

The High Price of Being a Disciple

Keith DeLorme

“When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die.”
(Dietrich Bonhoeffer, The Cost of Discipleship)

That is the invitation of Christ, and it is the high price of being a disciple. If we’re to follow Christ, then we need to know about his mission - what His purpose was – and He told His disciples what it was - **(v.31)** “...the Son of Man must suffer...”

This announcement stunned the disciples – did He really just say that, or did He mean something else Jesus was very clear – he was not speaking in parables, no ambiguity. Peter didn’t like what he heard Jesus say. **(v.32b)** *And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him.* Peter’s protest was born out of his ignorance of God’s will and his deep love for his Lord. One minute Peter was led by God to confess his faith in Jesus Christ **(Matt. 16:17)**, and the next minute he was thinking like an unbelieving man and expressing the thoughts of Satan. Christians beware to not be used of Satan! Peter argued with the Word of God. When we argue with God’s Word, we open the door for Satan’s lies. Well-intentioned actions that unwittingly align with Satan’s purposes is a dangerous possibility for any believer, and we need to be careful not to allow our complex pride to cloud the simple truth.

(v.33) *But turning and seeing his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, “Get behind me, Satan! For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man.”* Peter had very quickly slipped into a man-centered perspective, and as well-intentioned as he was, he was speaking to Jesus in support of the Devil’s agenda. Jesus rebukes Peter publicly because He saw the disciples watching, and Jesus needed everyone to hear and understand the rebuke. Sometimes public sin requires a public rebuke.

Genuine disciples of Jesus ought to be willing to...

SURRENDER (v.34) *And calling the crowd to him with his disciples, he said to them, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.* Denying self is not the same as self-denial. Self-denial is when, for a good purpose, we choose on occasion to give up things or activities. On the other hand, denying self means we surrender ourselves to Christ and determine to obey His will. Submission to God’s will for our life is evident when we want what He wants.

From the human point of view, we are losing ourselves, but from the divine perspective, we are finding ourselves. When we live for Christ, we become more like Him, and this brings out our own unique individuality.

“If we live for ourselves, we will lose ourselves, but if we lose ourselves for His sake and the gospel’s, we will find ourselves.” (Warren Wiersbe)

SUFFER (v.31,34b) *And he began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes and be killed, and after three days rise again. And calling the crowd to him with his disciples, he said to them, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.*

In Jesus’ day the cross meant one thing: a torturous death. The crowd listening to Jesus would have understood clearly his lesson concerning a cross; they just didn’t understand that He’d be on one. A true disciple of Jesus is willing to suffer for His glory.

SACRIFICE (v.34c) *And calling the crowd to him with his disciples, he said to them, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.*

Bearing a cross meant one was about to die, in a most horrific way, and that one would face ridicule and disgrace along the way in the midst of tremendous pain that would only climax once the victim was nailed to it. There is no greater sacrifice that one could give than to be willing to die in order to follow; and this is exactly what Jesus did for us. Dying to self is an absolute surrender to God. True sacrifice demands commitment that is almost blindly resolute – it does not consider earthly consequences like pain, sorrow, or humiliation, but rather heavenly rewards like eternity and joy.

So, these are the marks of a true disciple: Surrender, Suffering, and Sacrifice. Why would anyone sign up for that? Obedience. Because a genuine disciple will obey God’s call to follow, even unto death.

- **True disciples know that they have an eternal destiny (v.35)** *For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it. We should follow Jesus at all costs because it is the way of salvation – we are saved in order to serve. Our service infers follower, and if we spend our lives on ourselves and clinging to what we desire we risk losing eternal life. If, however we let go of our own will and lose our lives for His sake we will gain eternal life; to lose ourself is not an act of desperation, it is an act of devotion that should lead to practical duty, and our duty is to share the gospel with a lost world.*

- **True disciples understand principles of investment (v.36-37)** For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul? For what can a man give in return for his soul?

“He is no fool who gives up what he cannot keep in order to gain what he cannot lose.” (Jim Elliot):

Saving faith is a matter of eternal destiny and discipleship is a matter of profit and loss - of whether we will waste our lives or invest our lives. To “forfeit his soul” in the context of discipleship means wasting our life - missing the great opportunities God gives us to make our life count. We might “gain the whole world” and be a success in the eyes of men but have nothing to show for our life when we stand before God. This world lures people into giving themselves to temporary pleasure.

- **True disciples understand that they’ll give an account (v.38)** *For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him will the Son of Man also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.”*

Jesus points us forward to the last day - the day when we will each stand before the LORD face to face, and while we are tempted to shy away from our profession of Christ to avoid shame in this life, if we think too highly of the opinions of men, we risk facing the ultimate shame when we stand before the Lord. We should be more fearful of being rejected by Christ on the last day than we are of being rejected by other people today.

As Christ-followers, we’re disciples who are willing to surrender, suffer, and sacrifice, just as He did. First the suffering, then the glory. But many evangelicals today seem to just want the glory: “hold the surrender, keep the suffering, and sacrifice – not so much.” The high price of being a disciple is being willing to suffer for the sake of the cross. A true disciple of Jesus is willing to suffer for His glory.