



“The Cost of Following”
 – *Luke 9:57-62*
 by **Pastor Tim Dodson**
 at **JF Believers Church**
 in **Menomonie, Wisc**
 on **January 15th, 2017**

Luke 9:57-62 Now it happened as they journeyed on the road, that someone said to Him, "Lord, 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 He said to another, "Follow Me." But he said, "Lord, let me first go and bury my

father." Jesus said to him, "Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and preach the kingdom of God." And another also said, "Lord, I will follow You, but let me first go and bid them farewell who are at my house." But Jesus said to him, "No one, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God."

The reality of our faith is that most of us are in this Jesus thing for the benefits. It’s the ‘benny’s’ that brought us and often it is the ‘benny’s’ that keeps us. We seek a better life...a safer, more stable, rewarding and purposeful life. And such is not a ‘pie-in-the-sky’ dream, for Christ does indeed so often bring those rewarding factors to our post-redemptive life. But contrary to such popular belief, Jesus didn’t save us to give us a ‘good life.’ We all eventually show our hand in this as we pass through a difficult time in our lives, or if Satan ‘up’s the ante’ and “makes us an offer we can’t refuse.”

So truthfully, we tend to go where we get the best stuff. That could be Christ for awhile, and later the world: this church for a time, and later on down the road. Oh, certainly most of us have come to experience a far greater peace and reward as believers, but no such guarantee is ever made in scripture. What about the individual who finds new birth but lives in a deeply Muslim country or Hindu country? Are they less saved and less loved by Christ? Are they second class Christians, when they are beaten or even killed for their faith? Is it possible that the American paradigm of Christianity is foundationally flawed in its understanding of what this is all about?

These men that have come to Christ in this passage were no doubt a lot like us. They meant well. In their own minds they had good intentions. But they also failed to understand what they were getting into. Unlike us however, Jesus was right there to audibly confront them on their real motives and the truth of their hearts. Because while their heads were in the game, their hearts were missing the mark! As I said, *just like us* most of the time! But how do we rectify what can seem to be a mixed message? After all, didn’t Jesus say salvation was a ‘free gift?’

We must make no mistake in this matter from either direction! Salvation is indeed a free gift of God. We cannot earn our salvation, but if we are truly redeemed and have indeed become a new creature, then there will be a natural desire to walk near Christ, and an equally natural and furthermore assured pulling toward Him as a follower and disciple. It’s not a perfect 24 hour a day dynamic, but this is also not merely a hope, or goal. It is a supernatural transformation “fact” supported throughout scripture. And that will not be free. If we are to be a follower of Christ, it will cost us. How much, I cannot say, for such depends upon how tightly we are clinging to this world. Christ has done His great work, but it is up to us to respond to that work!

This is the “mystery” Paul wrote and warned us about this in Romans 11:25 “*For I would not, brethren, that ye should be ignorant of this mystery, lest ye should be wise in your own conceits...*” Jesus had already given the parameters of a relationship with him back in verse 23 of this chapter – “*And he said to them all, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me.*” Why can we not then fairly extrapolate the reverse ramifications of such passage and accept then that if I do NOT deny myself and 'take up my cross'...*which means that I die to this world and its pursuits*, then I **cannot** therefore 'come after Him' or at least I will fail in the attempt if I try?

Sometime ago, a couple departed from this fellowship because they decided to adhere to a hyper-Calvinistic stance that says God does *everything* in our faith lives: that we can do nothing and it is “all God.” And while that sounds great, and we can even find scripture to support such a stance, much is missing in that theology! Yes, John 15 tells us clearly that “*without me you can do nothing.*” Indeed! But such a belief systems fails to read *all* of scripture and understand the *whole* picture. Certainly such is a convenient theology, because in that doctrine I am therefore responsible for nothing! If I fall short, essentially it is GODS fault, because after all, *it's all God*, right?

