

WILLING

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THE

PRICE

BY GIL RUGH

***Willing to Pay the Price***

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# ***What Jesus Said About Being a Disciple***

In Matthew 28:19 Jesus said, “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations . . .” Our mission, as Christians, is to share the Gospel of Christ, making disciples of the nations. Unfortunately, there has been much confusion over what it means to be a disciple and how we as Christians should present the message of Christ. Fortunately, Jesus gives us clear instruction in His Word on this area of discipleship.

## ***What Is a Disciple?***

Some have taught that discipleship is a higher level of Christianity. They would say that a person becomes a Christian, but later, when he becomes more committed, then he becomes a disciple. However, that is not true. A disciple is simply a Christian. The word *disciple* means *learner* or *one who follows the teachings of another*. Therefore, a disciple of Christ is simply one who follows Christ. In Acts 11:26 it is stated, “the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch.” Here it is clear that the terms *disciple* and *Christian* are interchangeable. A disciple is a Christian, and a Christian is a disciple. There are no categories of Christians.

Matthew 8:18-22

The message of Jesus was a call to surrender. It meant a turning from sin and an embracing of the Lordship of Christ. This message of Christ, as we shall see, was no more appealing two thousand years ago than it is today. When Jesus addressed the issue of

discipleship, He did not give a set pattern to be followed. The Gospel is not a formula, but there are basic issues that are always the same when a person is confronted with the claims of Christ.

### ***The Demands of Discipleship***

Being a disciple of Christ is not easy. It can mean loss of prestige and material security. The original twelve disciples had to follow a Man who had no place to call home. In one episode, Jesus encounters a religious leader who wanted to be a follower of His:

Now when Jesus saw a crowd around Him, He gave orders to depart to the other side. And a certain scribe came and said to Him, 'Teacher, I will follow You wherever You go.' (Matt. 8:18-19)

Scribes were prominent people in Jesus' day. They were the official interpreters and teachers of the law. A scribe had an exalted and honored position in Israel. In this case, a scribe openly tells Christ he will follow Him. From one standpoint, this could have been quite an opportunity for Jesus. To have someone as prestigious as a scribe willing to follow Him, would no doubt have given Him more credibility with the Jewish religious leaders. Yet Jesus did not look at this situation that way. Instead, Jesus confronted this man on whether he truly was willing to be a disciple of Christ.

And Jesus said to him, 'The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head.' (Matt. 8:20)

Jesus made it clear to this scribe that being a disciple of Christ was not an issue to be taken lightly. Jesus told this man that if he wanted to follow Him, he would be following someone who had no place to call home. Would this man who was a well-respected man of prominence and honor be willing to give up all those comforts to follow a man who was homeless?

We are not told what the result of this encounter was. The abruptness of the ending may even indicate that the scribe was going to rethink the situation. This encounter between Jesus and the scribe gives us an important lesson, one that we will see in following texts as well. The lesson is, being a disciple of Christ is demand-

ing. In fact, it is something one should think about seriously before making a commitment. Jesus does not want someone following Him who does not understand what it means to be His disciple.

### ***The Urgency of Discipleship***

Becoming a disciple is an urgent matter as this next example shows:

And another of the disciples said to Him, 'Lord, permit me first to go and bury my father.' But Jesus said to him, 'Follow Me; and allow the dead to bury their own dead.' (Matt. 8:21-22)

Jesus wanted this man to follow him, but the man asked permission to first go and bury his father. We do not know for sure the state of this man's father. His father may have died, and this man wanted to mourn his loss. Or it could be that his father was aged, and he wanted to wait until his father passed away. Either way, this man was asking Jesus for time off so that he could take care of business and then come back and follow Jesus. Jesus told him to "allow the dead to bury their own dead." In other words, nothing, not even family ties, is to get in the way of following Christ. Christ does not allow any delay when it comes to following Him. The issue is now. There is an urgency about being a disciple.

Matthew 10:24-39

### ***Disciples Are Treated Like Christ***

A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a slave above his master. It is enough for the disciple that he become as his teacher, and the slave as his master. If they have called the head of the house Beelzebul, how much more the members of his household! (Matt. 10:24-25)

Being a disciple of Christ means expecting the same treatment that Christ received. Disciples do not know as much or have the status of their teachers, nor do slaves have a higher status than their

masters. Likewise, disciples of Christ cannot expect better treatment than Christ Himself received. Christ was slandered and persecuted. They even called Him “Beelzebul,” which is a synonym for Satan. The attitude of the people in general and the religious leaders specifically was one of disrespect and rejection (cf. Matt. 12:24). Jesus warns His disciples that if the world called Him “Satan,” His followers could expect the same. Persecution is a result of being a disciple of Christ. As Paul said, “. . . all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.”

