

## **The Cost of Discipleship**

### **Luke 14:25-35**

Almost weekly we hear of Muslim women strapping explosives to their bodies and blowing up innocent victims or Muslim men driving a vehicle rigged with a bomb into a building, a police station or a crowd. They are suicide bombers, who sincerely believe that by killing infidels and themselves, they will go directly to heaven. We may question their religion; we may challenge their wisdom, and we may violently disagree with their theology, but we cannot deny their commitment. They are acting on their beliefs. The tragedy is they believe a lie, are sold out to a false god and are committed to a false theology. While they earnestly believe this suicide act will take them directly to heaven, in reality, it will take them directly to hell.

Jesus Christ had much to say about commitment and much of what he says is found in the context of discipleship. Jesus never hid the fact that to follow Him there was a demand as well as an offer. He offers all that come to Him a free and gracious salvation wherein one is forgiven of all sins, given eternal life, made a son or daughter of God and set free from the certain wrath to come.

Yet, it is also true that while He offers men a free salvation. He demands their allegiance and submission to Him. There is a price to pay for every true follower of Christ. Salvation is free, but the effects of salvation often cost much.

An American soldier in Iraq was being interviewed by a reporter. The reporter said, "Why are you willing to go through the hardships of battle, even facing the possibility of being maimed or killed, for the concept of freedom?" The soldier gave a profound answer. He said, "Freedom is not free; it costs to be free." We may give much the same answer about our Christian salvation. Salvation is free, but it costs to be a disciple of Christ. Salvation is free but sanctification costs.

Every coin has two sides but there is just one coin. One side of the salvation coin is grace, love, life, freedom, security and peace. The other side of the coin of

salvation is work, perseverance, submission, suffering, sacrifice and warfare, which is the essence of discipleship.

Jesus taught discipleship but this is not a very popular message today in the USA. Yet, what the church needs today are dynamic, radical believers for Christ. We need “fanatics” for Christ. Simply put, we need the kind of disciples that Christ taught about in the Bible. Unfortunately, the words “radical” and “fanatical” have taken on a bad connotation since 9/11. Very few people want to be called “fanatical Christians” or “radical believers.” These terms are now given over to the radical fundamentalists of Islam. However, what the church needs today is for preachers, teachers, evangelists, Christian workers and laymen to take Christ very seriously as to what He says about true discipleship

When we think about true commitment to Christ, we often fear that we will be mocked and even persecuted for our Christian beliefs. This is true and the Apostle Paul said, **“In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted (2 Tim. 3:12).”** If the unsaved world calls us “fanatics” or “radicals” or “religious right” or “fundamentalists” or “narrow minded bigots” or “Bible thumpers” or “worshippers of a paper pope,” so be it. You may hate these titles (and so do I) but we are already being called these names by the secularists in this country who have a distain for Christians.

The Lord Jesus Christ had much to say about discipleship. We Christians need to re-examine His teachings and obey them as His true followers.

**THE CALL TO GENUINE FAITH (Luke 14:25): “Large crowds were traveling with Jesus and turning to them he said:”**

By this point in the life of our Lord, He had been rejected totally by the leaders and the majority of Jews were following the leaders. Now that He has been rejected by the majority, it is going to be at a great cost of discipleship that a few follow Him. There were still large crowds following Jesus, but their motives were wrong. Christ, therefore, throws out a challenge to test the reality of their faith and to expose their ingenuous motives.

A few of the multitude were undoubtedly true believers, but the majority was just along for the ride. Some were probably following the Lord for religious motives, thinking perhaps he was the Messiah. Others were thrill seekers that wanted to see a miracle. Others followed for political reasons, hoping that Christ would overthrow the cruel Roman government. Still others followed for personal reasons wanting their ears tickled, or they were curiosity seekers, or they only wanted their bellies fed. Whatever their motives, Jesus knew their hearts and rejected the vast majority of these professing disciples. *Jesus knew that nothing does so much to harm the cause of true Christianity as hypocrisy, backsliding and unconverted hearts in the visible church, and all this happens when so called disciples are enlisted without warning them of the cost of discipleship.* Jesus challenged the crowd about true discipleship in order to weed out false professors of Jesus Christ. His goal was to get rid of the phonies!

Why did Jesus want to get rid of the phonies? He alone understood that the work of Christ is to be carried on by true, born again believers that are committed to be followers of Christ at all costs. It only takes a few good men and women to do a big work.

