

## **The Cost of Discipleship**

The hard truth of Scripture is not everyone is cut out to be a Christian. Many are called by God, but few are chosen. But the blame for this exclusion does not rest with God, but with sinful mankind. There is no deficiency in God for He desires all people to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth, but we ourselves always retain that freedom to reject God's saving intention. This morning we learn just how steep Christ's demands really are. Following Christ wherever He may lead is never meant to be an easy path. Wide are the ways that lead to destruction, but narrow is the path that leads to salvation. Discipleship in God's kingdom is a call, which encompasses every aspect of our lives; there is no part of ourselves that is left untouched by it. Such a call means forsaking all else to walk the lonely way with the only Person who really matters. Christ's call goes out to each one of us, "Follow Me". It is a simple call, easy to understand. Follow Me! This simple call requires a simple answer. There are only two ways we can respond: yes or no. If no, then what follows is a life without Christ. "No Lord, I want to walk by myself and live without you". God could use force to make a person believe, but He doesn't. His call must be answered by faith or not at all. Persuasion or coercion will not do. The other answer to Christ's simple call is "yes". But with this answer nothing can be added to nor subtracted from the call itself. There is no such thing as half-way Christians or lukewarm believers for as God says in the book of Revelation, "These I will spit out of my mouth". The call of Christ is unconditional and it must be fully embraced or not at all. So, we follow Christ wherever He goes—we are attentive to His message, rejoice in His gifts, obedient to His commands; we are led by His hand, filled with His Spirit, motivated by His love; we speak where He has spoken and where He is silent so are we.

This is the cost: Christ or everything else—His Word or ours, His life or ours, His way or ours. There is no middle ground, no compromise.

We hear in our text about three different people who expressed a willingness to follow Jesus yet added their own man-made conditions and stipulations. The first one said to Jesus: "I will follow you wherever you go". This first disciple took the initiative to follow Jesus. This might appear praiseworthy, but in fact it was not. No one can willingly choose or accept Christ. No one can make himself a Christian. To try to do so, means that you do not fully grasp the meaning of faith, the depth of grace, the cost of discipleship or the real suffering that

follows. To this overzealous man Jesus said: “foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head”. The second disciple heeded the call of Jesus, but added: “let me first bury my father”. Again, this man’s response might appear noble, but in point of fact he inserted something between himself and Christ. He placed his own personal obligations and responsibilities above God’s call and in doing so transformed his father into an idol, which came before God Himself. Nothing can come between Christ and His followers: “So let the dead bury the dead, but you go and proclaim the kingdom of God”. And still a third answered Jesus’ call with: “I will follow you Lord, but let me first go and say goodbye to my family”. Like the second man in our story, this man also put something above, and between Christ and himself. The moment he added his own personal wishes is the moment it ceased to be a true call to Christian discipleship and became instead a human initiative governed by human standards. Christ speaks sternly to this man: “No one who puts His hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God”.

We are not told what happened to these three men; whether or not they listened to Christ. But by observing their responses, we learn by negative example what the call of discipleship means for our lives. The call of discipleship begins and ends in grace. It is first and foremost centered in Christ who comes to us and meets us where we are in this life. He tailor fits His Call to suit our individual lives. He plays to our strengths and employs us where He needs us the most. No two Christians have the same call of discipleship. God calls the individual uniquely. God makes us who we are, and He places us within a history and context to serve Him above all else. Embedded in the command itself we come to understand that when Christ calls us to follow Him, He never asks us to do something, which He himself has not already done. Christ while He was upon this earth walked the path of righteousness before us, so that where we are lacking, He freely adds His grace; where we are weak, He lends to us His strength. The way of righteousness is hard, the path at times is steep and rocky, but in the struggle comes understanding, through life’s oppositions comes clarity. The whole journey in Christ is meant to be joyful revelation. For along the way God is revealing fresh insights to us about life, about ourselves, and about who He is. In serving God, we come to know who we are, the reason for our short little existence upon this earth, and the very purpose for our lives. “Follow Me”, Christ says, and by grace we respond to His call: “Here I am, send me.” Amen.