### ***Disciples Fear God More Than Men***

Persecution will come. With persecution often comes fear. But Jesus said:

Therefore do not fear them. For there is nothing covered that will not be revealed, and hidden that will not be known. (Matt. 10:26)

There is an intimidation factor we all face as believers. As we identify openly with Jesus Christ and His Word, we will face the animosity and disdain of the world. Sometimes we may get discouraged and ask “What’s the use? All I do is stir up trouble and animosity.” Knowing this, Jesus tells us not to fear. He tells us that there will come a day when everything will be revealed for what it truly is. God will make everything right. Those who persecuted us will be shown for what they are — enemies of God. And those who proclaimed the truth will be shown to be true servants of God. Our enemies do not win. Knowing that someday God will vindicate His disciples is a motive for us not to fear being persecuted in this age.

What I tell you in the darkness, speak in the light; and what you hear whispered in your ear, proclaim upon the housetops. (Matt. 10:27)

Disciples are to be bold with the truth Christ has entrusted to them. His followers are not to keep the truth to themselves. What we learn in secret we are to make known to everyone. Back in Jesus’ day, if someone wanted to make a proclamation, he had to get on top of a house and shout his message. We, too, as disciples of Christ, must get the message of Christ out.

And do not fear those who kill the body, but are unable to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell. (Matt. 10:28)

Disciples must have a proper perspective on fear. The context here is still referring to persecution for being a disciple of Christ. Men do have the power to kill our physical bodies. They can make us suffer and eventually kill us. But they cannot touch our souls, and they can never take away our eternal life. So we should not fear them. Instead, our fear should be directed to the sovereign, all-powerful God. We should be fearful towards the One who has authority over the eternal destinies of men. This is key for a disciple of Christ to know. As we live our lives for Christ, we will face the wrath of men. But in those times, remember it is God we are to fear and obey.

Are not two sparrows sold for a cent? And yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Therefore do not fear; you are of more value than many sparrows. (Matt. 10:29-31)

The tender care of God gives us another reason not to fear. God intimately knows what is going on in our lives, and He cares! He knows when every sparrow falls, and He knows every hair on our heads. What a comfort to know that God is always with us. Discipleship is hard and it costs us much, but our Father tenderly cares for us.

### ***Disciples Openly Confess Christ***

Everyone therefore who shall confess Me before men, I will also confess him before My Father who is in heaven. (Matt.10:32)

Disciples must be willing to identify with Christ publicly. The word *confess* means *to agree with*. Salvation occurs when a person agrees with God about his sin and about Jesus Christ. First John 1:9 says, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." When we agree with God about our sin and the remedy for our sin, God forgives us. First John 4:2 says, "Every spirit that confesses that Jesus

Christ has come in the flesh is from God.” First John 4:15 says, “Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in Him, and he in God.” To be saved, one must agree with God about his sin and who Jesus Christ is. And that agreement is expressed as we confess Him publicly before men. There is no allowance here for secret believers. A disciple cannot say, “I believe in my heart but I just keep my faith to myself.” If a person never talks about his faith publicly, something is wrong. But for those who openly identify with Christ, Christ will identify with them before the Father. What a promise! It will be a glorious day when those who identified with Christ stand before the Father, and Christ confesses them as His own.

But whoever shall deny Me before men, I will also deny him before My Father who is in heaven. (Matt. 10:33)

Those who will not identify with Christ, who deny Christ, will find themselves denied by Christ when they stand before the Father. Some people are afraid of identifying with Christ because of what it might cost them. Some are afraid of what their families would say if they followed Christ and left the religion they grew up in. Some are afraid of losing their friends. Therefore, some people are tempted to say that they will just believe in their heart but they will never tell anyone. Jesus says that is impossible. A disciple must confess Christ; if he does not, he is denying Christ. There are no middle roads.

### ***Being a Disciple Brings Division***

Do not think that I came to bring peace on the earth; I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. (Matt. 10:34)

Being a follower of Christ is hard. We all would like it if we could be Christians and still be liked by everyone. But that is not how it is. For those who are followers of Christ, who openly identify with Christ, and faithfully proclaim the truth of His Word, there will be opposition from the world. Jesus does bring personal peace for those who belong to Him (cf. John 14:27), and someday He will establish a kingdom of peace on this earth (cf. Isa. 2:4); but for now there will not be peace between Christians and the world. This



present world system hates God and those who belong to Him (cf. 1 John 2:15-17). Knowing Christ brings conflict.

