

Lesson 1

Counting the Cost of Living in a Lost World

What will I invest in my spiritual life in order to get home to heaven?

Introduction

The value we place on something influences our willingness to give up things for it. Spiritual priorities do not come without sacrifice, Matthew 6.24a. What will I invest in my spiritual life in order to get home to heaven?

How you choose to answer these questions depends on your heart. The Biblical heart is the storehouse of human thought, will, and emotion. Your heart is a storehouse. What is contained there will be expressed through your speech and actions, Matthew 12.35. Where is your treasure? For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also, Matthew 6.21.

The Problem

Today, our culture is being transformed into one of dependence and entitlement. When asked about employment, a typical on-the-street interview might reveal a person who is more concerned about a job's benefits than the work involved. Today's job force demands an excellent salary, a full benefit package, and generous time off. People rarely discuss personal productivity, useful involvement, or tasks resulting in personal fulfillment.

Think about society's expectations. We want guaranteed medical help of every kind at modest prices. We want a minimum annual income for every adult even if the person refuses to work. We want everyone to enjoy a good level of life with no one having to pay for it. A growing number of individuals believe our government can pay for anything. Whether we want to admit it or not, on some level this perspective affects all of us and our thinking.

What about our religious expectations? How many expect a no-cost salvation? Do we have the viewpoint that God's blessings should be available to everyone, with very little effort expended? Some want to dwell exclusively on the fact that salvation is the free gift of God.

Scripture teaches there is a price associated with acquiring eternal life. But, caution is necessary. While we must emphasize the responsibility of godly obedience, we must not create a false impression. Too many are convinced they can earn salvation. This leads to problems of self righteousness where a person feels saved by virtue of his or her own goodness. Nothing is more offensive to God than the human arrogance of self righteousness. Others find themselves plagued by constant guilt. They try to do everything associated with perfect godliness and find it is an impossibility. The harder a person tries to earn salvation, the more guilt. Too many Christians are imprisoned victims of hopelessness. Because perfect obedience eludes them, they are terrified of God. Every failure results in despair. For them, the Christian life becomes an existence of intense frustration rather than an existence of joy and hope.

But, when we properly emphasize that we can never earn our salvation, Ephesians 2.4-10, some are so relieved that they go to an opposite and equally wrong extreme. There are those who claim to trust in the Lord and refuse all spiritual responsibility, which results in serious consequences. Christian lives turn into a farce, obedience is forgotten, and individuals become spiritually irresponsible and negligent.

We desperately need a sound understanding of salvation. We need to understand we are saved by grace. Salvation cannot be earned. It is grace that enables us to live a life of joy, hope, and happiness that is free from despair and guilt. Yet, salvation is tied up in the faith that expresses itself in appreciative, grateful obedience. Obedience trusts God's grace. Appreciation of salvation expresses itself in total commitment. Obedience is an expression of gratitude, not an attempt to earn. Thus, salvation involves a combination of God's grace and human obedience.

We also face other problems. Today, many Christians battle materialism and sensuality. A materialist is one whose number one priority revolves around the things of this world. He or she gives the highest importance to things and lives for things. A sensualist is a person whose life's highest priority is satisfying physical wants and desires. The appetites of life determine the course, conduct, and interests in life. Too many Christians live more for material and sensual purposes than for spiritual purposes. It is frightening to see how Christians try to combine Christianity with the things of this world.

We also face a dilemma in that many believe they can get by with the minimums of service and still be pleasing to God. We cannot buy God's grace. But, it takes more than the minimums to continue in that grace. Do you honestly believe you can receive forgiveness of sin, daily spiritual strength, special strength in crisis, God's presence in death, and ultimately eternal life for assembling inside a building one to four times a week? For prayer when it is convenient? For getting up Bible class lessons when it is convenient?

A Look at 1 Peter 1

The first twelve verses of this chapter focus on the great blessings of salvation, 1.3-9, and the wonderful privileges associated with our relationship with God, 1.10-12. First, let's focus on 1.3-5.

In 1.3, Peter stresses our hope. Thinking back, Hope was at the foundation of your response to Christ. Hope is the reason you live in Christ. This is a living hope, not a mere wish. It is not subject to death, because it is based on a resurrection, 1 Corinthians 15.20, 22.

In 1.4, we learn of our inheritance. We are spiritual heirs. We anticipate our promised land, our own country. We hope for a place that will be incorruptible. It is imperishable and undefiled. It serves only God's purposes. Time has no impact on our inheritance.

In 1.5 we also discover another important concept. As long as we continue our relationship with Christ, God's power guards us. Christians live in anticipation of the ultimate salvation, life with God.

1.10-12 stresses the beauty of these blessings. Presently, Christians enjoy the finest spiritual privileges God has yet revealed. The prophets of old knew God was yet to reveal wonderful privileges. They searched for a time when these things would be revealed, hoping it would be in their lifetime. Yet, they found it was not for them during their lives, but for those who would accept the Messiah. When we look at men like Elijah, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Daniel, we think of towers of strength. Yet, those men would have gladly traded places with us just to have the opportunity to have what we take for granted. As great as they were, they never had what we have in Christ.

Our Privileges Come With a Price

The second part of 1 Peter 1 can be summarized in three main points.

Gird up your mind, 1.13. New Testament Christians need to develop a mind to work. Lazy minds produce thoughtless acts that work against salvation. Salvation involves both our mind and body. So, we must lead sober lives. Salvation deserves much more than a passing thought. Dealing with sin, death, and destruction after judgment requires us to make sensible, wise decisions. We must also set our hope on the grace in Christ. Our full hope must be placed in Christ, not in ourselves.

Live righteously with holy conduct, 1.14-16. We are children of obedience. Christians accept the responsibility to be holy in all behavior. Since God is holy, we must set holiness as our standard. As God is totally set apart from sin, we must consciously seek to set ourselves apart from sin.

Realize the seriousness of our commitment, 1.17. If we call God our Father, we must live for Him in awe and respect. Never forget the price He paid to redeem us - making our relationship with Him possible. God used something more precious than money to purchase our freedom. He used the blood of His sinless Son. The point of 1.18-19 is that if we accept His redemption, we must live in awareness of what it cost Him.

Being a Christian is a precious privilege and a serious responsibility.

Conclusion

How serious are you about being saved? Is it the most important goal in your life? Are you a child of obedience? Is your behavior holy? Or, do you feel you can live as you please, unconcerned about God? Do you feel you can occasionally give God a polite smile and thank you and reach heaven with no problem? Do you think you can have all of God's benefits without any personal cost?

For Thought and Reflection

1. How do you think society is playing a role in shaping our viewpoint on Christian service?
2. How has materialism and sensuality affected your life?
3. How can you resist the urge to give minimal service?
4. By giving us salvation, what great blessings has God given us? (1.3-5) What does this mean to you?
5. How did the prophets view these blessings? (1.10-12)
6. In what three ways do we demonstrate our appreciation for these blessings? (1.14-18)
7. What are some things that can distract us from serving with the mindset Christianity requires?
8. What does day-to-day holiness look like?
9. How can we live with a greater awareness of what our salvation cost Jesus?