



## **THE HIGH COST OF A FREE GIFT**

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Can something be free and cost you something at the same time? The saying goes something like this: 'nothing in life is free'. It means even if something is advertised or offered at no cost, there are always strings attached and we will end up paying in one form or another. While many people jump at the prospect of getting something for nothing, there IS usually some catch. Many today think that any number of services and commodities should be free for all. But, of course, somebody must pay for those things. There is a cost whether we immediately recognize it or not. The greatest thing in all the world is indeed free. It is truly a gift from God. In Romans 6:23, the apostle Paul wrote: "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." Salvation is freely given by God's grace and never by man's merit. But the truth is that this free gift comes at a very high cost. How can this be? It's one of the great paradoxes of the gospel and we'll talk about that in our lesson today.

A paradox is at least two statements that seem to be incapable of being true at the same time. They appear contradictory and maybe even absurd but after a closer look, the statements do not collide but instead reveal important truths by the comparison of their parts. Many of Jesus' teachings are paradoxical. For example, in Mark 8:35, Jesus said: "For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel's will save it." That doesn't appear to make any sense, yet it is one of the most powerful truths in the bible. The phrase 'to save one's life' simply refers to living one's life according to his own desires and objectives. When one chooses to do so, they forfeit their eternal soul. When one 'loses his own life' by selling out and surrendering to the will of Jesus, then he is promised ETERNAL life. So, a seeming contradiction teaches an important and soul-saving truth.

Jesus also taught that those who are first will be last and those who are last will be first or that the least in His kingdom will be the greatest. One time he said to his disciple 'leave the dead to bury their own dead.' He was telling this disciple, who wanted to delay his service to Christ because he needed to go and bury a dead relative. Jesus used this odd statement to show him that spiritual matters are more pressing than physical things and that those who were already

spiritually dead and unrepentant could attend to those who have physically died while the disciple should put spiritual matters first in his life. So, paradoxes are a way of impressing powerful truths upon us and Jesus used them often in his teaching. Our lesson today consists of a paradox: the high cost of a free gift. Salvation is a gift from God. It is free, but at the same time it is costly. How do we reconcile those statements?

Much of the world has very a terribly concept of how salvation is received. They believe that salvation is earned by the good deeds that they do. If you try to be a good person and do nice things for others, then you'll go to heaven when you die. That's the idea that most people have regardless of their religion. Many world religions are based on such a concept. Even many professing Christians live under such a delusion. That's why you rarely go to a funeral but that the preacher depicts the deceased as now enjoying the bliss of heaven because of some redeeming quality in their life. Perhaps they were friendly, or they were kind to people. Maybe they loved their family. Perhaps they gave a lot to the community or devoted their time and money to charitable causes. Maybe they were even devoutly religious and lived a moral life, regularly attended church services, and stayed busy in religious activity. Those are wonderful things, but they don't earn salvation. Nothing can earn salvation.

Paul plainly tells is in Romans 6:23 that eternal life is 'the gift of God.' Paul also declared in that oft-quoted but usually misunderstood passage, Ephesians 2:8-9, "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast." The word grace means 'favor' and more specifically, it refers to unmerited favor. God showed favor toward us that we in no way deserved and had not and never can earn because the bible says in Colossians 1:21, "And you, who once were alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now He has reconciled". Romans 5:10 says: "For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life." How could we ever claim to have earned or secured our own salvation in view of such wonderful statements? Not only that, but the gift of eternal life is also offered to all who will receive it! Jesus said in Revelation 21:6 "...I will give of the fountain of the water of life freely to him who thirsts." One cannot earn it by their good works, nor can they purchase it with money. It's not for sale. Peter said we were not redeemed with silver or gold but with the precious blood of Christ. (1 Peter 1:18-19) And Simon the Sorcerer was condemned by Peter in Acts 8 for attempting to purchase the gift of God (which in that case was the apostolic power to impart miraculous gifts) with money. So, by essence of the definition of the word 'gift', salvation is God's gift that is graciously and freely offered to all who desire to have it. Salvation is free. But does that mean that it costs nothing? The answer is 'no'. In fact, there is nothing in all the world that has ever cost so much.

First, consider the high cost of PROVIDING the gift. While the word free often appeals to us, behind it is the reality that someone at some point had to pay something for that thing. That is certainly true of salvation. Many have the idea that salvation is merely an arbitrary decision on God's part. They believe that God, on whatever basis, simply decides to forgive us but that's not the case because of God's own nature and character.

Number one: God is holy. He is by His very nature, separate from and untainted by sin. God is life and He is light and can have no fellowship with unholiness. Therefore, while we are in our sins, we have no relationship with the God of life and light and therefore are spiritually dead and in darkness. God warned man before he ever sinned that the day he did so, he would die.

Number two: God is true and therefore cannot lie. If God says that death and condemnation are the consequence of sin, then He is bound not only by His own holiness but also His own word. If He simply overlooked the sin of man and did not mete out judgment for sin, He would be a liar.

Number three: God is no respecter of persons. If God arbitrarily forgave my sins without sin's punitive requirements being met, He would also have to forgive yours, and the next persons, and the next persons on the same basis. But God does love the sinner! He has a great interest and desire in seeing sinner's forgiven and the original relationship restored. To do that, the consequences of sin must be meted out and the demands of His justice and holiness met. So, somewhere in all of this, there is a debt that is owed and must be paid for God to be reconciled to us and for us to be given eternal life.