The world is not changed by the masses but by committed people. In 1918, a small group of men gathered together in a brewery in Germany in order to discuss political aspirations. These men were the nucleus for the Nazi Party which would soon dominate Germany and bring a tyranny to the world. Among this small group of men was Adolph Hitler. He saw a group of men who were energetic, dedicated and pliable and he seized upon the occasion to put forth his political views. Hitler addressed them and confronted them with this challenge: "Give me men," he said, "fifty men who have no will of their own; fifty men who are willing to follow me; fifty men who are desirous of total commitment, and I will conquer the world. He almost did it!

### **THE CALL TO DISCIPLESHIP (Luke 14:26a): “If anyone comes to me...”**

This context is about coming to Christ for salvation with a desire to be His follower. One must clearly understand that there is a price to be paid to follow Christ. Jesus leaves the call open to “anyone,” meaning any man or woman. He will lay down the rules expecting the true disciples to adhere to them. He will not pressure the person who wants to follow, but from those who do follow, He demands undivided loyalty and submission to Himself. Christ compels men to make a radical breach with the past and be separated unto Him.

“He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep, to gain what he cannot lose” (martyr to the Auca Indians, Jim Elliott).

### **THE CALL TO A PERSON (Luke 14:26b): “If anyone comes to me. . .”**

Discipleship means that we are committed to Jesus Christ alone. Our ultimate devotion does not belong to a local church or a denomination, and we follow these organizations only as long as they follow Christ. Christ is inviting men to Himself to learn from Him, to obey His words and to identify with His cause. We must have inward commitment to Christ, but we also must have an outward testimony so that men know we are Christians, true followers of Christ. The true Christian follows the person of Christ, not any man-made system, and he or she is motivated to faithful service out of love for Christ, not legalism or fear.

### **THE CALL TO SEVER LIFE’S DEAREST TIES (Luke 14:26c): “and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters. . .”**

Jesus asks for a severance of life’s dearest ties. He demands loyalty to Him above our families. The Lord is not saying that we should hate our parents or wife or children after conversion. In fact, Christ makes us love our families more. This is emphatic language and all He is saying is that He must be first! If there is a conflict between our loved ones and doing the will of God, then we must follow

Christ and believe that God will change the hearts of our loved ones. It is loyalty to Christ above loyalty to family. One of the greatest foes of Christ might be our family, either parents who are unsaved or saved parents who fight the call of God on their children's lives.

My parents, especially my father, were very much opposed to my going into the ministry. He was not saved and looked at ministers and leeches on society. Just before I left for seminary, I called my dad to tell him I loved him and that I did not want to hurt him, but I had to follow Christ. His last words were, "I understand, son, what you are doing, and I think you are a damn fool!" And with these cheery words, I went off to seminary.

**THE CALL TO HATE SELF (Luke 14:26d): "Yes, even his own life—he cannot be my disciple."**

Jesus asks for sacrifice of self. To follow Him means to renounce self-will, to surrender one's rights. It is not to deny things to oneself, but to deny oneself to oneself. It is to say "no" to self and "yes" to Christ. Jesus asks us to surrender the person we love most—OURSELVES. This is what really hurts—not only denial of others but that which one holds dearest of all—Himself. If we are not willing to put Christ above others and ourselves, we cannot be His disciple. This is a sobering and staggering statement, but our Lord means what He says and says what He means.

A disciple evaluates everything in life through the person of Christ and His spiritual kingdom. Sometimes people committed to false causes understand the essence of discipleship better than Christians.

"There is one thing about which I am in dead earnest, and that is the Communist cause. It is my life, my business, my religion, my hobby, my sweetheart, my wife and mistress, and my bread and meat. I work at it in the daytime and dream about it at night. Its hold grows on me and does not lessen 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, books, ideas, and actions according to how they affect the Communist cause and by their attitude towards it. I have already been in jail because of my ideas and am ready to go before a firing squad” (communist youth).

**THE CALL TO MARTYRDOM (Luke 14:27): “And anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.”**

Every Jewish hearer knew what it meant to take up a cross. They had witnessed hundreds of Roman executions by crucifixion. The condemned prisoner was forced to carry that heavy cross through the public streets and out to a hill on the outskirts of the town. As the prisoner carried the cross, he would be mocked and scorned and his fate would ultimately be death.

Jesus is saying that the Christian must be willing to be mocked for the cause of Christ. Unbelieving men will call Christians bigots, narrow-minded, fanatics, uneducated, demon possessed and crazy as we go to tell the world about the salvation which is found in Jesus Christ. Public ridicule is part of being a genuine disciple of Christ.

Sometimes disciples of Christ are called upon to make the ultimate sacrifice of their lives for Christ. Occasionally followers of Christ have to die physically for their convictions about sin, Christ, salvation, heaven and hell. If that happens, Christ will be there to go through it with us as He was with Stephen when he died a martyr’s death.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a German Christian, who refused to accept Adolph Hitler and the Nazi philosophy of life, was put into prison for his faith and hung to death just short time before the Third Reich fell. Bonhoeffer said, “When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die.”

