

Is Salvation Free?

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“Salvation is free! We don’t have to do anything to be saved! Jesus paid the price!” This is a commonly expressed belief. Many people think that nothing is required of them to be saved. This belief partly comes from Paul’s explanation of the grace of God. In Romans chapter five, he contrasts Adam and Jesus. Through Adam, sin and death entered the world; whereas, through Jesus, grace and life were offered. Paul wrote, “But the free gift is not like the trespass. For if many died through one man’s trespass, much more have the grace of God and the free gift by the grace of that one man Jesus Christ abounded for many” (Rom. 5:15).

Contextually, Paul has shown how the human family failed God. Both Gentiles and Jews rejected God and turned to idolatry. Man had proven incapable of flawlessly serving God (Rom. 1-2). Therefore, man could not earn his salvation. Salvation could only be offered through Jesus, the grace of God (Rom. 3:21-30).

Salvation from the wrath of God is extended to everyone in Jesus. Yet, unless and until we obey Jesus, we will not be saved. Salvation is received by our faith in God’s grace (Eph. 2:8-10). With this in mind, let us examine the cost of salvation.

Salvation Came at a High Price

The Bible affirms the high price of human salvation. Jesus paid this price. He alluded to this when He told the apostles, “For even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45). Our salvation would cost Jesus everything.

The apostle Peter later explained, “...you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot” (1 Pet. 1:18-19).

Jesus was qualified to serve as the sacrifice for our sins. Therefore, as a sacrifice for our sin, He stayed and satisfied the wrath of God poured out as punishment for sin. The technical term for this is “propitiation.” No one else could serve in this capacity. Paul teaches that God put forward Jesus as a propitiation by His blood (Rom. 3:25). But that’s not all.

Paul says God put forward Jesus as a propitiation by His blood *to be received by faith* (Rom. 3:25). For God’s wrath to be stayed and satisfied for our sins, we must believe. And, believing is costly.

Excited Followers

Sometimes people respond to Jesus with excitement. After delivering what would become known as the Sermon on the Mount, two men reacted to Jesus with acclamations of devotion. However, neither of the men had considered the cost of following Jesus.

And a scribe came up and said to him, "Teacher, I will follow you wherever you go." And Jesus said to him, "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head." Another of the disciples said to him, "Lord, let me first go and bury my father." And Jesus said to him, "Follow me, and leave the dead to bury their own dead." (Matt. 8:19-22).

What was Jesus trying to impress to these prospective disciples? Jesus was conveying the commitment of the kingdom. Commitment requires priority and priority requires sacrifice. The excitement of these men was admirable. Likewise, today we should be joyous regarding how Jesus has paid for our salvation. However, we must give thought to what His sacrifice will cost us to follow Him.

The Cost of Our Salvation

1. Time. Jesus once told the apostles, "I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work" (John 9:4). Jesus had a short time to fulfill His Father's mission. Likewise, we have a short time to fulfill ours.

Salvation involves developing ourselves after the example of Jesus. We must learn to properly use our emotions and direct our desires. We must learn to use our God-given abilities to serve others. All of this requires time. As Peter wrote, we must cease from sin and use the time of our life to do the will of God (1 Pet. 4:1-2).

2. Relationships. Some costs of our salvation may be deeply personal. We may have to sacrifice relationships for the sake of our salvation. The message of the Gospel may sever relationships. Jesus said, "Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. And a person's enemies will be those of his own household. Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me" (Matt. 10:34-37).

Jesus knew that His message would cause division not just in the world generally, but within families. Perhaps a son would believe, but the father would reject Jesus. This is a lamentable but realistic possibility. Are we willing to pay this cost?

3. Self-indulgence. Those who promote the misguided notion that salvation costs nothing are often looking for justification for self-indulgence. Many want to be saved from the wrath of God, but do not want to give up what God's wrath is coming to destroy: sin.

We must learn self-control in the pursuit of holiness. Paul wrote, "For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from sexual immorality... For God has not called us for impurity, but in holiness" (1 Thess. 4:3, 7).

Conclusion

David sinned against God. In response, a plague spread throughout Israel. To stay and satisfy the wrath of God, David was to offer sacrifices. David propositioned to buy a man's property to use as a place to offer sacrifices. When the man learned why David wanted to buy his land, the man offered to give the land to David for free. In response to the man's offer, David said, "No, but I will buy it from you for a price. I will not offer burnt offerings to the LORD my God that cost me nothing" (2 Sam. 24:24).

Salvation is free due to the self-giving love of God in Christ, but it is not cheap. Discipleship which costs us nothing is not discipleship. We cannot profess the name of the Lamb of God if we are unwilling to pay the cost of our salvation. Let us share in the resolute attitude of David and pay what we owe Jesus.