

Broomfield



# PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH MINISTRY OF THE WORD

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## **The Cost of Discipleship, Part Two**

Ron Blue, a well-known Christian financial counselor, quotes the statistic that the person who uses a credit card spends on the average of ten to thirty percent more than if he uses cash. This has to do with the nature of credit. When a person uses credit, at the time of his purchase psychologically he is not using money. And thus, when the purchase price rings up to \$500.00 and the available credit on the card is \$10,000.00, the purchase price of \$500.00 takes on the appearance of “insignificance” — even though the person may actually have only \$1,000.00 in the bank. The net effect of credit is the devaluation of the worth of money — \$500 is the same as \$5,000 when your credit line is \$50,000 and your monthly payment is \$50.00!

Now all of this has amazing parallels with the Christian in the United States. The relative ease with which we live in the United States as Christians affects us spiritually much the same as credit has affected our society. In Scripture we are told that persecution will be a part of the Christians' life — to which history plainly bears testimony. Yet, the Christian in the United States pays very little for his faith — as it relates to persecution; it is as though he is living on credit. This credit line of easy living naturally has led to the devaluation of the worth of our salvation.

Why do you suppose Christ told the rich young ruler, “How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God” (Luke 18:24)?

Because the life that accompanies riches and wealth devalues a gospel which speaks of forgiveness of debt, freedom from slavery, and a life lived unto God. Christ promised to spit the church of Laodicea out of His mouth because they said, “I am rich, and have become wealthy, and have need of nothing... [all the while they were] wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked” (Revelation 3:17).

Indeed, when the physical needs have been met, how important, really, is peace with God; the promise of a glorious hereafter; and eternal life?

Let me remind you our salvation has come at a great price — the blood of Christ.

Hebrews 9:11-12, “But Christ being come an high priest of good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this building; Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us.”

In view of this passage, we must conclude that there is nothing more important in all the world than the kingdom of God! This is why it is little surprise to find that in Scripture there is a HIGH COST TO DISCIPLESHIP. While the price of salvation is zero<sup>1</sup> the cost associated with participating in it is EVERYTHING — including our earthly riches and security!

## The Cost: Earthly Security

Brothers and sisters that is the lesson we must learn and live by if we are to be faithful disciples of the kingdom, and this is the lesson the would-be disciple learned in our text this morning.

Luke 9:57-59, “**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.”

This occurred in 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. By this time, Christ's popularity was rising. And thus, large crowds gathered around Him for many different reasons. Some were fascinated with Christ's miracles.<sup>2</sup> Others followed for what they could receive from Him.<sup>3</sup> Others came for the purpose of seeking to trip Him up and thereby condemn Him.<sup>4</sup> Still others were interested in Christ's teaching.<sup>5</sup>

Now out of the mass of people who followed Christ, there were some who genuinely were drawn by His words. Our passage contains the account of three such men.

As Christ entered the boat to cross over to the other side of the Sea of Galilee and as others filled their boats to follow Him<sup>6</sup> three men approached Christ in order to become one of His “personal” disciples. Now, last time we saw that in Christ's day it was common for a teacher/rabbi to have a small group of men who closely followed them.

While the teacher discoursed with the crowds, it was his disciples who closely fellowshiped the teacher. They were the ones that ate and were taught by the teacher. They lived in many cases with the teacher. And thus, the teacher/disciple relationship became synonymous with the intimate love relationship.<sup>7</sup>

Now, it was this teacher/disciple relationship that is addressed in this text. Out of all the masses of people gathered around Christ, three were singled out as ones who potentially would follow as a “personal” disciple. The first “would-be” disciple was a scribe who had failed to count the high cost of discipleship. And thus, on account of his love for WORLDLY COMFORT, he failed in his quest to become Christ's disciple.

Now, we pick up on the next would-be disciple of Christ.

Luke 7:59, “And he said unto another, Follow me. But he said, Lord, suffer me first to go and bury

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<sup>1</sup> Compare Ephesians 2:8-9

<sup>2</sup> Compare John 2:23

<sup>3</sup> Compare John 6:26

<sup>4</sup> Compare Luke 20:20

<sup>5</sup> Compare Matthew 7:28; Luke 21:38

<sup>6</sup> Compare Mark 4:36

<sup>7</sup> φιλέω phileo

my father.”

