

Series: Ruin to Renovation	Reference: Mt 16:26 & Various Passages	Title: How's My Soul? Pt2	Date: 07.15.18
<p style="text-align: center;">Website Writeup:</p> <p>Augustine was correct, God has made us for himself, and our hearts are restless until they find rest in Him. We're secure in God's Grace in Christ, but we can choose to wage war on our own souls by walking outside the standards (the Law) of God. We can clog the pipes of relationship with him not experiencing rest & life in our souls.</p>			

Color changes in text indicate slide changes

Thanks to Dallas Willard, this series is born out of his book, *Renovation of the Heart*. Many of his thoughts & words make it into these sermons; read the book as you follow along.

TITLE SLIDE UP for introductions. *What good will it be for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul? [Mt 16:26.]*

I was recently watching *Black Mirror*. Interesting show; every episode different. One was set around the fact that, due to technology imbedded in their eyes, people had the ability to block someone with whom they don't wish to interact. With a push of a button, both parties only see a silhouette of the other, and only hear murmuring when they spoke. At the end, one guy's punished when he's set free from prison through a deal he's struck, but doesn't realize that one of the stipulations of his release is, he's blocked from all other souls in the world. Although he can walk around freely, he's still imprisoned in only being able to see silhouettes, unable to communicate with anyone.

The Soul is the foundational level of life, and, by nature, rooted in God. Realize it or not, it's the one relationship for which we truly long. Augustine was right when he said, "Thou hast made us for thyself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it finds its rest in thee." Humankind is walking around as if they can only see the silhouette of God, unable to hear his voice. Born into that state, knowing nothing else, they long, not recognizing it as a longing for Divine Soul connection. In tragic spiritual blockage, they can't recognize God if he stood before them.

Jesus removes that blockage. He's the On Button. Upon dropping our pride & receiving his sacrifice for our spiritual blockage, he turns the system back on. God comes into focus in Jesus, and suddenly we can hear his voice. No longer a murmuring silhouette we've learned to disregard, but someone with whom we can have relationship giving meaning & true lasting life. Psalms is the great soul-longing book. Listen to how the writer expresses his...

O God, you are my God; earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you; my flesh faints for you, as in a dry & weary land where there is no water. (Ps 63:1)

My soul will be satisfied as with fat & rich food, and my mouth will praise you with joyful lips, (Ps 63:5)

8 My soul clings to you; your right hand upholds me. (Ps 63:8)

My soul longs, yes, faints for the courts of the Lord; my heart & flesh sing for joy to the living God. (Ps 84:2)

1 As a deer pants for flowing streams, so pants my soul for you, O God. 2 My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When shall I come & appear before God? (Ps 42:1–2)

God is our refuge & strength, a very present help in trouble. 2 Therefore we will not fear though the earth gives way, though the mountains be moved into the heart of the sea, 3 though its waters roar & foam, though the mountains tremble at its swelling. 4 There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy habitation of the Most High. 5 God is in the midst of her; she shall not be moved; God will help her when morning dawns. (Ps 46:1–5)

That last Psalm reminds me of John Wesley as he returned to England from what might be considered a failed ministry in America. At the time he considered himself a good Christian; did all the right things, a pastor, missionary, educated, knew the Scriptures. However, on the ship back to England a storm brewed & they were tossed violently. John was terrified. He noticed a band of Moravian Christians in peaceful prayer on the ship which struck him. Where did they get such peace in uncertainty?

When he returned to England he wrote, “I went to America to convert the Indians; But O! Who shall convert me? Who, what is he that shall deliver me from this evil heart of unbelief? I have a fair summer religion. I can talk well; nay, and believe myself while no danger is near; but let death look me in the face, and my spirit is troubled. Nor can I say to die is gain...I show my faith by my works by staking my all upon it...O who will deliver me from this fear of death?”

There he met with another Moravian, Peter Bohler, who instructed him on Salvation by faith alone. He started to read Luther’s commentary on Galatians. He was then invited to a Moravian gathering & he wrote of the experience, “In the evening I went very unwillingly to a society in Aldersgate Street, where one was reading Luther’s preface to the Epistle to the Romans. About a quarter before nine, while he was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone for salvation; and an assurance was given to me that he had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin & death.” John’s soul was being turned on. He could suddenly see God for who he really was in the person of Jesus, and have a relationship with him allowing him to have peace in the midst of chaos.

