

The Value of the Gift

For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.
(Romans 6:23)

JESUS died and rose again so that all who believe in Him might “die to sin” and be raised from death, to live joyfully forever with God the Father and Jesus. The gift He gave us, having paid for it with His life’s blood, was eternal life in the Kingdom of Heaven.

Why? Why would God send His Son to die, to save us? Why would Jesus willingly suffer and die for us?

Jesus told us why: *“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.”* (John 3:16-17)

“God so loved ... you. He loves you so much that He paid the costly penalty so you could have eternal life with Jesus and the Father in Heaven.

How valuable is this gift of salvation?

Jesus told two parables together which address this question:

“The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field.



“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls. When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it.” (Matthew 13:44-46)

Do you see any difference in these two stories? Let’s examine them one at a time.

In the first parable, Heaven is compared to a treasure. A very valuable treasure—so valuable, in fact, that the man who found it was happy to sell everything he had in order to possess it. Did he have a lot of possessions, or only a few? It does not matter—everything you have is a lot, even if you don’t have as much as others do.



Jesus was saying that Heaven—eternal life with God—is so precious, so valuable, that it is worth giving up everything else

in order to have it. And then He proved how precious and valuable this gift is by giving up everything He had—His very life—so that we might have it.

Let’s look at the second parable. You might think it says nearly the same thing—a treasure, a fine pearl, sort of the same, right? Some people see it that way. But notice this—in the first story, the Kingdom of Heaven is like the treasure. But in the second story, the Kingdom of Heaven is not like the pearl. It is like the merchant, the one who is looking for the very valuable pearl.



What does this mean? It simply means that you are the pearl of great value. *“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”* The King of Heaven—God—gave the most valuable thing He had—His only begotten Son, Jesus—in order to pay the price that was demanded for your life.

That price was death, and it was demanded by God’s own law—*For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

These two stories together tell us that heaven is worth everything to us. There is nothing you or I have, or ever could have, that can begin to be as valuable as Heaven. And Heaven—that is, God—loves you and me so much, and wants you and me to live forever in Heaven with Him so very much, that He was willing to sacrifice His only Son to a horrible, undeserved death so that we could have that gift.

Now nothing has value just by itself. It only has value if it is valuable to someone. An uncut diamond is no more valuable than any other pebble until someone wants it. Crude oil from the ground meant nothing for centuries, until there was a demand for it and it became valuable.

Is eternal life with God valuable to you? I hope that it is. The two values should balance each other. Your life is very, very, very valuable to God. The sacrifice of His Son proves it. You should value God’s gift of eternal life in the same way, and be willing to do whatever it takes to get it.

Does this mean you have to do something to earn Heaven? Do you have to match Jesus’s sacrifice with one of your own?

The answer is, No. God doesn't ask you to do anything to earn His gift. All He asks is that you realize its value, and desire to receive it. Heaven is yours if you really want it.

A few decades ago a Roman Catholic monk named Brennan Manning, who was a well-known Christian speaker, said something like this: "I am convinced that when I get to Heaven Jesus will only ask me one question. 'Did you really believe that I loved you?'"

Do you really believe that God loves you? Do you understand what He was willing to sacrifice in order to save you; in order to satisfy His law, to pay the penalty for your sins, and make it possible for you to enjoy Heaven with Him forever?

It's really all about love. God loves each one of us with a love that is so complete, so unconditional, that we cannot truly comprehend it. Check out what the Apostle Paul said about God's love: "... *I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.*" (Romans 8:38-39)



Nothing can separate you from God's love. Nothing you do, no matter how sinful, can make Him love you any less. And you can't do anything to make Him love you more than He already does, because He already loves you totally.

How does one respond to such love? God tells us how He wants us to respond. He wants us to love Him back. This is not a suggestion or a request; it's a command. "*Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.*" This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: "*Love your neighbor as yourself.*" (Matthew 22:37-39)

That's easy enough to say, but how do you go about loving God? I don't claim to have all the answers, but I think I know some of them.

First of all, forget about feelings. Love has to be a fact before it can become a feeling. First you decide to love someone, then you follow through with your actions, and the feelings manifest themselves as a result of the relationship that you have established.

So how do you build this relationship? Three things are necessary, I believe.

First, you have to believe that God loves you. His word says so, and the witness of Christians from the time of Jesus until now confirms that it is true, but until you actually believe it, it won't be real for you. So believe it. God loves you.

Secondly, you need to do what Jesus did.

Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death— even death on a cross. (Philippians 2:5-8)

This is the supreme—and extreme—example of submission to God's will. Jesus was (and is) God, even though we don't understand exactly what that means. But He temporarily laid aside the powers of his godhood and became a human being. Then He showed us how human beings should respond to God's love—He "emptied himself" and became totally obedient to the Father's will.

