

40. The Cost of Being a Disciple

Luke 14:25-35

Luke: A Walk Through the Life of Jesus

Jesus was now in the last months of His life on earth, visiting various towns and villages on his way to Jerusalem, knowing that He would be crucified there. He had spoken to his disciples about his impending death, but they refused to believe it (Luke 9:44-45). Luke begins this passage by informing us again of the large crowds of people following Christ as He visited different towns and villages on His way to Jerusalem. □

In the minds of most of the thousands in the crowd was the belief that the kingdom would come when Jesus got to Jerusalem. Even on Palm Sunday as He entered the city, the people began to sing, “Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!” The Pharisees told Him to rebuke His disciples for it; for they understood that the people thought that the kingdom would appear and that Jesus was the Messiah (Luke 19:37-40). They did not understand nor foresee that Messiah Jesus, had to come a first time as the Substitution Lamb to pay the ransom price for our sin. The thousands in the crowd following Him wanted to be there in Jerusalem when the Kingdom of God would appear physically. Many in the crowd wanted to see the spectacle spoken of by the prophets. □

¹⁴Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision! For the day of the Lord is near in the valley of decision. ¹⁵The sun and moon will be darkened, and the stars no longer shine. ¹⁶The Lord will roar from Zion and thunder from Jerusalem; the earth and the heavens will tremble. But the Lord will be a refuge for his people, a stronghold for the people of Israel (Joel 3:14-16).

¹³“In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence. ¹⁴He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all nations and peoples of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed (Daniel 7:13-14).

Of course, both passages of Scripture will yet be fulfilled in the coming of Jesus on the clouds of heaven in great power and glory as He foretold (Matthew 24:30-31). Before that day comes, though, God plans to seek out and save a body of people that He calls the called-out ones—the Church. Who are those called-out ones? Certainly, not those whose love is only half-hearted and lacking in commitment, those whose heart is still focused on enjoying sin. □

One can never accuse Jesus of not clarifying what following Him meant. Turning around to the thousands following, the Lord shocked them with His words of total abandonment to His person and cause.

²⁵Large crowds were traveling with Jesus, and turning to them he said: ²⁶“If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters—yes, even his own life—he cannot be my disciple. ²⁷And anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple (Luke 14:25-27).

Three times in the passage, verses 26, 27, and 33, Jesus used the phrase, *cannot be my disciple*. He used the personal pronoun *my* to signify that this was a call to Himself, i.e., to belong to Christ. Becoming a Christian is to be a disciple: “The disciples were called Christians first at Antioch” (Acts 11:26). To be a believer in Christ was and is to be a disciple. Some would say that you can be a Christian and yet not a disciple, i.e., that a disciple is a higher calling. In my opinion, this is a deception of the enemy. One who is not a disciple follows the broad way rather than the narrow way of Christ. In other words, a non-disciple is one of the five unwise virgins that Jesus never knew (Matthew 25:10). He only knows disciples. The passage of Scripture we are studying today is all about how to be saved. □

Many people come to Christ and are not about told the whole package. We live in a day of easy "believe-ism," where the message is just to come to Christ and believe. Yes, I do think it is that simple, but many come to Christ thinking that a simple prayer is all there is to follow Christ. However, if your faith never costs you anything, it is false or fake. When sharing your faith with someone, it is better to share up front with a person these words of Jesus and let the chips fall where they may. When a rich young man came to Christ asking what he lacked, Jesus told him to give away everything he had and follow Him. When the man started walking away, the Lord didn't say, "Oh, hold on a minute, let's renegotiate and make it easier." The Lord saw that the man didn't control his money; his money controlled him (Matthew 19:21-22). The man went away sad because he had great wealth. If Jesus did not make it easy but required people to enter through a narrow difficult door, what makes us think we can make it easier than Jesus Himself?

[Question 1\) Why did Jesus seek to thin out the crowds? Why do you think the Lord posed such difficult challenges to people?](#)

There is nothing wrong with crowds of people following Christ. In fact, in the Book of Revelation, we see a great multitude from all nations standing before the throne of God at the end of the age (Revelation 7:9). All that hear deserve to know the true qualifications of how they are to enter the kingdom. When we share Christ with others, we must not forget to talk about repentance. Though the message is simple, the Christian life is not easy. There is more to it than that. Many people are attracted to Christ because of what they can get out of it; they have little thought of what He wants of us. Jesus came to give us new life, and life more abundantly, but there is something that He wants of us: total commitment to His cause. Eternal lives are at stake, and He needs all of us to give up our lives and no longer live a life of me first. Three times in the passage, Jesus spoke of the qualifications of being a disciple; so first of all, we need to look at what a disciple is. After we clarify that, then we can consider His requirements. □

What is a Disciple?

