**THE GOSPEL OF LUKE**

**THE COSTLY GIFT OF SALVATION**

**Luke 18:18-34**

**INTRODUCTION**

Everything that’s worth something costs something. If you want to get something of value, you need to give something of value in return. We’re reminded of this every day when we buy things we need. Our time is valuable, but we give our time to work so that we can earn money to buy things that are valuable to us.

For many of us, however, this weekend is an exception to the general rule that you have to give to get. It’s Labour Day weekend, which means that many of us don’t have to work to earn money. We get to stay at home, or go away on a mini vacation, but our employers pay us anyways.

As I thought about Labour Day weekend earlier this week, I realized that I had no idea why we celebrate Labour Day in Canada. It’s a great little holiday to end the summer and begin another school year, but what exactly are we celebrating? It’s a bit of an ironic name. The name “Labour Day” implies that we’re celebrating the fact that we have jobs, but the way we’re celebrating is by not going into our jobs and staying home instead. That doesn’t make any sense.

So I did a little research and discovered that Labour Day commemorates a parade that took place in 1872. A bunch of members of the Toronto Typographical Union had been on strike. Their goal was to obtain 9-hour work days, but in the course of their strike, they were arrested because striking was illegal at the time. In response, 27 other unions held a parade in support of these imprisoned typographers. The parade drew so much media attention and public support that Prime Minister John A. Macdonald abolished many of the anti-union and anti-striking laws in Canada, freeing the imprisoned typographers and opening up the door to more robust workers’ rights in Canada.

That’s what we’re celebrating every year on Labour Day. We’re celebrating the fact that a little group of printers gave up their freedom almost 150 years ago so that workers today could work under better conditions. The freedom we enjoy this weekend wasn’t free. It cost something. We may not have had to pay the cost, but that doesn’t change the fact that this holiday that we enjoy every year, and many of the rights that workers now enjoy, all came at a cost. Everything that’s worth something costs something, and this weekend is no different.

What about salvation? Does salvation cost something? If you’re a Christian, then you know that salvation is a gift. It’s given to us as a gift of God’s grace. Like Labour Day, we don’t have to pay for it because someone else paid for it instead. Jesus paid for it, and therefore, we don’t need to earn salvation from God’s judgment by being good enough, or doing enough good things, or somehow atoning for our own sins. All we need is to put our trust in Christ, and he will save us.

Salvation is a gift. It costs us nothing because Jesus paid the cost for us. And yet, the Bible also teaches that *salvation costs us everything*. Jesus has said that over and over again throughout Luke’s gospel:

“If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it.” (Luke 9:23-24)

“If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple. Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple.” (Luke 14:26-27)

“Whoever seeks to preserve his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life will keep it.” (Luke 17:33)

If you want salvation, you have to follow Jesus, and if you want to follow Jesus, you have to give up everything. That’s what Jesus is going to teach us about today.

The title of this message is **The Costly Gift of Salvation.**  My aim today is to show you that **Christians Give Up Everything For the One Who Freely Saved Us.**

We will have two points today:

1. The Gift of Salvation
2. The Cost of Salvation

(1) **THE GIFT OF SALVATION**

Our text today begins in verse 18 with a question from a man Luke describes as “a ruler”. Luke doesn’t tell us what kind of ruler he was – he could have been a religious leader known as the “synagogue ruler” or he could have been a political ruler – but he does tell us in verse 23 that the man was “extremely rich”. In the parallel account in the Gospel of Matthew we are also told that he was young. When you put it all together, we see that the man asking the question was rich, he was young, and he was a ruler, which is why this text is commonly known as Jesus’ conversation with “the rich young ruler”.

This tells us that this man was exceptionally bright. In a culture that typically put elders in positions of leadership, this young man was not only able to secure a high position of influence, but was able to become extremely wealthy as well. You could say that he was the Mark Zuckerberg of his time. Smart, competent, and charismatic.

