

THE COST OF DISCIPLESHIP: FORSAKING ALL FOR JESUS

(CP Lu 14:28-35) Jesus told three parables here to stress the importance of what He was teaching – the qualifications of discipleship. Jesus spoke these parables so that there could be no misunderstanding of what He said in V26-27 (CP V26-27). The word *hateth* here is an idiom of preference. It does not mean that we are to literally hate our parents, wives, children and other family members, but that we are to love them less than we love Jesus (CP Mt 10:37). Jesus demands that our love and our loyalty to Him be greater than any other attachments we may have, including even our attachment for our families. To impress the point upon His listeners in Lu 14 that there is a cost involved in being His disciple, Jesus then told the three parables. Let us study them now in more detail (CP Lu 14:28-30). This is called the parable of the tower builder. Jesus illustrates in this parable the absurdity of following Him without first counting the cost (CP Lu 9:57-62).

Here we have three seemingly sincere candidates for salvation but they all failed to measure up to the standards Jesus has set for His disciples. These passages teach above all else that anything less than total consecration to the service of God and complete surrender to the authority of Jesus eliminates one from the Kingdom of heaven. The first incident teaches that an emotional enthusiasm that has not considered the cost of abandoning material security to follow Him is insufficient by Christ's standards. The second incident teaches that loyalty to Christ must take precedence over all other loyalties. Following after Jesus must be our highest priority. Jesus is not being insensitive to the propriety of funerals here, but is teaching against procrastinating – putting off the work of God. Followers of Christ have the urgent task of proclaiming the life that is in Him to those who are lost (CP 2Cor 6:2; 1Ti 4:13; 2Ti 4:1-2). In the Greek construction of 2Ti 4:1-2, Paul commands Timothy, and by extension every Christian, to be in a constant state of readiness to preach God's word – whether we feel like it or not and whether the time is opportune or not. The third incident teaches that once we start in God's service we cannot turn away from it. Service to God demands our undivided attention and if we are not prepared to single-mindedly serve God, then we will forfeit our place in the future eternal Kingdom (CP Gen 19:1, 12-26). Lot's wife would not let go of Sodom where her treasures were. She looked back and was turned into a pillar of salt. There must be no confusion in our minds as to what these scriptures teach. To be a true disciple of Christ requires total consecration to the service of God and complete surrender to the authority of Jesus. Anything less will cost one the Kingdom (CP Lu 14:31-33).

This is called the parable of the king going to war. Jesus illustrates here the impossibility of being saved unless one forsakes all for Him. *Forsaketh* means to place in order, to assign to a different place, to farewell, dismiss, renounce. It carries the notion here of putting something aside to prevent it being a hindrance or gaining excessive control. V33 is one of the most misunderstood passages of

scripture in the bible. Most Christians believe it means that they must be *willing* to forsake all for Jesus, but Jesus said they *must* forsake all for Him. The meaning is unmistakable. Unless believers forsake all for Jesus, they cannot be His disciples. Jesus demands that all we have: material possessions, family, even our own life must be placed at the service of God. He also requires our total renunciation of all self-interests and ambitions and everything else that would take precedence in our life over the things of God (CP Mk 10:17-27).

The rich young ruler sincerely wanted to be saved. He came running to Jesus and kneeled before Him, but he did not get saved – he failed the test of discipleship. He would not forsake all for Jesus. This does not mean that believers must sell or dispose of all their wealth and possessions in order to get saved, but it does mean that they must place all their wealth and possessions at the service of God once they are saved (CP Lu 9:23). To deny one's self is to put the interests of the Kingdom above all else. It means that Christians are to completely disregard themselves and abstain from any self-interests and ambitions that are contrary to God's word, and subjugate all selfish desires and pleasures (CP Col 3:1-4). There can be no compromise, because the choice between denying ourselves and living for our own selfish desires has to be made daily, and that choice will determine our eternal destiny. These seem to be harsh conditions, but Jesus has set the standard for discipleship and no one can come to Him on any other terms. That is what Jesus means in Lu 9:23 when He said, "*If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me*". Followers of Christ have to take up their cross every day. Not periodically or when it suits them, or when it is convenient or popular, but daily to the end of their life. Christ expects Christians to be committed sacrificially continuously throughout their Christian walk (CP He 13:10-14).

