

# The Cost of Discipleship

3afterEpiphany

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1 Cor. 7:29-31

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Grace, peace, and mercy be to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

This morning, each of our readings has a common theme. That theme is the cost of discipleship. Each text comes at this theme from a slightly different angle, but they each deal with it. Look again at today's texts, as we hear about this cost from Jesus in the Gospel of Luke:

“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. Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple. For which of you, desiring to build a tower, does not first sit down and count the cost, whether he has enough to complete it? Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him, saying, “This man began to build and was not able to finish.” Or what king, going out to encounter another king in war, will not sit down first and deliberate whether he is able with ten thousand to meet him who comes against him with twenty thousand? And if not, while the other is yet a great way off, he sends a delegation and asks for terms of peace. So, therefore, any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple.”

First Jesus says a person must be able to hate his family, even father and mother, to follow Him. That's what we see in our Gospel text, with Simon and Andrew and the sons of Zebedee leaving everything behind, even their own father, to follow Jesus. Next Jesus speaks about a king who must decide if he is able to wage war against an opponent. The entire city of Nineveh considered God's Word from Jonah proclaiming its destruction. They realized that they could not withstand God's wrath, and so they repented.

But what of our third text, the Epistle from 1 Corinthians? How does it fit into the theme of the cost of discipleship? That's what we'll consider as we turn to it for our meditation this morning.

## Verse 1

Our text says: “This is what I mean, brothers: the appointed time has grown very short. From now on, let those who have wives live as though they had none, and those who mourn as though they were not mourning, and those who rejoice as though they were not rejoicing, and those who buy as though they had no goods, and those who deal with the world as though they had no dealings with it.”

These words are the opposite of what we might expect. The world teaches that we should follow our hearts or our emotions. Television shows and popular media encourage us to relate to characters because they are so likable. Then some of those characters go and do things which we know are wrong—things which are against God's Will—to try to weaken our resistance toward those actions. These shows cause us to develop an emotional attachment toward their characters; then play music designed to make us feel bad when that character is chastised for doing the things we know are wrong.

But sometimes it's not just television characters who do the wrong things. When a friend or family member does the wrong thing, our emotions might tell us to feel bad for that person. In the passage from Luke, though, Jesus makes it clear that we are not to follow our emotions. We are to love God more than our friends or even our own family members. God teaches us to live according to His Word, whether our emotions agree or not.

In both Luke's Gospel and our Epistle text, we are commanded to love God so much more than anyone else that by comparison we hate anyone other than God. This includes our very spouses, that we live in love toward God so much that it is as though we didn't even have a spouse.

What is more, we are commanded to live the opposite of how we want. If you are sinning and continue to do it to make yourself feel good, you are not worthy of following our Lord Jesus. “(A)ny one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple.”

### Verse 2

Brothers and sisters in Christ, we have been saved by the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus. We have been called to faith and discipleship in Him; and through God's Spirit, we continue to walk in Him. Through our baptism into Christ, we have not been called out of the world, but to live in the world, and yet not of it.

As we do, we live in a manner different than our neighbors, co-workers, friends, or even family. To them, it will appear that we are not rejoicing when they might expect us to, or that we won't be mourning when it would be deemed appropriate by the world. We live our lives in devotion and faith toward God. If we find that we cannot live in the world without succumbing to lust, we marry. If we find that we can live in the world without desire, we remain single. Both of these are God-pleasing ways in which to live and serve before Him.

When we have cause to mourn at funerals and afterward, we do not persist in grieving and hoping that they somehow hear us from heaven. Rather, we grieve, but with hope. That hope being the hope that we have in Jesus' resurrection: that we, too, will rise. We do not desire for them to return to this sinful place; we desire to be there with them according to God's timing. And in Christ Jesus, we have the assurance we will see our friends and family who believed when they were here again.

In Christ, we also discipline ourselves, praying that our wills be sacrificed to God's good and gracious will. In the Lord's Prayer, we pray that God would break and hinder every evil plan—even those of our own old sinful nature—so that we might live as His new creations. So we do rejoice, but we rejoice in those things which please God, not those which please our Old Adam.

With every other dealing with the world, we live as ones who are not going to remain here, but as ones who are only passing through. We are only strangers and pilgrims. So we don't settle here. We don't indulge in every opportunity but remain content with what the Lord has granted to us. Here's how Luther describes this section: “This is a general teaching for all Christians, that they should treasure that eternal blessing which is theirs in the faith, despising this life so that they do not sink too deeply into it either with love and desire or suffering and boredom, but should rather behave like guests on earth, using everything for a short time because of need and not for pleasure (Luther's Works, Vol. 28).”

### Verse 3

As we hear these things, we might think that the cost of discipleship seems great: giving up everything to follow God. And we realize that we are not able to pay it of ourselves. Even as ones who have been saved by the work of Christ, we find we are still sinners at the same time that we are saints. Our Lord Jesus has led the way. When He came to the earth as the manifestation of God in the flesh, He perfectly lived loving for God and loving those around Him. Then He took up His cross and was nailed to it at Calvary. Rising from the dead, He has gone ahead of us to prepare a place for us. Now, “the present form of this world is passing away.”

Today Jesus has called you through His Word to follow Him. Through His Holy Spirit, we are given the will and desire to take up our own crosses and follow Him. Just as “the present form of this world is passing away,” the Spirit is at work in each of you, transforming you to be like Christ.

This is an invisible process. And it is not completed in this life. That’s why time and time again we hear that God, who has begun this good work in you, will bring it to completion on the Day of our Lord Jesus Christ.

In Jesus’ Name. Amen.