

COST OF DISCIPLESHIP

Speaker: Rev. Dr. Cecil Clements

Date: 08-04-2020

Scripture: Luke 14:25-35

Oh, our loving heavenly Father! How good it is to know that we are safe under Your protective care, under Your wings. Lord, we thank You for this protection, and I pray for Your peace to descent on every home, on everyone who is listening online, that they would experience Your peace and Your joy and Your good health. Lord, we also pray for those who are not well, who have been affected by this COVID-19 virus. We pray that even in their state, Lord, You would let faith arise, that You would build up hope, Master, that You would touch them and bring them out of homes, isolation wards and ICUs and ventilators. Bring them back to health again Master, and we pray for an end to this disease in the name of Jesus. Now Lord, be with us as we look at Your Word. Anoint me, anoint each one who is going to be listening and we pray that our will and Your will would align with Your perfect will this evening. In the name of Jesus, we pray. Amen.

Luke 14:25-35

Now large crowds were going along with Him; and He turned and said to them, "If anyone comes to Me, and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, 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 food; 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."

The Word of God for God's people.

Whenever I think about discipleship, I think about following Jesus, and I am reminded that it is never about forcing anybody. It is never about coercion; it's always about invitation. It's always about thinking this through before you make up your mind.

Even in this passage, Jesus starts by saying, "If anyone wants to be my disciple." I remember reading in 1 Kings 18:21 where Elijah is standing before the children of Israel and it is the darkest period in Israel's history, and he says to them, "If the Lord is God, follow Him." It's a clear clarion call to them to decide; not that he is forcing them to follow God, but he is saying, "If the Lord is God, then follow Him; and if He is not, follow whatever else you are following. But don't vacillate between these two opinions." In other words, if you are going

to follow God – ‘if’ you have decided in your mind that God is God and He is worth following, then follow Him. But follow Him fully.

That’s what Jesus is doing here in the context of many people coming along with Him. He turns to them and he says, “If you want to follow Me, if you want to take this to the next level, if you want to go beyond just watching Me feed thousands of people, or teach, or do miracles – there’s more to it than what you are just seeing. So, He starts by saying, “If you want to be My disciples...” In Luke 9:58, when somebody comes and says that he’d like to follow Jesus, He says to him, “Foxes have holes and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay His head.” Consider carefully before you say that you want to follow me.

The rich man who came to Jesus and said, “What shall I do to get eternal life?” Jesus said, “Keep all the commandments.” The man said, “All that, I’ve done.” So, Jesus said, “Sell all you have and give to the poor; then come and follow Me.” And he went away downcast because he loved his possessions more than he loved eternal life, and the path to eternal life that Jesus was talking about. If you want to be My disciple...

Then Jesus outlines for us some key thoughts. What are those thoughts or requirements?

If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, even his own life – he cannot be My disciple.

What is Jesus asking? What does He require? Is He asking us to hate? No! the context here is the opposite of love. What Jesus is saying is that the love that you have for Me must seem like hate for anybody else. You must love Me so much that any other love will be like hate. Or as the Passion Translation puts it, “When you follow Me as My disciple, you must put aside your father and your mother and everybody else.”

Is Jesus saying “Don’t love!” No. Jesus wouldn’t have gone against the 5th commandment, which is ‘Honor your father and mother.’ Jesus said, “I have not come to abolish the law, but I have come to fulfill the law.” Jesus is talking about attachments. He is saying that the love you have for Me must be so great that anything else would look like hate. That’s the kind of love that we must have as a disciple of Jesus Christ.

If I can pull out the passage in Luke 9 where Jesus says, “Foxes have dens and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay His head.”

Apart from attachments, Jesus is saying that there can’t be comfort as a disciple of mine. You cannot take it for granted that you will be comfortable. It can get uncomfortable as well. When you think about it, He is not making it easy to be a follower of Jesus. He’s not saying – Come follow Me and everything will be hunky dory, everything will fall in line. You will be prosperous, you will have money, homes, wealth, health and it’s all going to be wonderful.

No. He is saying – it can get difficult. You must love Me with the kind of love that surpasses everything. And you must be prepared for inconveniences. To another man in that same chapter, Luke 9, He says “Follow Me”, and the man responds by saying, “Let me first go and bury my father, because that’s a duty that I have. I have to first bury my father.” And Jesus says to him, “The duty to Me far outweighs the duty to your family.” Again, attachment to Jesus – we lay aside comforts and in duties, Jesus comes first. Those are pretty demanding words from Jesus, and He’s reiterating to us that it is not easy. Which raises a question: What

or whom do you and I love more than Jesus that can compete for the love that we have for Jesus? Stay with that thought and then we'll. Move on.

Count the Cost

Jesus reiterates again, "Don't follow Me without counting the cost." What is this cost that He is talking about? He says, "You've got to carry your own cross and follow Me." Again, if I can read from the Passion translation, "And anyone who comes to Me must be willing to share My cross and experience it as his/her own, or he cannot be considered to be My disciple." So, don't follow Me without considering what it will cost you.

Then He goes on to say, "For who would construct a house before first sitting down to estimate the cost to complete it? Otherwise he may lay the foundation and not be able to finish. The neighbors will ridicule him, saying, 'Look at him! He started to build but couldn't complete it.'" So, we count the cost of following Jesus before we begin to start. Jesus is saying to count the cost. You've got to realize that it is something that will cost you. It will cost you in terms of your relationships. It will cost you in terms of your commitments. It will cost you in terms of your resources. It will cost you in terms of the involvements that you have. It will cost you in terms of your own principles. And Jesus is saying, "Count the cost! Look at everything, think through it clearly, and then decide that this is what you want to do."