Notice that with this disciple, the Lord is more direct; He said, “Follow Me.” Because this narrative is surrounded by two accounts in which Christ is personally approached (vv. 57-58, 61-62), it is very likely that this disciple first approached Christ — just as the other two men — with the intention of becoming His disciple. It's that here Christ beat him to the punch with the exhortation, “Follow Me!”

## **Follow Me**

Now notice that this command is the essence of discipleship: “Follow Me!”

- Luke 7:57c, “I will follow thee whithersoever thou goest.”
- Luke 7:59b, “Follow me.”
- Luke 7:61, “I will follow thee.”

We read of Peter and Andrew’s call these words:

- Matthew 4:19-20, “And he saith unto them, Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.”

When Christ called Matthew:

Matthew 9:9, “And as Jesus passed forth from thence, he saw a man, named Matthew, sitting at the receipt of custom: and he saith unto him, Follow me. And he arose, and followed him.”

Philip received this command:

- John 1:43, “The day following Jesus would go forth into Galilee, and findeth Philip, and saith unto him, Follow me.”
- John 10:27, “My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me:”

See FOLLOWING Christ is the essence of discipleship. This is an important truth to recognize! Often we think that the essence of Christianity is “salvation” — the saving of a soul from hell. We consider ourselves saved from death, and thus we conclude, “It is well with my soul.” We hear of sin in the body of Christ and we do not grieve, for after all they're saved.

Yet, Christ's command here speaks of a revolutionary standard so needed today. The disciple is one who NOT ONLY receives forgiveness for his sins BUT positively FOLLOWS Christ.

And what does that mean?

I want you to look back with me to the command that Christ gave His disciples — a passage that serves as the standard for the would-be disciple of our text.

Luke 9:23-24, “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. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: but whosoever will lose his life for my sake, the same shall save it.”

We learn from this verse that “following Christ” involves at least four elements.

1. A heart's desire to do so — “if anyone wishes...”
2. Denial of self — “denies himself...”
3. Death to self — “takes up his cross...”
4. Loss of self — “for whoever wishes to save his life shall lose it...”

And thus, Christianity is NOT the means whereby we simply avert God's condemnation and wrath. Rather, the sine qua non of the Christian walk is this:

1. The total and complete crucifixion of self — its wants, desires, privileges, “rights,” needs, etc.
2. The total and complete subjection of your life to Christ.
3. The yielding of your members to Christ — for His use and service.
4. In the words of Christ, it is “dying to self!”

From this it should be obvious that following Christ will be the most difficult thing a man can do and yet the most joyous. For it is when we are “following Christ” that HIS life and HIS love pulsate through us!

## The Commitment

Now with this, notice the commitment this disciple makes.

Luke 7:59, “And he said unto another, Follow me. But he said, Lord, **suffer me first to go and bury my father.**”

The Jewish burial rite was one which was surrounded by much ritual. Upon the death of a person the burial took place almost immediately — typically the same day. This was because as long as the dead remained unburied, the family was ceremonial unclean. Thus, after the body was washed and prepared for burial through the anointing of a mixture of spices, it was dressed or placed in a linen shroud. It then was transported to its grave in a procession which included musicians, the family, and professional mourners. And though the body was laid to rest in the tomb, for the next thirty days it was to be repeatedly anointed with oil.

From this it should be obvious that this ritual was of utmost importance to the Jew. In fact, of all rites in the Jewish culture, the burial was of the highest priorities. It was considered an act of kindness that ranked higher than any other service requiring attention. Thus, the provision of the burial of a loved one took precedence over almost everything else — including these:

- Attending religious service.
- Studying the law.
- Temple service.
- The killing of the Passover sacrifice.
- The observance of circumcision.
- In fact, the one who faithfully carried out their obligation to the deceased was promised an eternal reward.

In view of this elaborate preparation which required vigilance over the loved-one's body for thirty days, it is obvious here that Christ could not wait for this would-be disciple. And so the Lord responded to him with these seemingly cold words, “Allow the dead to bury the dead.”

In other words, Christ told him allow your spiritually dead family and relatives to bury your father; my work is more important; you follow Me.

Now, this is one interpretation. And yet, it leaves a rather large problem. For if indeed this disciple's father had actually died, we raise the following questions:

1. In view of the importance attached to burial in Christ's day — again an importance that even ranked above the service of the Temple and circumcision! — What was this man doing listening to Christ in the first place?
2. If the burial of this would-be disciple's father wasn't so important that this man could follow Christ in His ministry in Galilee, why would the burial prevent him now from following Christ further?
3. If this man was so concerned for his filial obligations such that he couldn't follow Christ, why was he forsaking his grieving family and the responsibilities that were associated with the mourning ritual?

