

Broomfield



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The Cost of Discipleship, Part One

Contrary to what is generally taught, Christ's three years of ministry were NOT characterized by large multitudes coming out to Him. Yet it was that way in the beginning. Specifically when Christ first began to heal and feed the multitudes. In fact, Christ acknowledges as much in John 6.

John 6:26, "Jesus answered them and said, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Ye seek me, not because ye saw the miracles, but because ye did eat of the loaves, and were filled."

But then a shift took place. The multitudes actually began listening to what Christ was saying. And what He was saying offended them.

John 6:60, "Many therefore of his disciples, when they had heard this, said, This is an hard saying; who can hear it?"

John 6:66, "From that time many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him."

This is why Christ exhorted the multitudes of His day.

Luke 14:27-28, "And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple. For which of you, intending to build a tower, sitteth not down first, and counteth the cost, whether he have sufficient to finish it?"

Truly if we would be disciples of our Lord, it behooves us all to consider what is implied by a life of service in His name and contemplating what we can be expected if we follow the Lord. We must count the cost!

The text we are addressing gives insight into these questions;

Luke 9:57-62, "And it came to pass, that, as they went in the way, a certain man said unto him, Lord, I will follow thee whithersoever thou goest. And Jesus said unto him, Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head. And he said unto another, Follow me. But he said, Lord, suffer me first to go and bury my father. Jesus said unto him, Let the dead bury their dead: but go thou and preach the kingdom of God. And another also said, Lord, I will follow thee; but let me first go bid them farewell, which are at home at my house. And Jesus said unto him, No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is

fit for the kingdom of God.”

In contrast to Christ's determination to go to Jerusalem and there die for His people,¹ Luke includes this account of three would-be followers who sought the path of discipleship without counting the cost. Nowhere do we read of these “would-be” disciples again — they simply disappear. Yet that's OK for it brings before our eyes the focus of this text: The HIGH COST OF DISCIPLESHIP!

I want to examine this text with the goal that individually and corporately we come face to face with the high cost of discipleship. Now, to do this let us begin by looking at the first “cost” associated with service in the Kingdom of God.

The Cost of Worldly Comfort

Luke 9:57, “**And it came to pass, that, as they went in the way,** a certain man said unto him, Lord, I will follow thee whithersoever thou goest.”

From Matthew 8:18, the parallel account, we learn that this passage occurred during Christ's second year of ministry in the region of Galilee. Just before His departure by boat from Capernaum to the land of the Gadarenes, Christ had just spent a day healing the sick — all who were brought to Him.² And he did so without discrimination! Yet, on account of the healings a multitude of people began to crowd around Him.

Now as it was late in the day and He was exhausted, the Lord sought to withdraw. He was preparing to go and the crowds filled their boats to follow Him.³ Three men moved by Christ's teaching approached the Lord in order to become one of His “personal” disciples.

Now, this isn't very significant until you understand a little about the culture in Christ's day. Just as Plato's Socrates discoursed with many in his day, and yet had a small group of men who traveled with him, so also were there many in the first century who had a following — a group of people who intimately interacted with their teacher. This would have included these:

- Rabbis — men like Hillel
- The Pharisees — men like Gamaliel
- The scribes — who were notorious when it came to discipleship; they were above all else, “Teachers of the law”
- John the Baptist — he had a group of disciples⁴

In fact, this mode of thinking was so pervasive that in 1 Corinthians Paul argued against any thought that he or Apollos were “teachers” worthy of “personal” disciples.

1 Corinthians 1:12-13, “Now this I say, that every one of you saith, I am of Paul; and I of Apollos; and I of Cephas; and I of Christ. Is Christ divided? was Paul crucified for you? or were ye baptized in the name of Paul?”

¹ Compare Luke 9:51

² Compare Matthew 8:16-17

³ Compare Mark 4:36

⁴ Compare Matthew 11:2

Now this intimate teacher/disciple relationship was one that Christ Himself participated in. Many thousands followed Christ at a distance. Yet, it was only a few men, twelve to be exact, who were allowed to stay with Him at all times. These disciples were told the secret of the kingdom from the parables. And these men ate with Him and fellowshiped with Him.

