

## “THE COST OF FOLLOWING JESUS”:

*...you terms or His?*

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**Matthew 8:1-4** *When He had come down from the mountain, great multitudes followed Him. And behold, a leper came and worshiped Him,*

*saying, "Lord, if You are willing, You can make me clean." Then Jesus put out His hand and touched him, saying, "I am willing; be cleansed." Immediately his leprosy was cleansed. And Jesus said to him, "See that you tell no one; but go your way, show yourself to the priest, and offer the gift that Moses commanded, as a testimony to them."*

**Matthew 8:18-22** *And when Jesus saw great multitudes about Him, He gave a command to depart to the other side. Then a certain scribe came and said to Him, "Teacher, I will follow You wherever You go." And Jesus said to him, "Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head." Then another of His disciples said to Him, "Lord, let me first go and bury my father." But Jesus said to him, "Follow Me, and let the dead bury their own dead."*

**Mark 4:35-41** *On the same day, when evening had come, He said to them, "Let us cross over to the other side." Now when they had left the multitude, they took Him along in the boat as He was. And other little boats were also with Him. And a great windstorm arose, and the waves beat into the boat, so that it was already filling. But He was in the stern, asleep on a pillow. And they awoke Him and said to Him, "Teacher, do You not care that we are perishing?" Then He arose and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, "Peace, be still!" And the wind ceased and there was a great calm. But He said to them, "Why are you so fearful? How is it that you have no faith?" And they feared exceedingly, and said to one another, "Who can this be, that even the wind and the sea obey Him!"*

**We begin this section** with the story of Christ healing the leper. We begin here, because essentially this is where we all begin. If you are a student of the bible, you may very well be aware of the picture that leprosy presents in scripture. Leprosy, you see, was the scourge of the ancient world. Nothing evoked more fear, more dread, or more revulsion than the sight of these "walking dead." Understanding the disease and its affects paints a clear picture of why it is associated with the issue of sin as the symptoms are amazingly similar! Sin, like leprosy, is inside us, deeper than skin-level, though its presence is clearly manifested on the surface, "in the flesh." (Leviticus 13:3); sin and leprosy both spread over time (Leviticus 13:8); they both always defile and isolate the person (Leviticus 13:45-46); and just as leprous garments are fit only for the fire (Leviticus 13:52-57), so is the end for those who die clothed in sin. And like our sin, leprosy was absolutely incurable by the methods of man! (Note: Scott Weiland, the former frontman for the Stone Temple Pilots and Velvet Revolver found dead.)

As the “disease” of leprosy progressed...*as sin also always does*, it soon brings a zombie-like quality to the individual. There would be the abject poverty, the tattered clothing, the isolation, the smell of decay, all of which was the result of this disease! And the whole journey was progressive...each day sliding further into the ramifications of this ailment. It was ugly, visible to all, incurable, and contaminating to anyone who makes contact with the individual.

*But then came Jesus.*

**There is a mysterious irony** in scripture concerning the issue of leprosy and healing. While it was well understood that leprosy was incurable, there was a provision given in Leviticus 14 for what to do if you were cured of your leprosy. (Note/read Leviticus 14 instructions) Such is given therein, complete with details and offering instructions, yet before Christ one would wonder if such instructions had ever been utilized! Yet it seemed that the Old Testament law anticipated the coming of the 'great physician' and had preordained a pathway to redemption.

Note that the healing itself occurred from outside of the individual and was affected solely by the healer. The individual that was cured played no part in his or her healing except to come to Jesus and seek His redemptive intervention. *“A leper came and worshiped Him, saying, “Lord, if You are willing, You can make me clean.”* However, after being healed there would be action he would need to take... action that would move him from one life paradigm to another... that would 'set him apart' from the world he had lived in and would place him in a new world. This is reflective of the experience of personal sanctification participation. An ongoing change of thinking, action, and environment. A 'putting on' of the new man. A 'taking off' of the old.

But for this he would have to move... he would have to *act*. He would not stay in his tattered clothes...he would not continue to live in the leper slums...he would not continue to embrace relationship with other lepers. He would move on. He was to go to the temple. He would make offering. He would take steps of practical cleansing... embracing a new holiness.

All of this was under the umbrella of God and his church to facilitate and empower, but it was up to the newly healed leper to personally and unilaterally act on his own behalf under the faith belief that if he obeyed, he would be transformed. He did not return to his old world, nor did he expect the temple, the priest, and the whole of the redeeming process to come to him and to cater to a 'do it all for me' spirit.

What began as merely stepping out into that singular healing power of the great physician would now call him to step up and act under that same new power of the presence of God's spirit. This is *God's* part and *our* part. Jesus gave him instruction... "don't get distracted along the way... just GO, SHOW, and give offering, GIVE TESTIMONY through obedience and surrender!" **Prove you are healed...** to others and yourself!

Soon after our salvation...as the changes are still occurring in us and around us, we are apt to begin to grasp both the certainty of our redemption as well as the surety of the costs involved. It's not that we were given the old “bait-n-switch,” it's just that despite all and every warning, we still don't really know what we are getting into until we have ‘crossed over.’

I have never soft-peddled true Christianity, and neither did Christ Himself. It's a radical thing, a crazy thing, a wild and wondrous ride. And it is not for the divided heart or the weak commitment! To attempt a half way commitment is spiritual suicide and could seriously cost us on the earthly realm too. We have seen those that have attempted to execute such a maneuver...*the half way approach to Christian faith*, and it eventually took them out...destroyed marriages, broke their spirits, divided long friendships and kicked their feet out from under them.