But what about the rest of that very verse? “*I am the vine, ye are the branches: **He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing.***” So immediately I am confronted with “*am I abiding?*” 1 Peter 2, verse one says “*So (you) **put away malice, deceit, hypocrisy, envy, etc***” Verse 8 of that same chapter says “*They stumble **because they disobey...***” Paul says in 1 Corinthians 9:24-27 “*Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one receives the prize? **So run that you may obtain it.***” And Paul goes on there to say “***But I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified.***” Galatians 5 tells us that one of the ‘fruits of the Spirit’ is **self-control**. Lamentations 3:40 says, as does many other places in scripture “***Let us test and examine our ways...***” Clearly, we participate in “*work(ing) out our own salvation,*” and had best do so “*with fear and trembling!*” (Php 2:12)

Christ in this passage is not making the demand that we abandon our friends and family or shuck our responsibilities and obligations. However, Jesus does want those who will follow Him to fully understand that as a disciple of Christ, He must come first; Jesus must be the priority of our lives if we are to follow Him! This is one of those passages in scripture that is extremely damaging to the 'Family First' movement. Certainly it's not the ONLY contrary scripture, but it's an **impactful** one of the many! Ironically, if you are going to see a 'mom and dad and kids' in your picture of a 'family,' then family isn't first or even second! Actually, MARRIAGE is second! If it's not, I promise you that you will not have much to offer the 'family' dynamic!

Sadly, our families today have ceased to be a calling, a mission, and a duty, and have instead become an idol before which we kneel. Such is no longer today an opportunity to manifest our Christ assignment but rather a replacement for the true godhead, and generally the supreme ruler of our lives and schedules. Family is often the 'golden calf' of the modern church generation. Ironically, the more we rally around it as the center of our lives, the more of a failure it seems we are in it. Few of us really believe the promise that if we “*seek first the kingdom of God, all these (other) things will be added into us.*”

Take a moment to absorb Luke 14:26-27. “*If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple. And whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple.*” Now the Lord isn't telling us to literally **hate** our families... for such would run contrary to the rest of the whole of His message! But what He IS saying is that our love for him and the manifest of that love must exceed any desires we have in this life. Not just a little bit but so much so that how we feel about the members of our family would seem like hatred in comparison to how we feel about Christ. Anything and everything that stands between us and the Lord must take a back seat or we cannot be his disciple.

Christ went on there in Luke to say why self evaluation is so important in this matter... “*For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not sit down first and count the cost, whether he has enough to finish it — lest, after he has laid the foundation, and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him, saying, ‘This man began to build and was not able to finish?’*”

“Count the cost” Christian! Oh how we want to reject the extreme nature of this relationship! We in our natural state seek most often to be in control of our personal lives...to be king of our personal domains. The irony is that we sanction such an attitude when that is the very heart of the Lordship of Christ! It is here that the battle is fought. We want to shun any situation or insinuation that we are acquiescing to anything or anyone the power over our lives. Such keeps us from walking fully with Christ, and ironically, from Covenant Membership in a church! Or at least honest participation, because we sense somehow that to be a member is cowing to the authority of the church and its leadership.

We want to come and go when we want to come and go. We want to live where we want, work where we want, and essentially *do* what we want when we want to do it. And because of this struggle so many of us have failed to find our place, failed to find our earthly mission, and fail to fulfill our calling in Christ. Scripture calls us to “*pick up our cross*”...to die to ourselves, our earthly dreams and plans, and *surrender to Christ and His control*. Hence, to then “follow HIM” where He leads us.

You see, salvation is essential *surrender*. If no surrender, there is no salvation! Many of us have come to believe that Jesus is the Son of God and holds eternal life in His hands. We “believe” this, and thus feel we are indeed reborn. But that’s not what scripture says! It says to be saved we must “Believe in *Him*” not believe in “what He has said.”

Do you Christian, today believe in HIM? Do you believe that He has got your back and loves you and has a great plan for you, even if it is not a comfortable plan or an earthly rewarding one? Have you surrendered your heart to that belief, or just your thinking? Because even Jesus Himself said He “had no place to lay His head.” He didn’t have a house or a car or a wife and kids. He had a *mission*. And that mission clearly cost Him dearly. The living priority of His life was tossed about and was transformed from something earthly and self-seeking into the life of a “bond-servant.” Essentially a willing volunteer *slave*. Personally willing, but *still a slave* and all that that means!

Sadly, many folks begin this journey with good intentions, just like the men who came to Christ that day. They just wanted a “reasonable” expense, and assumed Jesus was open to negotiation. Sort of a deal making venture. It plays out like this: “Hey Jesus...I will be a Christian but I really want (or need) you to give me a spouse. And I want kids of course! Will you “bless” me with a well-paying job? (as if ‘blessings’ of course are always feel good earthly benefits!) And Lord...don’t let me get sick, or be in any danger. And I want a kingdom position that has some clout. And don’t make me sacrifice too much because I know you want me to be comfortable and happy. And don’t pin me down anywhere specific because I may want to just get up and move on sometime. I want to live near the grandkids. ETC.” How can we say He is “Lord” under those restraints? Let’s tell the truth...*He’s not*.

