

WHAT ABOUT THEIR SOUL? (ABE MCCOY FUNERAL)

I've known for several months now what I would be speaking to you about today; other than myself, only Pastor Jack and Pastor Rick have known until this moment. With Abe McCoy, there was simply no other choice for a sermon title or subject. No, the Lord didn't tell me that he was going to die; He seldom lets us in on information like that.

In fact, just the opposite; I really believed until the last moment that the prayers of Abe's family, friends and church family would overcome this dreaded disease called cancer. And we really did try – after all, we've seen miracles like that happen before, right here in this church. But this time, for reasons known only to Himself, God had another plan.

Abe was not a formal man in the least (he hated neckties!), but seldom have I seen anyone face the end of their days on earth with such dignity. Right up to the moment when he could no longer communicate with us, his concern was for his family. Not one time did I hear him utter a concern about money, possessions, or who got what after he was gone; but multiple times I heard him – right up to the last – speak about the subject he left for me to talk to you about today.

This is the sermon I don't want to preach, but it is also the message I am honored to speak. You see, Abe was many things ... a husband, a father, a grandfather, a friend, a hard worker, a church member. But for the last thirty years, ever since a life-changing experience with God at a humble little church building on McGloin Street, he was a Christian. And something more ... something not many others are ... a prayer warrior.

So many times I would hear him, in the far end of the church basement on Sunday night (usually all alone in the back stairwell), praying this one question over and over and over. I don't think I ever heard him call out a name – he wasn't trying to embarrass anyone – but it was easy to read his thoughts as he prayed, "What about their soul, God? What about their soul?" If I live to be 100, those words will never leave my memory.

He prayed that nagging question, that uncomfortable question, that eternal question, so many times that I would be desecrating his memory and failing my friend if I did not make it my subject today.

And so, I read to you today from the words of our Lord Jesus ...

Matthew 16:26 (KJV) 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?

What is this illusive something called the soul? The dictionary tells us that it is "a person's total self," "the spiritual part of all human beings," or "the essential part of something." That's why we have terms like soul mate, soul music, even soul food. Anything to do with the soul is supposed to be something that fulfills us, something that we crave, something that brings meaning and happiness to life.

But that definition is a bit vague, isn't it? It's like something is missing, something that you just can't put your finger on. Oh, we know that there should be some spiritual dimension to life, but all too often we come up short in that area. We do a lot of existing, a lot of daily grind, rat race kind of scurrying around, but not really much living. There's lots of activity but not much spirituality, lots of noise but not much joy, lots of schedule but not much SOUL.

Only the Bible gives us the missing piece to the puzzle, by teaching us that the SOUL is not only the "essential" part of us, it is also the "eternal" part of us. The soul is our very essence.

Genesis 2:7 (KJV) And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.

The Bible teaches that the soul contains our intellect, thoughts, reasoning, emotions, temperament, feelings, attitudes and moods, but most importantly, it houses our will, our choices and our decisions. The human WILL is the most awesome feature of the soul, for it alone has the power to determine your eternal destiny.

Ezekiel 18:4 (KJV) Behold, all souls are mine; as the soul of the father, so also the soul of the son is mine: the soul that sinneth, it shall die.

Because the Lord created us, all souls belong to Him ... Abe's soul, my soul, even your soul. Only God makes the rules that govern the souls of men. We can try to deny it or drown it out, but built into every one of us is a little nagging voice that will not be stilled saying, "What about your soul?" God's Word decrees that "the soul that sinneth, it shall die."

Caskets, hearses and funerals are hard enough to deal with, let alone this concept of our soul dying eternally. But eternity is too long to be wrong, so deal with it we must.

Since the initial sin of Adam and Eve, every human being has come into the world with a spiritual birth defect. It's like a hole in the heart, only worse – it's a hole in our soul. In a lifetime, we are likely to spend thousands of hours and thousands of dollars trying to fill the hole, plug the gap that exists between us and the relationship with our Creator that we are seeking. For most of us, we don't even realize that this is what we need ... so we keep looking, trying, experimenting ... and failing.

What we don't realize is that this life is not supposed to be an end in itself. Every one of us will exist eternally somewhere, and there are only two possible destinations ... in Heaven with God, or in Hell without Him. It's not politically or religiously correct to talk about Hell anymore, but Jesus talked about it more than anyone else in the Bible. And my friend Abe McCoy would want me to talk about it today, because he prayed this prayer for you ... "What about their soul, God? What about their soul?"

If God makes the rules on souls, then what is His rule to get us into Heaven with Him for all eternity? Just this: give God your earthly life, and He will give you His eternal life. That's what the Bible teaches ...