The writer of Hebrews here compares the sacrifice of animals in the Old Testament and that of Christ in the New Testament. As the carcasses of the animals were burned outside the camp, so too Christ was killed outside the city gate (CP Lev 4:21 and 16:27 with Jn 19:16-18). The animal sacrifices and their blood which was taken into the most holy place in the earthly tabernacle to atone for the sins of the people in the Old Testament typified the atoning work of Christ on the cross for sinners in the New Testament (CP Lev 16:11-19 with He 9:11-24, 10:1-14, 19-20). Jesus shed His sacrificial blood outside the city gate in order to sanctify – set apart for God's service – all who believe on Him. Therefore Christians are exhorted to "*go forth unto Him outside the camp*". This means that followers of Christ are to reject the corrupt world system and its practices, and be prepared to bear the contempt and abuse and shame that Jesus bore (CP Mt 5:11-12; Lu 6:22-23; 1Pe 4:14). The world is not the home of Christ's followers – theirs is an everlasting home in heaven (CP Eph 2:6, 19; Php 3:20; He 12:22).

The cross is a symbol of suffering, ridicule, self-denial and rejection, and followers of Christ must be prepared to suffer the reproach, hatred and ridicule of the world

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for Jesus' sake (CP Mt 10:38-39; Mk 8:34-37; Lu 9:23-25; Jn 12:24-26). These scriptures all teach that to be a disciple of Jesus we must be prepared to lose our life, not gain it. This means that making the achievement of happiness and pleasure our goal in life, instead of living in God's will and by His principles, will end in disappointment and loss. To renounce our ways and to live in fellowship with Jesus, basing our lives on His teachings is to find true life and joy, here and hereafter. This explains the paradox of discipleship highlighted in those scriptures – to lose life is to find it, to die is to live. While Jn 12:24-26 is a prediction by Jesus of His death, the principle by which he illustrates it applies to us too. Unless we die to self we cannot bring forth any fruit fit for the Kingdom. What Jesus says in all those scriptures has a two-fold application for Christians. One is that whoever lives a life of total consecration to the service of God and complete surrender to the authority of Jesus will gain it (CP Ro 8:12-13; 1Cor 6:9-11; Col 3:5-10). The other application is that if Christians are put to death for the Gospel's sake, they have the sure hope of eternal life (CP Ac 6:8-7:60; 1 Jn 2:13-14; 4:4; 5:4-5; Rev 2:7, 11, 17, 26; 3:5, 12, 21; 12:10-11). If through fear of physical death they deny Jesus, God will punish them (CP Mk 8:38 (also Lu 9:26); 2Ti 2:11-12; Rev 21:8). The *fearful* in Rev 21:8 are professing Christians whose fear of man overrides their loyalty to Christ and the truth of His word. Their personal feelings and status among men mean more to them than proclaiming God's word and witnessing to His saving grace. *Fearful* means to be timid, afraid, faint – hearted. Jesus places them first

among those consigned to the lake of fire because they profess to be Christians, but they compromise His word rather than proclaim it (CP Psa 119:46; Mt 10:32-33, 39; 13:20-21; Mk 8:34-38; Ro 10:8-10; 2 Ti 2:12; Rev 3:5). The radical nature of discipleship is highlighted throughout scripture. While the benefits of the Gospel are solely on the basis of personal choice, complying with the conditions for appropriating those benefits are part of the cost of that choice. Salvation is a paradox – it is both free and costly. Free because Jesus has already paid for it with his life's blood, yet there is a cost in terms of its impact upon those who would follow after Jesus (CP Lu 14:34-35). This is the parable of savourless salt, the last of the three parables Jesus told in Lu 14 to impress upon His followers the qualifications of discipleship, which we read at the commencement of this study. This teaches that like salt that loses its saltiness has no value and is thrown out, so disciples who no longer contain the characteristics of discipleship – that of total consecration to the service of God and complete surrender to the authority of Jesus – are of no value either (CP Mt 5:13; Mk 9:49-50). This clearly refutes the teaching by some in the church that *once saved* means *always saved*. If it were not possible to forfeit salvation, then these scriptures and others which teach the same thing would not be in the Bible. There is a lesson for the church here, and that is that salvation must never be represented to anyone as something that requires no commitment on their part because Jesus has done it all for them, and all they have to do is believe in Jesus to be saved. Nobody can be saved by a Gospel of easy believism. There must be no confusion in anyone's mind as to what Jesus really means when He said "*Follow me*".