Jesus said to him, "No one, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God."

Do we understand what Jesus is saying here? We “began to build”...but we didn’t count the cost. We “began the job” but we “looked back” from where we came. We “looked back” to the world that we said we died to. We “looked back” to the life we said we left behind. Oh, how many have been lost because of this practice? Are they still a Christian? I don’t know, and I don’t know that they ever were. But they are not disciples! Because they thought Jesus was Burger King and that they could have it “their way.”

It wasn't that they decided that they *didn't* want Jesus, they just wanted Jesus *plus*. **Plus** comfort. **Plus** a nice house and a well paying job. **Plus** this cute girl or that handsome man who is paying so much attention to me. **Plus** security. **Plus** all the earthly amenities. **Hear me today believer:** *No such version of Christianity exists.* Some of us frankly plant our feet here and say "well, I just don't believe that," as if Christianity is a buffet line. But Jesus didn't just die for Him to be your Savior. He died to be your LORD. And if He is not, then what do you really have other than a different world view and a different political and morality stance than the rest of the world? But Christianity...the one the Bible propagates, speaks not just of a faith based on what you think or *do not do*, but what you actually do.

Jesus said that "unless a man be *born again*, He will not see the *kingdom* of God." Do we fully grasp the ramifications of that verse? If I am born again, I am a *new creature*. This one is not like the old one and does not belong to us. I have surrendered that old life and have received a brand new one in its place. Christianity isn't a rehab, but a tear-down and reconstruction! This "new creature" has **new** priorities, **new** directions, **new** friends, **new** passions, and a **new** boss.

If I fail in this, I will never see the *kingdom* of God. And that is more than just heavenly eternal life. For the Kingdom of God exists now and it exists here, and true believers live in it. It is not the fullness of His perfect realm, but it is here and it is all His, and it is the special realm where believers live and breathe with and in Him. Many of us still struggle, and fight. We won't let God call the shots. We won't let a "Lord" control our movements. And therefore there is no real peace in our life, because we are still trying to be a Christian and yet control our own personal playing field. And no peace will be coming. Because we are not factually *living in the kingdom of God*. You are not "fit" for it. It's like you were reborn a fish and now have the wonders of the ocean to live in, but you still seek to walk on land and eat at McDonalds!

One last consideration: God will let you go back "to land" if that is what you want. 2 Peter 2:19 – 22 warns us of such: "*...are a slave to whatever controls you. And when people escape from the wickedness of the world by knowing our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and then get tangled up and enslaved by sin again, they are worse off than before. It would be better if they had never known the way to righteousness than to know it and then reject the command they were given to live a holy life. They prove the truth of this proverb: "A dog returns to its vomit." And another says, "A washed pig returns to the mud."*

Such folks are more miserable than they were before, because "*their eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord.*" They have at one time "tasted" enlightenment, ...they have "tasted" of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, and have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come..." (Hebrews 6:4-5) But they "looked back." They looked back at what they could be and what they could have in the world, and their desire is a rejection of God's lordship. Their "want" is a rejection of God's care and authority. It is truly a miserable place to be, and there will never be a win in that life. For they will forever be "torn between two lovers" as the old song lyric goes! Because once the kingdom has been seen, you will never be able to "un-see" it.

So I ask you today, *are you "following" Jesus, or are you forever trying to get Him to follow you?* Who is indeed the "lord of your life?" No guarantees here on this side except that you will be forever loved like no other can love you. Your eyes will be opened. You will know purpose and mystery. Joy, even if it is in the absence of happiness. You have in reach, the calling of your life. And when engaged, you will experience not just the "ride of your life" but the "ride of all of time." **Plow** Christian! Your joy is ahead of you, not behind you. Yes, it will cost you plenty. But when you can swim the length and breadth of the ocean, who needs feet? Dietrich Bonhoffer said this: "*Discipleship never consists in this or that specific action: it is always a decision, either for or against Jesus Christ.*"

What do you need to do today to make this right with Jesus?