The Greek word for ‘disciple’ (*‘mathetes’*) was used before the time of Christ to denote a “follower” or “student” of a teacher or philosopher. The disciple had the responsibility of not only putting the Master’s teaching into practice but also of passing his teaching along to others. Disciples are called to champion the cause, reproduce the skills, and propagate their teacher's ideas. From ancient times, the word “disciple” has been used to describe students who are passionately loyal to their teacher. The master models to the disciple how a follower of Christ is

to live and how he is to pass on the master's teaching. A.W. Tozer once said,

The new Christian is like a man who has learned to drive in a country where the traffic moves on the left side of the highway and suddenly finds himself in another country and forced to drive on the right. He must unlearn his old habit and learn a new one and, more severe than all, he must learn in heavy traffic.¹

Because of their involvement with their Master, disciples learn a new way of thinking and behaving. They exhibit a new way of life. All things become new when a person receives the gift of salvation (2 Corinthians 5:17). They embody their master's **disciplines**. What does the word discipline mean? It is training expected to produce a specific character or pattern of behavior; especially training that produces moral or mental improvement.

Living this kind of life may sound impossible, but the exciting part is that the Lord is the One who also enables us to make this possible. He can live His life through us, with us, and in us, to create a life that is richer, more meaningful, and more far-reaching than we could ever accomplish by living for self. Evans Hopkins once said, "True Christianity is an all-out commitment to the living Christ...The Savior is not looking for fans but followers—followers who will go with Him to death if necessary." We are to live in the same way Jesus lived. □

The Commitment to be a Disciple

Question 2) This "hating" of our mother and father, wives, and children, is a hard statement to understand. It sounds so different from other statements Jesus made, such as "loving one's enemies." What can He mean by saying we are to "hate" our relatives and even our own lives?□

Here is the real challenge to commitment for every follower of Christ. Who is first in our lives? The followers of Christ were threatened that if anyone acknowledged that Jesus was the Christ, he would be excommunicated from the synagogue (John 9:22). There would be pressure from wives, mothers, and fathers not to follow Christ because the synagogue was the center of Jewish life and society. To be put out of the synagogue would be like being treated like a leper. Even today, in the twenty-first century, an orthodox Jew will have a funeral for a son who commits his life to Christ. He will disinherit him entirely and not speak to him again. Jesus was letting the crowd know ahead of time what He required of them. In many parts of the world, our Christian brothers and sisters are going through these kinds of situations at the hands of their families and Islamic and Hindu extremists. Jesus was speaking to them in comparative terms. When our love and duty to our parents come in competition with our love and commitment to Christ, we must put first our love and obedience to Christ.

The bar is deliberately set high for a disciple of Christ. If we will follow Christ, our love for Him is to outshine all other loves, even above those who are our parents and spouses or even our children. Abraham had waited many years for the promise of a son and heir. When God miraculously gave him a son through his aged wife Sarah, the boy became everything to him. The Lord gave him a test: would he be obedient to trust God over his love for his own son? (Genesis 22:1-18). Who was first in his life: God or Isaac? The Lord Jesus Christ is to be first

¹ *Gathered Gold, A Treasury of Quotations for Christians*, Compiled by John Blanchard, Evangelical Press, 1984. Page 68.

and foremost at the center of our lives. Sometimes, even family members may seek to turn us from a life of pure devotion to Christ when they do not understand the significance of spiritual things. Some would make us feel that we are “wasting our time” and advise that we use our God-given talents and abilities to make money or do something more “worthwhile” rather than serving God's kingdom. We must realize that our enemy will sometimes use even our loved ones, without their realizing it, to turn us away from Christ. It can be very intimidating when it comes from a father or mother whose wisdom you trust implicitly.