But sometimes, even after our soul’s been switched on, it feels as if someone’s hit the off button again...back to seeing a silhouette & have difficulty hearing God’s voice. Maybe we’ve not paid attention to our soul needs; not nurtured the divine relationship. We’ve allowed the worries & busyness, or worse, to crowd out the axiomatic truth that our soul

must commune with Jesus in order to be well-fed & have true meaning - our soul must find rest in God. This doesn't negate God's saving grace in salvation, but we can clog the relationship. In a modern culture constantly clamoring for attention, with only soundbites & constantly shifting targets for satisfaction & fulfillment, God stands quietly in the crowd maybe like a shorted out screen coming only into focus in fleeting intervals like an old TV trying to catch a weak signal.

What if all this stuff we pursue doesn't fully matter to our soul-identity? What if it becomes toxic when it's made priority? All the clamoring for career, financial safety nets, marriage, children, or what have you? Is it possible, that which otherwise might be good, when your soul's ordered well with Christ, might actually become poisonous & deadening? **What if what really matters is what Jesus said in Matthew 6:25-34:**

²⁵ "Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes? ²⁶ Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? ²⁷ Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life?"

²⁸ "And why do you worry about clothes? See how the flowers of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. ²⁹ Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. ³⁰ If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today & tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you - you of little faith? ³¹ So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' ³² For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. ³³ But seek first his kingdom & his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. ³⁴ Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own."

When you hang out with good friends, does it really matter to you what they do for a living? How important they are in some office someplace? How much money they have? What kind of car they drive? Any of that?

No, you think of them as a mom or dad, your friend whom you call in trouble, the person with whom you laugh & cry. Culturally we're told our soul identity is so deeply tied with what we own, what we do, what we drive, where we live, how much we have in the bank, how busy we are, whether we're married or not, or how much others rely on us - in the midst of our worry, our souls may not be able to find rest or meaning in Christ. But Jesus' burden is light & life-giving. Everything else only takes when it's made priority over Jesus.

²⁸ "Come to me, all you who are weary & burdened, and I will give you rest. ²⁹ Take my yoke upon you & learn from me, for I am gentle & humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰ For my yoke is easy & my burden is light." (Mt 11:28-30)

Remember Proverbs 1:7 from last week...*The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom & instruction.* Are we listening? What if my soul was so satisfied with Him, I lived in the reality of Matthew 6? Or, actually believed & practiced what he's called me to in the Great Commission (Mt 28:18-20)? What if I could abandon all outcomes to Jesus, and allow God to be god in all situations? What if my gratitude for the system being turned back on was so great, it birthed in me a humility which could bear anything for Jesus?

What if we could live out of 1 Peter 5:5b-10...

All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because, "God opposes the proud but shows favor to the humble." ⁶ Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time. ⁷ Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you. ⁸ Be alert & of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. ⁹ Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that the family of believers throughout the world is undergoing the same kind of sufferings. ¹⁰ And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you & make you strong, firm & steadfast.

Imagine that kind of life, lights turned on, abiding in Him, walking humbly with him, having peace & purpose...sounds nice. One sure way to ruin that idyllic image is *not* to practice 1 Peter 2:11 where it says, *...I urge you, as foreigners and exiles, to abstain from sinful desires, which wage war against your soul.* When we take back control of our lives, deciding for ourselves how we should live, picking up pride once more which is the opposite of Humility, we invite warfare on our own souls instead of peace. We invite spiritual blockage to return. Not that we've lost our salvation, but the relational pipes which flow with rest & meaning have been clogged.

To unclog those pipes, we stand on God's Mercy & Grace, secure in our relationship with him, trusting in his perfect Law. God's law provides a picture of reality, of how things are with Him & creation. God's law enables us to know Him more fully, to see what he's doing, and to find our meaning & purpose in that, wherein true well-being lies. As Moses said to the people of his day, *⁷ What other nation is so great as to have their gods near them the way the Lord our God is near us whenever we pray to him? ⁸ And what other nation is so great as to have such righteous decrees & laws as this body of laws I am setting before you today? ⁹ Only be careful, and watch yourselves closely so that you do not forget the things your eyes have seen or let them fade from your heart as long as you live. Teach them to your children & to their children after them.* (Dt 4:7-9)

Recently someone told me they read through the Bible in 6 months. During that time they thought, *"When I get through this, I can go back to watching Grey's Anatomy."* But at the end of it felt, they couldn't do that, since the benefit received from storing up the Word in their heart made them only want more. *The Word is powerful, as stated in Hebrews 4:12, ¹² For the word of God is alive & active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul & spirit, joints & marrow; it judges the thoughts & attitudes of the heart.* From the beginning to the end of the Scriptures it's

true - human deliverance is always from a personal relationship with God, established by His gracious love & power. But the Law is an essential part of that relationship. God's Holy Spirit, the Covenant Promise of Grace, and his Law always work hand-in-hand in our spiritual formation.

