



## **“WHAT DOES YOUR RELIGION COST?”**

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Our study today will come from the Old Testament book of 2<sup>nd</sup> Samuel. I want to read from the 24<sup>th</sup> chapter, verses 18-25. The Bible tells us that “...Gad came that day to David, and said unto him, Go up, rear an altar unto the Lord in the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite. And David, according to the saying of Gad, went up as the Lord commanded. And Araunah looked, and saw the king and his servants coming on toward him: and Araunah went out, and bowed himself before the king on his face upon the ground. And Araunah said, Wherefore is my lord the king come to his servant? And David said, To buy the threshing floor of thee, to build an altar unto the Lord, that the plague may be stayed from the people. And Araunah said unto David, Let my lord the king take and offer up what seemeth good unto him: behold, here be oxen for burnt sacrifice, and threshing instruments and other instruments of the oxen for wood. All these things did Araunah, as a king, give unto the king. And Araunah said unto the king, The Lord thy God accept thee. And the king said unto Araunah, Nay; but I will surely buy it of thee at a price: neither will I offer burnt offerings unto the Lord my God of that which doth cost me nothing. So David bought the threshing floor and the oxen for fifty shekels of silver. And David built there an altar unto the Lord, and offered burnt offerings and peace offerings. So the Lord was entreated for the land, and the plague was stayed from Israel.”

These verses tell us about the time David had upset the Lord by numbering the people of Israel. There were three punishments proposed by God and David could choose which one the Lord would mete out. He could suffer through three years of famine; endure three months of invasion by David’s enemies or receive three days of pestilence. David decided to fall into the hands of God for mercy and so, the Lord decided to send to three days of pestilence. In order to bring an end to this terrible curse, David had to go and build an altar where oxen could be sacrificed as burnt offerings to God. When the Jebusite king learned about what David was going to do, he not only offered him the ground upon which to build his altar, but also the oxen for the sacrifices and other items that might be needed in the service. Now, it

may sound strange but David refused the generous offer of the king. David was determined to pay full price for the things needed to worship God.

Most of not only appreciate a bargain, we jump at one when it is offered. But not David! When he was offered a cheap way to serve God, he refused it. He simply would not practice a religion that came to him easily. Imagine what the church would be if more people were of the mind of David. Well, I want to ask you a personal and challenging question in our study today; what does your religion cost?

The story is told about a rich man who was approached by several preachers. Each one of them talked about all of the things their church offered and tried to get the man to attend there. Every time, though, the man would ask "what's it going to cost me to attend your church?" Well, the preachers assumed the man thought they were after his money and so they all emphatically said, "it won't cost you anything." One day a faithful gospel preacher approached him and invited him to services and like all of the other times he asked "what will it cost me?" The preacher surprisingly replied, "why, it will cost you everything you have." The man looked relieved and said, "That's exactly the church I've been looking for because I don't want a cheap religion."

Well, that man had an unusual take on things. Didn't he? Most people today are looking for a bargain basement religion. I mean they want a religion that offers them all of the inducements and benefits commonly associated with Christianity but they don't want it to be too much trouble. People today want a cheap religion. They want a religion that doesn't interfere too much with their lives. They don't mind taking an hour or two out for the Lord here and there as long as it's convenient, but they don't want something that will demand a whole lot of time, effort or money. The Lord never offered that kind of religion to anybody. Jesus didn't go about the country looking for people to make a deal with. He didn't say, "now if you'll just give me a little bit of consideration here and there and remember Me from time to time, then that's all I'll ask for." No! Rather, the Lord taught that it's all or nothing.