The words Jesus used are strong on purpose, but it is hyperbole, an overstatement designed to make a point with maximum effect. We see this kind of language in Paul's writing when he wrote, “**Just as it is written: ‘Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated,’**” (Romans 9:13; Malachi 1:3). It wasn't that God hated Esau, but this is comparative language—Jacob was the one who was chosen to bring forth those who would inherit the land and the promises of God. This kind of language was also used by Jesus when He said, “**No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money**” (Matthew 6:24). We are not to hate our bank accounts, but our bank accounts should not rule our decision-making over the Lord. This strong language style of teaching was designed to create word pictures in one's mind to enable easy recall. Here are just a few other examples of this:

- Cutting off one's hand (Matthew 5:29-30)
- A camel passing through the eye of a needle (Matthew 19:24)
- Accepting violence and robbery without resistance (6:29)
- A timber in one's eye (Luke 6:41-42)

Jesus went further by teaching us to hate “**even his own life**” (Luke 14:26). It is impossible to hate one's own life, but the Lord is talking about priorities, i.e., the disciple is no longer to prioritize himself over Christ. We cannot love our father, mother, spouse, children, brothers, sisters or ourselves properly *unless* we forsake our own love and receive the love that God has for our parents, spouse, children, siblings and ourselves. When Jesus calls a man or a woman to follow Him, it is a call to “come, die, and live.” We cannot follow Christ if we are alive to our self-dominated, “me -first,” excuse making, i.e., the internal programming we inherited from Adam. We must admit that we, in our own selves, do not have what it takes to be a disciple of Christ! □

The saying is true: “The Christian life is not difficult. It is impossible. The only one who can live it is Christ.” The rich young ruler learned that “**What is impossible with man is possible with God**” (Luke 18:27). The disciples learned that rich people have a difficult time entering the kingdom of God. Jesus said that, without entering into the substitutionary work of Christ, it couldn't be done. The sooner we come to grips with this, the better: It takes Christ's LIFE to be Christ-like. When Christianity fails to be the outliving of the Indwelling Christ, it is fraudulent (Colossians 1:27; Romans 8:10).

If we were only able to visualize all that Christ gives us in return for the life we exchange with Him, it would seem a tiny sacrifice on our part. He promises to provide us with life in abundance. C.S. Lewis once said, “Christ does not ask everyone to give up everything for Him,

but He does expect them to be **willing** to give up everything.” The call of Jesus is uncompromising, it is discipleship at all costs, and discipleship costs all. The good news is that Jesus gives us the “all” that discipleship requires. He gave ALL that He was in dying for us on the cross. He rose from the dead, ascended to the Father, and now gives ALL that He is in the power of resurrection to us through His indwelling Holy Spirit. This kind of life is how Jesus lived: During a spiritual prayer battle in the Garden of Gethsemane, the Lord could have chosen to live for Himself, but He chose to die for you and me:

⁴¹He withdrew about a stone's throw beyond them, knelt down and prayed, ⁴²"Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done" (Luke 22:41-42).

A Christian no longer lives for himself. He is bought with a price and no longer has the right to do what he wants. When a person is baptized, he is saying to the world that he chooses to die to himself and be raised to be a new person. □

The story is told of James Calvert who went out as a missionary to the cannibals of the Fiji Islands. The captain of the ship that carried him there sought to turn him back by saying, “You will lose your life and the lives of those with you if you go among such savages.” Calvert’s reply well demonstrates the cost of commitment: “We died before we came here.”²

A disciple of Christ has chosen to walk as Jesus walked, even if it means he should die for his faith. That's why we are to take up our cross just as Jesus did. Everything must be subordinate to Christ, even our own being. The story of Jim Elliot and four others martyred for their faith reminds us that the cost to follow wholeheartedly can lead to our death. These men gave their lives for the furtherance of the Gospel that the Huaorani tribe of South America would be represented before God at the Resurrection of the Saints.

What we are saying is that it takes men and women of exceptional commitment to give up their lives, take up their cross, and oppose the evil culture of the world system. The kingdom of God is different from the kingdom of this world. It requires a life laid down in complete surrender to our Lord and Master, Jesus Christ. The Lord Jesus is drafting all His children into His army. We are conscripts, not volunteers, but we all too easily find excuses and dodge the draft.

Question 3) What do you think a disciple looks like in our modern society? Is a modern-day disciple any different from New Testament times? Discuss similarities or differences. □

The Cost of Discipleship

Jesus then used a parable of an architect envisioning a building and a general going to war.

²⁸"Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Will he not first sit down and estimate the cost to see if he has enough money to complete it? ²⁹For if he lays the foundation and is not able to finish it, everyone who sees it will ridicule him, ³⁰saying, 'This fellow began to build and was not able to finish.' ³¹"Or suppose a king is about to go to war against

² 1500 Illustrations for Biblical Preaching, Michael Green, Baker Book House, Page 72.

another king. Will he not first sit down and consider whether he is able with ten thousand men to oppose the one coming against him with twenty thousand? ³²If he is not able, he will send a delegation while the other is still a long way off and will ask for terms of peace. ³³In the same way, any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple (Luke 14:28-33).