Jesus himself places a high emphasis on the Law of God when he said in Mt 5:17–19, *17 “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. 18 For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished. 19 Therefore anyone who sets aside one of the least of these commands and teaches others accordingly will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices & teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.*

Martin Luther coined the term *Antinomian* to designate & argue against some in his day who held that God's law wasn't a factor in conversion to Christ; it means 'Against the Law'. Based on the mistaken conclusion & strongly rejected in Paul's writing & Jesus' words, that because we aren't justified by keeping the law, rather through our personal relationship with Jesus in his sacrifice & resurrection, that we have no essential use for the law & can disregard it. The essential idea is, sinning or not, obedience or non-obedience to the law has nothing to do with being saved. Nothing in the Scriptures teaches this. On the contrary, the Law's held as perfect & life-giving. Something we're called to obey & follow under the freedom we have in grace.

Antinomianism is alive & well in the church today when we disregard whole passages or books of the Bible, or water things down so much that they lose effectiveness. When we justify our sinful thoughts & actions by saying 'that was true for them, but not for us' in the modern world concerning issues which have always been universal orthodox beliefs & values for the people of God throughout history.

Some things aren't easy to understand in the Scriptures, but we can't excise the Law of things which don't fit our current humanistic worldview & decide for ourselves how we should live. Being anti-Law also comes to life in us when we decide to do something we know is against Scriptural teaching justifying it by saying, "Jesus died for me, he'll forgive me - he has to." What did Paul say in Romans 6:1–2... *Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? 2 By no means! We are those who have died to sin; how can we live in it any longer?* In other words we've died to those things the Law speaks against, we can't willingly seek them any longer & not expect it to clog the pipes if we do.

Jesus said the same in Jn 14:23–24, *“Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching. My Father will love them, and we will come to them & make our home with them. 24 Anyone who does not love me will not obey my teaching. These words you hear are not my own; they belong to the Father who sent me.”* And in Luke 6:46, *“Why do you call me, ‘Lord, Lord’, and do not do what I say?”*

We're saved by grace, yes, but in spiritual formation, it matters what we do - the pipes of relationship can be clogged - the image of Jesus can go fuzzy. The presence of the Spirit of God in our lives is not meant to set the Law to the side, providing free license. It's rather to enable conformity to the Law of God through an inwardly transformed person. When we walk in the Spirit of the Law, the letter of the Law follows appropriately - you can't gain righteousness by what you do, that's legalism. But the spiritually transformed person loves God to the point of obedience to His life-giving standards. The law by itself kills off any hope of rightness, or righteousness before God, through our own human ability & effort, but it kindles a great hope in God as we walk in step with the Law through the power of Christ's redemptive work in our lives. Law comes with grace into the renewed soul, but there's no such thing as grace without the perfect Law. Grace has to do with life, and life requires order, meaning, purpose & direction.

There's an inner connection & affinity between the soul & the law of God. It's why when we become habitual law-breakers, our souls become sickly & distanced from God. But love of the Law restores the soul under the confines of God's grace. The love of the Law of God restores us since it expresses the order of God's kingdom & reveals God's character. If we want to know God more fully, we look deeply into the eyes of his perfect law. Grace is essential in the sense, we can't live up to the Law of God, we can't save ourselves by following it perfectly. But, Grace isn't something which just gives us a freedom to do as we please throwing God's character/Law aside.

When my kids were little, I'd grab their arms & force them to slap themselves in the head (not hard, only playing) while saying, "Why're you hitting yourself!?" When we choose to walk outside the healthy standards God has put forth, it's like hitting yourself. If you find yourself too lenient in your walk of faith, living with a foot in two worlds, maybe your clogging the pipes of relationship with God. Maybe if you feel dry, not finding rest in Him, you're living in ways which wage war against your own soul? Bring balance to life by a study on the book of James. Which says things like, ¹² *Speak & act as those who are going to be judged by the law that gives freedom* (Jas 2:12). Or, ¹⁴ *What good is it, my brothers & sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save them?* (Jas 2:14)

One whose aim is anything less than obedience to the law of God in the Spirit & power of Jesus will never have a soul at rest in God & will never advance significantly in spiritual formation into Christ-likeness. Transformation of our soul requires we acknowledge its reality & importance, placing it under the yoke of Christ, learning in humility from Him, abandoning the outcomes of life to God - this brings true rest to the soul. The law is the structure of a life of grace in the kingdom of God. Let's walk well in righteousness & obedience to God on the solid foundation of Grace.

Because Jesus was right... *What good will it be for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul?* [Mt 16:26.] Augustine too was correct, God has made us for himself, and our hearts are restless until they find rest in Him.