But as smart and competent as he was, he still had questions that he didn’t know how to answer. He may have figured out this life, but he hadn’t figured out the life to come. So he goes to Jesus, who happens to be just like him – a young, charismatic leader, except he’s poor instead of rich – and asks, “Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?”

Before we look at the answer, we need to understand the question, because if we don’t get the question right we won’t understand the answer. The question seems simple enough, but it’s packed with theological significance. After all, he’s not just asking about how he can live forever as if he’s on the quest for the “Holy Grail”. He’s asking about much more.

Jesus tells us that what the man is really asking about is how to enter God’s Kingdom. We see that in the way Jesus frames the issue in verse 24 when he says, “How difficult it is for those who have wealth *to enter the kingdom of God!*” To inherit eternal life is to enter God’s Kingdom. They’re the same. If you don’t enter God’s Kingdom, you won’t inherit eternal life, but if you do, you will. Another way of putting the question is to use the language of salvation. We see that in the way the disciples frame the issue in verse 26 when they respond to Jesus’ teaching with the question, “Then who can be *saved*?” Inheriting eternal life is the same as being saved from God’s judgment.

Three ways to ask the same question. Inheriting eternal life is the same as entering God’s Kingdom and being saved from God’s judgment. Miss one, and you miss all three.

This is important to notice, because it shows us that what Jesus is talking about here is really no different from what he was talking about last Sunday when Jesus told the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector in verses 9-14. The issue Jesus was addressing there was, “Who is justified?” which means “Who is righteous in God’s sight so that they will be saved from his judgment?” It’s really the same question the rich young ruler is asking. This means that what Jesus says in that parable is relevant to our text today. We’re meant to keep in mind that it’s the humble, sinful tax collector who was justified and inherited eternal life, and not the rule-keeping, self-righteous Pharisee.

Then in verses 15-17 Luke told us about the children who were coming to Jesus, and that little narrative was about, “Who will enter God’s Kingdom?” When the disciples rebuked them and told them to go away, Jesus rebuked the disciples and said that they needed to become like children. Why? Because only someone who receives the Kingdom like a child could enter the Kingdom, which again is the same issue that the rich young ruler was wrestling with. Only someone who believed in Jesus like a child could enter God’s kingdom and inherit eternal life.

So as we encounter the rich young ruler’s question in verse 18, we need to realize that Jesus has already answered it. The only way we can inherit eternal life is if God gives it to us as a gift. God gives eternal life to anyone who trusts in Jesus with a child-like faith and cries out to him for mercy.

So as the rich young ruler asks his question, we are meant to ask our own: “Does he trust in Jesus like a child? Does he cry out for mercy? Or is he just like the self-righteous Pharisee who trusted in himself?”

We get a hint at the answer in the way he asks the question. He doesn’t ask, “Good Teacher, who does God give eternal life to?” or “Good Teacher, how is eternal life obtained?” Instead, he asks, “Good Teacher, what must *I do* to inherit eternal life?” The way he asks the question assumes that eternal life is something that is earned, not given. It’s something that he must obtain by what he does and not something that God must give out of his mercy.

Jesus doesn’t miss this. He sees that this is a man who is used to getting what he wants because he’s smart enough, talented enough, and good enough. And as he comes to Jesus, he likely assumed that Jesus was just like him. He saw that Jesus was influential and charismatic, just like he was, so of course, the two of them must share a lot in common right? Just picture him coming up to Jesus with a wink and a knowing nod, saying “Let’s talk. Young ruler to young ruler. You tell me your secrets and I’ll tell you mine.”

That’s why Jesus begins with correction in verse 19. He says, “Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone.” Jesus recognizes that the rich young ruler has a man-centered perspective. His focus is on what he has accomplished as a man, and on what Jesus has accomplished as a man, but Jesus wants him to focus on God. That’s why he says what he says in verse 19. He’s saying, “Don’t put the focus on me, on my influence or my accomplishments. Focus on God, and I will tell you what he requires.”