Each of them "sits down" and thinks through or estimates what resources he will need to fulfill the task ahead of him. There will be decisions made as to what must be given up that the mission may be accomplished. There will also be thoughts of other skills and people that will help you in the task, whatever it is that God has called you to do. Discipleship requires total consecration to God, which means *empty hands* and speaks of emptying your hands of everything that you own so that you may present them to God to fill. He only can fill empty hands. "Consecration isn't our giving anything to God. It is our taking our hands off what already belongs to God" (Walter B. Knight). Some were attracted to Christ's teaching, miracles and the winsomeness of His person, but wanted to follow Him on their terms. I must repeat it: you cannot be a follower of Christ on your terms. You must agree to the terms of the ticket. You cannot make up your own ticket. If you do, you will be outside the door when the time comes.

Jesus calls His followers to a relationship of uncompromising trust and obedience.

⁵⁷"As they were walking along the road, a man said to him, "I will follow you wherever you go." ⁵⁸Jesus replied, "Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head." ⁵⁹He said to another man, "Follow me." But the man replied, "Lord, first let me go and bury my father." ⁶⁰Jesus said to him, "Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and proclaim the kingdom of God." ⁶¹Still another said, "I will follow you, Lord; but first let me go back and say good-bye to my family." ⁶²Jesus replied, "No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God" (Luke 9:57-62; See also Matthew 8:18-22).

The Lord concludes the two analogies by saying: "In the same way, any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple" (Luke 14:33). How can we give up everything we have? We need houses and cars, etc. What does it mean to give up everything? The Greek word is *apotasso*, i.e. "to say farewell, to take leave (of). Figuratively, to renounce, to give up something." If you have decided to entrust your life to Christ, it will require that ownership of all that you have, even your own life and your family's, will be given into Christ's hands. True freedom and joy come when a person gives up all he has into the hands of the One who will take care of all that is entrusted to His care. We see this kind of lifestyle in other places in the book of Luke. Peter, James, and John leave their nets (5:11). Zacchaeus gives away half his wealth to the poor (19:8), and Levi left his tax collecting business (5:27-28). □

Our lives affect others more than we realize. If a person looks at my life and sees that I talk the talk, but I do not walk the walk, then he will conclude that Christianity has no power to change a person's life. I can become a stumbling block to someone's coming to Christ because of the way I live my life. Be careful, then, how you live your life before others. We may not be aware of it, but every one of us influences others.

³⁴Salt is good, but if it loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? ³⁵It is fit neither for the soil nor for the manure pile; it is thrown out. He who has ears to hear, let him hear (Luke 14:34-35).

This passage of Scripture concludes with Jesus talking about salt. In those days, there was no such thing as refrigerators, salt was the preservative. In Israel, salt came from the evaporation of the water of the Dead Sea. The salt was not pure sodium chloride but had all sorts of different minerals mixed into it. It was possible for the salt to become stale, lack flavor and lose its preservative quality. When our lives are not completely given in total consecration to God and His grace, we become stale and bland, and lack the ability to slow the putrefaction or rotting of the culture around us. God has called and equipped ordinary men and women, like you and me, to go against the tide of this world system.

Question 4) What men and women of God can you think of that had a tremendous impact on the culture of their day? For what specific things are they known?

Here are a few that come to mind: Martin Luther King and Rosa Parks, who stood against the injustices of their day; Martin Luther, the hero of the Reformation; William Booth, the founder of the Salvation Army; John Wycliffe, the man who translated the Scriptures into English against colossal opposition. William Wilberforce, who challenged slavery among the political elite in Britain. If we had the time, we could think of many who have changed lives and history and headed against the tide of the culture in which they lived. Any great work that God wants to accomplish starts with the calling of a man or woman totally owned by God. John the Baptist was a man like that. He was sold out for God's glory: "There came a man who was sent from God; his name was John" (John 1:6).

How can we fulfill our commitment to Christ? Like the builder of the tower, we must admit our human inadequacy, declare bankruptcy, and appeal to the mercy of a higher court. The verdict is that there are resources available from outside ourselves to finish the work started. In the words of Major Ian Thomas, "All that He is is all that I have. I can never have more and need never have less." □

"The one who calls you is faithful and he will do it" (1 Thessalonians 5:24).