And thus out of the masses of people gathered around Christ listening to Him teach, in our text we read of three who wanted to follow Him as a “personal” disciple. Let's pick up on the first of these “would-be disciples.”

The Commitment

Luke 9:57, “And it came to pass, that, as they went in the way, **a certain man said unto him, Lord, I will follow thee whithersoever thou goest.**”

Based upon Matthew 8:19 we know that this “someone” was a Scribe, which makes this verse quite shocking! Scribes were highly educated and considered to be authorities in Jewish law. They constituted the scholarly class of Jewish society. As such, they were fiercely loyal to the Jewish system of religious traditions —namely the Mishnah. These Scribes were first and foremost teachers, NOT followers of teachers.

Now it was this person — this religious leader and authority — who, obviously drawn by Christ's words, called out to the Lord and said, “I will follow You wherever You go” (Luke 9:57c).

In view of the relationship that existed between the teacher and the disciple at this time, we understand this phrase as a request to be on the inner circle. He wanted to participate in intimate and close communion with Christ. And he wanted to learn and submit to Christ’s teaching.

And thus having heard Christ's words and seen His miracles, this Scribe wanted to belong to the close group of disciples who accompanied Jesus on His travels. This again was quite an amazing desire for this religious leader. For a Scribe to make such a public commitment was to break with everything he had been trained in. NOT ONLY would he be subjecting himself to a Person who denounced the traditions which Scribes held as sacred — the Mishnah — but he, an authority in the Law, would be submitting himself to Christ — who did not have any formal training in the Mishnah!!

In fact, in the parallel passage in Matthew, we discover that this “teacher of the law” himself called Christ “teacher.”⁵ And thus we see the incredible “commitment” of this Scribe. He was willing to forfeit MUCH in order to follow Christ.

- His pride.
- His position as a teacher.
- The praises of men.
- Great power and prestige.

Yet sadly by Christ's response, we discover that he wasn't willing to forfeit ALL. And that really is the issue. It is not that we have to forfeit all in order to follow Christ; but we must be willing.

⁵ Compare Matthew 8:19

The Cost

And that brings us to the cost.

Luke 9:58, “ And Jesus said unto him, Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head.”

Jesus does not directly criticize this Scribe's statement of commitment. Rather knowing this teacher's heart, the Lord made a statement concerning discipleship which the man probably had never considered: “the foxes have holes.” Now, foxes were plentiful in and around where Christ traveled. Their holes or dens were often burrows in the ground from which they made their nightly raids which devastated the fields, orchards and vineyards of many a farmer.

Jesus then states: “the birds of the air have nests.” Likewise birds had their nests/roosts from which they would fulfill their day's work and return at nightfall.

The point here was that BOTH the “fox” and the “bird” had definite places of refuge; yet the “Son of Man” had none!

This is significant. At the end of a busy day of preaching, teaching, and ministering, the scribe would naturally expect to return to a well-furnished, multi-roomed home. With a Man of this power [referencing Christ], we'd expect nothing less! Yet Christ and His followers knew less security than a fox or a bird. Foxes and birds at least had homes. Yet the “Son of Man” did not have a place to lay His head.

The fact that Christ used the term “Son of Man” in this context is quite significant. It was a title that the Lord used most frequently of Himself. It was a way of identifying Himself as the “Servant of God,” and the Messiah.⁶

As the “Son of Man,” Christ forfeited many of the fundamental comforts we associate with life — specifically here, a place to live! It began at his birth, when there was no room in the inn.⁷ And it continued throughout His entire ministry.

- Judea rejected Him, John 5:18.
- Galilee cast Him out, John 6:66.
- Gadara begged Him to leave its district, Matthew 8:34.
- Samaria refused Him lodging, Luke 9:53.
- After the dispute about Jesus' healing of the blind man, John tells us that while “everyone went to his home,” and “...Jesus went to the Mount of Olives” John 7:53-8:1.
- Earth would not have Him, Matthew 27:23.
- And even heaven forsook Him, Matthew 27:46.
- And thus, UNLIKE other worldly creatures and leaders, Christ had “nowhere to lay His head.”

