

Sermon preached at Faith Presbyterian Church, Springfield, Virginia,
on Sunday, January 7, 1990, by the Rev. W. Graham Smith, D.D.

MATTHEW 13:45,46

“The kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls, who, on finding one of great value, went and sold all that he had and bought it.”

TAKE WHAT YOU WANT—AND PAY FOR IT!

There is an old Spanish proverb which runs, “Take what you want,” says God, “take it and pay for it!”

Now that is precisely the message of our Lord’s parable which we are to consider together this morning: “The kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls, who, on finding one pearl of great value, went and sold all that he had and bought it.”

You see, whether a person chooses the best in life, or the worst, he always has to pay for it. Adolf Hitler chose to indulge his mad lust for world domination; and he paid for it with his life as he died by his own hand in an underground shelter in Berlin. Jesus Christ chose to redeem the world from sin; and He paid for it with His life when they nailed Him to a Cross on the hill of Calvary.

“Take what you want—take it and pay for it!”

Now, in the first place, consider that

1. This thought brings right into the focus of attention the whole question of self-sacrifice.

Whenever we speak of a life of self-denial and self-sacrifice, we invariably think of how costly a thing it is to live a good, useful life, serving our fellow human beings, following and obeying Christ, and living for the highest and the best. And I would not minimize this stern fact that to be a disciple of Christ is a very costly business. Did not our Lord Himself say, “If anyone would come after Me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow Me” (Luke 9:23); “And anyone who does not carry his cross and follow Me cannot be My disciple” (Luke 14:27)? It is no cheap or easy thing to be a Christian.

But, it costs even more to live the other kind of life. When a person chooses to live a wasted, dissipated life, when he lives for the pleasures of sin, we call it self-indulgence; but in reality it is self-sacrifice—the costliest self-sacrifice a person can make; for by living that kind of life, he gives up everything that makes life really worthwhile; he sacrifices talents, opportunities, ideals, home-happiness, self-respect. In a word, he loses his soul; and what self-sacrifice could ever be as great as that? It is like giving a handful of diamonds for a can of ashes.

Surely Christ lived a life of self-sacrifice, but so did Judas Iscariot, poor fellow—with one of the greatest opportunities a man ever had to be remembered as one of the illustrious band of apostles, but giving it all up for thirty pieces of silver, a suicide’s grave, and a rotting memory!

You see, we must acknowledge this basic fact that we must all live a life of self-sacrifice. We can’t choose between self-indulgence and self-sacrifice, but only between two kinds of self-sacrifice.

Satan persuades Esau to sell his birthright, but he doesn’t tell him that later on he will pay for such self-indulgence—pay dearly in bitter remorse and anguish of soul when he realizes what a fool he has been to part with such a sacred possession for a bowl of lentil stew.

Many a young couple, happily married and enjoying the blessings of a Christian home with its deep fidelities and satisfactions, are glad that they came to their marriage day with a pure heart. Of course, it cost them to do that. But, in retrospect, they realize how much more it would have cost them had they made the other choice, and been obliged to live till the end of their days with bad memories and an accusing conscience.

The old mediaeval theologians had a famous saying that “the Devil is an ass.” Indeed he is! Wicked? That does not half cover it; he is an ass. He gets men to be Judas Iscariots, Benedict Arnolds, alcoholics and dope addicts, telling them not to sacrifice, but to indulge themselves. He persuades the Esaus of the world to sell their birthright for a bowl of lentil stew. A clever ass the Devil is, but crazy too—as though it were self-sacrifice to give up the low for the high, but not self-sacrifice to give up the high for the low.

“Take what you want—take it and pay for it!”

And that brings us to another important consideration:

2. Whenever you choose what is evil, you get what you want at once, and pay for it afterwards. But whenever you choose what is good, you pay for it first, before you get it.

Here is a young man, starting out in life, easygoing, lazy, a bit undisciplined and irresponsible perhaps, and enamored by the pleasures of sin. Well, he can have those pleasures at once. He can place the cup of self-indulgence to his lips and drain it to the dregs—but he’ll pay for it sometime! You see, the Devil says, “Have your fling; never mind about the bills; they will come sometime perhaps, but forget about them just now; eat, drink, and be merry!”

