

The Cost of Discipleship

The word “disciple” comes from the root word “discipline”. Discipline usually is associated with self-control and can mean to follow a particular code of conduct.

I exercise discipline in my life when I live my life by certain parameters and within certain boundaries; there are certain things that I will do and certain things that I don’t do.

1. Christ calls all different types of people to be His disciples

“Then it happened, as He was coming near Jericho, that a certain blind man sat by the road begging. And hearing a multitude passing by, he asked what it meant. So they told him that Jesus of Nazareth was passing by. And he cried out, saying, ‘Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!’

Then those who went before warned him that he should be quiet; but he cried out all the more, ‘Son of David, have mercy on me!’ So Jesus stood still and commanded him to be brought to Him. And when he had come near, He asked him, saying, ‘What do you want Me to do for you?’

He said, ‘Lord, that I may receive my sight.’

Then Jesus said to him, ‘Receive your sight; your faith has made you well.’ And immediately he received his sight, and followed Him, glorifying God. And all the people, when they saw *it*, gave praise to God.” *Luke 18, 35-43.*

- The blind beggar experienced a miracle by calling upon the name of Jesus, and by having faith that He could do it. His response to the miracle is to follow Jesus along the road, giving glory to God, telling others what the Lord had done for him.

- Following Jesus along that road leads to the cross – and death: the death of the flesh-life and the birth of a new life in the spirit. Following Christ is a discipline –daily we must crucify our flesh (which is destined for decay) and cultivate everlasting things, that is, the things of the spirit and the kingdom of God.

-When Jesus enters Jericho, He encounters a different individual, Zacchaeus.

“Now behold, *there was* a man named Zacchaeus who was a chief tax collector, and he was rich. And he sought to see who Jesus was, but could not because of the crowd, for he was of short stature. So he ran ahead and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see Him, for He was going to pass that *way*. And when Jesus came to the place, He looked up and saw him, and said to him, ‘Zacchaeus, make haste and come down, for today I must stay at your house.’ So he made haste and came down, and received Him joyfully.” *Luke 19, 2-6.*

- Zacchaeus was a wealthy person, a tax collector for the Roman government who made money by charging people above the amounts required by the Romans. As such, he was despised by his fellow Jews, but he had the protection of the Roman legions, so he

could continue what he was doing indefinitely. However, this man was seeking for Jesus, having heard about Him and about how he was able to heal people. Zacchaeus needed healing too, but not the physical kind. Perhaps he was hurting because he knew that what he was doing for a living was wrong and sinful, and he desired absolution, cleansing, forgiveness, a Savior. His response to Christ's invitation is immediate repentance, and then fellowship with Christ as a friend, as implied by having Him stay at his house. The Lord's invitation to Zachaeus implies that Christ had already forgiven his sin – this had to be true because sin makes us enemies of God, and enemies cannot enjoy such fellowship.

“But when they saw *it*, they all complained, saying, “He has gone to be a guest with a man who is a sinner.” Then Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord, “Look, Lord, I give half of my goods to the poor; and if I have taken anything from anyone by false accusation, I restore fourfold.”

And Jesus said to him, “Today salvation has come to this house, because he also is a son of Abraham; for the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost.” *Luke 19, 2-10.*

- It's not just the poor, the destitute, and the homeless who need Christ. The people in the office towers, CEO's, the well-to-do and rich members of society also need the saving, healing touch of Christ. All thirst for the “living water” that only Christ can provide.

- There were many other people in the crowd surrounding Jesus desiring to see him, but why did Christ single out Zacchaeus? Christ could see the hearts of the people around Him, and He knew that Zacchaeus needed healing through forgiveness and repentance. He knew that Zacchaeus was ready to turn from his sinful ways at the invitation to lead a new life of fellowship with Christ.

2. A different kind of response to Christ's invitation

Another rich young man came to Jesus.

“A certain ruler asked him, ‘Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?’

‘Why do you call me good?’ Jesus answered. ‘No one is good—except God alone. You know the commandments: ‘You shall not commit adultery, you shall not murder, you shall not steal, you shall not give false testimony, honor your father and mother.’

‘All these I have kept since I was a boy,’ he said.

- The man believes that he is righteous, although in truth he has surely not kept all the commandments. He's asking what he must do to inherit eternal life, so that he can earn his way into heaven on his own merit.

“When Jesus heard this, he said to him, “You still lack one thing. Sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow Me.”

- Following Christ has a cost: the material things of this world, which includes the self, the “I”, the “me”, the “my own wishes and desires”, must be released. Following Christ means giving up the reigns of your life, and handing over control to Christ; He is leading the way. Understandably, a frightening concept for individuals who have many material possessions and elaborate plans for their own life.

“When he heard this, he became very sad, because he was very wealthy. Jesus looked at him and said, ‘How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God! Indeed, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God.’

Those who heard this asked, ‘Who then can be saved?’