And what does God require from a self-righteous man like this? Obedience. More specifically, obedience to God’s Law. The man asked, “What must I do?” He asked for the Law, so Jesus gives him the Law in verse 20: “You know the commandments: ‘Do not commit adultery, Do not murder, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Honour your father and mother.”

Jesus gives him five of the Ten Commandments, and the five he chooses are those that deal with how we are to relate to other people. They are the commands that are summed up in the command to love your neighbour as yourself.

What about the other five, the ones that deal with how we are to relate to God? What about the command to have no other gods before the Lord, or the command to not worship idols, the commands that are summed up by the command to love the Lord with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength? Jesus doesn’t mention them in verse 20, but that doesn’t mean he’s forgotten them. They’re very much in his mind, as we will see a little later in our text.

The rich young ruler then confirms what we already suspect at this time: he’s proud and self-righteous rather than humble and broken. We see that in verse 21 when he says, “All these I have kept from my youth.” He may have well have said, “I’m perfect! I’ve never sinned by breaking any of these commands.” This man wasn’t just rich, young, and influential. He was also proud, the kind of man who trusted in himself that he was righteous and treated others with contempt. He was the kind of man who thought he was righteous but would go home unrighteous in God’s eyes.

Now, what Jesus does next is absolutely brilliant. In two simple sentences, Jesus exposes the rich young ruler’s sin with penetrating insight. He says in verse 22, “One thing you still lack. Sell all that you have and distribute to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me.” Luke then tells us in verse 23 that, when the rich young ruler heard these things, “he became very sad, for he was extremely rich.”

What just happened? One moment the man is confident and sure that he’s good enough to enter the Kingdom of God, and the next he walks away full of sorrow because he knows he won’t. Why? Because Jesus brought the full force of the law on him and showed him that he wasn’t good enough. We may not have seen it at first, but what Jesus did in verse 22 was he brought the other five of the Ten Commandments to bear on the rich young ruler, the commands that are summed up with the command to love God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength. If he truly loved God with all his heart, soul, mind, and strength, then giving up his possessions would have been a breeze. But it wasn’t, because he didn’t love God like that. He loved his money instead, and therefore, he was a lawbreaker who had failed to do what he needed to do to inherit eternal life.

This shows us the depths of human sin. The man knew what he needed to do to inherit eternal life. He knew the price of admission into the Kingdom, but he wasn’t willing to pay it. He would rather be worldly rich and eternally poor than give up his worldly possessions.

As the man walks away, Jesus brings the lesson home to his disciples in verse 24, where Luke tells us that “Jesus, seeing that he had become sad, said, ‘How difficult it is for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God! For it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God.’”

If you want to earn your way into heaven, you have to satisfy God’s law, and if you want to satisfy God’s law, you have to love God and Jesus Christ God’s Chosen One above everything else. God, and God alone, must be the primary object of your affections, and if anything else competes with him, if anything else crowds him out of your heart, then you’ve failed to keep God’s commands and you won’t do what you need to do to earn eternal life.

Money is one of those things that can crowd God out of our hearts. As Jesus taught earlier, money can function like a false god, where we live for it rather than for the One True Living God, but other things can do this as well. It can be family. It can be career. It can be comfort. If we’re loving others things more than we love God, if we’re not willing to give those things up for God’s sake, then we’ve sinned, and there’s no way we can ever earn our way into heaven.

The disciples realized what this meant. They knew that it meant that no one could be saved, because no one can love God this much all the time. This wasn’t just a rich man’s problem. It was a human problem, so they ask in verse 26, “Then who can be saved?” Who has hope to inherit eternal life?

Jesus’ answer is both no one, and every one. He says in verse 27 that, “What is impossible with man is possible with God.” No one can save themselves, but God can save anyone. No one can earn salvation, but anyone can be given salvation as a gift. Even this rich young ruler who walked away is not without hope. It may have been impossible for him to love God more than his wealth, but it wasn’t impossible for God to save him. At any point, God could give him a new heart full of new affections for himself. Salvation may have been impossible for him, but it wasn’t impossible for God.