Can you do that? Can you "empty yourself" to the point where you no longer care about what you want, but only about what God wants? Well, no, you can't do it, unless you let God help you. If you get on your knees before God and say "Lord, I want to be like Jesus; I want to be just as submissive to your will as He was," you'll find eventually that you can do it.

But don't expect it to happen quickly or all at once. God will give you time enough to convince Him, and convince yourself, that you really mean it.

The third thing, which really in a way is the first thing, is simply to spend time with God. Set aside a time every day to do some Bible reading. Walk with Jesus through each day, knowing that He is close by, showing Him what you are doing, asking His opinion of things. It may feel like pretending, but do it anyway. And set aside another portion of time to spend in



prayer, asking the Holy Spirit to be with you and help you pray; asking for anything you think the Lord wants you to ask for, but also listening, keeping your lips and your mind quiet so you can hear from God. *Come near to God and He will come near to you. (James 4:8a)*

Here's what I want you to remember from this lesson:

- 1) Eternal life with God is so valuable that it is worth giving up literally everything to obtain it. But God wants you to have it. He paid a terrible price in order to be able to offer it to you as a free gift.
- 2) God loves you. You are precious to Him. He longs for a relationship with you that will last literally forever. You can enter into this relationship by wanting it, and loving Him in return.

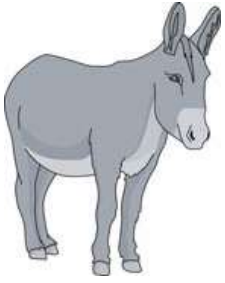
Don't undervalue God's gift. It's important to you. Desire it. Receive it. Enjoy it.

God bless you, my brothers and sisters in our Lord Jesus Christ, and give you His peace —

Brother Roland

The Farmer and the Donkey

One day a farmer's donkey fell down into a well. The animal cried piteously for hours as the farmer tried to figure out what to do. Finally, he decided the animal was old, and the well needed to be covered up anyway-it just wasn't worth it to retrieve the donkey.



He invited all of his neighbors to come over and help him. They all grabbed a shovel and began to shovel dirt into the well. At first, the donkey realized what was happening and cried horribly. Then, to everyone's amazement, he quieted down.

A few shovel loads later, the farmer finally looked down the well. He was astonished at what he saw. With each shovel of dirt that hit his back, the donkey was doing something amazing. He would shake it off and take a step up.

As the farmer's neighbors continued to shovel dirt on top of the animal, he would shake it off and take a step up. Pretty soon, everyone was amazed as the donkey stepped up over the edge of the well and happily trotted off!

Life is going to shovel dirt on you, all kinds of dirt. The trick to getting out of the well is to shake it off and take a step up. Each of our troubles is a stepping stone. We can get out of the deepest wells just by not stopping, never giving up! Shake it off, and take a step up.

Carrots, Eggs, and a Cup of Coffee

A young woman went to her mother and told her about her life and how things were so hard for her. She did not know how she was going to make it and wanted to give up. She was tired of fighting and struggling. It seemed as one problem was solved, a new one arose.

Her mother took her to the kitchen. She filled three pots with water and placed each on a high fire. Soon the pots came to boil. In the first she placed carrots, in the second she placed eggs, and in the last she placed ground coffee beans. She let them sit and boil; without saying a word.

In about twenty minutes she turned off the burners. She fished the carrots out and placed them in a bowl. She pulled the eggs out and placed them in a bowl. Then she ladled the coffee out and placed it in a bowl. Turning to her daughter, she asked, "Tell me what you see."

"Carrots, eggs, and coffee," she replied.

Her mother brought her closer and asked her to feel the carrots. She did and noted that they were soft.



The mother then asked the daughter to take an egg and break it. After pulling off the shell, she observed the hard-boiled egg.

Finally, the mother asked the daughter to sip the coffee. The daughter smiled, as she tasted its rich aroma the daughter then asked, "What does it mean, Mother?"

Her mother explained that each of these objects had faced the same adversity: boiling water. Each reacted differently. The carrot went in strong, hard, and unrelenting. However, after being subjected to the boiling water, it softened and became weak. The egg had been fragile. Its thin outer shell had protected its liquid interior, but after sitting through the boiling water, its insides became hardened. The ground coffee beans were unique, however. After they were in the boiling water, they had changed the water.

"Which are you?" she asked her daughter. "When adversity knocks on your door, how do you respond? Are you a carrot, an egg, or a coffee bean?"

Think of this: Which am I? Am I the carrot that seems strong, but with pain and adversity do I wilt and become soft and lose my strength?

Am I the egg that starts with a malleable heart, but changes with the heat? Did I have a fluid spirit, but after a death, a breakup, a financial hardship, or some other trial, have I become hardened and stiff? Does my shell look the same, but on the inside am I bitter and tough with a stiff spirit and hardened heart?