A rich young man came to Jesus one time and asked Him what he had to do to inherit eternal life. Now, here was a young man that had all of life's ducks in a row. He had done pretty well for himself and now he thought he needed to take care of the spiritual side of things. That's the way people are you now. They want to compartmentalize their lives. Religion is an important part of one's life, but that's really all it is, is one part of it. And so this man asked Jesus what he had to do to be saved thinking the Lord would give him some simple commandment or formula for salvation. He boasted that he had done a good job of keeping the Ten Commandments all of his life. Perhaps he was expecting the Lord to commend him for his effort. But brother, was he surprised at what Jesus said just like many today would be surprised were they to ask the Lord for His assessment of the depth and value of their religion. Jesus told him he lacked one thing and it was one very big thing that would keep him out of heaven. He said you have to go and sell everything you have and give it to the poor and then come and follow Jesus. Well, that just took the wind right out of his sails. The bible says in Luke 18:23 that he was very sad because he was very rich! The record says that "when Jesus saw that he was very sorrowful, he said, How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God! For it is easier for a camel to go through a needle's eye, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God."

Now, the Lord wasn't condemning this man for having wealth and neither does the Lord require that a person be destitute in order to be a Christian. However, Jesus could see inside this man's heart and knew how greedy and materialistic he was and I think He saw a man who was looking for a cheap religion. Jesus wanted Him to know just like He wants all of us to know that a religion that doesn't cost

us dearly is not the real deal. Remember that Jesus said that every disciple of His must first deny himself and then take up his cross daily and follow Him...according to Luke 9:23.

According to our text, David refused to offer to the Lord a sacrifice that didn't cost him something. And after all, what good is a gift that doesn't require something of the giver? When the widow came to the temple and threw in her two mites, Jesus saw it and said that she gave more than anyone else including those who had given some pretty hefty sums of money. Why is that? Well, simply because she gave all she had. Her offering was a true sacrifice. Now, I want to ask you today if your religion requires a real sacrifice of you.

You know, anything in life that is worth much, usually comes at great cost or effort. If you're going to get a good education that won't come easily. It costs tens of thousands of dollars to go through a good university and merely acquire a four year degree. Continue on to earn a masters or a doctorate and the cost can be enormous not to speak of the fact that it will require hundreds and even thousands of hours, days upon days, and even years of intense study, discipline and effort to success in school. If a person goes to college and goofs off and doesn't come to class, doesn't study, doesn't apply his or her self someone will have wasted a lot of time and money for essentially nothing.

Marriage is a costly proposition. If a couple isn't wholly committed to one another and to making that marriage what it should be, well, it isn't going to work out and it's going to be one of the many that end up eventually in divorce. In fact, it's a challenge and commitment that lasts as long as that couple lives if it is going to succeed.

If you have a successful and rewarding career or perhaps you're a business owner, I don't have to tell you how much blood, sweat and tears a person has to invest to make it in business. It requires a lot of extra hours at the office or hitting the pavement and making sales, producing products and so-on to make that career or business get off the ground. If a person is casual and half-hearted about his job; is never willing to go the extra mile; is lazy and looks for excuses not to work; that person isn't going to get very far in life.

It costs to be a proficient athlete. When you watch the Olympics, you're not merely seeing the product of natural talent; you're seeing the fruit of many years, perhaps even a lifetime of preparation and hard work. Athletes train for hours at a time over the course of years to get where they are. They watch their diet, they exercise every day, they practice for hours on end and, as a result, they become one of the best in their sport. Well, if all of that is true in life, in marriage, in business and in sports why isn't it true in the most important thing of all and that is our service to God?

People think of Christianity in terms of all that it offers but how many people really stop and think about what it costs. Preachers make it sound like an easy thing to be saved today. They want a crowd and so they don't demand very much of people. They promise them everything but require very little. Churches market themselves by telling people about all of their ministries and all of their amenities. They build family life centers and gymnasiums and health clubs, provide day care centers, offer people a promising social network and on and on. But how many churches advertise themselves by telling people about the changes Christ will demand in their lives and how much sacrifice He'll require of them? That's how Jesus talked about His kingdom. Now, don't misunderstand me. Jesus certainly pointed to all of the blessings that would be enjoyed by those who became citizens in His kingdom but He also said that it would cost them dearly. And any preacher or church that isn't conveying that same message isn't telling the whole story or isn't representative of true Christianity.

