

The Cost of Discipleship
(Mt 10.34—39)

²⁵ Now large crowds were traveling with him; and he turned and said to them, ²⁶ “Whoever comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and even life itself, cannot be my disciple. ²⁷ Whoever does not carry the cross and follow me cannot be my disciple. ²⁸ For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not first sit down and estimate the cost, to see whether he has enough to complete it? ²⁹ Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who see it will begin to ridicule him, ³⁰ saying, ‘This fellow began to build and was not able to finish.’ ³¹ Or what king, going out to wage war against another king, will not sit down first and consider whether he is able with ten thousand to oppose the one who comes against him with twenty thousand? ³² If he cannot, then, while the other is still far away, he sends a delegation and asks for the terms of peace. ³³ So therefore, none of you can become my disciple if you do not give up all your possessions.¹

For the last month we have studied kingdom living. We have learned about greed verses generosity; humility verses honor; compassion verses only following man-made rules. Today we will learn about the cost of discipleship.

When Jesus left the Pharisee’s house, great crowds followed Him, but He was not impressed by their enthusiasm. He knew that most of those in the crowd were not the least bit interested in spiritual things. Some wanted only to see miracles, others heard that He fed the hungry, and a few hoped He would overthrow Rome and establish David’s promised kingdom. They were expecting the wrong things. When Jesus made the statements in our scripture he was on the road to Jerusalem. He knew that he was on his way to the cross; the crowds who were with him thought that he was on his way to an empire. That is why he spoke to them like this. In the most vivid way possible he told them that the person who followed him was not on the way to worldly power and glory, but must be ready for a loyalty that would sacrifice the dearest things in life and for suffering that would be like the agony of a man upon a cross.

¹ *The Holy Bible : New Revised Standard Version*. Nashville : Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1989, S. Lk 14:25-33

So, Jesus did the opposite of any good advertiser, he turned to the multitude and preached a sermon that deliberately thinned out the ranks. He made it clear that, when it comes to personal discipleship, He is more interested in quality than quantity. Don't get me wrong, in the matter of saving lost souls, He wants His house to be filled; but in the matter of personal discipleship, He wants only those who are willing to pay the cost.

Jesus intended to impress on the people their need to examine their resolve to follow Him. He was on His way to die on the cross. Ultimately everyone did desert Him when He was alone in the garden and then arrested and put on trial.

To emphasize that discipleship is difficult, Jesus begins by saying that one must hate his own family and even his own life in order to be His disciple. Literally hating one's family would have been a violation of the Law. Since Jesus on several occasions taught others to fulfill the Law, He must not have meant that one should literally hate one's family. His point here is on the priority of love. We must love Christ supremely. Our love for Christ must be so strong that all other love is like hatred in comparison. In fact, we must hate our own lives and be willing to bear the cross after Him. One's loyalty to Jesus must come before one's loyalty to family or even to life itself. Actually, those who did follow Jesus against their families' wishes were probably thought of as hating their families.

So let's examine discipleship. A "disciple" is a learner, one who attaches himself or herself to a teacher in order to learn a trade or a subject. Our closest modern equivalent is an "apprentice," one who learns by watching and by doing.

Jesus seems to make a distinction between salvation and discipleship. Salvation is open to all who will come by faith, while discipleship is for believers willing to pay the cost. Salvation means coming to the cross and trusting Jesus Christ, while discipleship means carrying the cross and following Jesus Christ. Jesus wants as

many sinners saved as possible, but He cautions us not to take discipleship lightly; and in His teachings He made it clear that there is a price to pay.

The second difficult qualification Jesus stressed was that one must **carry his** (his own) **cross and follow** Jesus. When the Roman Empire crucified a criminal or captive, the victim was often forced to carry his cross part of the way to the crucifixion site. Carrying his cross through the heart of the city was supposed to be an admission that the Roman Empire was correct in the sentence of death imposed on him, an admission that Rome was right and he was wrong. So when Jesus asked His followers to carry their crosses and follow Him, He was referring to a public display before others that Jesus was right and that the disciples were following Him even to their deaths.

