

HAVE YOU CALCULATED THE COST OF BECOMING A DISCIPLE OF CHRIST?

SERIES: JESUS, SAVIOR OF THE LOST

By Ron Ritchie

I recently received a letter from Dudley Weiner, a pastor and evangelist who is serving our Lord in Paris, France. Last summer, Dudley took his wife Janet and their three children on vacation to the seaport town of St. Jean de Luz in the southwest of France. One warm day he took a walk along the beach with a young man. He continues in his letter: "I seemed to be aware of each step into the soft sand as I purposely strode along the narrow strip of beach laden with sun bathers. My mind raced with images from the past and questions for the present as I looked at the young man next to me. . . We sat down in the balmy sand. As I looked into his eyes he looked into mine. I saw innocence and sincerity and at the same time determination and certitude. I said, 'Are you sure you want to do this?' He affirmed, 'Yes.' I continued, 'You must first understand the cost of this decision and how it will affect the rest of your life.' He listened patiently. I said, 'It's not something you can take lightly. It will stand out as a landmark decision in your life. God will honor this decision and so will I . . . It means you want to be a follower of Jesus Christ and truly be his disciple.' He affirmed, 'Yes.'"

Two thousand years ago, our Lord Jesus had a similar experience with two brothers named Peter and Andrew on the sandy shores of the sea of Galilee. They were fisherman, engaged in casting their nets into the sea, when he came along. He called out to them, "Follow Me, and I will make you become fishers of men. And they immediately left their nets and followed Him." (Mark 1:16-20) Over the past two thousand years, Jesus has continued to call out men and women from this fallen world to follow him. If we decide to leave our nets and do so, he then leads us through the door of "Discipleship University." Within its hallowed halls he begins to introduce us to a prescribed set of spiritual courses that will enable us over the process of time to disciple others in our generation.

In Discipleship #101 (Luke 9:18-27), which we have already looked at (message #4142), we found our Lord talking to his disciples at Caesarea Philippi. There, at the headwaters of the Jordan, he spoke of the cost of discipleship in these words: "The Son of Man must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders and the chief priest and scribes, and be killed, and be raised up on the third day." And He was saying to them all, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow Me. For whoever wishes to save his life shall lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake, he is the one who will save it. For what does a man profit if he gains the whole world, and loses or forfeits himself?" There is a cost to discipleship. Christian discipleship is not like joining the Elks or the Boy Scouts. Following Jesus may result in the losing of one's life.

In Discipleship #102 (Luke 9:57-10:24; message #4145), our Lord was headed toward Jerusalem when he was confronted by three men who had their own hidden agendas when it came to the subject of discipleship. Jesus warned the first man who approached him that if he followed Him he would never have a home. Then the second man wanted to follow Jesus but only after he buried his father first. The third man wanted to follow Jesus but he first wanted to go home and say goodbye to his family. It was at this point that Jesus disqualified all three because of their hidden agendas. He said to them and all who desired to follow him in the future: "No one, after putting his hand to the plow and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God."

Today we come to Discipleship #103 (Luke 14:25-35). The scene changes, and we find our Lord facing a new crowd in Perea that wanted to follow him. They were anticipating the physical and spiritual blessings that would come to them because of their relationship with the Messiah. But Israel's spiritual leaders had rejected their Messiah, so the physical blessings had to be postponed. As tension continued to build up around him, he needed more disciples to carry out his mission after his death and resurrection in Jerusalem. He did not want his disciples to follow him based on an emotional reaction to an exciting message. He sought, rather, people

who would give up all that they held dear, even their own lives, to follow him.

Today, therefore, we will see that Jesus continues to build on Courses 101 and 102 as he asks the question: "Have you calculated the cost of becoming my disciple?" If we have, then we know that :

I. We must be willing to hate our own family

Luke 14: 25-26

Now great multitudes 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, and even his own life, he cannot be My disciple."

Our Lord Jesus had reminded his disciples on more than one occasion of the purpose of his ministry on earth. He said: "I have not come to call righteous men but sinners to repentance" (5:32), and that "...the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost" (19:10). At this point in our Lord's life we find him just a few months away from the cross of Calvary, preaching about the kingdom of God. As a result of his preaching many men and women wanted to join him and the other disciples in their ministry. It was at this time he needed to challenge them about the true cost of discipleship, for in the days ahead anyone who was willing to follow him would have to join with him as he faced the full wrath of the Jewish leadership as well as the political powers of the Roman Empire. For some of the disciples this could mean arrest, jail, whippings, and death.

