

BASIC BIBLE KNOWLEDGE

11. DISCIPLESHIP: Following Jesus

Text: Mark 8:34-38; Luke 14:26-33

I. COUNTING THE COST

In our study of the basic truths of the Christian faith, we have now reached the stage where one must face up to the challenge of DISCIPLESHIP or FOLLOWING JESUS. It is all very well to acquire Bible Knowledge and to recognise JESUS CHRIST as the SAVIOUR of the world, and that He is able to save and to give eternal life to all who believe.

But the crux of the matter is this: Are you willing and ready to become a disciple or follower of Jesus Christ? While His **OFFER** of salvation is FREE (by GRACE are ye saved), the **PRICE** of discipleship is COSTLY. Nevertheless, its **REWARDS** are precious, without price.

In considering DISCIPLESHIP, it is well for us to remember that our Lord Himself never persuaded anyone to follow Him in easy terms. On the contrary, He challenged them with the hard facts of discipleship and plainly discouraged those who were not serious or unprepared to face up to its demands.

So, while we long and yearn for men and women to become Christians, nevertheless, we have no desire to increase Church membership by encouraging and admitting those with only a superficial or passing attraction to Christianity. Truly, the great tragedy of the Church is the presence amongst its membership of great numbers of men and women who have never fully appreciated the meaning of discipleship. We call these “nominal Christians”, still unregenerate. Such a state of affairs is the greatest hindrance to spiritual growth and testimony in the Church.

Let those who wish to follow Jesus therefore soberly count the cost, even as our Lord said,

“For which of you, intending to build a tower, sitteth not down first, and counteth the cost, whether he have sufficient to finish it? So likewise, whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple” (Luke 14:28,33).

Being His disciple, like building a house, is no trivial or light-hearted matter. One must be serious and consider the cost.

WHAT COST?

One day our Lord called the people and addressed them with these words:

“Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it; but whosoever shall lose his life for my sake and the gospel’s, the same shall save it. For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?” (Mark 8:34-36).

This passage expresses in a nutshell the cost of following Jesus which every would-be disciple must be prepared to pay.

Denying Self

It is natural for men and women to esteem “self” most highly and to put self at the top of the priority list in everything: in our affection, security, comfort, pleasure, prestige - just to name a few. This great “I” rules supreme in the life of the unsaved, the non-Christian, the men of the world. It is the biggest stumbling block and hindrance to discipleship. “Self” and “selfishness” must first be dethroned before CHRIST can be enthroned, for this is just what it means to follow JESUS. HE must be the LEADER, MASTER and LORD of our life. Only then can we become followers.

Indeed, not only must “self” be dethroned, it must be put to death - crucified. Paul the apostle expresses it thus:

“I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me” (Galatians 2:20).

To deny self, then is to crucify that selfish, sinful, wretched “old man”. No place must he dictate my way of life, my thinking and actions. In the place of self I must invite the LORD to come to my heart and rule my life. The old self has been crucified, no longer to make decisions and policies. The new person is now altogether controlled and led by the HOLY SPIRIT.

In the process, I must renounce my old sinful past, confess and repent of all known sins and come with the penitent heart to Jesus for cleansing and the new birth.

As the Apostle Paul says:

“Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new” (2 Corinthians 5:17).

The old “selfish I” has passed away. I am now a new person. CHRIST the LORD is in control. This is the meaning of to “deny self”.

But there is more of it. If CHRIST is LORD and truly in control, then there must be a VISIBLE DIFFERENCE. My present life must be different from my former life. In what way?

CHRIST has a plan for every follower of HIS. If you have denied yourself to follow HIM, He has a plan for you - for your life.

We will discover HIS plan for us by total commitment and surrender of our lives to Him. Our home, our marriage, our work, our friends, our recreations and pastimes - all these come under His control. Our resources, finance and time too belong to Him. In all these - the way we live and build relationship, the way we employ our time, talents and money - JESUS CHRIST must have the CONTROL.

“If CHRIST is to be LORD at all

He must be LORD of all.”

No more SELF but CHRIST!

Taking Up the Cross

Become a Christian can be easy, or it can be difficult, but “where there's a will there's a way”. What way? The way of the cross. It is no easy way, but if you have made up your mind to resolutely follow Jesus, there will be no insurmountable difficulties.

Our Lord's Words give cheer and hope to every follower:

“Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light” (Matthew 11:28-30).

Taking up the cross seems heavy, but to those who follow, Jesus makes the burden light. Taking up the cross signifies walking the way of the condemned prisoner, going to his execution. This is a metaphor or figure of speech to impress on the disciple the need of “dying daily”. The “old person”, “the flesh” must needs be constantly subdued or put to death or crucified, with all its passions and sinful desires. Everyday, the follower must consciously walk the Calvary road in the attitude of the man going to the gallows, realising his own “lostness” and hopeless condition. And only the cross can remind him of the utter worthlessness of “self”. Let him therefore take up his cross daily.