Let me ask you, very personally, about your own religion. How much does it cost you? What about in your relationships to other people? Has your religion exacted a price when it comes to some of your friendships or family relationships? Perhaps a business relationship or your standing in the community? You know, the Bible tells us that Christianity is a divisive force. That doesn't sound very appealing does it? But nonetheless, Jesus Christ is a divisive personality. Jesus said in Matthew 10:34-37; "Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword. For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter in law against her mother in law. And a man's foes shall be they of his own household. He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me."

This is one of the hardest sayings that Christ ever uttered. Jesus didn't come to bring peace but a sword and that sword often cuts sharply through the dearest and most intimate relationships on earth. I remember baptizing a young man into Christ during a gospel meeting a few years ago. He was scared to death about what his parents were going to say when he got home. They were members of a denomination that doesn't believe in baptism for the remission of sins and this young man had come to understand what the Bible taught about that. He was in his late teenage years but still lived at home. While we were readying for the baptism, he was very nervous about the reception he would receive later that night. However, he went on and did what he believed was right and resolved he would accept the consequences. That's what Jesus is talking about here. Paul felt the sharp edge of that sword when he came to know Christ. Paul had been a strict Pharisee. He was raised under the law by devout parents. However, he turned his back on everything he had been taught in order to embrace the truth when he heard it. This same great apostle said in 1 Corinthians 7:15 that sometimes unbelieving husbands or wives will leave when their spouse becomes a Christian and his admonition to the believer is to be faithful to Christ and let that unbeliever depart. Now I'm telling you, that takes some courage and it takes some conviction and frankly, it takes more conviction than a lot of people who claim to be Christians have today.

Some people wouldn't give up the religion they were raised in to save their life because they don't want to disappoint their parents or their grandparents even though what their parents believe is wrong. Well, Jesus said those who aren't willing to pay that heavy price can't be His disciples. Have you had friends and loved ones turn away or cool in their relationship to you because of your beliefs and practices? If you're not willing to go that far with your religion, Jesus said you're not worthy of me.

I read something the other day that fell into the hands of Billy Graham years ago. It was a letter from a young and dedicated communist who was breaking off a relationship with an American girl. He said the relationship just simply wouldn't work because he wasn't willing to give up his belief in communism. The girl gave the letter to her preacher who in turn, sent it to Mr. Graham. What he said about his commitment to that cause was pretty telling. I want you to listen to part of his letter written many years ago. He said, "We communists have a high casualty rate. We're the ones who get shot and hung and ridiculed and fired from our jobs and in every other way made as uncomfortable as possible...We communists do not have the time or the money for many movies or concerts or steak dinners or decent homes or new cars. We've been described as fanatics. We are fanatics. Our lives are dominated by one great, overshadowing factor: the struggle for world communism. We have a philosophy of life which no amount of money could buy. We have a cause to fight for, a definite purpose in life. We subordinate our petty personal selves into a great movement of humanity; and if our personal lives seem hard or our egos appear to suffer through subordination to the party, then we are adequately compensated by the

thought that each of us, in his small way, is contributing to something new and true and better for mankind. There is one thing in which I am in dead earnest about, and that is the communist cause. It is my life, my business, my religion, my hobby, my sweetheart, my wife, my mistress, my bread and meat. I work at it in the daytime and dream of it at night. Its hold on me grows, not lessens, as time goes on; therefore, I cannot carry on a friendship, a love affair, or even a conversation without relating it to this force which both drives and guides my life. I evaluate people, looks, ideas and actions according to how they affect the communist cause, and by their attitude toward it. I've already been in jail because of my ideals, and if necessary, I'm ready to go before a firing squad."

Now, I'm here to tell you that there are some people just devoted to such a cause. There are people who are devoted to evil and mayhem to the point that it doesn't matter who or what opposes them, they are faithful to that ideology. Now, if that's the case with causes that are evil and unjust, how much more should we be loyal to a cause that is noble and right? True Christianity is worth the sacrifice of any relationship or any potential gain of worldly position or possession. If we're not willing to be that dedicated to its message of truth and right, then we aren't worthy to be the disciples of Jesus.