"If anyone comes after Me. . .," said Jesus. Within this idea of discipleship we find the same principles as we do in a marriage relationship: the leaving of family, the cleaving to a wife, and the becoming one in body, soul and spirit. Before we commit ourselves to invite Jesus to be our Lord we must give this commitment the same serious consideration we would give to a marriage proposal, because within that agreement are the terms of servanthood and a willingness to die to self. In his book *According to Luke*, David Gooding wrote: "Thousands have been and still are confronted with this choice right at the outset of their Christian lives. They see, as clearly as Saul of Tarsus saw, that salvation is a free gift. Equally clearly they see that confession of faith in Christ will cost them career, friends, family, perhaps life itself; and they have to decide between Christ and salvation on the one side and all else on the other side."

"...and does not hate his own ..." This concept is best understood when we view it side by side with what our Lord said in Matthew 10:34-37: "He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me; and he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me." In the context of Luke 14: 26, our Lord was challenging those in the crowd who were thinking of following him that they would have to "hate" or "love less" their family members. And the call to the Christian to give his loyalty to Jesus will at times be looked upon by his family as if it "hates" him. But Jesus must be the final authority in everything a Christian does in life.

I was reminded of this principle of "love less" the other day when I had an opportunity to think through the early days of our marriage. When Anne Marie committed to marry me, she was still living at home in Rabat, Morocco. She was surrounded by the security of her family, friends, religion and school. She enjoyed the sights, sounds and smells of a delightful French and Moroccan culture. We met in Rabat. There we grew in love, committed to marriage, exchanged vows, and moved into our first home where we lived for about a year. But we both knew that in time we would have to pack up and move to my home in Pennsylvania. When that day came, Anne Marie was asked to leave her family, friends and church, the sights, sounds and smells of that delightful French and Moroccan culture and in essence to "love less" all that she had held dear all her life in order to depart with me on a foreign adventure.

Now the same thing must happen when we come to Christ. Have we calculated the cost of becoming his disciple? We must realize that to love Jesus Christ and follow him means we must love our families less.

There is another thing. We also need to come to the realization that:

II. We must be willing to hate our own life

Luke 14:26

"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."

Our Lord had already challenged the twelve disciples in Luke 9:21-23 when he said, "...if anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself." To deny oneself means to choose by the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit to live daily in the spiritual reality that Paul shared with the Corinthians: "You are not your own; you have been brought with a price" (1 Cor 6: 19-20). "To deny oneself ...is to turn away from the idolatry of self-centeredness" (C.E. B. Canfield). Once we place our faith in Jesus as Lord and Savior we become his bondservants, and we begin to learn to live our lives to fulfill his will, not our own. We will need to learn to deny our self-confidence, self-adequacy and self-sufficiency which we were taught by the spirit of this age. Either Jesus is Lord of our lives or we are. We cannot have it both ways. And this is a process of learning which never ceases until we join him in eternity.

The key attitude of our new lives in Christ is set out in the words of our Lord on the night before he willingly died on the cross of Calvary for our sins. While praying to His Father he said, "Father, if Thou art willing, remove this cup from Me; yet not My will, but Thine be done" (Luke 22:42). Jesus added in this context that if one does not "hate his own life he cannot be My disciple." Of the original twelve disciples ten were willing to hate their own lives and died untimely deaths as martyrs. John was imprisoned by the Romans for his faith in Christ and later was released to die a natural death in Asia. Only Judas loved his life more than Christ, and he committed suicide. When we give up our rights, however, others receive life. There was a wonderful segment on ABC television news last week about a woman who does just this. She has twelve children of her own, and she takes in the homeless, the sick and the hungry and bathes and feeds them. This helps restore the sense of dignity of those less fortunate than herself, she said. She was denying herself that others might live. This is a critical part of Christian discipleship.

In 1979, Chet Bitterman arrived in Bogota, Colombia to begin work among the Carijona Indians. Before his arrival, Chet wrote in his diary: "Maybe this is just some kind of self-inflated martyr complex, but I find this recurring thought that perhaps God will call me to be martyred for him in his service in Colombia. I am willing." Two years later, Chet was captured by terrorists who demanded that his mission, Wycliffe Translators, leave Colombia immediately. Wycliffe understandably refused their demands. Seven weeks later, Chet's body was discovered in an abandoned bus. He had loved his life less than his Lord and had paid the ultimate price.

Have we calculated the cost of becoming a disciple of Christ? Not only must we come to the realization that to love Jesus Christ and follow him we must be willing to "hate" (or love less) our families and our own life, but also:

III. We must be willing to carry our own cross

Luke 14: 27-32

"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 take counsel 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 terms of peace."

