

### O My Soul

Bless the LORD, O my soul,  
and all that is within me,  
bless his holy name. (Psalm 103:1)

My soul thirsts for God,  
for the living God. (Psalm 42:2)

Why are you cast down, O my soul,  
and why are you disquieted within me?  
Hope in God; for I shall again praise him,  
my help and my God. (Psalm 42:5,6a)

What profit would there be for one to gain the whole world and forfeit his *life*? Or what can one give in exchange for his *life*? (Matthew 16:26, NAB, emphasis mine)

In yesterday's adult forum, we discussed the word "soul": the Bible's use of it, the change in its meaning for Christianity influenced by certain Greek philosophies, the misunderstandings of it that contributed to a debased view of the human body and all things bodily, the unbiblical use of it to promote an other-worldly view of salvation, and the tendency of modern translators and ministers to prefer other words for *psyche* which is the New Testament word for "soul" or (as in the quote above) "life." I suggested we had stopped using the word for legitimate reasons but had lost something, too.

Defining the soul is difficult because it is the person rather than just some part of the person, but it is the person's deepest and truest self. My soul is the "who I am" that God loves and longs to redeem, the essential self. The soul is not immortal, and life for me is always and forever God's gift to me. The idea of there being some "immortal part" of me, some spark of the divine housed (or imprisoned) in mortal flesh, is unbiblical and works against our hope for resurrection. In the Greek philosophies which injected this unbiblical view into Christianity, eternal life is not given by resurrection but is oblivion effected by re-absorption into the "world soul" or great sea of being. In the Bible, it is love (not being) which never ends, and so the person (the "who I am") that is loved by God is given newness of life beyond death.

Look at the quote of Jesus from Matthew above. It is a truism that no matter how much wealth or power or prestige I may gain, I lose all when I die. We know that. But what Jesus is telling us is more than just that truism. Life can be lost, and death takes all of us from this life. But the soul to which I think Jesus is referring is a self that can be damaged or even lost while the person continues to live. That understanding of the soul gives Jesus' warning more impact. He's telling me I can lose my soul by inches even as I continue to gain my piece of "the whole world." That's different.

I have said I would keep these "discussion starters" to one page each, although I've cheated a little with this one by adjusting the margins. If there's interest, I can share more about the soul and the psalmists' dialogue with it. By the way, one person who got me thinking about it was J. K. Rowling.