Don't miss the obvious implication, “As Christ is so shall we be!” If Christ lived in honor and glory in His first advent, then we could expect the same. If Christ lived in dishonor and without the comfort and convenience of a permanent dwelling — which was the case — then so ought our expectation to be!

⁶ Compare Daniel 7:13 this term “son of Man” is used of Christ over eighty times in the Gospels!

⁷ Compare Luke 2:7

It was this truth that the Scribe of our text missed. Perhaps taken back by the crowds, the miracles, and the enthusiasm, the Scribe made a public profession of commitment. Yet he failed to understand the implications of discipleship when it came to Christ, namely the willingness to forfeit the most fundamental comforts of life — a place to dwell.

And thus, just as in His discourse with the woman at the well in John 4, Christ does not respond to the Scribe's spoken words, but to his heart. This response revealed that there was one thing holding back this scribe from service in the Kingdom of God, the scribe's desire for worldly comfort.

How about you?

Why are you a follower of Christ?

What promise(s) are you holding the Lord to?

False motives and desires prevail throughout the body of Christ. This one is in it for the comfort. That one is here for the excitement. This one came because in Christ he found fulfillment. That one is saved because it is the expectation of her family. So why are you in the body of Christ?

I want you to consider with me the only lasting motive for service in the Kingdom of God. To do that, turn back with me to Luke 7.

Luke 7:36-39, "And one of the Pharisees desired him that he would eat with him. And he went into the Pharisee's house, and sat down to meat. And, behold, a woman in the city, which was a sinner, when she knew that Jesus sat at meat in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster box of ointment, And stood at his feet behind him weeping, and began to wash his feet with tears, and did wipe them with the hairs of her head, and kissed his feet, and anointed them with the ointment. Now when the Pharisee which had bidden him saw it, he spake within himself, saying, This man, if he were a prophet, would have known who and what manner of woman this is that toucheth him: for she is a sinner."

You know this passage. At the beginning of Christ's second year of ministry, a religious leader, quite well-pleased with himself, invited this local phenomenon, Jesus, into his home for table fellowship. In a Jewish context, "table fellowship" was all important for by it the parties involved publicly endorsed each other! So this Pharisee didn't invite Christ because he wanted to learn; he wanted an endorsement!

Now as was the custom of that day, uninvited guests could attend the meal provided they sit against the walls surrounding the table. One such guest in this passage was a prostitute. She would have been viewed as a sinner by all who were present. And it was during the meal that this woman, beside herself on account of her sin, approached Christ and began to wash and anoint His feet.

Now you need to know three things in order to understand this. First Jewish meals at this time typically were eaten lying on the side with the feet stretched out away from the table. Secondly because of the position of the body during the meal, it was important for the feet to be washed so that you wouldn't have to eat in the presence of whatever your neighbor stepped in that day. And thirdly, the job for washing the feet before a meal was left to the lowliest person in the room.

It was during the meal that this prostitute began to wash Christ's feet with here hair. Now, this is shocking. It was shocking for the Pharisee because if Christ were truly a prophet he'd know that this

woman was a sinner and therefore He should rebuke her. It is shocking for us, because the Pharisee in his arrogance considered himself to be above the Lord, and so didn't wash His feet. And it was shocking for the prostitute because she deemed herself to be the lowliest of all present, she knew her sin and that it was great.

The passage continues. After telling a parable about love and its correlation to forgiveness Christ indicts the Pharisee.

Luke 7:44-48, “And he turned to the woman, and said unto Simon, Seest thou this woman? I entered into thine house, thou gavest me no water for my feet: but she hath washed my feet with tears, and wiped them with the hairs of her head. Thou gavest me no kiss: but this woman since the time I came in hath not ceased to kiss my feet. My head with oil thou didst not anoint: but this woman hath anointed my feet with ointment. Wherefore I say unto thee, Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much: but to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little. And he said unto her, Thy sins are forgiven.”

Based on this passage, what is the only lasting motive for service in the Kingdom of God?

