

## The Cost Of Discipleship

Often, in our evangelical fervor to get people saved, we loudly proclaim to them that salvation is completely free, that it does not cost them anything at all to receive Jesus as their Savior. And that is so very true.

But, as we who have the Lord Jesus as our Savior well know, salvation is only a beginning point in the journey that we will walk with Him, and along that pathway, there will be a cost, sometimes a heavy cost.

And in the passage that I'll read for us in a moment that is the plainly spoken message that the Lord Jesus has for some of His disciples as he speaks with them about the coming days of their relationship with Him, that the next steps of their walk can quickly begin to demand a cost from them.

And folks, the same is true for you and me. Listen to these words given in Luke chapter 9, beginning with verse 57.

<sup>57</sup>Now it happened as they journeyed on the road, *that* someone said to Him, "Lord, I will follow You wherever You go."

<sup>58</sup>And Jesus said to him, "Foxes have holes and birds of the air *have* nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay *His* head."

<sup>59</sup>Then He said to another, "Follow Me." But he said, "Lord, let me first go and bury my father." <sup>60</sup>Jesus said to him, "Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and preach the kingdom of God."

<sup>61</sup>And another also said, "Lord, I will follow You, but let me first go *and* bid them farewell who are at my house." <sup>62</sup>But Jesus said to him, "No one, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God." (Luke 9:57-62)

May I say again clearly that the salvation that the Lord Jesus gives to us truly is completely free. His sacrifice of His precious blood paid all that our debt owed for us to have eternal salvation. All that He requires of us is that we "believe in Him and receive Him" into our heart. Those words in John 1, verse 12,

<sup>12</sup> But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, (John 1:12)

With our simple response of our believing in Him and receiving Him into our hearts, we are then eternally saved. But again, that is not all that takes place. Salvation is only the beginning of our relationship with the Lord Jesus. From those

very first moments that we begin to experience our newfound salvation, we also begin to realize that the new eternal relationship that we have with the Lord Jesus has a next step beyond our salvation, that there is more. Much more!

And that “next step” is what our bible scholars refer to as “Lordship”. “Lordship”! As we read through these gospels, we can’t help but clearly see that Jesus is most often referred to as being the “Lord”, meaning that He is not only “Christ our Savior”, but He is also to be “Christ our Lord”, “the Lord Jesus”! And by the simplest definition of the title “Lord” we know that a Lord is a person who has authority, control and power over us.

And so, while our salvation truly is “full and free”, the “Lordship” that comes quickly upon the heels of our salvation does have some requirements of us.

Within our newfound salvation we find that real changes begin to take place within our souls, changes that begin to pull and draw and compel our desires and habits and behaviors to be different from the way they were before our salvation.

And folks, that is a very good thing. But while it is very good, it is also at the same time, often a very difficult thing. Difficult because the sin that once lived within us and controlled our very being before we were saved has been cast aside within us, and our old sinful nature does not like that. And it fights back, inciting that old nature to begin what these scriptures call a “war within our members”.

And while “war” may sound a bit overstated, it really isn't. It has all the miseries of a war, an ongoing war that rages moment by moment between our old sinful flesh and the new presence of the Spirit of Christ who lives within us, a war that we are not at all accustomed to fighting, making it ever so difficult for us.

Listen to the way that that war is described to us in the scriptures, first in Galatians 5,

17 . . . the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do. (Galatians 5:17)

And then also in Romans chapter 7, familiar words that I have read to us on other occasions,

15 . . . I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate.

. . .17 So now it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me. 18 For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. 19 For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing. 20 Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me.

21 So I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand. 22 For I delight in the law of God, in my inner being, 23 but I see in my members another law waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members.

24 Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?

25 Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself serve the law of God with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the law of sin.

(Romans 7:15-25)

Our salvation is truly wonderful folks, but it brings with it some of the greatest of struggles and changes within our souls, changes that demand that we begin to think and to do so many of the things of daily life differently, in ways that we have never done them before.

But dear friends, those changes and those battles are all very, very necessary. That's because our God is a very jealous God, a very righteous God who wants and desires and even demands that we walk through our daily life very differently from the way we once did, that we turn away from those former ways and begin to follow after the Lord Jesus and His ways.

And yes, His ways are very different from the ways we once walked, those crooked and perverse ways of the world within which we were once so comfortably accustomed to walking.