"Being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus" (Philippians 1:6).

There is nothing casual about discipleship. Jesus called for a radical commitment in which nothing or no one takes God's place of primacy in our affections and loyalty. When we fully surrender to God, His grace can work in ways that we could not imagine!

A surrender is an act of our will. You must first trust Christ fully to surrender totally to Him. Ask God in which areas of your life you need more to trust Him. Ask for His help in actively putting your trust in His ability to sustain you and protect you. "For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future" (Jeremiah 29:11). He has the best in mind for your life and knows your needs even better than you do. Take time in prayer to identify those things that would hold you back from

becoming a fully committed follower of Christ. Be aware of your greatest fears as well as your strongest temptations. Then, present these things to Him and ask Him to take over the rule over your life. Ask the Holy Spirit to remind you whenever these things start to cloud your decision-making or challenge your first commitment to Jesus Christ.

When invited, the Holy Spirit is the one who "comes alongside" us to show the way of God more perfectly. You will also need to fill your mind with the Word of God, which will influence your decision-making and even your desires. Television, the Internet, and other media so persuasive in our lives must be brought under the control of the Holy Spirit. We need to recognize and choose what will be the loudest voices, so to speak, in our lives. Whatever we decide to give our time or whatever influences our thoughts will doubtlessly affect our minds and, therefore, our will.

To fully surrender, we also need to acknowledge that it will change our lives. To consider deliberately what this means is to "count the cost." Since God's grace is always sufficient, to count the cost means that we must have a "reality check":

- ❑ To be a follower of Christ is not comfortable.
- ❑ To be a follower of Christ means that you will experience hardship, rejection, persecution, and the first-hand experience of spiritual warfare.❑
- ❑ To be a follower of Christ means there will be times you feel broken hearted and sometimes "broken."
- ❑ To be a follower of Christ means you will face all kinds of pressure, opinions, and controversy.❑
- ❑ To be a disciple of Christ will mean there will be days when you feel like quitting but must persevere by faith.❑
- ❑ To be a follower of Christ means that you will share in His sufferings if you would also share in His glory. You must be willing to be the outcast.
- ❑ To be a follower of Christ means the more that you love, the less you may be loved in return (See 2 Corinthians 12:15).³

The benefits of obedience to Christ are numerous:

- ❑ First of all, there is an ever-increasing glorious future. "Those who are wise will shine like the brightness of the heavens, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever" (Daniel 12:3).
- ❑ Secondly, close communion with Christ and other believers will bring great joy. "I no longer call you servants because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you" (John 15:15).
- ❑ There will be great fruit in your life as you make an impact on those around you. "Come, follow me," Jesus said, "and I will send you out to fish for people" (Matt. 4:19).❑

³ So I will very gladly spend for you everything I have and expend myself as well. If I love you more, will you love me less? (2 Corinthians 12:15).

- ❑ The benefits are not only in eternity, either, for there will be fruit and rewards in this lifetime. "Truly I tell you," Jesus said to them, "no one who has left home or wife or brothers or sisters or parents or children for the sake of the kingdom of God will fail to receive many times as much in this age, and in the age to come eternal life" (Luke 18:29-30). □
- ❑ There will also be eternal rewards that are yet to be revealed! "What no eye has seen, what no ear has heard, and what no human mind has conceived; the things God has prepared for those who love him" (1 Corinthians 2:9).

The choice to follow or not to follow Christ is a question we all answer by our response to Him, changing not only our lives but also the lives of others. There is a favorite Christmas movie that depicts this so well. It is called *It's a Wonderful Life*. For those of you who do not know the story, it is about George Bailey, a man whose imminent suicide on Christmas Eve brings about the intervention of his guardian angel, Clarence Odbody. Clarence shows George all the lives he has touched and the contributions he has made to his community, and how different it would be had he never been born.

The two stories are told simultaneously, and the viewer can compare these two lives: a life lived with others in mind, and a life lived totally for self. Although it may be on the extreme end of the scale, we all make a similar choice. Imagine for a moment, two movies are being made, both about your life. One would depict the story of your life as a disciple of Jesus Christ, and another about a life lived for self, a life of your own choosing. Imagine how they may differ, i.e., the lives that would be affected and the rewards earned or lost. All our lives resound for eternity, one way or another. In which movie will you star? You will invest your life in making one or the other.

Prayer: Father, I surrender myself into Your loving arms. Grant me the grace to live for You in this life so that I may make choices with my life that are God-honoring. Amen

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