No, we have never felt inclined around here to paint a rosy picture, because those of us that are in love with Jesus and pledged our lives to Him and the kingdom cause don't ask for such nor do we expect such. For me it is the best life and the *only* life, but it is not the comfortable life or the soft life. It will challenge you in every way possible and Satan will attempt without a pause, to bring you down. You will be tested and challenged and men who are really just boys will fail and women who want the world's offerings *and* Jesus will drown in their attempts to "serve two masters."

There has long since been a parasitic part of the broad Christian church community that preaches what is commonly called the "prosperity doctrine." Never mind that Jesus never lived it, the apostles certainly never lived it, and that it isn't biblical and it is contrary to all that Jesus taught! Why wouldn't we in the flesh love such a premise! I get to have Jesus, eternal life, and all the stuff of the world too! Yea! Too bad it's not true!

Now don't misunderstand what I am saying. I'm not saying God won't take care of us. Quite the contrary! He said He would never leave us and never reject us. He said he knows what we need before we even ask. He says He loves to "give good gifts to his kids."(Luke 11:13) So our Lord is extremely adept at keeping watch over us that follow Him. But the cost of following Jesus...*really following Jesus* is steep. There was "no place to lay His head." There was the problem of money to pay taxes because they were busy about kingdom business instead of the priority of a house in the 'burbs' and a comfortable career in the private sector. Remember: salvation is free, but discipleship will cost you *everything*.

Most of us will opt for "option B"...the middle road approach that has been invented by the modern American church to allow for us to have both. Again, Jesus never offered any such path. Let's face the truth today: *living the true faith-filled life will cost us*. Jesus was and is loving, patient, gracious and giving. But He never flinched from the truth that Christianity is an "all-in" lifestyle. He cut this guy no slack in telling him "let the dead bury the dead...you come and follow me."

Wow. That seems a little callous. It can rub us the wrong way and bristle our modern earthly sensibilities. Sounds kinda radical. Frankly, it sounds a little cultic! But then again, let us remember that such is exactly what the Jewish world thought of Christianity even early on. Concerning Paul the apostle, we read in Acts 24:5 NLT "*We have found this man to be a troublemaker who is constantly stirring up riots among the Jews all over the world. He is a ringleader of the cult known as the Nazarenes.*" Yet we in the greater church keep looking for ways to cut the rhetoric and soften our approach to make ourselves more palatable to a world that hates Christ and us for following Him. Jesus once said that His way is narrow and *few* shall find it!

The fact is, the storms will indeed come! And Jesus never said He would keep you out of the storms but rather He will get you *through* them. The apostles were still learning and still growing. They had not yet overcome all their doubts and fears, and if they were like us (and they were), they probably never would completely. When the storm arose, their eyes were on the storm, not on Jesus. They were holding tight to the situation that was before them, instead of Jesus beside them.

When Jesus says “*Let us cross over to the other side.*” we can...we *must*, realize that Jesus intends for us to get there even when we don’t know how that is going to happen and things look very bleak. Jesus never promised that you won’t get tossed around and quite wet in the storms of life. But He does say He has got you, and He will never let you go. Philippians 4:19 promises us: “...*my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus.*” Not all your “want” but all your “need.”

At least four of these disciples grew up fishing on this sea. They were familiar with storms, and knew how to deal with them. And yet all of us will come to the end of ourselves when we live out our lives with Jesus. It WILL happen or we will spend a lifetime fighting His Lordship over our lives. And the fact is, so many of us do spend our lives doing just that. “*Oh Lord save me! But don’t mandate that I follow you into the storms and to surrender my plans and will to you. Just come along side me and back me up as I pursue the same life that I would if I was not reborn!*” Yet the fact remains that Jesus called upon us to “deny ourselves...pick up our crosses (meaning to die for Him) and **follow Him.**”

He told us to “count the cost” because there is indeed a cost. There are many who want to preach a free-gratis Christianity, but Jesus Himself begs to differ. But we must forever remember that despite the storms we travel through, Jesus is in the same boat and He is there by choice. He is there and He is not worried. He was not cowering in a fetal position in the front of the boat. He was *sleeping*. And not because He didn’t care, but because He wasn’t worried. Are *you*?

We must get a handle on what this Christianity thing means to us. We must wash away the thought that He is our meal ticket...our “get-out-of-jail-free” card and that He is there to make all our dreams come true. For a life of faith is a life of breaking, learning, humbling, and trusting in Him. It is a journey of earthly sacrifice and surrender of our plans and our very life to where *HE* is going, and HE is going across...He is going through! The gospel emphasis is: man's extremity is God's opportunity. God loves to display Himself in the midst of our problems.

I don't know about you, but there are times in life where one can feel that God is just asleep...unconscious to the storms of your life. Such has been the common plight of mankind. The Psalmists felt it, the prophets felt it, the disciples felt it, the apostles felt it. There are quite simply times when you maybe think God has gone to sleep, God is not aware of what you're going through - or if He's aware, He apparently doesn't care, or He's not answering. Listen to the Psalmist in 13:1-2: *O LORD, how long will you forget me? Forever? How long will you look the other way? How long must I struggle with anguish in my soul, with sorrow in my heart every day?*

Have you ever experienced what is called by some as 'the dark night of the soul'? If you're truly a child of God, one day you will experience it. It is inevitable - why? Because the servants of the Lord must tread the path of the Servant of the Lord, and it's not always a path of roses, but it certainly is a path of crucifixion! Maybe you find yourself just now in a storm, and God seems millions of miles away, and you're asking like the disciples: ***does He care?*** I mean, did Jesus know this storm was coming? Do you think He did, when He put His head upon the pillow?

The fact is, the way we come to a full surrender is to come to a point where we understand that we are not in control and He is. It is then that we give it all to him, or we attempt to swim to shore on our own. We can go it alone or we can know that Jesus is fully and forever in total control and He has a boat...