

Dear Friends,

How much of our daily time should we spend rationalizing why we need not--or supposedly cannot--sell out our personal idols for Jesus and His "Kingdom treasure"? Pastors often hear members try to rationalize their refusal to follow Jesus' teaching in this lesson. The price is too high in their assessment. They've failed too much in the past, so they simply can't take this teaching seriously.

When I first started speaking in the church, I encountered a number of seasoned preachers who often talked about their early seasons of "Rebelling against the Lord's calling them to preach." They described their rebellion almost as if it was a merit badge. They seemed proud of it, not ashamed. I didn't understand their reasoning then, nor now. If Jesus and New Testament teaching calls us to regard the Lord and His "Kingdom treasure" as the most precious thing in our lives, something we should immediately and without reservation "Buy" (Proverbs 23:23 KJV) and refuse to sell, we have no sound basis to pridefully think or talk about our sinful rebellion and refusal to obey Him.

How much are we willing to "Sell," to give up for Jesus and His kingdom lifestyle? To live that simple disciple's lifestyle that Jesus taught and exemplified in the gospels, and His apostles manifested in Acts? Or how much time do we spend rationalizing why we are not obligated to do what the New Testament emphatically teaches us to do? In 2 Timothy 3:16-17, Paul affirmed that God was--and is--supernaturally involved in the giving and preserving of Scripture for "the man of God." He also erased any doubt; Scripture contains what we need to know for "...all good works." How much of your personal life falls outside the clear New Testament model? And how much of your mental energy do you devote to rationalizing why that is acceptable for you rather than working to transform your life into the mold of Jesus and the gospel? True Biblical faith requires our living life in harmony with New Testament teaching, not rationalizing why we need not do so, or rationalizing why our favorite imaginations do not contradict New Testament teachings.

In the gospels, how did Jesus frequently describe servants who chose to do their stewardship their way instead of respect and follow their master's requirements? Was He okay with unfaithful stewards? Hardly! Do we understand that, when we ignore or contradict Scripture in our lives, we are acting the part of an unfaithful steward? Why should we think we can live this lifestyle and still be blessed? It won't happen. It can't happen. Unfaithful stewardship always brings the Lord's chastening and withholding of blessings.

The rich blessings of the gospel only come our way when we willing "sell all that we have" that contradicts or interferes with our service, our New Testament right service to the Lord. The more we choose to ignore Him, His teachings in Scripture, and go our private course the more we distance ourselves from the precious richness of Him and His "Kingdom treasure." In the two parables that Jesus taught in this context, the parable of the treasure hid in a field and the parable of the pearl, Jesus left no doubt. The treasure was worth everything the man paid for it--and more. And the man freely was willing to "sell all that he had" for that treasure.

Are we so willing to sell all that we have for Jesus and His kingdom treasure? What is your private possession that you need to sell for Him and His kingdom? Are you willing to sell it? Do you value Jesus and His kingdom treasure as greater in value than your trivial treasure? Perhaps our greatest need of the hour is to conduct an immediate sell-out. When shall you--or I--actually conduct the sale?

Lord give us wisdom and grace,

Joe Holder

Parable of the Pearl

Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchant man, seeking goodly pearls: Who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had, and bought it. (Matthew 13:45-46 KJV 1900)

There is one notable distinction between this parable and the parable of the treasure hid in a field. In that parable the man had to purchase the field to gain possession of the treasure. In this parable, the man purchased only the pearl. However, the two parables have one point in common. Both men had to sell "**all that he had**" to purchase the item he treasured. In this point, Jesus nudges each of us to a serious internal assessment. Yes, we love the Lord. Yes, we love His people and His church. Oh yes, we love the truth of His gospel. But how much? In a not-so-subtle sense, Jesus' three questions to Peter may have confronted him with this probing, soul-searching question. "Peter, how much do you love me?" (John 21:15-19 KJV) If Jesus confronted you or me with this question, how would we fare? "How much do you love me?" serves as a direct corollary to the underlying lesson in the two parables, "How much are you willing to pay for this kingdom treasure?"

This question inserts itself throughout the gospels in Jesus' ministry and teaching the disciples to prepare them for their future "Kingdom service."

And another of his disciples said unto him, Lord, suffer me first to go and bury my father. But Jesus said unto him, Follow me; and let the dead bury their dead. (Matthew 8:21-22 KJV)

The person who asked Jesus' permission to "...*first go and bury my father*" was not someone who considered becoming a disciple. Matthew states clearly, "...**another of his disciples said**...." The proper application of these lessons is not to strangers to the faith, but to "Disciples" of Jesus.