In Luke 9:21-23 the Lord told his disciples: "If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow Me." In this context, months later the Lord drove another nail of truth into the hearts of the men and women around him who were expressing a desire to follow him. He wanted them to get a full picture of what they were asking. Thus he declared: "Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after Me cannot be my disciple."

The cross was an instrument of shame, humiliation and death used by the Roman authorities to punish criminals. When the Jews watched a criminal pick up a cross and follow a squad of Roman soldiers to the hill of Calvary, they all knew he was making a one-way trip to his death. The criminal, of course, took up his cross under duress, but the Christian does this willingly by the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit. Now to carry our cross does not mean putting up with living with our mother-in-law, or some handicap or sickness. Rather, to carry our cross means (1) we are willing to admit that it was because of our sins of envy, rebellion, pride, lust, murder, adultery, slander, etc., that Jesus died on the cross on our behalf. But we placed our faith in him, and when he died, we died once and for all to the power of sin. And now because he lives we are able to live a new, resurrected life of righteousness by his resurrection power (Rom. 6).

To carry our cross means (2) that we have a daily reminder that our flesh needs to be put to death. The apostle Paul wrote to the Galatians: "Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit" (Gal. 5: 24-25.) We are not to coddle or cuddle our flesh, to tolerate it or give it any encouragement. Instead we are to reject it, together with its selfish desires. We must nail the flesh to the cross daily by the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit.

To carry our cross means (3), according to Paul, if Jesus is Lord, then "...we who live are constantly being delivered over to death for Jesus' sake, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh. So death works in us, but life in you" (2 Cor 4:11-12.) John R.W. Stott wrote in his book *The Cross Of Christ*: "The cross undermines our self-righteousness. We stand before it only with a bowed head and a broken spirit. . . and there we remain until the Lord Jesus speaks to our hearts his word of pardon and acceptance, and we, gripped by his love and brimful of thanksgiving, go out into the world to live our lives in his service." To go out into the world means entering a world of the breathing dead. I can hardly count the number of times in the past few days that I have heard sports figures, who are involved in youth programs, say on television that what they teach young people is how to be the best, how to try harder and not quit, etc. But none of this works, does it? It's all of the flesh, and as Paul says, "the flesh profits nothing."

So we must daily take up our cross, and says Jesus, "follow Me. . ." Many Jews were willing to follow Jesus for a while, but then they left him because he continued to offer them a spiritual kingdom while they wanted a political kingdom. The word of the Lord, however, was that a true disciple would not only deny himself and take up his cross, but also would follow him wherever he led. Sometimes this would involve even their own physical death on a cross. Several of the original twelve would suffer death in this way years later. To follow Jesus means to walk in obedience to his word so that our lives bring glory to him and joy to our hearts. We must follow him each and every day with the view to crucifying the flesh, and if necessary, even to give up our physical life for his name's sake.

Most of you are aware of the hazards of living in Columbia, South America. I remember a trip I made to that country in the late 80's with Ed Woodhall and Carl Gallivan. We had heard stories of how the drug barons had systematically murdered 54 judges and forced 108 others to leave their posts. Not only were the lives of those ministers of justice put on the line, but also the ministers of the gospel of Jesus Christ were threatened. Miquel Mosquera, a pastor and attorney who serves the Lord in Medellin, the capital city, was quoted recently as saying: "For me to live is Christ, to die is gain. Christ is the reason for my living, and if my death contributes toward the salvation of the people of Medellin, then I am willing to take the chance. Christ accepted the risk of living in the midst of a lost and corrupt world, a world that took him to the cross. Why should I not risk myself?" In other words, if his death would contribute toward the salvation of the people of Medellin, he was willing to suffer death. In the slums of Medellin a number of years ago a young Columbian woman took me on a tour to show me her ministry. She worked among the desperately poor, mainly ex-convicts who were not permitted to work and earn a living for themselves. We saw such dangerous places that I feared for her life every minute, but she too was willing to die so that her flock should live. This is what it means to be a follower of Jesus Christ. Once his disciples boasted that they would follow him anywhere, even unto death.

Jesus responded, in effect, "Really? Today Satan wants to sift you like wheat. After you return from denying me, go in strength. Peter, unless the Spirit of God lives in you and empowers you, you can't talk like that. If you are going to follow me, you will suffer, but you will have much joy too as my disciple."

