

The Cost of Discipleship

The cost of being Christ's disciple is everything you have. In this world, everything costs something. We are immersed in a society that glorifies consumption. In the United States, it seems like everything is for sale. Clothes, food, cars, houses, fame, power, influence and pride can all be bought with the all mighty dollar. The more you have the better off you are, right? Not everything is bought with money. Relationships take time, effort, commitment, trust and faith in the other person. These qualities are not things you can buy, but instead practice. So, this brings up another question: is discipleship free? A disciple is someone who spends extensive time and resources to learn from their teacher. Today we are going to discuss the cost of being Christ's disciple. Jesus challenged his followers to count the cost before becoming his disciple. We will quickly find that to be Christ's disciple we must be ready to give up all we have.

The scripture we read today comes from Luke 14:25-35. The Bible says:
25 Large crowds were traveling with Jesus, and turning to them he said: 26 **"If anyone comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters—yes, even their own life—such a person cannot be my disciple."**

Context is important to understand what is going on in this text. These large crowds that are traveling with Jesus have been with him for some time. We read in Luke 13:22 "Then Jesus went through the towns and villages, teaching as he made his way to Jerusalem." This is the second time Luke mentions Jesus traveling toward Jerusalem. Jesus knew that he was traveling to his death. He teaches the crowds that follow him on his way to the cross.

The word "hate" in these verses is $\mu\sigma\epsilon\iota$ which translates cleanly as hate or strong loathing. Is Christ really calling us to hate our biological family? No, I believe he is using strong language to grab his audience's attention and expose where their love lies. In Matthew 10:37 we read; **"Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son and daughter more than me is not worthy of me."** In Hebrew, the same word translated as hate in Greek means to love less than. Jesus is telling his audience that their allegiance and love have to be in the right place. To follow Christ is to put him first above family, friends, mentors, teachers and yes even above yourself.

In the United States, the popular way to think is to put ourselves first and others second. Ads will constantly point you to something you don't have. Commercials show you perfect families with the newest things. There is so much that pulls at our attention, and all of it points to us as individuals. Society tries to train you to believe that you should simultaneously care little about what others think and believe yourself inferior based on what others have. So many young men and women fall prey to the idea that they are not enough, that they don't fit in. This causes so much anxiety and stress. Jesus calls his disciples to place him first above all else. If we can't give him first place in our hearts, we can't be his disciple and we are unworthy of him. Jesus goes one step further saying we must suffer as he suffered.

27 **And whoever does not carry their cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.**

What does it mean to carry our cross? How is the cross related to discipleship? To be crucified was an awful form of torture and death. It was saved for the worst of criminals and shameful thieves. Jesus suffered so much pain, and here he claims we must suffer pain too. He is not saying that we must literally be crucified. Instead, we are each called to battle the sin inside us. Our cross is the daily spiritual battle raging inside us. It is the struggle against thoughts, actions, and words that are against God's will in our lives. It is also the real trials and persecution we experience as we go through life with Jesus. To carry our cross and follow Jesus is to place him first each morning and do our best to follow what Jesus did and taught. I find that worshiping Jesus helps guide my heart and reminds me of the cost He paid.

Jesus warns his disciples to count the cost before they commit to him. The Bible says:

28 **“Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Won't you first sit down and estimate the cost to see if you have enough money to complete it?29For if you lay the foundation and are not able to finish it, everyone who sees it will ridicule you,30saying, ‘This person began to build and wasn't able to finish.’**

31 **“Or suppose a king is about to go to war against another king. Won't he first sit down and consider whether he is able with ten thousand men to oppose the one coming against him with twenty thousand?32If he is not able, he will send a delegation while the other is still a long way off and will ask for terms of peace.33In the same way, those of you who do not give up everything you have cannot be my disciples.**

Who has ever started a project before counting the cost? I know I have. I am an Eagle Scout and part of what you have to do to receive this honor is complete a community project. They require you to lay out a very detailed plan on how you will complete your project. You must tally the cost of materials and labor and lay out exactly how much time, people and resources you will need. There was a local elementary school who needed some help, so they asked if I could do my project for them.