But what does it mean to “carry the cross” today? It means daily identification with Christ in shame, suffering, and surrender to God’s will. It means death to self, to our own plans and ambitions, and a willingness to serve Him as He directs. A “cross” is something we willingly accept from God as part of His will for our lives. The Christian who called his noisy neighbors the “cross” he had to bear certainly does not understand the meaning of dying to self.

Using two illustrations or parables, Jesus then taught that discipleship must include planning and sacrifice. The first illustration concerned a tower. Before a person begins to build, they should be sure they will be able to pay the full cost of the project. The tower which the man was going to build was probably a vineyard tower. Vineyards were often equipped with towers from which one watched against thieves who might steal the harvest. An unfinished building is always a humiliating thing. Jesus’ followers must also be sure they are willing to pay the full price of discipleship.

The second illustration concerned a king who went out to battle. The king should be willing to sacrifice a desired victory if he senses he is unable to win.

This principle of sacrifice is also important in the realm of discipleship: we must be willing to give up everything for Jesus. Many of the people who were following Jesus throughout the countryside of Israel had done that. They had given up possessions and employment, knowing that the message Jesus was proclaiming was the most important thing on earth.²

The usual interpretation is that believers are represented by the man building the tower and the king fighting the war, and we had better “count the cost” before we start, lest we start and not be able to finish. But Campbell Morgan offers another way of looking at these; he said that the builder and the king represent not the believer but Jesus Christ. He is the One who must “count the cost” to see whether we are the kind of material He can use to build the church and battle the enemy. He cannot get the job done with halfhearted followers who will not pay the price.

Discipleship is serious business. If we are not true disciples, then Jesus cannot build the tower and fight the war. “There is always an *if* in connection with discipleship,” wrote Oswald Chambers, “and it implies that we need not [be disciples] unless we like. There is never any compulsion; Jesus does not coerce us. There is only one way of being a disciple, and that is by being devoted to Jesus.”

If we tell Jesus that we want to take up our cross and follow Him as His disciples, then He wants us to know exactly what we are getting into. He wants no false expectancy, no illusions, no bargains. He wants to use us as stones for building His church, soldiers for battling His enemies; and He is looking for quality.

²Walvoord, John F. ; Zuck, Roy B. ; Dallas Theological Seminary: *The Bible Knowledge Commentary : An Exposition of the Scriptures*. Wheaton, IL : Victor Books, 1983-c1985, S. 2:243

After all, He was on His way to Jerusalem when He spoke these words, and look what happened to Him there! He does not ask us to do anything for Him that He has not already done for us.

To some, Jesus says, “You cannot be My disciples!” Why? Because we will not forsake all for Him, bear shame and reproach for Him, and let our love for Him control us.

It is possible for us to be a follower of Jesus without being a disciple; to be a camp-follower without being a soldier of the king; to be a hanger-on in some great work without pulling our own weight. Someone was once talking to a great scholar about a younger man. He said, “So and so tells me that he was one of your students.” The teacher answered devastatingly, “He may have attended my lectures, but he was not one of my students.” It is one of the supreme handicaps of the church that in it there are so many distant followers of Jesus and so few real disciples. It is a Christian’s first duty to count the cost of following Christ.

In every area of life a person is called upon to count the cost. In the introduction to the marriage ceremony according to the forms of the Church of Scotland, the minister says, “Marriage is not to be entered upon lightly or unadvisedly, but thoughtfully, reverently, and in the fear of God.” A man and woman must count the cost.

It is the same with the Christian way. But if we are frightened by the high demands of Christ let us remember that we are not left to fulfill the demands alone. He who called us to the steep road will walk with us every step of the way and be there at the end to meet us.³

³ Barclay, William, lecturer in the University of Glasgow (Hrsg.): *The Gospel of Luke*. Philadelphia : The Westminster Press, 2000, c1975 (The Daily Study Bible Series, Rev. Ed), S. 195