In our salvation, as the newly indwelling Holy Spirit begins to take charge of our thoughts and behaviors, words like those in Isaiah 55 begin to call out within us saying,

<sup>6</sup> Seek the Lord while He may be found,  
Call upon Him while He is near.

<sup>7</sup> Let the wicked forsake his way,

And the unrighteous man his thoughts.  
Let him return to the Lord,  
And He will have mercy on him.  
And to our God, For He will abundantly pardon.  
8 "For My thoughts *are* not your thoughts,  
Nor *are* your ways My ways," says the Lord.  
9 "For as the heavens are higher than the earth,  
So are My ways higher than your ways,  
And My thoughts than your thoughts. (Isaiah 55:6-9)

Before we were saved, such thoughts never entered our minds. We don't think as He thinks. And unfortunately, even after we are saved, our mind still often thinks in its old ways. Too often, we still have the old ways of the flesh and of the world holding control over our thoughts and our desires.

But immediately upon receiving Jesus as our Savior, His Spirit comes to live in us and begins to make changes within us. And He says to us, "Come and follow me!" And within our newfound salvation, the Holy Spirit puts a mysterious "want to" within us, and we do then begin to "want to" follow Him.

But also, and unfortunately so, as we have just said, our flesh does not just lie down and submit itself willingly. And therein rages that ongoing battle for our soul that we read about a moment ago in Romans chapter 7, that battle between our flesh and our spirit.

And here within the scripture passage that we are studying today, we can see that battle clearly. These followers of Christ spoken about here were experiencing a conflict taking place within them. Yes, they did want to follow Jesus, but the warfare was strong and it was clever.

Note here in these words that the arguments put forth by the flesh were simple, logical, and sounded very innocent. These were caring, family matters that seemed even to be the exact thing that a caring family member should always do.

And for some who read these words, they might think the Lord Jesus to even be unreasonable in his demands. Verse 57

<sup>57</sup>Now it happened as they journeyed on the road, *that* someone said to Him, "Lord, I will follow You wherever You go."

<sup>58</sup>And Jesus said to him, "Foxes have holes and birds of the air *have* nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay *His* head."

<sup>59</sup>Then He said to another, "Follow Me." But he said, "Lord, let me first go and bury my father." <sup>60</sup>Jesus said to him, "Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and preach the kingdom of God."

<sup>61</sup>And another also said, "Lord, I will follow You, but let me first go *and* bid them farewell who are at my house." <sup>62</sup>But Jesus said to him, "No one, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God." (Luke 9:57-62)

When God wants to strongly emphasize one of His truths, He often expresses it three times. And here, Jesus has done that. He has emphasized this deep and difficult truth by expressing it three times, that following Him will very often bring with it deep and difficult suffering, a complete denial of "self", and a denial of all that "self" demands.

Why "denial of self"? Why is that so important? It is because "self" is our first and most powerful "other god" that we bow our knee to every moment of every day. "Self" is the god that Adam and Eve erected when they denied the One True God and His Lordship over them, and chose instead to follow their own newfound sense of knowledge and worth. Self is our first and most powerful god!

On another similar occasion, in Matthew 16, Jesus told a man,

<sup>24</sup> . . . "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. <sup>25</sup>For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it. <sup>26</sup>For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and yet forfeits his own soul?  
(Matthew 16:24-26)

Before salvation, our soul was completely controlled by "self", a very powerful taskmaster. But with salvation, we are no longer under the power and control of that taskmaster. We are now free from its demands. Jesus said, "if the Son shall set you free, you shall be free indeed".

And if we are free indeed, then we must begin to live as if we are free. We are no longer to submit to the demands of our old "god of self".

Here in these three encounters with Jesus, we find men who were sincere. And they sincerely wanted to follow Jesus. But other, very common matters of daily life stood in the way. And that is the way it will often be with each of us.

As we consider the first of these three men, while the idea of following Jesus is very appealing because it truly does bring with it great rewards, those rewards will often not take place in a way and in the timing that we might desire. To follow Jesus really does mean that we will need to give up our love for this world and the things of this world. And the Lord tells us that clearly in 1 John chapter 2. There He tells us to,

<sup>15</sup>Love not the world, neither the things *that are* in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. <sup>16</sup>For all that *is* in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. <sup>17</sup>And the world passes away, and the lust thereof: but he that does the will of God abides forever.  
(1 John 2:15-17)

When this first man declared,

<sup>57</sup> . . . "Lord, I will follow You wherever You go."