What Jesus is saying here is that salvation is a gift. Righteousness is a gift, not a reward. We don’t earn our way into eternal life. We receive it by grace. Jesus is simply repeating what he said in the parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector. The one who tries to earn his way into the Kingdom will never become righteous, but the one who humbly cries out for God’s mercy will.

That’s the first lesson of our text today. Salvation is a free gift of God’s grace, and therefore, everyone has hope for salvation even though none of us could ever be good enough to earn it.

(2) **THE COST OF SALVATION**

So far there has been a lot of overlap between our text and the parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector, but the remaining verses add a whole other layer to understanding what it means to enter God’s Kingdom, which leads to our second point: The Cost of Salvation.

As the disciples reflected on Jesus’ words about salvation, Peter, who was the spokesman for the twelve apostles, pipes up in verse 28 and says, “See, we have left our homes and followed you.”

This is very interesting. Jesus had just said that, if you want to earn eternal life, you have to leave everything behind and follow him, which is something that is *impossible* for men and women to do. But here, we have Peter saying that this is exactly what the disciples had done! It seems that what Jesus had said was impossible for them to do had actually become possible.

So what’s happening here? Is Peter contradicting Jesus? Is he saying, “Wait a second Jesus. You said it’s impossible for man to leave everything behind and follow you, but we did it, so how can you say it’s impossible?” Is that what he’s saying? Well, if it was, then we would expect Jesus to rebuke him, correct him, or argue with him, but that’s not what Jesus does. Instead, he commends Peter and the disciples and everyone else who would leave their homes and families to follow him in verses 29-30: “Truly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or wife or brothers or parents or children, for the sake of the kingdom of God, who will not receive many times more in this time, and in the age to come eternal life.”

No, Peter isn’t contradicting Jesus. He’s confirming him. Remember that what is impossible with man is possible with God. The disciples were able to do the impossible – leave everything behind and follow Jesus – because God made it possible. God is the one who gave them the strength to leave their homes, their careers, even their families for the sake of the Kingdom. You see, Jesus’ statement about what is impossible with man but possible with God doesn’t just apply to salvation. It also applies to the obedience we were supposed to have to earn salvation.

God does two things that are impossible for us. He saves us from the judgment we deserve because we fail to love him most, and then he changes us so that we actually come to love him most. He changes us into the kinds of people who would hear a command like verse 22 to sell all we have and distribute to the poor and respond not by walking away, but by saying, “If that’s what you want me to do, I’ll do it, because Jesus is worth it. Jesus is worth more than all the treasures of this world, and he is worth more than all the people I care about in this world.” That’s what God did in the first disciples, and that’s what God will do in believers today.

This is how salvation can be both free and costly at the same time. It is free because we don’t have to earn it, but it is costly because it makes us the kind of people who give up everything to follow Jesus.

Two questions remain before we wrap things up. First, what does it mean to leave what we love to follow Jesus? Does it mean that, if our parents are unbelievers we leave our homes, or if our children are unbelievers we abandon them? Of course not. The first disciples left their homes and families because they were following Jesus while he walked on the earth. For them, following Jesus literally meant leaving their lives behind going wherever Jesus went.

The situation is different for us because Jesus is no longer here on earth. Jesus isn’t calling us to physically leave our homes and families behind and just move somewhere else, but he is calling us to leave them behind in our hearts if we need to. Many of us have unbelieving family members. It could be a parent. It could be a child. It could be a spouse. Others have unbelieving friends, people you grew up with, people you love dearly. Leaving them doesn’t mean that you stop talking to them or you cut them out of your life, but it does mean that, if you have to choose them or Jesus, you choose Jesus every time.