I was tasked to rebuild two benches and their surrounding area. I met with the principle of the school and we laid out a detailed plan. On the first day of the project, when we actually began to build, we realized that we had grossly underestimated how many cobblestones we needed to complete the project. I have no idea how we made such a large mistake. It added an additional \$300 to our project, but the principle was willing. Then, in the middle of us working, the principle changed her mind on how she wanted things done. So we had to run to the store and buy additional supplies. Towards the end of us finishing the work, she changed her mind again requiring more supplies. By the end of the project we were about \$500 over budget, but the school loved the way it turned out and they happily paid. I can't imagine what we would have done if they refused to pay. Jesus gives two examples of how important it is to count the cost beforehand.

Towers were important structures during the time of Jesus. They were built for security, for storing grain, and as a sign of power. For an individual to build a tower there would be a lot of planning that would have to take place. The cost would have been significant. Not everyone would have been able to build a tower themselves. To start a project and then run out of money before completing it is grounds for mocking even today. War is expensive in commodities and lives. If a king does not spend time planning his moves, defeat will be inevitable. To fight an army that has twice as many troops as you, is possible but you have to use intelligence, wisdom and insight to do it.

Jesus is challenging his followers with analogies that they would have understood. Are they following him because of the amazing miracles that he has performed? Do they understand the sacrifice they have to make to follow Jesus? Do we? Jesus was heading towards Jerusalem to die on the cross for their sins. To be a disciple of Christ, we must put to death our old lives and prioritize him first. Our allegiance needs to change from family and community to Christ. Each day we are called to carry our cross and follow him. This means daily placing his will first in our lives. Slowly, we become more like him. The more we place his will above our own, the more we begin to truly live life to its fullest. Jesus explains there is one more requirement to be his disciple:

33 **In the same way, those of you who do not give up everything you have cannot be my disciples.**

34 **“Salt is good, but if it loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? 35 It is fit neither for the soil nor for the manure pile; it is thrown out.**

The cost of being Christ’s disciple is everything you have. There is not a single good thing on this earth that should take the place of Jesus in our hearts. If you want to know what your heart clings to, look at how you respond in trials. When we go through hard times in life, we can see clearly what our heart is full of. When a cup breaks, whatever is inside is what comes out. We are a little like glasses and we choose what to fill ourselves with. Giving up everything for Jesus is required to allow him to take full control over your heart. Jesus wants effective disciples. If, in the process of growing in faith, we allow the world to take back our hearts, then we become worthless for the kingdom of God. We cannot be in love with the world and love Christ with all our hearts.

In the Middle East, salt was most often drawn from the Dead Sea. The water contains almost 35% salt, making it impossible for life to inhabit the dense water. There are some impurities in the salt, and if they are not taken out during processing the salt, it tastes nasty. This salt is useless for anything. So, we must ask ourselves, what kind of disciples are we? Are we effective for the kingdom of God, or have we allowed the world to steal part of our hearts? To follow Christ is to give up all that we have for him. He requires nothing less than all we are. The wonderful part of all of this is that, the moment we give him all we have, he gives it back freely.

In this passage of scripture, Jesus has laid out three requirements to be his disciple. First, we must place him above any earthly relationship we have. This means listening to and following him even if it means cutting off loved ones. This means making him our first love above all other human relationships. Second, we must carry our crosses and follow him. There is a spiritual war that rages in the hearts of us all. Carrying our cross is a part of fighting that war. When trials arise, we are reminded of the sacrifice Christ made on the cross. Finally, Jesus commands that we give up everything to be his disciple. He knows how humans think and act. Christ knows it's easy for us to attach things to our hearts. He wants us to give up everything for him. If we fail to follow these three requirements, we can quickly fall into the trap of believing we are "good people." We then begin to think that it's not so hard to be a Christian, that we can love the world and Jesus as well. The quickest way to become ineffective as a Christian is to love something or someone in place of Jesus.

Our faith in Christ must have hands and feet as well. If we refuse to follow Christ's example as given to us in the Bible, we fail to live as his disciples. There are some practical ways you can begin to live out your faith today. If this message has moved you, if the Spirit has spoken to you, allow me to challenge you to ask yourself three questions:
Who takes first place in your life?

Are you carrying your cross and following Jesus?

Have you given up all you have to Him?

The answers to these questions should be visible in the way you live your life. Let's go to the Lord in prayer together.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Chris A Rice". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.