Jesus then tells his potential disciples two stories to illustrate how he had counted the cost before he came to our world to save us from our sins: first, the cost of a tower (14:28-29): "...for which one of you..." Our Lord looks out over the crowd and reminds them of a basic principle of life. If a man needs to build a tower in a field in order to keep watch over his fields or flocks, isn't it only natural for him to first "calculate the cost" before he begins to build it? Otherwise, if he merely has a vision to build a tower and in the heat of the moment runs out and purchases some material, only to discover later that he has but enough to build a foundation, then he has no money left to finish the project. In time, onlookers come to see that he did not take the time to fully "calculate the cost" of his tower. As they pass by each day they make fun of him among themselves, saying, "This man began to build and was not able to finish." In this story, Jesus was teaching that he came to earth to build a tower called the "Spiritual Kingdom of God" or "The Body of Christ, the church." In Caesarea Philippi, after Peter had declared him the "Christ of God," Jesus said to Peter "...and upon that rock I will build My church and the gates of Hades shall not overpower it" (Matt. 16:17-18.) But before he came to earth, he sat down with his Father and they "calculated the cost" of this tower. The cost would be the life of the innocent Lamb of God, crucified on the cross of Calvary for the sins of humanity against God the Father. The Lord did not come to earth with a plan for the salvation of man and fail to follow through to the end-his death for our life. No! He came with a plan, with a beginning, a middle and an end. As Paul wrote, "The Son of God...emptied Himself, taking the form of a bondservant, and being made in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross" (Phil. 2:7-8.) Because of his resurrection and ascension, we who are willing to become his disciples now have been given the Holy Spirit who enables us to make disciples in each generation until his second coming.

And now, Jesus' second story: the cost of a battle (14: 31-32): "or what King..." Here our Lord uses another familiar but basic natural principle concerning war. No king under attack would begin a war with his enemy without first sitting down with his generals and "taking counsel" to see whether or not he was strong enough to defeat him. The fact that he had only 10,000 men while his enemy had 20,000 is not the issue, but whether his army of 10,000 is strong enough to defeat the 20,000 men. If not, then he would be wise to send a delegation and ask for terms for peace. Our Lord came to build his church, saying that the "gates of Hades shall not overpower it." (Matt. 16:18) Jesus was in a battle against a spiritual foe who was determined to destroy the church he was building. He wanted faithful men and women to join him in the building as well as the battle. In the case of our Lord, we know that he and his Father sat down and took counsel against Satan and his army in the heavenlies. It would be a spiritual battle against Satan for the souls of men, women and children. The issue was: Was he strong enough to defeat this arch enemy? After taking counsel with the Father, he decided to enter the battle and to defeat the enemy by his voluntary death on the cross, followed by his resurrection. This King was willing to give up all he had so that others might live. Through his death and resurrection, he defeated Satan, and God was then able to "deliver us from the domain of darkness, and transfer us to the kingdom of His well-beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins." (Col. 1:13-14) At the same time "...God highly exalted Him and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those who are in heaven, and on earth, and under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father" (Phil 2: 9-11.)

Jesus was willing to count the cost to build the church as well as win the battle. In light of these spiritual realities we can see that the call to discipleship is a serious step. We must (1) love our family less than we love the Lord; we must be willing (2) to love our own life less; and we must be willing (3) to take up our cross and follow him wherever he leads us. Finally:

IV. We must be willing to give up all our possessions

Luke 14:33-35

"So therefore, no one of you can be My disciple who does not give up all his own

possessions. Therefore, salt is good; but even if 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."

Our Lord challenges these "would-be disciples" to seriously "calculate the cost" before they set out to follow him. They must be willing to give up all their earthly possessions in the sense that they give them over to his control. At that point we no longer own anything of material worth but we become stewards of God's possessions. At times, our Lord may ask some of his true disciples to literally give up their earthly possessions to serve him in a certain manner, and he expects them to do so gladly. The important thing is that whosoever desires to follow him must be inwardly free from worldly-mindedness, covetousness and selfishness, and wholly devoted to him.

It is of interest to note that Judas would have been in this audience listening for the third time to this kind of sermon. As the treasurer for the disciples, he was quietly stealing money from the purse in order to purchase a field. The things of this earth were very important to him as well as many others in the crowd. Or take the struggle the rich young ruler had after he had asked Jesus, "What shall I do to obtain eternal life?" Jesus admitted that the young man had kept the commands, but he lacked one thing, so he said, "...sell all that you possess, and distribute it to the poor, and you shall have treasure in heaven, and come and follow Me. But when he had heard these things, he became very sad, for he was extremely rich" (Luke 18:18-27.) The Lord wanted the man, not his money. In this case the rich young ruler was held prisoner by his wealth, thus he was not free to follow Jesus. The issue is, Whom or what are you serving? Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount, "No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other or he will hold to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and riches" (Matt. 5:24.)