In view of these formidable questions, let me suggest another way of understanding this passage- one which does greater justice to this text.

A few years ago a missionary asked a rich young Turkish man to go with him on a trip to Europe, during which time the missionary hoped to disciple the man. When the young man replied that he couldn't go because he had to “Bury his father,” the missionary offered his sympathy. To which the Turkish man surprisingly responded that his father was alive and healthy. The expression “bury my father” simply meant staying at home and fulfilling his family responsibilities until his father died and he received his share of the inheritance.

Though this is a modern example, it nevertheless illustrates the nuance that “bury my father” carried in Christ's day. See “bury my father” was a colloquialism in the ancient near east for attending to the family inheritance. In the case that your father died while you were away and you were unable to fulfill your duty to him your inheritance was customarily lost or reduced. Thus to say that you had to “bury your father” was equivalent to saying that you wanted to wait until you received your inheritance. Dr. John MacArthur put it this way:

“The man's asking for permission to bury [his] father, however, did not mean that his father was already dead. The phrase was a common Near Eastern figure of speech that referred to a son's responsibility to help his father in the family business until the father died and the inheritance was distributed.”<sup>8</sup>

## The Cost

And that is what this man meant when he told Christ, “...Permit me first to go and bury my father.”<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary*, Matthew 8-15, pp. 24-25. See also Geldenhuys (NICNT) for further support of this.

<sup>9</sup> For the sake of clarity, I emphasize here that this man's father had not died (for Christ to respond in this way would be completely out of character; He was one who frequently wept on account of this state of sin and misery, Luke 19:41; John 11:35). Again, it is that this disciple did not want to risk losing his inheritance by committing himself fully to Jesus. He wanted to be associated with Jesus in name only. All the while the focus of his life was on his personal prosperity and security!

Before he left on a journey with the Lord, he first wanted to secure his future! Now this leads to the cost that accompanies discipleship — which is spelled out further in Christ's own words.

Luke 9:60, “Jesus said unto him, Let the dead bury their dead: but go thou and preach the kingdom of God.”

Like the answer Christ gave to the first would-be disciple, this response is a colloquialism which meant something like, “Let the world take care of the things of the world.” Of all the things that should concern you as a disciple of the kingdom, issues of security ought not to be one of them.

Thus we take Christ's response as nothing less than this:

1. First, trust yourself to God.
2. Then, follow Me!

Such is the cost associated with following Christ: The willingness to forfeit earthly security!

Does that mean we ignore our earthly responsibilities and live with no care of tomorrow?

No! Paul said, “if anyone will not work, neither let him eat.” (2 Thessalonians 3:10b). Rather, it is that we must make sure that in our labor to live, move, and have our being we are not found to be trusting in earthly means of security instead of God.

## **Florida Security System**

I've shared this with some of you before that when we were in Florida, we purchased a home that was close to some really bad neighborhoods. In fact, our first day there we tripped the security system and when the police arrived and we told them that it was an accident, we were informed that ours was a dangerous neighborhood; they told us they wouldn't live where we were.

Frequently police helicopters would circle above flashing their spotlight in our back yard looking for a criminal. And yet, we weren't foolish, we got a dog, and kept our security system activated.

Well you can imagine that sleeping under these circumstances didn't provide for the best night of sleep; all it took was an unfamiliar noise, and we'd be roused out of bed. And so before long we found ourselves at any sound that raised concern, we'd gaze at our security system panel to ensure that it was armed. I can't tell you how many times the red “armed” light brought comfort to our hearts.

But then it hit us. You know what had become our security? It was no longer God; it was our alarm system! The proper use of secondary means — an alarm system — had replaced God. And I was shocked!

## **Trust in God**

And yet this is where so many of us dwell on a daily basis when it comes to our walks with Christ. Timothy was to instruct the wealthy in his congregation to “not fix their hope on the uncertainty of riches, but on God” (1 Timothy 6:17).

From this I conclude that the tendency for most of us will be to have no problem with worship, ministry, self-denial, quiet times, acts of sacrifice, etc. But allow any of these things to threaten our sense of well-being, health, pocket books, private time, and security and we will fuss and complain.

How ought we to live as Disciples of our Lord? What was the man in our passage to do?