It means that, when the Bible tells you that your unbelieving family member or friend will go to hell if they die apart from Christ, you don’t say, “I don’t believe that. I can’t believe that. My loved one is going to heaven no matter what the Bible says.” That’s not what following Jesus looks like. That’s abandoning Jesus and following a belief system that you’ve created yourself. But if you truly follow Jesus, if you truly choose him over everything else that’s precious to you in this world, then you say, “I accept that I may not see this person in heaven. I accept that this person will spend an eternity in hell apart from Christ. I grieve for them, I mourn for them, but I’m willing to leave them behind, because Jesus is worth more to me than them.” That’s what following Jesus and loving him most of all looks like. That’s the impossible made possible.

The second question is this: why would we be willing to leave what we love for Jesus’ sake? What makes Jesus worth it? Jesus talks about reward in verses 29-30, which is remarkable because God is doing the work, but we are the ones receiving the reward. Jesus says that “there is no one who has left house or wife or brothers or parents or children, for the sake of the kingdom of God, who will not receive many times more in this time, and in the age to come eternal life.” Jesus promises reward both in this life and in the life to come for those who love him most. Why? Why would God credit us with what he himself has done? Because that’s what God is like. He gives us salvation, and he gives us reward, not because we earned it, but because he is merciful and generous.

That’s one reason why leaving what we love is worth it. It’s one reason why giving up everything for Jesus is worth it. But it’s not the main reason.

The main reason why giving up everything for Jesus is worth it is that Jesus gave up everything for us. Jesus talks about this in verses 31-34. He takes the twelve apostles aside and reminds them of what’s awaiting them in Jerusalem: suffering. Not theirs, but his. In Jerusalem, Jesus would be abandoned by his own people and delivered over to the Gentiles. In Jerusalem, Jesus would be mocked as a fraud and shamefully treated with ridicule and spit upon with contempt. In Jerusalem, Jesus would be flogged with a whip covered with knives and broken bone and sharpened glass. And in Jerusalem, Jesus would be killed as they nailed him to a cross, where he would suffer and die alone, abandoned by his friends, and abandoned by his Heavenly Father.

Jesus gave up everything for us. He gave up his dignity. He gave up his innocence. He gave up his body. He gave up his life. He gave it all up for sinners like us so that we could be forgiven and reconciled to God. Luke tells us in verse 34 that the apostles didn’t understand this. On that side of the cross, they didn’t understand why the Messiah had to suffer and die. They didn’t understand how that fit within God’s plans of salvation. But on this side of the cross we do. We understand that Jesus had to die, not for his own sins, but for ours. His death, and his death alone, was necessary to atone for our sins and pay our penalty so that we could be saved from God’s judgment. When we understand this, when we truly grasp the magnitude of the love that Jesus displayed for us in laying down his life for us, then we will be willing to lay down our lives for him.

**CONCLUSION**

I am so thankful that God, in his great mercy, has filled our church with people like this. Many of you have family members who have died apart from Christ, and many of you have seen loved ones walk away from the faith, and yet, you haven’t given up your faith. You haven’t stopped following Jesus. Instead, you’ve pressed on, looking to Christ to sustain you and satisfy you. It’s been hard to say goodbye. It’s grieved you to say that these loved ones are lost. But in the end, you’ve chosen Jesus over them, because you love him more than anything else.

Jesus reminds us today that this hasn’t been our own doing. It’s been God’s. It’s impossible for us to love Jesus like this, but God makes the impossible possible. He has given us hearts that love him above everything else, so that if we have to say goodbye to our most treasured possessions and beloved people, we will, because Jesus has become more valuable to us than anything or anyone in this world.

If this describes you, then I encourage you to spend some time thanking God for his work in your life. Thank him for the faith that you have in him. Thank him for the affections that you have for him. Thank him that the great loss you have suffered for Christ hasn’t kept you from walking the narrow way of following Christ and loving him most of all.

And when you find yourself struggling in your love for Christ, if you find yourself being tempted to think, “Is Jesus really worth it? Is life with him really better than life with my loved ones who have fallen away?” then don’t try to do the impossible. Don’t look to yourself to find the strength of faith that you need to endure. Look to Christ, the author and the perfecter of your faith, because only he can give you a heart for him. Only he can do the impossible. And he will, because you are his, and he is yours.