For I came to set a man against his father and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; and a man's enemies will be the members of his household. (Matt. 10:35-36)

Being a disciple of Christ often brings division in the home. Some people wonder why families are torn apart when a member becomes a Christian, but Jesus said that is what would happen. Jesus is not saying that we should stir up animosity by being personally unpleasant, but division is an unavoidable consequence of becoming a disciple of Christ. Jesus said, "If the world hates you, you know that it has hated Me before it hated you" (cf. John 15:18). As we identify with Christ and confess Him before men, there will be division, even in our own homes. Those who do not believe in Him will become antagonized by those who do, and that brings an unpleasant situation.

He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of me; and he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. (Matt. 10:37)

Christ says the price of being a disciple of His is high and for those who are not willing to pay the price, they are not worthy to be His disciple. If one's relationship to his parents, children, husband, or wife is more important than his love for Christ, he cannot be a disciple. Jesus is not willing to bargain or compromise. He demands total allegiance and unreserved commitment as Lord and Master, and love for Him must be above all else. If that means losing family members and friends, then it must be that way. Jesus is clear in His message. But this is not always the message that is proclaimed by the Church today. Some are afraid that if we preach discipleship like Jesus did, we will drive people away, and that is true. We must make sure we preach the Gospel in the way God tells us in His Word.

## ***Discipleship Involves Taking up Your Cross***

And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me. (Matt 10:38)

In Jesus' day, the picture of taking up a cross was one of scorn, humiliation and rejection. Being a disciple is a hard road of self-denial even to the point of death. Is that the Gospel we offer to people? The true Gospel is not the way of the Prosperity Movement, which teaches that coming to Christ means being wealthy, healthy and popular. The Gospel is not the way of the Church Growth Movement, which caters towards making unbelievers comfortable with the messages. People say that if we preach discipleship like Jesus did, then we'll drive people away. And that is true, but that is what Jesus did. The message Jesus preached was not popular back then, and that same message is not popular today; but that is how we must preach it. The true Gospel has not been presented faithfully by the Church in these days, and as a result many people are deceived into thinking they are Christians when, in fact, they are not. Many people have made professions of faith who have not seriously considered the cost of being a disciple of Christ.

He who has found his life shall lose it, and he who has lost his life for My sake shall find it. (Matt. 10:39)

Whether a person becomes a disciple of Christ's or not, there is still a price to be paid. Those who try to find their lives by living life their own way will eventually lose their lives forever. What they try to gain in this physical life, they will lose eternally. Often times, people will not come to Christ because they want to pursue their dreams and fun. They know that they would not be able to do that if they came to Christ. But the price for that decision is eternal destruction. Those who think it's too costly to become a disciple of Christ lose everything. But those who lay down their lives for the sake of Christ will gain eternal life. When a person comes to Christ, he in a sense lays down his life and allows Christ to do with his life whatever He wills. For those who lose their lives to Christ, they will gain it for eternity.

Luke 14:25-33

### ***Discipleship Includes Counting the Cost***

In most Gospel presentations today, there is little emphasis on counting the cost of being a Christian. Oftentimes people are too afraid to bring it up for fear of teaching works-salvation. Yet that is what Jesus did with the crowds who followed Him:

Now great multitudes were going along with Him. (Luke 14:25)

At this point in Jesus' ministry, He was something of a phenomenon. Because of His great teaching and miracles, many were following Him. Many were excited to be around Him. But what Jesus said to the crowd is important:

And He turned and said to them, 'If anyone comes to Me, and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be My disciple.' (Luke 14:25b-26)

Jesus uses the strongest possible language to make His point. Those who will not come to Christ because of family cannot be His disciples. Many times people will not believe in Christ because that would mean abandoning the religion of their parents. But Jesus said family cannot stand in the way of commitment to Him. He requires absolute devotion. A person must love Him above everything and everyone else.

Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple. (Luke 14:27)

There is no room for superficial followers. Jesus wanted the crowd to be clear in their understanding of what it meant to be a disciple and the commitment it would take. Then He told them how important it was to consider carefully the issues involved:

For which one of you, when he wants to build a tower, does not first sit down and calculate the cost, to see if he has enough to complete it? Otherwise when he has laid a foundation, and is not able to finish, all who observe it begin to ridicule him,

saying, 'This man began to build and was not able to finish.' Or what king, when he sets out to meet another king in battle, will not first sit down and take counsel whether he is strong enough with ten thousand men to encounter the one coming against him with twenty thousand? Or else, while the other is still far away, he sends a delegation and asks terms of peace. (Luke 14:28-32)

Discipleship is such a serious matter that it must not be treated lightly. Wise people do not build towers or go to war without seriously considering what they are getting into. Those who do, are considered fools for not being able to finish what they started. Yet many people today make professions of faith in Christ without having any comprehension of what it means to follow Christ. This is not to say that a person must understand everything there is to know about discipleship in order to be a Christian, but it does mean they must have some idea of what they are getting into and what it may cost them. Too many people in the church today claim to be Christians but have never considered the cost of being a disciple.

So therefore, no one of you can be my disciple who does not give up all his own possessions. (Luke 14:33)

Being a disciple also includes being willing to give up everything, including material possessions, if the Lord so wills. If a person loves his possessions more than Christ he cannot be His disciple.

Luke 18:18-25

### ***Discipleship Means Letting Go of the World***

Love of material possessions is often one of the greatest hindrances of people coming to Christ as the account of the rich, young ruler shows:

And a certain ruler questioned Him, saying, 'Good Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?' And Jesus said to him, 'Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone. You know the commandments, do not commit adultery . . .'

And he said, 'All these things I have kept from my youth.' And when Jesus heard this, He said to him, 'One thing you still lack; sell all that you possess, and distribute it to the poor, and you shall have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me.' But when he had heard these things, he became very sad; for he was extremely rich. (Luke 18:18-23)

Here is a case of a man who wanted eternal life. Yet he loved his possessions more than Christ, and as a result, he could not become a disciple. Jesus did not avoid the main stumbling block in this man's life. This man needed to be willing to surrender all he had, or Jesus would not take Him. Jesus did not adjust His message for this man. Salvation means Jesus is in control of all areas of one's life, including riches. Matthew 6:24 says, "No one can serve two masters; . . . You cannot serve God and mammon [riches]." Yet this man went away "grieved." As badly as he wanted eternal life, he loved his riches more.

And Jesus looked at him and said, "How hard it is for those who are wealthy to enter the kingdom of God! For it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God. (Luke 18:24)

The more possessions a person has, the more he is usually attached to them. The rich, young ruler would have loved to believe in Christ and have eternal life, but not if it meant giving up his possessions. A person cannot become a disciple on those terms. A person cannot take hold of Christ by faith while also holding on to this world.

### ***How Should We Present the Gospel?***

Salvation is a free gift from God and cannot be earned by any works at all. Yet true faith includes a willingness to turn from sin and surrender to the Lordship of Christ. That is the message Jesus preached, and that is the message we are to preach.

Discipleship is a serious matter. It means putting Christ above family and possessions, and it includes counting the cost. But some say, "If the Gospel is preached that way, you'll drive the people

away.” But that is the way Jesus said the Gospel must be preached. We must be careful that we present the Gospel faithfully, no harder or no easier than Jesus presented it. It is true that many people will not respond to the Gospel, but the elect will. The Gospel is a message of absolute obedience to the living Savior and Lord. There will be people who will want to hang on to their old, religious systems, or who will not depart from an immoral relationship, or who are not willing to offend their families, and will still claim that they can be Christians because they have believed in Christ. But that is not the Gospel Jesus preached. He said that a person better consider those things before he makes a commitment.

When we bring the Gospel we must be willing to confront sin as Jesus did. Bringing up sin is uncomfortable for most of us but one cannot be saved without realizing that he has offended a holy God. To the unbelieving world we must preach that there is a living and holy God who will someday judge their eternal souls. If a person is not willing to lay hold of Christ by faith and confess Him, He will deny him before the living God and will sentence him to an eternal hell. People should know that if they do come to Christ, it might cost them their job, friends, family, etc. We are often afraid to tell people these things because we don't want to bring works into the Gospel. As a result, we don't tell them to give up their immorality or drunkenness or whatever. We imply to people that they can escape hell while continuing to live a godless life. Salvation is then reduced to fire insurance from hell. But Jesus never made those kind of bargains. As the crowds grew and followed Jesus, He made it clear that being a disciple meant making Him the number one priority in a person's life. In our presentation of the Gospel, in every situation, we must be careful to present the same message Jesus did. The heart of this message is the cross of Christ. A person must believe in Him, and that means sin must go. When a person comes to believe in Jesus as Savior and Lord, his life belongs to Him. Disciples can no longer live in immoral relationships or continue in false religious systems. The Gospel is a hard message to accept. In fact, only those who are being called by the Spirit of God will respond to it. But praise God—it is the message that brings life!

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