Luke 9:60, “Jesus said unto him, Let the dead bury their dead: **but go thou and preach the kingdom of God.**”

Here the “kingdom of God” is an expression that denotes Christ’s reign and rule. Thus, to proclaim the kingdom of God is NOT ONLY to call upon people to live in light of God’s reign and rule — i.e., evangelism — BUT it is likewise to do the same — to subject OURSELVES to the reign and rule of God!

That was the primary task given to this would-be disciple in love with earthly security. Living in light of the reign and rule of Christ! He was to be concerned with his eternal inheritance rather than his earthly one. And that is the task that must occupy our lives if we are to prove faithful as disciples!

- Do you understand that God reigns over all of creation?
- Do you understand that He holds us in His hands?
- Do you realize that the king’s heart is like waters in the hand of the Lord?<sup>10</sup>
- Do you know that a bird does not fall to the ground without your Father ordaining it?<sup>11</sup>

Let us abandon the feeble claim of security which we derive from our health, jobs, spouses, parents, money, and self. Let the dead bury the dead. **AND LET’S FOLLOW CHRIST!**

And yet we cannot “follow Christ” without the knowledge that God is our security. And so let me encourage you. Recall the preface to the Great Commission:

Matthew 28:18-20, “**And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth.** Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen.”

Before He charged His disciples with a command which would forever change the face of church ministry, Christ assured them of one truth:

- **HE WAS IN CHARGE!**
- **HE COULD BE TRUSTED!**
- **HE NEVER WOULD LET THEM DOWN!**

This truth holds for us today!

Psalm 46:1-3, “God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the

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<sup>10</sup> Compare Proverbs 21:1

<sup>11</sup> Compare Matthew 10:29

sea; Though the waters thereof roar and be troubled, though the mountains shake with the swelling thereof. Selah.”

Because of whom God is we need not fear. The world could fall to pieces around the child of God, but we have this confidence — GOD HAS US RIGHT WHERE HE WANTS US!

2 Timothy 1:12, “For the which cause I also suffer these things: nevertheless I am not ashamed: for I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day.”

The man who wrote this would soon die. Yet what was the truth that held him up throughout this very bitter providence? God is able to guard what Paul entrusted to Him!

Do you see it?

God is big enough, gracious enough, and good enough for you to entrust your souls to Him.

You say, “Yes! But is He patient enough? The disciple of our passage balked and Christ said, 'Let the dead bury their dead.' If you walked with me this past week you'd see that I too have balked many times. Will this be Christ's response to me?”

May I encourage you?

2 Timothy 2:13, “If we believe not, yet he abideth faithful: he cannot deny himself.”

This means that if you once have entrusted your soul to Christ, He will not let it go. And that is the difference between the Christian and the false disciple of this text. The false disciple's attempt at following Christ is in order to get salvation. The true disciple's attempt at following Christ is because of his salvation.

And so though we frequently fall in our service of Christ<sup>12</sup> nevertheless we have the assurance that in Christ we not only forgiven but we are restored.

Oh may this wean us all from creation's security. And impel us unto fidelity in our service of the Lord.

## **Ananias and Sapphira<sup>13</sup>**

Ananias and Sapphira serve as a warning to all would-be disciples of the danger of half-hearted service. Just like the disciple of our passage, they came to Christ holding their EARTHLY RICHES in their hands. And this half-hearted devotion — this double-mindedness — cost them their lives...

Acts 5:1-5, “But a certain man named Ananias, with Sapphira his wife, sold a possession, And kept back part of the price, his wife also being privy to it, and brought a certain part, and laid it at the apostles' feet. But Peter said, Ananias, why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost, and to keep back part of the price of the land? Whiles it remained, was it not thine own? and after it was sold, was it not in thine own power? why hast thou conceived this thing in thine

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<sup>12</sup> Compare also Proverbs 24:16

<sup>13</sup> This conclusion was omitted from the sermon



heart? thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God. And Ananias hearing these words fell down, and gave up the ghost: and great fear came on all them that heard these things.”

His wife would later be buried by the same hands that buried her husband! See Ananias was in love with the riches of this earth, and thus he sought to hide his love through deceit, not realizing that the one he really violated was God!

Brothers and Sisters, you can fool your neighbor, your family, your church, and the world; but you cannot fool Christ! Christ knows your heart and where it is!

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## **About the Preacher**

Greg Thurston preached this sermon on March 26, 2006. Greg is the Preacher at Broomfield Presbyterian Church.