

Discount Discipleship

- A. I've confessed that I am a hopeless bargain hunter.
 - 1. When I walk into a store, I walk right past the fancy displays with the latest products and I head straight to the back looking for the last chance, clearance section.
 - 2. Sometimes that works out pretty well for me. Over the years I've found some really good stuff for a fraction of what it originally cost.
 - 3. But it doesn't always work out well. There have been a few times when I bought what I thought were really good shirts. But after one trip through the washer, the collar was permanently disfigured and the buttons were gone. In that case, I got what I paid for.
 - 4. I guess what doesn't really matter if we are talking about buying a dress shirt.

- B. But when people start searching for some easier way to follow Jesus – a discount version of discipleship – the consequences can be eternally serious!
 - 1. It sounds like a ridiculous notion, and yet I fear it is spirit that is far more prevalent than we might want to acknowledge.
 - a. A friend told me about visiting a church one day and one of the people leaned over and said this: "You'll love this place; no guilt."
 - b. Is that what people are looking for; a place where they can be who they are and do what they want to do and no one makes them feel guilty about it? Is that genuine discipleship; or did we pull that off the clearance rack?
 - c. It's easy to be critical of that kind of thinking, but are we really much better when we measure our devotion to Jesus almost solely on basis of how many services we attend?
 - 2. When you pay attention to what Jesus really required of His followers, we quickly discover that the commitment He has in mind is a whole lot deeper than this.
 - a. In fact, there are some pretty radical things said in scripture about what it is that Jesus requires of those who would be His followers.
 - b. We need to be careful that we are not being sold a discount version of discipleship. It's only going to disappoint us.
 - c. We need to make sure we have the real thing – that we settle for nothing less than genuine discipleship.
 - 3. To help us get there, let's begin by examining some of those radical things Jesus requires of true disciples.

What Christ Requires

A. Luke 9:57-62

1. It's easy to read a passage like this and be confused.
 - a. How could Jesus object to a man wanting to attend his father's funeral, or with the other man wanting to say goodbye to his friends?
 - b. I think our knee-jerk reaction is to look at the actions of Jesus on these occasions as harsh and unfair.
 - c. But we are missing the point...
2. Our confusion will be cleared when we focus on a little phrase that appears in the statements of both these men..."permit me first (v. 59); "first permit me" (v. 61). Jesus is trying to teach both of these "would-be" disciples a lesson about priorities.
 - a. We usually do not struggle with priorities when the choice is between something of obvious importance and something clearly trivial. If you are headed out to pick up a new phone at Best Buy and your child runs in from the backyard bleeding, it's not difficult to decide what to do.
 - b. But what if your spouse says, "I'm going to leave you if you keep insisting on going to church all the time." What do we do when our job (our source of income to provide for our families) begins to hinder our service in the kingdom of God? What choice do we make then?
 - c. What Jesus is trying to teach these men is that, even when it comes to the most important responsibilities that we have in this life, our first and most important responsibility is to Him! He comes first, above all else.
3. I had a good friend who wanted to teach Bible class, but he worked a swing shift that prevented him from being at services regularly. So, he accepted a demotion and a significant cut in pay to take a less prestigious position where he worked 8-5, Monday – Friday, and was able to be at every service.
 - a. As I reflect on his decision, what disturbs me is not that many would not make the same choice, but that many would not consider it an option.
 - b. Jesus was trying to teach these "would-be" disciples in this passage that our first priority, even among the important things we have to do in this life, is to Him.
 - c. Anything less than first place in our lives is too little. If He's not Lord of all, He's not Lord at all. This is what Jesus requires of genuine disciples.

B. Luke 14:25-26

1. Again, we find a passage that seems like it cannot be true. Is Jesus saying I have to hate the people who mean the most to me if I am to be His disciple?

- a. Obviously Jesus is not telling us to hate our parents, spouse and children in the sense that we would despise them and desire their harm.
- b. We all recognize that to say that would contradict other passages that tell us to love our parents and kids.
2. What then is His point?
 - a. Jesus is trying to emphasize is the greatness of a true disciple's love for God. Even when it comes to life's most precious, intimate, loving relationships (parents, spouse, children, etc.), the true disciple loves Jesus more, even than these.
 - b. It's not just that we love Jesus most (top of the heap); we love Him far more, like the distance between love and hate.
 - c. Again, it is what Jesus requires of genuine disciples.

C. **Luke 14:33**

1. Jesus really hits Americans where they live.
 - a. We live in a culture where people are what they own; where men are measured by the size of their houses and bank accounts.
 - b. To a culture like ours Jesus would say that, if we are to be His disciples, we must give it all up.
2. Does that mean that disciples cannot own anything? Obviously not.
 - a. Clearly Christians owned things in New Testament days; in fact, some were quite wealthy (I Timothy 6:17-19).
 - b. What then is Jesus trying to say to us?
 - 1) He is saying that, when we become His disciple, the ownership of our possessions changes hands. These things I own are not mine any more; they belong to someone else; they belong to Jesus.
 - 2) My goal becomes to use all that I have to His glory. Everything that I have, myself included, I put at the disposal of Jesus, to use as He sees fit for the good of the kingdom.