Then He goes on to say, "Or have you heard of a commander who goes on to war without first sitting down with a strategic planning team to determine the strength of his army to win the war against a stronger opponent? If he knows he doesn't stand a chance of winning the war, the vice commander will send out delegates to ask for the terms of peace." Jesus is saying, "Understand that part of the cost is that you will have opposition, that you will be opposed and that you may have people who may be stronger." How do you navigate through all of that? We must understand that to follow Jesus, to be His disciple, is something that will cost us dearly. This is how Jesus is putting it.

You think to yourself: My goodness! Would I want to be a follower of Jesus with these requirements? They are so demanding. But we always look at these requirements in light of what Jesus has done for us. He gave His life for you and for me, to show us the perfect way back to the Father. God stands in this picture that we have and says "You want eternal life; you want to spend eternity with Me? Then this is the way through My Son Jesus. What do you have to do? Believe in Him and then to follow Him, to be His disciple and He will show you the path back to Him.

We need to be prepared to have what it takes to finish the race as His disciple, to be prepared to understand the opposition to finishing that race. We ought to be able to say, as Paul said, "I've fought the good fight, I've finished the race, and I have kept the faith." Then Jesus goes on to say, "Likewise, unless you surrender all to me, giving up all that you possess, you cannot be one of my disciples." Everything that you have, we need to turn over to Jesus and say, "Lord Jesus, here it is! All that I have belongs to you."

What is that one thing that you love so much?

Abraham was tested in that area. God knew how much he loved his son Isaac, and He asked him to take him and sacrifice him. And Abraham did, because his love for God far outweighed his love for his son. And his obedience to God was complete and total. That's the requirement for you and for me, as well, as disciples, to be able to love God completely, to

hear His voice and to obey Him implicitly. I've often said this: 99% obedience to God is 100% disobedience. We can never obey God 99%; it has to be 100% or nothing.

The Saltiness of Salt

So, the conclusion for us is: salt is good for seasoning. Jesus ends by saying this. "But if salt were to lose its flavor, how could it ever be restored? It will never be useful again, not even fit for the soil or the manure pile." What is Jesus saying? He is saying that salt that isn't salt in character is useless, for it cannot be used anywhere. Salt that cannot produce saltiness is useless. The character trait of salt is to be salty, and if it is not salty, it is useless. In other words, there is no point calling ourselves disciples if we don't have the character trait of being His disciples. We cannot be followers of Jesus, we cannot be Christians – ones who bear His name and follow Him – if we don't have the character traits of being His disciple.

It's like the wedding ring that I wear. It reminds me that I am married to Sheila. It reminds me of the vows that I have taken. It reminds me that we are connected to each other till the end of our lives together, that we love each other. All of that is captured in this wedding band. But if all these things didn't have any meaning for this band, all it would be is just gold on my finger. It wouldn't be a wedding band. For something to have significance, the form must have meaning.

Similarly with being a disciple, if you and I call ourselves children of the most High God or followers of Jesus, it must be more than lip service. It must be that we exhibit and follow the traits of being a disciple. However costly it may be, we need to be able to say – I will be a disciple. I will follow You.

Nokseng was a man from the Garo tribe about 150 years ago. He and his wife and two children became the first Christians in their village. The chief came to him and said, "You need to recant. You need to renounce Jesus or you will die." Nokseng, under the powerful anointing of God's Spirit, just began to sing this song:

I have decided to follow Jesus,
No turning back, no turning back.

And the chief ordered his two children to be killed, and they were. They were shot with the bow and arrow. And as they died, he said, "Will you now renounce Jesus?" and again he sang:

Though none go with me, still I will follow,
No turning back, no turning back.

The chief ordered his wife to be killed, and as she lay there writhing in pain, he asked her to renounce. And again, he said:

The Cross before me, the world behind me.
No turning back, no turning back.

Then he was killed. But the chief was so taken up with what had happened, that he became a follower of Jesus through the faith of this one man.

No turning back! If you want to be My disciple, Jesus said, count the cost and follow Me. If you bear His name today, if you are a Christian – it cannot be just an empty name. It must be full of the meaning that Jesus has given us – that we love Him, that we pursue Him, that we count our possessions as nothing in the light of being able to do what He wants us to do. To be able to say, “No turning back.” We must be able to talk about Jesus, showcase Him and be able to present Him to the world through our lives, and not be ashamed of Him.

Why? There is a very sobering verse in Mark’s gospel (8:38) where Jesus says, *“If anyone is ashamed of Me and My words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of them when He comes in His Father’s glory with the holy angels.”* I don’t want Jesus to be ashamed of me. I want to be His disciple and to follow hard after Him. And I know that you do too, and that is your heart.

So, Sheila and I would like to sing this very familiar song: I Have Decided to Follow Jesus. We also invite you, if that is your heart as well, if you’ve been convicted by the Holy Spirit to truly be a disciple of Jesus, then join us wherever you are.

I have decided to follow Jesus;
I have decided to follow Jesus;
I have decided to follow Jesus;
No turning back, no turning back.

Tho’ none go with me, still I will follow
Tho’ none go with me, still I will follow
Tho’ none go with me, still I will follow
No turning back, no turning back.

The Cross before me, the world behind me,
The Cross before me, the world behind me,
The Cross before me, the world behind me,
No turning back, no turning back.

Would you receive this benediction?

Dearly beloved, know this, that He who has begun a good work in you will carry it on to its completion until the day of Christ Jesus. In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. God bless you.