Lest you think Jesus' response unreasonable, notice that the man did not specifically say that his father was presently dead. Typically, first century Jews buried their dead on the same day the family member died, not days later. Burying a dead relative was a near immediate action that would not interfere with serving Jesus. But waiting till a presently healthy parent died under the excuse of parental obligation was not a valid reason to defer following Jesus.

The probability is that this disciple means that, after his father is dead and buried, he will then be free to follow Jesus. "At the present day, an Oriental, with his father sitting by his side, has been known to say respecting his future projects: 'But I must first bury my father!'" (A. T. Robertson, Word Pictures in the New Testament)

First century Jewish culture strongly held that burying dead parents was part of the Commandment, "*Honor thy father and thy mother.*" (Exodus 20:12 KJV) Rather than imposing an unreasonable expectation onto this disciple, Jesus required that he "Pay the price" of discipleship and follow Him immediately.

How much of your personal and preferred lifestyle are you willing to give up for Jesus and His kingdom? What is your personal "*all that he had*" treasure that stands between you and the Lord's rich "Kingdom treasure"? If Jesus requires us to sell all for Him and His kingdom, *what must you sell?* I fear that many sincere folks, yes, disciples, are not willing to honestly look at a personal list of their possessions and preferences, much less seriously consider giving them up for Jesus and His kingdom.

What kind of things might appear on the typical twenty-first century disciple's list of things we must sell for Jesus and His kingdom? Career? If you were settled with a sound church where you minister to your church family, and your employer offered you a really big promotion that required you to move to another part of the country, would you accept the opportunity? Or would you "*Pay the price*" and remain in your healthy "Kingdom" connection with your church?

Career? Our church, located in the Los Angeles basin, has been richly blessed over the years by a significant number of godly and faithful members who came here because of a job assignment or opportunity. In each of these cases, the members involved contacted me and talked to their local pastors regarding their change. Before they accepted the assignment, they knew there was a church they could attend and support, and they came here committed to their faith. To a person, these people richly blessed our church, and I like to think we blessed them as well. When I think of others I've know about who came without validating their move by their faith and prayer, they attended a time or two and vanished, I now understand. They never truly committed their faith to their new world. I realize the vast difference between these two groups. One moved to a new location committed to their faith. The other moved to a new location without any true commitment to their faith. I wonder. Perhaps they made that move intending to abandon their faith and used the move to rationalize that change. They decided prior to leaving their prior location that the price of the treasure was more than they were willing to pay, so they used their move to rationalize spiritual bankruptcy. They already decided they were not willing to sell "*all that they had*" for the spiritual treasure of Jesus and His kingdom.

Family? If your family scheduled a special family event on Sunday morning, would you graciously decline and attend your church service, or tell your church family that you'll be absent that day from church? Perhaps, if you live a "Kingdom" lifestyle, your family will know your faithfulness to your Lord, your faith, and your church, and simply schedule family events at a different time.

Country? Ah, I'm nudging some "Sacred cows," aren't I? As I ponder the history of our country, especially comparing (In fact, we must more contrast than compare, because of today's broken and hostile divide that overshadows the country) our present state with our early history, I increasingly realize how divided we truly have become. Those of us who respect the founding of our country often tend to freeze the founding fathers in time, the time of the various founding documents. Do you ever honestly study the changing views of these men ten, twenty, or more years later? If so, you'd realize that most of the famous founders, with the single exception of Jefferson, strongly opposed political parties. A bloody civil war in England over political party division was too fresh in their minds for them to think favorably of any form of political party.

As I observe conservative Christians in today's culture, I increasingly struggle with a question that I can't honestly answer. What is the true religion these people follow? Is it Jesus or is it "Political party worship"? If I measure their zeal, the volume of their conversation on Biblical faith versus their political rhetoric, I am inclined to sadly conclude that their political ideology is more their religion than Jesus.