Jesus replied, ‘What is impossible with man is possible with God.’” *Luke 18, 18-27.*

- The young man is relying on his prosperity, his position, status, and standing, as his security, and this insulates him and keeps him distant from God. Unlike Zacchaeus, he does not recognize his sinful ways and his need for Christ. He will stand before God in his own righteousness, which is a no-win situation. He’s unwilling to give up that which is temporal for that which is eternal.

Peter was listening:

“Peter said to him, ‘We have left all we had to follow you!’

‘Truly I tell you,’ Jesus said to them, ‘no one who has left home or wife or brothers or sisters or parents or children for the sake of the kingdom of God will fail to receive many times as much in this age, and in the age to come eternal life.’” *Luke 18, 28-30.*

3. Christ defines the cost of discipleship

- The invitation is given to all, but few decide to accept

“‘I call heaven and earth as witness this day against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore choose life, that both you and your descendants may live’” *Deuteronomy 30:19.*

Christ illustrates this with a parable:

“Jesus replied: “A certain man was preparing a great banquet and invited many guests. At the time of the banquet he sent his servant to tell those who had been invited, ‘Come, for everything is now ready.’

“But they all alike began to make excuses. The first said, ‘I have just bought a field, and I must go and see it. Please excuse me.’

“Another said, ‘I have just bought five yoke of oxen, and I’m on my way to try them out. Please excuse me.’

“Still another said, ‘I just got married, so I can’t come.’

“The servant came back and reported this to his master. Then the owner of the house became angry and ordered his servant, ‘Go out quickly into the streets and alleys of the town and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame.’

“‘Sir,’ the servant said, ‘what you ordered has been done, but there is still room.’

“Then the master told his servant, ‘Go out to the roads and country lanes and compel them to come in, so that my house will be full. I tell you, not one of those who were invited will get a taste of my banquet.’” *Luke 14:16-24*

- There are many excuses people will provide for not following Christ, all having to do with fleshly desires for material things that will not last. But we must be careful not to put these things before Christ and serving Him.

The same parable in Matthew:

“Jesus spoke to them again in parables, saying: “The kingdom of heaven is like a king who prepared a wedding banquet for his son. He sent his servants to those who had been invited to the banquet to tell them to come, but they refused to come.

“Then he sent some more servants and said, ‘Tell those who have been invited that I have prepared my dinner: My oxen and fattened cattle have been butchered, and everything is ready. Come to the wedding banquet.’

“But they paid no attention and went off—one to his field, another to his business. The rest seized his servants, mistreated them and killed them. The king was enraged. He sent his army and destroyed those murderers and burned their city.

“Then he said to his servants, ‘The wedding banquet is ready, but those I invited did not deserve to come. So go to the street corners and invite to the banquet anyone you find.’ So the servants went out into the streets and gathered all the people they could find, the bad as well as the good, and the wedding hall was filled with guests.

“But when the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing wedding clothes. He asked, ‘How did you get in here without wedding clothes, friend?’ The man was speechless.

“Then the king told the attendants, ‘Tie him hand and foot, and throw him outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’

“For many are invited, but few are chosen.”” *Matt. 22:1-14*

The wedding clothes were of course offered at the door, but the man refused them. Refusing the invitation of Christ's righteousness can have eternal consequences. Standing in our own righteousness, we will be speechless before God. The invitation is for all, and we're told what to do ("choose life that you may live") but few accept.

Why? The cost. Difficult times and persecution may be some of the results of true discipleship:

"Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child; children will rebel against their parents and have them put to death. You will be hated by everyone because of Me, but the one who stands firm to the end will be saved. When you are persecuted in one place, flee to another. Truly I tell you, you will not finish going through the towns of Israel before the Son of Man comes.

"The student is not above the teacher, nor a servant above his master. It is enough for students to be like their teachers, and servants like their masters. If the head of the house has been called Beelzebul, how much more the members of his household!" *Matthew 10, 21-25*

•Discipleship means Christ in control, guiding my life.

"Happy are those who hear the word of God and observe it" *Luke 11, 28*

As a life process: all of me, none of Christ → more of me, less of Christ → less of me, more of Christ → none of me, all of Christ.

"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. Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple. 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? Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who observe it begin to ridicule him, saying, 'This man began to build and was not able to finish.' Or what king, when he sets out to meet another king in battle, will not first sit down and consider whether he is strong enough with ten thousand *men* to encounter the one coming against him with twenty thousand? Or else, while the other is still far away, he sends a delegation and asks for terms of peace. So then, none of you can be My disciple who does not give up all his own possessions.

"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. He who has ears to hear, let him hear." *Luke 14:26-35*.

•There were many people approaching Christ asking to be His disciple, but Christ tells them to consider the cost. Discipleship in Christ means death to self (the cross) so that we can be alive in Him. The benefit of discipleship— finding everlasting life in Christ:

"Always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body" *2 Corinthians 4:10*

"Anyone who loves their father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves their son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. Whoever does not take up their cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Whoever finds their life will lose it, and whoever loses their life for my sake will find it." *Matthew 10, 37-39*.