor of God, and everlasting life. The soul must be first. If you were a passenger on a steamship, and should invite the captain to come down into the cabin and play chess with you, while a gale was raging, he would say to you: "The lives of all on board are at stake. While my ship is in danger I can't stop to play games." So, my friend, when the salvation of your soul is secured, you may think and talk about business, or investments, or social entertainments, or other things not vital. Until then, your real business must be to flee from a just wrath to come, and lay hold on Jesus Christ. Why stop to furnish a house, when you have not thought of your soul's eternal dwelling-place? Why insure your property before you have insured your soul? Why so anxious about "good society" for a few years, and yet not an hour's serious thought about where or with whom you shall spend eternity?

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