John Wesley said, “I am immortal until the hour of my death.”

Henry Martyn, the missionary to India who died at 33 years of age by disease said, “Whether life or death be mine, may Christ be magnified in me. If he has work for me to do, I cannot die.”

The Apostle Paul said it best, “For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain” (Philip. 1:21).

We live in a time when men and woman all over this world are being killed because of their faith in Christ. There are many places in this world where revival is taking place, and where revival happens, the church suffers. In the Sudan, Nigeria, Rwanda, and the Congo alone, there have been millions of martyrs. *There have been more martyrs for the Christian Faith in the last 100 years than there has been in the whole history of the Christian Church.* Tertullian was right when he said, “The blood of martyrs is the seed of the church.”

**THE CALL TO FORSAKE THINGS (Luke 14:33): “In the same way, any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple.”**

The words “give up” mean "to renounce" or "set apart" or "say goodbye to." This is a present tense in the Greek which means that this forsaking is to be a continual process. Obviously total discipleship does not come overnight but it begins with an initial commitment to Christ, and it is a lifetime process.

Christ is speaking here about material possessions. Forsaking things deals with a person’s attitude towards them, a willingness or desire to let them go if called by Christ to do so. To renounce all, for the majority of Christians, does not mean a physical departure from home or job. Yet, it includes an inner surrender of both, and a refusal to allow any materialistic desires or worldly ambitions to occupy the first place in one’s heart. Discipleship does not mean that we should go live in a convent or monkery, nor leave a nice home or a good job, nor does it mean that Christians cannot have money, material things and enjoy many of the

pleasures of life. It means that they are not to be obsessed with these things and must be willing to give them up if Christ asks them to do so. It does mean that those who have money are to share liberally for the cause of Christ because that is the primary reason God has given them money. Discipleship deals with our inner motivations about material things and whether Christ is first.

Jesus said it best, **“But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well” (Matthew 6:33).**

Again the Lord says that if we are not willing to put Him first in all that we do, we cannot be His disciple. It costs to be a disciple, but it costs a whole lot more not to be a disciple, for without discipleship, one declares with his or her life that he or she is an unbeliever with no real desire to please Christ. Discipleship means temporary anguish at times in one’s life, but no discipleship means no eternal life. Once possessed eternal life can never be lost, but there are many professing Christians that have no desire for discipleship, giving evidence that they have never been truly saved. Those that are genuinely saved will desire to be disciples’ of Christ and will evidence the life of Christ in them to some degree.

## THE PROMISE TO DISCIPLES

Christians often have a horrible fear that if they really commit to Christ, becoming a radical in His kingdom, they will suffer so terribly and their lives will be miserable. But what does Jesus say?

The Apostle Peter also questioned whether following Christ was really worth it, and Christ gave him a direct answer.

*Peter answered him, “We have left everything to follow you! What then will there be for us?” Jesus said to them, “I tell you the truth, at the renewal of all things, when the Son of Man sits on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.*



*And everyone who has left house or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or fields for my sake will receive a hundred times as much and will inherit eternal life. But many who are first will be last, and many who are last will be first” (Matthew 19:28-30).*

Was Christ jerking us around? Was He lying to us? His words are either true or false. If they are false promises, Christ is a liar, and He is not worth following. Let us go out and eat, drink and be merry for tomorrow we die. If they are true promises, then not to follow Christ would be the biggest mistake any person could ever make. [NOTE TO READERS: At this point, or very near this point, eyewitnesses of this sermon on Jan. 9, 2005 believe Dr. Arnold said some unscripted words for a few seconds, then uttered his final phrase, “And when I go to heaven” and died of a heart attack in the pulpit as reported by the national media.] Not to follow Christ, will cost one his or her soul!

## CONCLUSION

What the church needs today are true disciples, outspoken followers of Christ, and bold believers. We need radical Christians that spread the good news of Christ through love and persuasion, not through force and killing. We need men and women who are willing to suffer for the gospel and die for it if called upon to do so.

John Wesley, the founder of the Methodist Church, said, “Give me one hundred men who love God and hate sin, and we will turn the world up side down for Christ!” Wesley almost did it in his generation.

I say to you, “Give me one hundred men or women that love God and hate sin, and we will turn the world up side down for Christ!” I think I could find one hundred men and women who loved Christ in America, but I am not sure I could find one hundred men and women in America that hate sin.

We Christians just have one life to give, so let us give it for Christ and His kingdom, for eternal values and for the glory of God.

“This life will soon be past.  
Only what is done for Christ will last.”