

"For what is a man profited?"

Dennis M. Elliott

JESUS, WHO WAS at all times intimately involved with the spiritual welfare of his chosen disciples, took the opportunity to place before them the vital issues of life and death, and he did it in a way that is unforgettable, for he said: "For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" (Mt. 16:26).

This statement followed closely upon the incident when Peter misguidedly found Christ's pronouncement upon his impending tribulation and crucifixion unacceptable, only to be rebuked with the words: "thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men" (v. 23). Jesus was telling Peter that his approaching agony and resurrection was in the plan and purpose of his heavenly Father. This was the only way in which men and women could come to God, through the saving name of the sinless Lamb of God who came "to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many" (20:28).

A little earlier Jesus had reproved his disciples because "there arose a reasoning among them, which of them should be greatest" (Lk. 9:46). It was a timely reproof, showing them that they were not to nurture personal ambitions of favoured positions in the Kingdom to come, a preview of which had just been witnessed by Peter, James and John, who were present at the transfiguration and had seen the "glory" of Jesus as he spoke with Moses and Elijah.

Jesus taught the disciples that they were to be his submissive followers, and not to harbour secret longings: "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me" (Mt. 16:24). The sobering and wise words of the psalmist reveal with clarity the limited duration of our tenure upon the earth: "The days of our years are threescore years and ten; and if by reason of strength they be fourscore years, yet is their strength labour and sorrow; for it is soon cut off" (90:10). Even if men and women reach the highest stations in this life, it is only for a comparatively limited period of time, and, unless they have devoted time to compliance with the requirements of God and the teachings of Jesus Christ, there can be no hope for them beyond the grave.

It is this very principle that Jesus was stressing when he said to his disciples: "what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?". To lose one's soul means to lose one's life in the finality of the grave. The Kingdom of God, to be established upon the earth at the return of Christ, is reserved for those faithful believers who have denied themselves in this life and chosen rather to do the will of God. They do so by leading humble and obedient lives, intent on being followers of Jesus.

He taught that we "cannot serve God and mammon" (Mt. 6:24), that is, we cannot have the best of two worlds, with "mammon", of course, representing this temporal order of things. There can be no doubt that people derive a certain happiness and fulfilment from rising to high positions in their respective spheres of endeavour, such as commerce, science, medicine, the arts, and sport; but, as already indicated, such prominence and honour will not qualify the persons concerned for an eternal existence in the coming Kingdom of God. In what must be the most wonderful prayer ever uttered, Jesus says: "And this is life eternal, that they might know Thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom Thou hast sent" (Jno. 17:3).

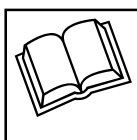
It is only upon the basis of knowing God and His Son, Jesus the Saviour, that men and women can be given this gift of grace that will never fade, for this will be the inheritance of those who willingly obey the commandments of God and put into practice the teachings of Christ. We can only "know" God and Jesus by diligently reading the inspired Scriptures of God. These things have been preserved for us that we might learn about God's greatness, power, majesty, glory, honour, holiness and mercy, and about our Redeemer sent into the world by God so that repentant sinners might have hope of salvation.

When Jesus asks, "For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?", he is in effect emphasising that people have a choice to make in this life. He urges them to weigh the consequences very carefully, because, if worldly influences have predominated in a person's life, then hope of redemption will have gone: "For whosoever will save his life shall

lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it" (Mt. 16:25). The words are clear and unambiguous, and illustrate the choice that lies before us as we exercise our free will.

In all ages it has only been a remnant that has sought to obey the laws of God and to heed the precepts of Jesus. It will be the same when Christ

returns, in the foreseeable future, to an unbelieving and troubled world, to rule the nations, as the prophets so beautifully portray: "Behold, a king shall reign in righteousness" (Isa. 32:1); "in mount Zion and in Jerusalem shall be deliverance, as the LORD hath said, and in the remnant whom the LORD shall call" (Joel 2:32).



Exposition

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The Exodus

A commentary on Exodus 1-15

D. Moses' Commission – Exodus 3-4 (Part 3)

Mark Vincent

The format of the commentary

The narrative has been broken down into several **major sections**, of a chapter or two each; some of these will be covered in one month, others will take longer. An **Introduction** is provided for each of these major sections, which sets out the major events and themes dealt with in those chapters.

Each major section is broken into **subsections** or **episodes** (these are typically between five and twenty verses each). For each the **AV text** is followed by a **Comment**, which draws out the major lessons and items of interest from the text. The AV text also contains **Footnotes**, in which additional 'one-off' points are made for those wanting to work through Exodus more slowly.

Introduction

WE ARE currently halfway through Moses' dialogue with God at the burning bush, which stretches from 3:4 to 4:17. God has outlined to Moses what He wishes him to do, and Moses has raised two matters of concern. The first is about his own worthiness or suitability for the task, the second about how he will identify God to the Israelites when he speaks to them.

They are perfectly legitimate queries, and God responds to each with consideration. But in this month's passage Moses raises three more matters which are more like excuses—reasons why he should not go when God has told him that he should. From a human perspective this is perfectly understandable; few readers can salve their conscience by imagining themselves to be any different. Who would not have approached such a mission with trepidation and anxiety? Nevertheless, given the assurances that God gives him, Moses overplays his reluctance. Upon hearing the fifth objection raised by His servant, God becomes angry—a fact that proves Moses to be in the wrong.

The incident provides a good illustration of the way in which human nature tends to make excuses when it does not want to do something. To see this more clearly it is worth paraphrasing Moses' objections in more contemporary language:

- "What is so special about me that I should go? I am not worthy for so great a task".
- "But the Israelites won't know the name of the God Who is to save them".
- "The Israelites won't listen to me. They will say God hasn't sent me".
- "I'm no good with words. My public speaking skills aren't good enough".