The same meaning is conveyed by our Lord's Words:

“For whosoever will save his life shall lose it; but whosoever shall lose his life for my sake and the gospel's, the same shall save it” (Mark 8:35).

He who refuses to surrender his life to Christ, but will “save” it e.g. insist on being his own master, will not find the true purpose and meaning of life as intended for us by God. He will not find everlasting life. So, he loses it. And if a man loses his life, though he may have vast possessions (“the whole world”), truly he has nothing. How sad! For what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?

II. TAKING THE STEP

Taking the step to follow CHRIST is the most important decision in life. It is a step which each person must take for himself/herself.

Passive agreement with the doctrines of the Christian faith, or intellectual assent to the Gospel, or joining a Church does **not** make one a follower or disciple of Jesus Christ.

Our Lord never puts pressure on anyone to follow Him, but those who follow Him must follow **on His terms**. We have already considered what those terms and conditions are. Nevertheless, may we enumerate them once again so that none should be in doubt.

1. Deny self, daily. The “old man” must be subdued, crucified, dethroned.
2. Take up the cross, humbly, acknowledging our utter “lostness” and condemned state, and our need for daily surrendering to Christ.
3. Forsaking all others, we must take Christ as our supreme object of life, our LORD and MASTER. All others - self, parents, spouse, family, ambition, profession, possessions, everything - must count as nothing in comparison with CHRIST. We must forsake all those for Him. The Apostle Paul said, “I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ” (Philippians 3:8).
4. Following is for life. Let none take the step lightly or haphazardly. But let each one make up his mind soberly, deliberately and resolutely. As the words of the Indian hymn go:

“I have decided to follow Jesus
I have decided to follow Jesus.
No turning back, no turning back!”
5. Life is short, time is urgent. While the Saviour invites tenderly, “if any man hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me” (Revelation 3:20). Remember, the invitation is not always available. Life is uncertain and the time is short. Following Jesus is therefore an urgent matter.

THE GAIN IN FOLLOWING JESUS

What does one gain in following Jesus? This is not an unreasonable question to ask.

Firstly, let us consider the losses. When a person has made a firm and resolute decision to follow Jesus he must make a break with all his sinful past. All unlawful practices and sinful habits must be given up. Such a loss is great gain!

Next, he may expect to lose his unsaved friends and worldly pleasures. Because of their different values and outlooks, there is likely to be a parting of the ways with old associates. Again, such loss is no loss.

A person who follows Jesus will experience a new sense of release from the bondage of sin and self and the world. He begins a new life in the spirit. And, where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty (2 Corinthians 3:17). He becomes a child of God, “For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God ... ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father. The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God” (Romans 8:14-16).

As a child of God, he becomes a member of the body of Jesus Christ, the Church universal. He finds spiritual kinship and unity with all true followers in every part of the world. What he may have lost in family and friends he will gain immeasurably more. “And every one that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for

my name's sake, shall receive an hundredfold, and shall inherit everlasting life” (Matthew 19:29).

Those who follow Jesus may expect trials and tribulation, even as He promised, “In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world” (John 16:33). We should therefore not be discouraged even though the road be rough and heavy-going at times. James 1:12 serves as our encouragement: “Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the **crown of life**, which the Lord hath promised to them that love Him.”

So let all who follow Jesus be of good cheer, for He whom we follow will soon return again to earth. “And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away” (1 Peter 5:4). If we are faithful to Him unto death, He will give us a **crown of life** (Revelation 2:10).

BIBLE KNOWLEDGE QUIZ

11. DISCIPLESHIP: FOLLOWING JESUS

Fill in the blanks:

1. Following Jesus may be costly, but there are many _____.
2. Those who wish to follow Jesus must first _____ the cost.
3. He who will follow Jesus must _____ himself and take up His cross daily.
4. If we are truly following Jesus, He must be _____ of our life.
5. Self must be denied or put to _____ if Christ is to reign in our life.

Underline the correct answers:

6. If we truly follow Christ, He must have full control over
 - (a) some of the things we do
 - (b) the trivial things in life
 - (c) all areas of my life and activities and possessions
7. Following Jesus is
 - (a) “losing business”
 - (b) the greatest gain in life
 - (c) only for fools
8. Jesus promises that those who come to Him will
 - (a) become heavy laden
 - (b) perish
 - (c) have their burdens made light
9. In deciding to follow Jesus, we must do it
 - (a) resolutely and spontaneously
 - (b) reluctantly
 - (c) thoughtlessly
10. Our Lord promises all who follow him
 - (a) a crown of life
 - (b) riches on earth
 - (b) freedom from all troubles