What does the New Testament teach us regarding the faithful Christian's attitude toward and relationship with the ruling civil government in the country where they live? Paul wrote most—not all—of what we read in the New Testament regarding a balanced Christian attitude and relationship toward civil government. Romans 13 requires that faithful believers respect and obey their civil government, pay their taxes, and pray for that government. Did you read anything in Romans 13 regarding worshipping your civil government? No? I didn't think so. So why do we see professing believers more worshipping their government than following Romans 13. How much did Jesus teach the disciples regarding civil government? He taught them to pay their taxes and to maintain a healthy balance between their faith and respectful obedience to their civil government. (Matthew 22:16-22 KJV)

In 1 Timothy 2:1-3, Paul urged prayer for—not prayer or worship to—civil government. And what objective did Paul specifically name as the intent of our prayers for civil government? That our party or favorite politician win the election? No. "...**that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty.**" (1 Timothy 2:2b KJV) Paul, is that the extent of our prayers for civil government? I turn that question to you. Can you provide a specific Bible lesson, "Book, chapter, and verse," not a vague generality of your personal philosophy, that teaches us to pray for more than this relative to our civil government? It simply isn't there, not in the New Testament. As I observe many in the conservative Christian community of our day and culture, I seriously question; do they interpret the Bible according to our country's founding documents, or do they interpret our country, past, present, and future, according to Scripture—Scripture alone? I fear that many of these folks would not answer such questions according to Jesus' and New Testament writers' inspired teachings.

The founding of this country exhibited many exceptional events. Quite possibly, the Lord blessed the new colonies to gain independence. However, nothing in history, and definitely nothing in Scripture so much as implies that God permanently established this country as His "New Israel," His favored nation. Nothing.

If we examine all of these and many other personal issues and preferences in our individual lives, what is that "**all that he had**" that we must sell for Jesus and His kingdom? And the question of the hour. **Are we willing to pay that price?** To give up all, not just a few things, that contradicts Him and His teachings in Scripture for the priceless "**pearl of great price**"?

Jesus didn't teach that the man seeking the treasure or the pearl must sell a token valuable from his many such possessions. He taught that we, like the two men in the parables, must sell all that we have for Him and for His "Kingdom treasure." If we follow Jesus' clear teachings in these two parables, we cannot equivocate, calculate, or negotiate. If we follow Jesus and His simple, albeit demanding, teaching, we shall immediately sell all that we have that in any way contradicts or compromises His faith, His teachings in Scripture for that priceless kingdom treasure. The soul-searching question of the hour, "Are you willing to pay that price for Jesus and His kingdom treasure?" Today! Not at some future date.

I suspect most pastors will fully understand and appreciate my observations. I can't know, much less tell every member of the church I serve what they must sell. Likely many of them hold things too closely that I know nothing of, things they must sell if they hope to realize Jesus' full fellowship and kingdom treasure. I love every member of the church I serve dearly. Many of them manifest selfless godly

traits that encourage and bless me. Do I think, even for a moment, that they all have fully “*sold all that they have*” for Jesus and for His true kingdom treasure? Sadly, no; in fact, I fear that few of us have made such radical decisions of faithful godliness for Jesus.

Have we followed the greater David, Jesus, in our life choices? Or have we imitated Jeroboam?

After this thing Jeroboam returned not from his evil way, but made again of the lowest of the people priests of the high places: whosoever would, he consecrated him, and he became one of the priests of the high places. (1 Kings 13:33 KJV)

When we consciously choose to ignore God and His ways, we typically leap to the mirror opposite, not to the nearest possible alternative. Jeroboam was a member of the tribe of Judah, not Levi. As such, he was forbidden by God’s law from occupying the priesthood. But he didn’t look to God’s way for his model. He looked to his personal ideology and what he perceived as good for him.

What would your life look like if you evaluated every single attitude and practice you presently observe in light of New Testament teaching **alone**? If you find it practiced or taught in the New Testament exactly as you do it, thumbs up. If you do not find it there, thumbs down. End it and return to Scripture alone. Would anything change in your life? Are we willing to face Jesus’ teachings in this parable, to sell all that we have for Him, His teachings, and His kingdom treasure? Or do we quickly start carving out our favorite ideas or habits and rationalize why they do not fall under this teaching?

Jesus didn’t simply ask, “How much are you willing to pay?” He takes us further, “Are you willing to sell **all that you have** for me and for my kingdom treasure?” Think long and hard. How will you and I answer that question? Are we truly willing—not just willing, but ready—to sell all that we have for Him, for His ways, for His teachings, and for His treasure? If we validate and honor our claim as His followers, we can only answer the question one way. Are we willing to follow through and conduct the sale? When does our sale begin?

Elder Joe Holder