Or am I like the coffee bean? The bean actually changes the hot water, the very circumstance that brings the pain. When the water gets hot, it releases the fragrance and flavor. If you are like the bean, when things are at their worst, you get better and change the situation around you. When the hour is the darkest and trials are their greatest, do you elevate yourself to another level?

How do you handle adversity? Are you a carrot, an egg, or a coffee bean?

May you have enough happiness to make you sweet, enough trials to make you strong, enough sorrow to keep you human and enough hope to make you happy.

The happiest of people don't necessarily have the best of everything; they just make the most of everything that comes their way. The brightest future will always be based on a forgotten past; you can't go forward in life until you let go of your past failures and heartaches.

When you were born, you were crying and everyone around you was smiling. Live your life so at the end, you're the one who is smiling and everyone around you is crying.

May we all be COFFEE!



Do you have a question about the Bible or the Christian life? Send me your question. I'll try to answer it or find an answer for you, and maybe share it with others via the "Good News Guide." Write to:

Brother Roland, P. O. Box 14, Fayetteville, PA 17222

Heaven Is a Wonderful Place

The Bible tells us that Heaven is wonderful. The Book of Revelation tells us about things we will see there, and I have put many of them into this puzzle. But Heaven is really just being with the LORD, forever. So enjoy Heaven with Him, starting now.

Puzzle:

K J B M Z N N P A J X N J E S U S C H R I S T X F R Q J R X X L
O X L E L T O A E O J F A S Y Q I U M V Y A R P P F A N I U E C
G W H L K S T T T A W B L E E K R V R J K S E W K V M C U T I B
W S K A R X E H R S C E J M L E Q G N I V I G S K N A H T D O Z
I J I S X T M V B O G E A D V C Q J L H Z F Y N V D F O C K D V
D M H U X A P T H N U H N I E B N P N O U R F O I Z R U S F N P
O U C R S T L W A Y S B R S T G L U D A O Q J I Y D Y M X W I J
G M G E R S E Q K O B L L Q K G R O G L G O D T H E F A T H E R
I V G J X N E U N O A L S E D J A K G N A Q E A C R H V S C Z G
X C M W F N F N O T X D G H S G E O C W I H F D J M U R S B S G
S E M E R G V K S Z N R H R D K P M H A H H T N O S O R R O W Y
F S F N O N O Y A U E O B Y L L F L B U G L T U L W P H X I T L
P A A I Z F R X Q A O L C I C Y O P S I Z Z I O Z Q E O W I L J
N I F L L C B L T C E E U A V K S G Z Z R D M F N H N L C V E W
O B H I G F C J T S J H T B I E E Q F F O O I D E X M Y R Q P I
S T F S F F O J S H V T C H A V T H B O O K F E Z E L O A Z A L
A E E R W Y O E K B R F P P G N A D R R S C H L Q O T N M U L I
D J A U G O D A E X D O O R S I G W G E X T B E H N P E G D P M
N Q J K Q N L C E R U S N A A Z R E Z P P S E W W T M O R T H H
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S L W S T Y A Q E L I N Z S O I S Q O U D P A J R D E I A G A Y
S C S A H R H B E F T A V R R F A E L S I G W J R T N S Q G N L
L D E V O G G S U S F V S B S W G A N G N Z H A F X S R Q P D L
J W T Z S H I N I N G R O B E S M O X N Y W W X Z O O A F G O E
R I L G V Y M V G T C E P A P B P Y D I F E O A K O L E S S M Q
S R Y T R A M Y L O H S E Z O A G F Q D R H C R U V P L C E E A
T A E J B C N X T S B W C F I S E V S D U Y R F C D G I A F G P
C N L A K A M Z X M I N G N E T T K O E F I L F O R E T A W A M
Q L J K E J U O R L G O K A G B R A X W Z X Z K J T Q W G T A Z
Q J P A Z T L J M T D R X M V U B E F Q P X N D A N L C L A Q V

Words:

ALPHA AND OMEGA
ANGELS
APOSTLES
BANQUET
BLESSEDNESS
BOOK OF LIFE
BRIDEGROOM
CROWNS OF RIGHTEOUSNESS
CRYSTAL RIVER
FELLOWSHIP
GATES OF PEARL
GLORY
GOD THE FATHER
GREAT JOY

HOLY CITY
HOLY MARTYRS
HOLY ONE OF ISRAEL
JESUS CHRIST
JEWELLED FOUNDATIONS
LAMB OF GOD
LIFE ETERNAL
NEW JERUSALEM
NO PAIN
NO SADNESS
NO SHAME
NO SORROW
NO TEMPLE
NO TROUBLES
NOTHING UNCLEAR

PEACE
PRAISE
REWARDS
SAINTS
SEA OF GLASS
SERVANTS OF THE LORD
SHINING ROBES
STREETS OF GOLD
THANKSGIVING
THRONE OF GOD
TREE OF LIFE
WALL OF JASPER
WATER OF LIFE
WEDDING SUPPER
WORSHIP