Now we come to this word from Jesus concerning salt. Salt was used in this community to arrest corruption and add flavor to food. When it was good salt it was of great value. Our Lord in the Sermon on the Mount had told his disciples, "You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt has become tasteless, how will it be made salty again? It is good for nothing any more, except to be thrown out and trampled under foot by men" (Matt. 5:13.) He had walked among the religious leaders long enough to see that many of them who once had a love for the Lord and his word were now bound up in self-interest and legalism. When the salt of their lives was poured out on the Jewish community to arrest corruption and add spiritual flavor, they were found wanting; they had lost their value as salt and their lives had become useless and tasteless. At the same time Jesus was looking for men and women who would follow him even into the fires of persecution and death, if necessary, without losing their spiritual flavor.

Last week, someone came to me and said there was a man sitting in the back who looked destitute and perhaps needed help. We get many people like this who come asking for help. When I saw him, I said, "You've been here before, haven't you?" "Yes," he replied. He was a nice-looking man, and he said he was in need of food and money-just twenty dollars-like we have seen so many times before. This time, however, the Lord said to me, "Leave it alone. Just deal with it. The man needs food and money? Just give it to him." So I gave him what he needed. Then he told me he had a friend in his truck who needed food, so I got food for him too. Something moved me and I said to him, "Can I pray for you." He said, "Yes." I put my arm around him and I said, "Lord, please give this man back his dignity, his image, his significance. Give him back a reason for living, a reason for life as you designed it to be lived. And give him back a view of who you really are in your Son Jesus. Give him life. In Jesus' name. Amen." I stepped back and I said, "I wish you well today." He looked at me, and then he hugged me. "Thank you," he said. He got in his truck and drove away. It's not so hard, is it? It's just salt. One more day in this man's life-salt, life, flavor, arresting corruption. God provided that. I was busy being religious, and then God said, "That's enough religion. Come over here, and I want you to get practical."

Norval Geldenhuys wrote in his Commentary on the Gospel of John: "A great deal is entailed in being a disciple of Jesus. But the enrichment of one's whole life and the eternal welfare resulting from it, is still much greater and more glorious. In addition, we must remember: not to be a disciple of Jesus means to be a disciple of the powers of darkness. And to be a servant of the world and of sin costs incalculably more than to be a disciple of Jesus-the price of it is the loss of the highest happiness in this life and darkness and affliction of

soul throughout eternity. How insignificant is the price of self-renunciation in His service in comparison with the price to be paid for rejecting Him!" Jesus said: "He who has an ear to hear let him hear." In effect: "Listen carefully to my words for your whole life; now and in eternity depends on it." And Peter as well as Judas was listening to these very words.

Have you and I calculated the cost of becoming a disciple of Christ? Here are the requirements of Discipleship #103 in Discipleship University:

1. We must be willing to hate our family or we cannot be his disciple.
2. We must be willing to hate our own life or we cannot be his disciple.
3. We must be willing to carry our own cross or we cannot be his disciple.
4. We must be willing to give up our material possessions or we cannot be his disciple.

There are no other options. We cannot audit the course. And Jesus doesn't expect us to fail it once we begin taking it because he has given us his Spirit.

Dudley continued the story of his walk with the young man on the beach of St. Jean de Luz: "It means you want to be a follower of Jesus Christ and truly His disciple?" He affirmed, 'Yes.' I asked him to tell me how he heard about Jesus and why he asked him to be the Lord and Savior of his life. He explained to me in detail what happened. I told him, 'Jesus said that "if anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me."' And I explained that to be a disciple of Jesus we must be willing to lay aside our desires and our goals and our expectations for our life and he will give us new ones...ones that come from the heart....ones that will produce life...eternal life...in us and in the lives of others. I again asked, 'Are you ready to do this? Are you ready to pay this price? Are you ready for the adventures that lie ahead?' And he said, 'Yes.' And I said, 'Then come with me. It's time for you to make a public declaration of your faith.' As we walked down into the water, he turned and faced a beach full of curious onlookers. Then he looked at me and made a verbal declaration of his faith in Jesus Christ as his Lord and Savior. It was then that I had the privilege of baptizing my son Joshua in the gentle waves of the bay of St. Jean de Luz."

Joshua is nine years old. I ask you, and I say to myself, is there any reason why you would want to live any other way? I hope there is not. What a waste of your life-to live any other way than as a disciple of Jesus Christ. I beg of you: Don't choose the other way. Being his disciple brings life, but if you're not a disciple of his, then you are a disciple of the powers of darkness. There's no other option. The choice is yours.

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