You remember how Mark Twain, in *Huckleberry Finn*, summed this all up: “Well, then,” said Huckleberry, “what’s the use you learning to do right when it’s troublesome to do right, and ain’t no trouble to do wrong?” That idea, shared by multitudes, comes largely from the fact that to do wrong costs nothing in advance; we get what we want at once—paying for it comes afterwards.

And that is why sin is so attractive. That is why Satan wins so many followers, because he

gives you what you want at once. But remember, he sells you his goods with a credit card—you pay in the long run, and the interest is exorbitantly high. His bills are heavy. The birds come home to roost. The young man I've referred to may have to put up with a second-rate job; he will undoubtedly lose his self-esteem. And when, perhaps long afterwards, the bills start rolling in, they may not all be sent to him—some of those he loves may have to help him pay those terrible bills.

May none of you young people ever be fooled by the way Satan dresses his window. Everything seems so very attractive; but he never gives you anything “on the cheap.” He gives you what you want when you want it; but you've got to pay up some day! Robert Louis Stevenson once wrote, “Everybody, soon or late, sits down to a banquet of consequences!”

Here is another young man. He has ambitions and ideals. He sees a goal in front of him, and he puts forth all his energies to reach it. He doesn't become a skilled technician in a day—he has to make considerable sacrifices. Long hours of physical and mental toil have to be expended before he becomes a master craftsman, a doctor, a lawyer, a teacher, a scientist. After years of hard work he becomes proficient, he reaches his goal, but he pays for it first! You see, everything that's worthwhile in life has to be paid for before we get it.

Recently one of the world's greatest golfers won a major tournament by sinking a 20-foot putt on the 18th green on the final day of play. Someone asked him how he accomplished such a magnificent feat under such nerve-racking circumstances. “Well,” he replied, “over the past year I've been dissatisfied with my putting game, so for the past two months I've spent five hours every day practicing on the putting green!” Three hundred hours just hitting balls into the hole! He got what he wanted, but he paid for it before he got it.

Many a person wants to be like Jesus Christ. But how few there are who are willing to pay the price—who are prepared to devote even ten minutes a day in communion with God—studying His Word, and speaking to Him in prayer, or in learning how to lead others to Him. Remember, there is no shortcut to a holy life. You have to sweat and toil in order to turn that wilderness of a soul of yours into a garden in which will grow the fruit of the Spirit. Jesus said, “Which of you, desiring to build a tower, does not first sit down and count the cost...?” (Luke 14:28).

You want a Christ-like personality? You earnestly desire to have a Christian home? You want to become a soul-winner for Jesus? Then, never forget, you've got to pay for these blessings before you possess them.

“Take what you want—take it and pay for it!”

Just one last word:

3. **We do not pay for everything; we get some things free.**

You didn't pay for your mother's love, or for the comfort and security of the home into which you were born. We did not pay, we could not pay for the rich heritage of great books,

great music, great art. Our religious freedom, and best of all our salvation through the Lord Jesus Christ, has come to us as a free gift—“without money and without cost” (Isaiah 55:1).

But remember—these things have all been paid for!

a. Great music—think of Franz Schubert, dying a pauper in his garret room at 31 years of age!

b. Religious freedom—we possess that today because in days gone by countless Christian martyrs were thrown to the wild beasts in the arena, or burned at the stake.

c. Our salvation—a free gift, because as the New Testament writers delight to proclaim, our Lord Jesus Christ “died for our sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring us to God...” (1 Peter 3:18).

Every sermon worth preaching should end by leading people to the foot of the Cross, there to gaze in adoring wonder upon our Savior’s dying and undying love for us.

“Oh ‘twas love, ‘twas wondrous love,
The love of God for me
That brought my Savior from above,
To die on Calvary.”

“Jesus paid it all; all to Him I owe;
Sin had left a crimson stain;
He washed it white as snow!”

Yes, indeed He did! And the grandest thing in life is to yield to Him, love Him, trust Him, and obey Him Who gave His all for us. Remember, you either sacrifice yourself for Christ, or you sacrifice yourself to the Devil, for —

“The kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls who, on finding one pearl of great value, went and sold all that he had, and bought it.”

“Take what you want,” says God; “take it and pay for it.”

AMEN.