Now, the bible says that such salvation is the gift of God given to us but that gift cost the giver dearly. It cost God the Father. The golden text of the bible, as it has been called, John 3:16 says: "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life." Verse 17 says: "For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved." The simple message of the gospel is simply that Christ, the innocent One, took our place; died the death we deserved because of sin; suffered all of the pangs and agonies that were rightly ours to suffer, so that we, the GUILTY one could go free and by the power of His resurrection can live eternally. But that cost God something, you see. It cost God more than any of us could or would even be willing to pay. Romans 8:32 says: "He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all..." And in chapter 5:6-9 he says: "For when we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet perhaps for a good man someone would even dare to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him." It cost God everything to reach down and rescue our pitiful and sin-wretched souls. That's why it is unconscionable that men and women refuse His gift today when they refuse to obey the gospel.

It not only cost the Father, but this free gift also cost the Son. Paul so eloquently tells us in Philippians 2:5-8 that Christ 'emptied Himself' in coming to earth. It thus cost Christ the renunciation of heavenly glory and majesty which He had with the Father before condescending to human form and entering this sin-cursed world. It cost Him the humiliation of servitude, even to the point of dying an ignominious and excruciating death upon a cross.

It even cost the Spirit of God to provide His work in the redemption of mankind. He who can be grieved according to Paul in Ephesians 4:30, has through the ages wooed the stubborn and sin-hardened hearts of people through the preaching of the gospel. He suffers long with wicked men who ignore Him and resist Him. All of heaven, in cooperation, has paid a dear and heavy price to make the gift of salvation possible. Have you ever stopped to consider the grace and the love that God has shown to you and all that He has given for you to be saved? Salvation is not something that God provides on an emotional whim: it is a marvelous and incomprehensible plan that He paid dearly to provide for you.

So, there's the high cost of PROVIDING the gift. But there is also the high cost of ACCEPTING this gift. First, please notice that the gift must be accepted. Though salvation is a gift, that

doesn't mean that it is automatically given. It is offered to us by God, but the gift must be accepted and received. And though we can never earn something, and it still be a gift, the paradoxical truth is that accepting the gift does require some things of us. For example, Jesus that it costs the denial of self and the relinquishment of many things that we hold dear. Luke 9:23-24, "Then He said to them all, "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will save it." You see, receiving Christ and His gift of salvation doesn't mean that nothing is required of us.

The Savior made it clear that one cannot be His disciple if he or she refuses to deny their own will and submit to Christ's. We must be willing to give up the world and anything that impedes a relationship with Christ, or we simply cannot be His. The apostle Paul stated it this way in Philippians 3:7-8, "But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ. Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ." Salvation is not merely an insurance policy to prevent one from going to hell. It involves a relationship with Jesus that requires self-surrender. This is what makes the gospel such a hard thing for many to accept. They want to receive Jesus as their Savior but not as the Lord and Ruler of their lives. But the two are inseparable. Luke 2:11 says "For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord." Peter preached that God has made Jesus "both Lord and Christ." (Acts 2:36) He is not only the Messiah sent to deliver; He is the Lord sent to rule in your heart and Jesus does not rule in a heart and life that is not sold out and fully surrendered to Him. The lordship of Christ over our self, our life, and all that we possess must be acknowledged and submitted to if we are to know Him as our Savior. And not only does that mean that the gift of salvation costs us something, it costs us the things that we hold very dear. We cannot merely surrender those things of little value and retain the things that matter to us: Jesus requires that we surrender all or nothing.

Now, if accepting God's gift of salvation requires surrender of our own will then that would necessarily mean that it also requires obedience to the teaching of the gospel. You can't surrender to Christ and at the same time refuse to obey His commandments. "Just accept Christ and be saved" is the appeal of much of the religious world but such a mantra is simply not biblical. In no passage does the Bible ever say such. Rather, those who heard the apostles preach the gospel and desired to be saved were told to submit themselves by faith to Christ's teachings. That's one reason the Bible uses the phrase "obey the gospel." The gospel is the good news of salvation offered to all through Christ, but that message is to be met with obedience by the person who hears and believes it. Listen to the Hebrew writer in Hebrews 5:9 "though He was a Son, yet He learned obedience by the things which He suffered. And having been perfected, He became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him." Does that mean that our actions earn or merit salvation? No! God forbid! The gift of eternal life can NEVER be earned. We will forever be reliant upon God's sovereign grace. Even after a lifetime of diligent obedience and service to Christ, Jesus said in Luke 17:10 that we are still "unworthy or unprofitable servants." Yet, that doesn't change the fact that accepting the gospel and receiving salvation requires obedient surrender to Christ.

Jesus told His apostles that they were to preach "repentance and remission of sins in His name. (Luke 24:47) You see, there is not forgiveness of sins without repentance! Does that mean that by repenting our sins that we have merited salvation, and it is no longer by grace? Of course not! Jesus said in Mark 16:15: "Go into all the world and preach the gospel (good

news) to every creature.” What is the gospel? It is the good news that Christ died for our sins (He paid the debt we could never pay); He was buried; and rose again for our justification. (1 Corinthians 15:1-4) So, how do we receive that? How are we to respond to that? He goes in the next verse to say: “He who believes and is baptized will be saved. He who does not believe will be condemned.”

Friend, the gift of salvation comes with a high cost. Salvation cannot be bought, earned, or merited by any number of good deeds or good intentions. Religious works will never make one worthy of such a wonderful and amazing gift. But the paradox is that a price must be paid. It cost God, the Father more than His word can convey to our weak and finite minds. It cost Jesus, His Son, the agony and shame of the cross. It costs the Holy Spirit all His effort and work through the gospel to woo your soul to Christ. And it comes every person who truly receives it the complete submission of self to the rightful claims of Jesus on your life and unconditional surrender and obedience to His will as expressed in the New Testament. And so, I ask you today: Jesus has paid the high cost to offer you eternal life; have you paid the high cost of accepting it? Have you obeyed the gospel in faith, repenting of your sins, have you made the costly confession of His name, and have you been immersed into Christ for the remission of your sins? I pray that you will consider doing so today.

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