D. And there are more...time does not permit us to tackle all of them.

1. **Matthew 5:27-30.** Jesus is not advocating that we mutilate the body to deal with sin; but He is saying that, whatever it takes, we have to get it out of our lives.
2. **Matthew 5:43-48.**
3. And we could go on!

Summary: Are you beginning to get a sense that there is far more to being a disciple than simply attending a few services each week? Jesus is calling upon us to make a radical commitment to Him. But there is more...

How Life Is Changed

To the early Christians, these were more than grand, lofty principles to be pondered. They were life-altering commitments with practical realities in their lives. This decision to be a disciple radically changed their lives.

- A. It fundamentally altered the course of their lives.
 - 1. Many of these early Christians had lived corrupt lives, **I Corinthians 6:9-11**.
 - 2. But when they made the choice to be a disciple of Jesus, everything changed.
 - a. In writing to the Ephesians, Paul would describe this change as the putting off of the old self and putting on a new self, **Ephesians 4:22-24**.
 - b. Speaking of change, think about the radical change that occurred in his life – persecutor to preacher. The course of Paul’s life was fundamentally altered by his decision to become a disciple.

- B. It set them out on a mission.
 - 1. The early Christians did not keep the good news to themselves. They were busy sharing that message with whoever would listen.
 - 2. The early church was vibrant and growing because the early Christians were busy preaching. Even in the face of tremendous persecution, they kept spreading the word, **Acts 8:4**.

- C. This commitment to Jesus made them willing even to suffer for the cause.
 - 1. Early disciples faced alienation from their families. At times they were made outcasts in the communities. Some lost jobs and were put into prison. Some were killed. Consider the suffering Paul endured, **II Corinthians 11:23-29**.
 - 2. Why did he do it? Because he committed to follow Jesus, no matter where it took him and no matter what it cost. Where else could he go (**John 6:68**).

Has It Happened To Me?

- A. We could go on with countless example of Jesus’ radical expectations and how people’s lives were changed when the truly became His disciples.
 - 1. But at some point, we have to bring all this home.
 - 2. Has this happened to me?
 - a. Am I truly committed to be His disciples, a genuine disciple?
 - b. Has that choice impacted my life the way it impacted the life of early disciples? Am I truly changed by my decision?

- c. Or, have I been quietly settling for some discounted version of discipleship that I pulled of the clearance rack?
- B. Sometimes our struggles sell us out. Think about it, if I'm really committed to the kind of discipleship Jesus described, then...
1. I'm not going to ask, **"Do I have to go to every service?"**
 - a. Think about what we're here to do (worship our God, learn more about His will, encourage others to do that).
 - b. To someone whose number one priority is Jesus and His kingdom, nothing else is of greater importance. To someone whose highest ambition in life is to be like Jesus he will not want to do anything else.
 - c. Just asking the question may be telling us that we need a change of heart.
 2. I'm not going to ask, **"Do I have to teach other people?"**
 - a. True disciples want more than anything to be like Jesus, and Jesus was busy reaching out to the lost.
 - b. They understand that Jesus has instructed us to teach the lost. As a disciple, I follow in the footsteps of my Teacher.
 - c. Besides, how can we keep quiet about something so wonderful?
 - d. Just asking the question may be telling us that we need a change of heart.
 3. I'm not going to ask, **"Do I have to spend time with other Christians?"**
 - a. Can we for moment imagine Jesus saying that ("Do I really have to spend more time with these disciples?")
 - b. As those who want most to be like Jesus and please Him with our lives, how can we help but to desire to be with people who will encourage us to do that? We want that time together!
 - c. Just asking the question may be telling us that we need a change of heart.
 4. I'm not going to ask, **"Do I have to study the Bible all the time?"**
 - a. For the true disciple, daily Bible reading and prayer is not a chore, it's a delight. It's the only way I can fulfill my passion to be like my Lord.
 - b. Just asking the question may be telling us that we need a change of heart.

Summary: The truth is that making a real commitment to be a disciple of Jesus simplifies things. This one decision makes so many other decisions for us, if we'll just be consistent.

Conclusion

- A. Often the heart of so many of our struggles...is our own heart.
 - 1. We've not made up our minds. We have not decided once for all that we will serve Jesus and accept whatever goes with that decision.
 - 2. Sometimes we try to live with one foot in the kingdom and one still in the world, and as a result we are constantly being pulled into different direction.

- B. Joshua challenged the people of his day to make up their minds (**Joshua 24:14-15**).
 - 1. We must make the same choice. Have you made a decision to be a disciple of Jesus? Would you make it today?
 - 2. If I have made the choice, am I living consistently with it?
 - a. Or, am I wrestling with things that should not even be an issue for a true disciple because I'm not sticking with the commitment I made?
 - b. Rededicate yourself to be a true disciple of Jesus.
 - c. Your life will be blessed, less complicated, because you truly committed yourself to Him.