Deut. 4:29 (KJV) But if from thence thou shalt seek the Lord thy God, thou shalt find him, if thou seek him with all thy heart and with all thy soul.

Deut. 6:5 (KJV) And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might.

Did you notice the word "ALL" in those verses? God is not interested in being a small religious addition in your already busy life. He wants ALL of you; after all, He created you and your soul literally belongs to Him. That's why so much of what you do and so much of who you are lacks real meaning ... because you haven't given Him your ALL.

Heaven is certainly the main benefit of giving your earthly life to God, and what an uneven trade it is! One of the songs they used to sing in the little church where Abe got saved talked about it ...

The windows of heaven are open, The blessings are falling tonight
There's joy, joy, joy in my heart, Since Jesus made everything right,
I gave Him my old tattered garments; He gave me a robe of pure white,
I'm feasting on manna from heaven, And that's why I'm happy tonight.

But Heaven is not the only benefit of being saved. In fact, we've seen one of the other benefits in Abe's life over the last several months. He had a relationship with God that literally held him together even as his body succumbed to cancer. He would be the first to tell you that he wasn't well educated, but he had learned the most important principle of life – he had a soul connection to the Almighty.

Psalm 25:1 (KJV) Unto thee, O Lord, do I lift up my soul.

Psalm 34:2 (KJV) My soul shall make her boast in the Lord: the humble shall hear thereof, and be glad.

Psalm 42:1 (KJV) As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God.

Psalm 119:167 (KJV) My soul hath kept thy testimonies; and I love them exceedingly.

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

Nowhere does the Bible promise Christians a life of ease; in fact, many Scriptures seem to say the exact opposite ...

Psalm 34:19 Many are the afflictions of the righteous: but the LORD delivereth him out of them all.

Sometimes God's dealings with humanity defy our cozy explanations and tidy little formulas of faith! As a pastor, I can tell you that I think I could have helped God out on this one ... Abe McCoy is certainly not a man I would pick to leave his family and his church this early in life.

Satan has practiced his arguments for thousands of years and learned his lines well, and he never misses an opportunity to accuse God and His dealings. "There is your God for you! He lets you work like a slave, pray without ceasing, pour out your heart, and give till you drop, and then He rewards you with trials and suffering. Do you deny these facts?" "NO." Well, what do you have to say to this fine mess?" "Just this ..."

2 Timothy 1:12 For the which cause I also suffer these things:
nevertheless I am not ashamed: for I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day.

The Apostle Paul balanced out his suffering with two unassailable facts:

I know WHOM I have believed – even though I do not understand, I do trust God, and that is enough for me.

I am persuaded that he is able to KEEP – nothing I have ever done for God is lost, because He is the one keeping the records, and He promises that eternity will be the great equalizer.

I think this is what Abe McCoy had a grip on – that his hope was not in anything here on earth, even his own health. His hope was in God!

Hebrews 6:19 (KJV) Which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and stedfast, and which entereth into that within the veil;

Like Abe, we never know when our earthly life will end and our eternal existence will begin. So, with apologies for invading your comfort zone today, I must ask you "What about your soul?" After all, it was Abe's question about you. Jesus summed it all up in one succinct story ...

Luke 12:15-20 (KJV) And he said unto them, Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he posseseth. And he spake a parable unto them, saying, The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully: And he thought within himself, saying, What shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my fruits? And he said, This will I do: I will pull down my barns, and build greater; and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods. And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry. But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided?

The sheer number of visitors at the Funeral Home over the last couple of days indicates that Abe placed the emphasis in his life on the SOUL. He left behind something much more valuable than an inheritance; he left behind a godly heritage.

Illustration: Dairy Queen Cup

We can get someone else to use Abe's tools, mow his lawn, plow his driveway and drive his truck; although it's much harder, as family and friends we can try our best to be a support to his children, to love those grandkids and to take care of this lovely lady named Marion. But the most difficult shoes to fill will be the shoes that walked faithfully to the prayer room. Who will step up to bat and pray, "What about their soul?" And most importantly, who will answer Abe's prayer and meet him in Heaven?

How can you answer Abe's prayer today? Find a church that knows God like he knew God ... don't just attend it, get yourself to the altar and find an experience with God like this man had!

King David said it best when he suffered the death of his infant son ...

2 Samuel 12:23 (KJV) But now he is dead, wherefore should I fast? can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me.

Today, in honor of my friend, I must ask the question that he asked literally thousands of times ... "What about their soul, God? What about their soul?"