

The Cost of Discipleship: Luke 14:25-35

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Introduction

As Jesus sought to seek and save the lost, He demanded a life of discipleship. A disciple literally means “a learner” and stands in contrast to “a teacher.” Thus, a disciple is “one who engages in learning through instruction from another”, a pupil, or an apprentice (BDAG, 609). For Jesus, being a disciple extended beyond the normal definition. It meant more than passive learning, an initial commitment, or simply believing that Jesus spoke truth. Being a disciple of Jesus demanded continual adherence. It demanded accepting and implementing the teaching. It necessitated that one abide in His word (Jn. 8:31-32).

“Now great multitudes were going along with Him; and He turned and said to them...” (v. 25).

On one particular occasion, Jesus addressed the subject of discipleship to large multitudes, who were following after Him. As was common during this time, those that desired to be disciples followed after the teacher and learned from his teaching. As the masses began to build, Jesus turned to them and laid a platform for discipleship. Following after Jesus meant that more than their presence was needed. They had to consider the cost as well. Jesus taught this message by providing two points of application, two parables, and two final conclusive statements. Jesus began by saying, “If anyone comes to Me, ...” He unmistakably addressed those who were standing around him, but his words echo for all who would follow after him.

“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” (v. 26).

Relationship is at the heart of being a disciple, and Jesus first addressed this subject. Familial ties in this life are normal. Everyone naturally cares for and cherishes his own family. When one becomes a disciple, however, he must put Christ above all others. Our hearts cannot be divided between God and our family (Matt. 6:24). Jesus illustrated this point in His own life by placing emphasis on His spiritual family rather than on His physical family (Mk. 3:31-35). Christ called on disciples to “hate” those closest to them. They must love their families less than Christ. Jesus first named parents in the list. As children grow up, they are instructed in the matters of life by their parents. A child’s rearing must be forsaken if it stands in contrast to the words of Jesus. As children grow up and leave their parents, they cling to a spouse and bear children. These relationships are the closest in life but they cannot supersede devotion to Christ. Finally, self denial is enjoined upon disciples. The way of man leads to destruction, and cannot be trusted as a safe guide (Prov. 12:14; 14:12; Jer. 10:23). A disciple must be willing to give up worldliness and the pleasures of sin. Even hopes and dreams that are innocent pursuits must yield to the pursuit of discipleship. If one is not willing to make this commitment, then he cannot be a disciple of Jesus.

“Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple” (v. 27).

In addition to putting Christ above family members, a disciple must be willing to take up his own cross and follow after Jesus. The cross was a symbol of pain and suffering in the Roman world. Crucifixion was more than a death sentence. It meant that a criminal would spend his last hours in pure torture. A disciple, therefore, must be one that is willing to endure persecution and even death for the cause of Christ. Persecution will be inevitable for a child of God (2 Tim. 3:12). It can only be avoided by compromising devotion to Christ. The assaults of persecution must be handled by sanctifying Christ and providing a defense for His cause (1 Pet. 3:13-18). If one is not willing to make this commitment, then he cannot be a disciple of Jesus.

“For which one of you, when he wants to build a tower, does not first sit down and calculate the cost, to see if he has enough to complete it? (v. 28).

Jesus, the Master Teacher, illustrated His teaching by providing parables or stories of everyday occurrences with spiritual lessons. The first parable that Jesus gave was the parable of the building of a tower. Before taking on a large project, a builder must first consider the costs associated with building. He must ensure that he has enough money to buy tools, material, and labor. He must be committed to completion. An overzealous and under prepared builder may build a great foundation, but it will be useless by itself. If the builder doesn't have enough to complete the project, then he should not start. After all, the goal is to complete the tower, not merely start it. A partially finished tower would result in ridicule and public humiliation.

“Or what king, when he sets out to meet another king in battle, will not first sit down and take counsel whether he is strong enough with ten thousand men to encounter the one coming against him with twenty thousand?” (v. 31)

The second parable that Jesus told was the parable of the king going to war. Just like the builder, the king must give forethought to his decision. He must ensure that he has the necessary amount of men, weapons, tactics, and leadership to win. A hasty decision to go into battle may create initial excitement and win immediate favor among supporters, but it will end in ruin. The lives of thousands may be lost and the kingdom could fall into subjection. By calculating the cost and using foresight, a disastrous defeat can be avoided by sending a delegation to seek terms of peace.

Both parables illustrate a similar point that can be seen in discipleship. The chance to follow after Jesus and be in heaven one day should create excitement. This decision cannot be made lightly, however. It must be accompanied by forethought and a commitment to finish the task. It is not enough to begin a life of discipleship; it must be completed. If one only considers the benefit without considering the cost, he will become disillusioned when difficult times arise. Persecution and the allurements of the world will cause many to fall away who have not considered the cost (Matt. 13:20-21). A firm commitment and an understanding of the price that must be paid will enable a disciple to overcome difficulties. A proper perspective is essential (2 Cor. 5:7). Focusing on Jesus and the surpassing riches of the glory that awaits will enable a disciple to endure through the assaults of Satan (Rom. 8:18; Heb. 12:1-3).

“So therefore, no one of you can be My disciple who does not give up all his own possessions” (v. 33).

By way of conclusion, Jesus called upon His disciples to give up their possessions. The word translated “give up” means to “say farewell, take leave (of)” or “renounce” (BDAG, 123). Many consider success to be an abundance of things, a simple accumulation of wealth. Life does not consist of our possessions (Lk. 12:15). The disciple of Christ must alter his view of this worldly mindset (1 Jn. 2:15). Possessions cannot be treated as personal property, the prize of an individual. Instead, one must remember that God has given all blessings (Jms. 1:17), and those that are stewards of God’s blessings must use them in His service. Christians should give freely and help those who are in need (Acts 20:35; 1 Thess. 4:11-12; Eph. 4:28). Money and possessions are tools of service, not trophies to be cherished (1 Tim. 6:9-10). If one is not willing to make this commitment, then he cannot be a disciple of Jesus.

“Therefore, salt is good; but if even salt has become tasteless, with what will it be seasoned? It is useless either for the soil or for the manure pile; it is thrown out” (vv. 34-35).

Jesus concluded His remarks with an illustration of salt. Salt is good, but it is only useful as long as it functions like salt. In a similar fashion, being a disciple is good, but it is only useful as long as a disciple functions like a disciple. If a disciple quits being a disciple, then he is as useless and tasteless salt. Just as useless salt will be thrown out, a disciple who has quit will be thrown into outer darkness (2 Pet. 2:20-22). A disciple must consider the cost and be willing to endure to the end. If one is not willing to make this commitment, then he cannot be a disciple of Jesus.

“He who has ears to hear, let him hear” (v. 35).

No mention is made of the reaction of the crowd. Every individual in the crowd had to consider the message for himself. Everyone that follows after Jesus must hear His words. They have to be imbibed and taken into the heart. As true students, disciples must adhere to the teaching of the Master Teacher, Jesus Christ. The decision to become a disciple is a serious commitment. A person must reflect on his heart and his desire to serve the Master. No man or woman should become a disciple without considering the cost. Being a disciple is a life-long commitment and endurance is essential. Only after a person recognizes the cost and determines to pay the price should he become a disciple.