

Mark 8:36

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world,
and lose his own soul?

Analysis

This rhetorical question exposes the fundamental calculus of human existence—the infinite value of the soul versus the finite value of material gain. The Greek *psychēn* (ψυχήν, "soul") refers to the immaterial, eternal essence of personhood that survives bodily death. Jesus contrasts gaining the *kosmon holon* (κόσμον ὅλον, "whole world")—comprehensive earthly success, wealth, power, pleasure—with losing one's soul. The verb *zēmiōthēnai* (ζημιωθῆναι, "lose/forfeit") indicates total, irreversible loss. This isn't temporary setback but eternal ruin. The implied answer is obvious: no worldly gain compensates for eternal damnation. Reformed theology emphasizes that humans naturally invert this calculus—pursuing temporal goods while neglecting eternal realities—until God's Spirit opens blind eyes to see Christ as the "pearl of great price" (Matthew 13:45-46) worth abandoning all else to possess.

Historical Context

Jesus spoke these words shortly after the first Passion prediction (Mark 8:31-33) and Peter's rebuke, which Jesus identified as satanic temptation. The context is discipleship's cost—Jesus called the crowd and disciples to deny themselves, take up their cross, and follow Him (Mark 8:34). In first-century Palestine, "gaining the world" might mean economic prosperity, political power under Rome, or religious status. The Zealots pursued political liberation; the Sadducees collaborated with Rome for wealth and power; the Pharisees sought religious prestige. Jesus rejected all these paths, instead embracing the cross. The early church faced this question

acutely—many Christians lost property, status, family, and life itself for confessing Christ. Yet they counted these losses as nothing compared to gaining Christ (Philippians 3:7-8).

Related Passages

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Study Questions

1. What worldly gains are you most tempted to pursue at the expense of your soul's eternal good?
2. How does understanding the soul's infinite value reorder your priorities regarding career, relationships, and possessions?

Interlinear Text

τί	γὰρ	ὠφελήσει	ἄνθρωπον	ἐὰν	κερδήσῃ	τὸν	κόσμον
what	For	shall it profit	a man	if	he shall gain	G3588	world
G5101	G1063	G5623	G444	G1437	G2770		G2889
ὅλον	καὶ	ζημιωθῇ	τὴν	ψυχὴν	αὐτοῦ		
the whole	and	lose	G3588	soul	G846		
G3650	G2532	G2210		G5590			

Additional Cross-References

Matthew 16:26 (Parallel theme): For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?

Psalms 49:17 (Parallel theme): For when he dieth he shall carry nothing away: his glory shall not descend after him.

Luke 9:25 (Parallel theme): For what is a man advantaged, if he gain the whole world, and lose himself, or be cast away?

Romans 6:21 (Parallel theme): What fruit had ye then in those things whereof ye are now ashamed? for the end of those things is death.

Job 2:4 (Parallel theme): And Satan answered the LORD, and said, Skin for skin, yea, all that a man hath will he give for his life.

Malachi 3:14 (Parallel theme): Ye have said, It is vain to serve God: and what profit is it that we have kept his ordinance, and that we have walked mournfully before the LORD of hosts?

Job 22:2 (Parallel theme): Can a man be profitable unto God, as he that is wise may be profitable unto himself?

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