Is it not gratitude? Is it not love on account of the great debt that Christ paid on account of our sin?

That is why after detailing twelve chapters of doctrine, Paul transitioned into a time of exhortation with these words:

Romans 12:1, “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.”

From this we conclude that if we are following Christ for any other motive than love, we will be horribly disillusioned!

Christ did NOT come to make us happy, fulfill us, or even strengthen our self-esteem. The Lord came for one purpose, “to seek and to save that which was lost” (Luke 19:10).

Oh how we need to hear this! Today so many in the body of Christ are like this Scribe. They are “fair weather fans.” Provided that Christ continues to provide for our food, happiness, convenience, comfort and meet our expectations for what we want out of life and what we want God to do we gladly will follow Him — and even sacrifice for Him. But the moment it costs us that which is most treasured — and it will — we can be found disillusioned, disheartened, angry and frustrated wondering if God truly loved us because we have been kept from this or that precious thing. Lenski said of some in the body of Christ...

“[They see] the soldiers on parade, the fine uniforms, and the glittering arms and [are] eager to join, forgetting the exhausting marches, the bloody battles, the graves, perhaps unmarked.”⁸

Family of God let me remind you of something very important. You are in Christ today. You are here today because He died on the cross to forgive your sin and to reconcile you to God. Now if you forget this not only will you be disillusioned in your Christian life BUT growth in grace will elude you.

Speaking of the traits which accompany maturation in Christ, Peter said, “For he who lacks these qualities

⁸ *The Interpretation of St. Matthew's Gospel*, pages 338-339

is blind or short-sighted, having forgotten his purification from his former sins” (2 Peter 1:9).

So how do you respond to a passage like the one before us?

Re-evaluate why you are here; it may be that yours is a false profession of faith! You “accepted Christ” not because you needed a Savior, but because you wanted a friend, purpose, or a sense of fulfillment. Now don't misunderstand, to have sported these motives at one time in your Christian life doesn't mean that your conversion was false. The question today is, “Do they continue to be that which impels you in your Christian walk?”

Truly, if your presence in the Kingdom of God rests upon worldly comfort and convenience, then based on our passage this morning you probably are not saved! If that is the case, it is not too late. Recognize that Christ did not come for your comfort — He came to save you on account of your sin. Accordingly

- Turn from your sin.
- Confess your sins to Christ.
- Rely upon Christ.
- And He will save you!

And yet, if you are trusting in Christ alone for salvation, then re-evaluate what you expect or want from God. Nothing will trip you up faster in your walk with Christ than holding false-expectations when it comes to God and His Kingdom.

So listen! Christ came to save you from your sin. Now we confess salvation involves a salvation from

- The penalty of sin — which is death.
- The power of sin - which is its ability to enslave you.
- And finally, the presence of sin — which is why you and I at times aren't fulfilled, don't know peace, and frequently get sick, and someday will die.

However there is an order and plan behind Christ's work of salvation. In the establishment of His Kingdom Christ in His first advent came to deliver us from the penalty and power of sin! That is what we enjoy on this side of the grave! Yet in His Second Advent Christ will deliver us from the presence of sin!

What that means as disciples is that if we get anything else out of life beside reconciliation with God, then we haven't been gypped! Indeed, sorrow and sadness ought to be our expectation here. And any amount of fulfillment or prosperity on this side of the grave must be viewed as nothing more than a foretaste of what awaits us in glory!

Now, don't walk away from this sermon with a sense of doom and gloom! God has been very gracious to us who live in this land. Thus we need not feel guilty or as second-class saints if God has graced our lives with so much beyond reconciliation.

Rather, we must walk away from this sermon

1. With the Biblical expectation that Christ did not promise worldly comfort
2. With gratitude for whatever blessings we have enjoyed beyond forgiveness.
3. With a renewed passion to follow the Lord unconditionally wherever He goes.

May the Lord grant us the grace to do accordingly.

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About the Preacher

Greg Thurston preached this sermon on March 19, 2006. Greg is the Preacher at Broomfield Presbyterian Church.