I also want to ask, what does your religion cost you in time? Be honest with yourself now; how much time do I dedicate to the cause of Christ? I'm talking about time you spend assembling with the church, how much time you spend talking to others about the gospel, how much time you spend reading and studying the word of God, and how much time you spend in benevolence and good deeds for others? Some of us barely make the time to go to church on Sunday morning. We often make the old excuse "I'm busy" or "I just don't have the time I would like to have and if I did, I would give more of my time to the Lord." Well, I can tell you one thing I have learned about myself and about others; we usually end up making time for the things that are really important to us. If we want to do it badly enough, we somehow find the time. I heard one preacher point out one time that all of us have the same amount of time every week. Did you know that? I have the exact same number of minutes in a day or in a week as the busiest man in the world has. I have the same amount of time as the President of the United States, for example. I have the same amount of time as the CEO of a company or anyone else for that matter. All of us have 168 hours in a week. Now, if I were to become a Christian at the age of 15 and live until I was 70 years old that would give me just a little over 480-thousand hours to use. Did you know that if my Christianity only amounted to going to church, let's be generous, and say three times a week, that in that 55 years, it would only amount to 16 months of service? 16 months out of 55 years! And many of us barely make it to church! What does that say about our investment in Christianity? Friends, it's really not about how much time we have; it's about how we use that time. It's about what's really important to us and how much we're willing to spend and be spent for the Lord.

Finally, how much has your religion cost you financially? Now, that brings us a little bit of a sore subject and I want to say right off the bat that we don't want any of your money on this broadcast. I have never asked for money from any of our viewers and I never will. We are not here to solicit funds. This program is fully paid for by the church and we're not interested in getting into your wallet. I don't have any patience for these affluent television preachers that beg money and tell you to plant some seed of faith so they can drive a Mercedes or a BMW. But I do want to say that being a Christian will cost us financially. It will cost us in what we give to our local congregation we are a member of. The Bible tells us in 1 Corinthians 16:1-2; "Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him, that there be no gatherings when I come." There was a special need that Paul was addressing but he wanted the Christians at Corinth to take up a collection every Sunday so that the church would have the money to take care of that need and other things related to the preaching of the gospel and the relief of needy saints as they arose. That offering, according to 2 Corinthians 9:7 is to be

given cheerfully and according to purpose of heart. In other words, God expects us to be liberal and eager in what we give to his cause. Do you give to your home congregation every Sunday with that attitude and using those guidelines? But beyond that, the Lord expects us to individual help others along life's way. We are to be compassionate and benevolent to the less fortunate and not selfish and greedy. Have you ever gone without so that others could have the things they needed? Even Cornelius, who was an unconverted Gentile, according to Acts 10, "gave MUCH alms." How much does your religion cost you financially?

Friends, real religion requires a sacrifice! In fact, God abhors offerings that don't cost anything and he refuses to accept them. He detests a life that claims to love and serve Him but makes little time and effort for Him in deference to worldly and selfish pursuits. I'd like to remind you of what God so harshly said to the indifferent and apostate priests of Malachi's day. In Malachi 1:7-8 God said "Ye offer polluted bread upon mine altar; and ye say, Wherein have we polluted thee? In that ye say, The table of the Lord is contemptible. And if ye offer the blind for sacrifice, is it not evil? and if ye offer the lame and sick, is it not evil? offer it now unto thy governor; will he be pleased with thee, or accept thy person? saith the Lord of hosts." He then said in verse 10 "Who is there even among you that would shut the doors for nought? neither do ye kindle fire on mine altar for nought. I have no pleasure in you, saith the Lord of hosts, neither will I accept an offering at your hand."

In other words, God says you wouldn't dare offer to someone else the kind of pitiful offering you bring to me. Is your offering the result of great sacrifice on your part? Where will you be as the church assembles today? Where are your priorities? What does your religion cost?

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