<sup>58</sup> . . . Jesus said to him, "Foxes have holes and birds of the air *have* nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay *His* head." (Luke 9:57-58)

The fact is folks, when we choose to follow Jesus, we are also probably choosing to give up most of the usual comforts of this world, the bigger, better houses, the nicer cars, the praises and honors given by men. And yes, sometimes God might return some of those to us, but usually never before we have given them up to Him.

The second man had concerns for his family.

<sup>59</sup>Then He said to another, "Follow Me." But he said, "Lord, let me first go and bury my father." <sup>60</sup>Jesus said to him, "Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and preach the kingdom of God." (Luke 9:59-60)

This man's request seems very reasonable, and Jesus' response sounds almost harsh. But remember, Jesus was able to know the hearts and the minds, the very thoughts of each of the people He encountered. And Jesus can easily perceive deception taking place within a person's mind, a deception that even the person themselves may not know is taking place, a deception often put there by the world, the flesh and the devil, a deception that does not require

the person to reject Jesus, but rather to just put Him off, to put Him into a second position behind the needs of His family. And that is a very easy deception to fall victim too.

But we must always know with a certainty that God is trustworthy, that He would not leave our families completely without the help they need. God has a personal relationship taking place with each and every person at the very same moment He is dealing with us, and no one is being ignored or forgotten.

Taking care of a sick and dying father is not a wrong thing to do, but it must not be done to the exclusion of our love for and our following after Jesus. We need not completely abandon one for the other. It is not necessary. Both can be done rightly if done in God's way.

Again, God knows our hearts and our every thought. And He knows when we are putting anyone, ourselves or our family members or our friends before Him.

On another occasion Jesus said,

<sup>26</sup>"If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple. (Luke 14:26)

Again, these words can sound harsh if you don't know the loving and gracious heart of God. These words are not harsh, but they are difficult and demanding. They simply define the measure and commitment of the relationship we must have with Christ. He must always be first.

The commandments clearly tell us, "Thou shall have no other gods before me." And though some might quibble about these kinds of decisions not being of that magnitude, as we said a few moments ago, the simple truth is, if we put anyone or anything or any purpose before God, then that becomes a kind of god to us, and that must not be allowed.

Jesus' said to this man,

"Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and preach the kingdom of God." (Luke 9:60)

While we can't know for sure all of the facts that are left unspoken in this brief exchange, simply knowing and trusting that the heart of Jesus is always pure

and generous in all matters, we can make a trustworthy assumption that He was aware of matters that made it unnecessary for the man to go back to bury his father.

And you and I must be willing to make those loving assumptions about God. He truly is always loving and kind and generous and trustworthy, even and especially when we don't understand His ways. That is the essence and the necessity of faith, believing and trusting when we can't easily see the pathway ahead of us.

The third man simply wanted to go back and say goodbye to his family. Listen.

<sup>61</sup>And another also said, "Lord, I will follow You, but let me first go *and* bid them farewell who are at my house." <sup>62</sup>But Jesus said to him, "No one, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God." (Luke 9:61-62)

Again, we must always know that Jesus is able to perceive the deepest thoughts and desires of everyone He speaks to, and that would be so with this man.

Reluctance to "surrender" everything we are and everything we want to be and to do is dangerous for our souls. Lot's wife wanted to escape death in Sodom and Gomorrah, but her heart was still tied to all those things that her daily life there had provided to her. Her turning back cost her everything, her life, and most likely, her eternity.

When the children of Israel crossed over the Jordan into the Promised Land, God had them to erect a monument, "stones of remembrance", to remind them in future days that they could never go back into the wilderness.

You and I must never look back to the days and to the lifestyle that we once knew as unbelievers. Back there in that lifestyle is only death and destruction.

Folks, God's ways are not easily understandable. As we read a moment ago, His ways are not our ways, but His ways are always trustworthy, and they are good.

One writer expresses the manner with which God sometimes ministers to us by using the words, "kindly, He unkindly". In other words, as God inserts His great



and powerful hand into our lives, He will often “kindly, unkindly” cause things to take place that we really wish would not have to be.

It is often through suffering and discipline that God very kindly, unkindly uses some of the most difficult circumstances of life to bring about His divine plan and His will for us.

And again, everything God does is always good, always truly kind and always trustworthy.

We'll close with words given in Jeremiah 29:11 that I often quote for us,

“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)

Let's Pray.