

Re-memorizing the Soul; Mornington, 8 Nov 2020

You may wonder why the first hymn was chosen, perhaps? "Eternal Father strong to save" contains the repeated idea of peril at sea. Deaths by drowning at sea were a common feature of life before 1900, particularly around the hazardous coasts of New Zealand. Ships with radiotelegraph machines became common and the original distress call for them before 1908 was CQD – CQ for all stations listening, and D for distress call. But in 1905 the German government maritime radio started using SOS and it was accepted at the first International Radio-Telegraph Convention in Nov 1906 and implemented by most nations in 1908.

Before you think this is descending into a history lesson lets go back – SOS? What do you think it means? Save our Souls, of course...actually no, although that is the powerful myth. It was chosen for ease of transmission 3 dots, 3 dashes and 3 dots. Or ...---... But Save our souls – I was taught this as a young NZ Scout. The soul has many uses in the English language -

All of us are aware of various statements involving the word "soul". The word was commonplace in frequent use in the youth of older members of this congregation –

She was a good soul; soul's ease; the soul mate of mine; doing soul-searching; there was not a soul at home; All Souls College, Oxford; his blue eyes bored into her soul; the soul of the father and the soul of the son; the joy of a son delivered from captivity; why upon my soul!; he was the soul of discretion; the word startled my soul; there was only one soul present....

The idea of the soul has had a long life, going back to at least 2000BC.....
The spirit or essence of anything...

My experience of the meaning of soul is I guess connected with my other role as a commemorations' historian. November 11 ---There was a great need in European and Australasian societies at the end of WWI to justify the death of so many soldiers. The notion of validating the deaths so that the enormous sacrifice would not be seen to be unnecessary led to statements about soldier death – "their death shall not be in vain", the nation was made on the shores of Gallipoli, "the soldiers' lives mattered", and to families and friends who remained ideas like "they died so we can live a better life". Much of this at the time was aligned with the death of Christ, and many, many services were taken in churches which paralleled the sacrifice of Christ "he died to save others" with the death of soldiers to save their mates and the nation. The essence of this is the noble and giving soul. This was, and still is, particularly the case in Australia.

Over and over again in Scripture, people are referred to as "souls" (Exodus 31:14; Proverbs 11:30). The human soul is that part of a person that is eternal—the part that lives on after the body dies and decays. Jesus said we were not to fear men, who can only kill the body, but not the soul (Matthew 10:28).

There is some confusion as to whether the human spirit and the human soul are the same thing, or different in some way. The Bible is not entirely clear on this point, but there is evidence of at least some subtle differences. The spirit is described more in terms of force (Numbers 14:24), while the soul seems to be a static entity. Again, there is very little in the Bible to tell us what differences exist between the two. However, there is indication that they are separate entities (1 Thessalonians 5:23; Hebrews 4:12).

Jesus Christ, because he was fully man as well as being fully God, also had a human soul. His soul experienced anguish at Gethsemane while He prayed before going to the cross. He said "My soul is very sorrowful, even to death" (Matthew 26:36-46). The Messianic psalm also speaks of the soul of the Messiah, saying that his soul will not be abandoned to Sheol, nor his body to corruption, or decay (Psalm 16:9-10; Acts 13:35-37).

The human soul can be strong or weak (2 Peter 2:14), saved or lost (James 1:21; Ezekiel 18:4). It was created by God (Jeremiah 38:16). The human soul needs the protection, purification, and atonement of God (Leviticus 17:11; 1 Peter 1:22). The human soul is eternal and imperishable, and every human soul will be somewhere for eternity. This is a sobering thought—every person you have ever met is a soul, living in a body, and that soul will last forever. Some will reject the love of God and as a result they will have to pay for their own sins with death (Romans 6:23), and since the soul is eternal, it will be an eternal death. Those who accept the free gift of forgiveness and Christ's atoning sacrifice will experience the opposite—eternal life and peace, in heaven (Psalm 23:2).

Essential to all of this is the notion of a soul joined with God. This was in the form of a compact or contract with the Israelites in the Old Testament, but in the New Testament it was in the form of a people bound in preparedness for the time of the arrival of Christ.

In his later years Wesley leaned more toward the separateness of the body and soul. He identified as not organic but part of the process of defining the question "What am I?" ie. personality or spirit. He hoped for body-soul unification after the second coming of Christ i.e. a point or place of wholeness under God.

He was also aware of the contractual nature of the God-human relationship, a sort of two way connection in the words "god does not continue to act upon the soul unless the soul re-acts upon God. He will not continue to breathe into our soul unless our soul breathes toward Him in return"

Wesley described what a Methodist looks like and what a Methodist does in "The Character of a Methodist." He concludes by saying,

And whosoever is what I preach, (let him be called what he will, for names change not the nature of things,) he is a Christian, not in name only, but in heart and in life. He is inwardly and outwardly conformed to the will of God, as revealed in the written word. He thinks, speaks, and lives, according to the method laid down in the revelation of Jesus Christ. His soul is renewed after the image of God, in righteousness and in all true holiness. And having the mind that was in Christ, he so walks as Christ also walked.

So, what do you think about your soul?

By the way - SOS on many cellphones is pressing the power key rapidly three times with a space, and repeating a number of times.