

2008

Water & Spirit Ministries

# [THE COST OF DISCIPLESHIP]

Forsaking all to follow Christ.

Welcome to an exploration of Luke 14.16-35. In this passage we find Jesus warning those who follow him of the demands of discipleship. To believe in Christ is but the first step of the journey of discipleship, for this journey is the quest to become like Christ – following his example.

Everywhere Jesus traveled, great multitudes came to hear him and to be healed by him. The Gospel of Luke places emphasis on Jesus' journey to Jerusalem and the destiny that awaited him there. The central element of Jesus' destiny and mission is the cross; in following him, we too must bear our cross – representing, in general, the sacrifices endured in following Christ. Included in the sacrifices and cost is the disdain of the world that rejects, represses and persecutes followers of Christ – simply because we're different and unlike the world.

In Luke, Jesus begins a discussion of the cost of discipleship with the parable of the banquet:

<sup>16</sup>Then He said to him, "A certain man gave a great supper and invited many, <sup>17</sup>and sent his servant at supper time to say to those who were invited, 'Come, for all things are now ready.' <sup>18</sup>But they all with one accord began to make excuses. The first said to him, 'I have bought a piece of ground, and I must go and see it. I ask you to have me excused.' <sup>19</sup>And another said, 'I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I am going to test them, I ask you to have me excused.' <sup>20</sup>Still another said, 'I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come.' <sup>21</sup>So that servant came and reported these things to his master. Then the master of the house, being angry, said to his servant, 'Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in here the poor and the maimed and the lame and the blind.' <sup>22</sup>And the servant said, 'Master, it is done as you commanded, and still there is room.' <sup>23</sup>Then the master said to the servant, 'Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled. <sup>24</sup>For I say to you that none of those men who were invited shall taste my supper.'"

**Luke 14.16-24**

This open invitation results in many rushing into the kingdom of the Master. At Matthew 11.12, Christ informs us "And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and the violent seize it." The Greek terms typically translated as 'suffers violence' (biazetai) is more properly translated in this context as 'is rushed into' and the term translated 'taken by the violent' (biastai), is more accurately translated as 'one who hurries in without considering the consequences, or those who speedily pushed their way in.' This describes how men hastily seize the opportunity to enter the kingdom; man rushes in without considering the consequences or the true demands. From Luke 16.16: "The law and

the prophets were until John. Since that time the kingdom of God has been preached, and everyone is pressing into it.” We can see in this verse the imagery of people clamoring into the kingdom.

We find a parallel passage at Matthew 22.2-14. Beginning at verse 10:

“So those servants went out into the highways and gathered together all whom they found, both bad and good. And the wedding hall was filled with guests. But when the king came in to see the guests, he saw a man there who did not have on a wedding garment. So he said to him, ‘Friend, how did you come in here without a wedding garment?’ And he was speechless. Then the king said to the servants, ‘Bind him hand and foot, take him away, and cast him into outer darkness; there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’ For many are called, but few are chosen.”

He who is not properly dressed is he who did not consider the requirements or expectations of the occasion. This occasion, the supper or wedding, represents the kingdom of God which Christ will submit to the Father, as the bride enters into union with Christ. Entry to this kingdom is given those who become disciples of Christ, followers of the Way. This is the baptism into Christ (the Church) and is a **commitment** to make discipleship to Christ the supreme priority of one’s life. The first invitees who excused themselves from attending were consumed by the world and made worldly concerns (land, oxen, marriage) their greater priority. In the following passage, Christ is instructing his followers of the need to properly weigh and prioritize the life-giving commitment they are undertaking.

Reading the Scripture:

<sup>25</sup> Now great multitudes went with Him. And He turned and said to them,

<sup>26</sup> “If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple.

<sup>27</sup> “And whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple.

<sup>28</sup> “For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not sit down first and count the cost, whether he has enough to finish it –

<sup>29</sup> “lest, after he has laid the foundation, and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him,

<sup>30</sup> “saying, ‘This man began to build and was not able to finish.’

<sup>31</sup> “Or what king, going to make war against another king, does not sit down first and consider whether he is able with ten thousand to meet him who comes against him with twenty thousand?

<sup>32</sup> “Or else, while the other is still a great way off, he sends a delegation and asks conditions of peace.

<sup>33</sup> “So likewise, whoever of you does not forsake all that he has cannot be My disciple.

<sup>34</sup> “Salt is good; but if the salt has lost its flavor, how shall it be seasoned?

<sup>35</sup> “It is neither fit for the land nor for the dunghill, but men throw it out. He who has ears to hear, let him hear!”

**Luke 14.25-35**

There are several terms and expressions synonymous with 'discipleship.' Christianity, the kingdom of God, salvation, following Christ, baptism into Christ, the church, and the new covenant are all terms used to denote discipleship, which is essentially an apprenticeship under Christ. We are to learn from him how to be like him. Jesus warns us that there are serious and weighty requirements for following him, and we must carefully consider these if we are to truly ...be disciples, ...enter the kingdom, ...find salvation, ...be the church, ...enter the new covenant, ...or be baptized into the body. For one can rush to be baptized without genuinely committing to being a disciple of Christ, and be like the guest who was inappropriately dressed for the wedding and was bound and taken out. Yes, your faith will allow you to gain entry as an invited guest, one who is called, but unless your faith moves you to true discipleship, you will not be among the few who is chosen.

So, Christ sets to clarify the nature of this true discipleship. He tells us that we must "hate" our father, mother, wife, children, brothers, sisters, and our very life to have the power and ability to be true disciples. Of course, this is not intended literally, for this is the same Master that teaches us to love even our enemies. The term "hate" (miseo) is taken from its Old Testament use and means in a comparative sense to give one less priority than another (such as the meaning when Scripture says that "Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated"). The expression is more clearly revealed when we compare Luke 16.26 to Matthew 10.37:

"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."

So, Jesus is not telling us to hate, rather he is indicating that all things must be in proper perspective, and following him must be **THE** supreme priority, second to none, in one's life. The newly purchased land, or oxen, or the wife of the newly wedded were improperly placed in positions of priority over the invitation to the "great supper" – the invitation to follow Christ. We have an invitation to discipleship, nothing else in life, not even life, is more important.

If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me. **Luke 9.23**

Jesus gave us the example of *bearing the cross*. His determined journey to Jerusalem was for the purpose of bearing the cross. For the disciple, the cross becomes a metaphor for enduring suffering and self-denial. This power to persevere is derived from the recognition that a life of worldly attachments is ultimately empty in comparison to the fullness of the kingdom of God. Therefore, having carefully considered the costs (and reward), make an enduring commitment to follow him.

No one, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.

**Luke 9.62**

The dedication to doing the will of the Father must be unwavering, despite the response and allures of the world or concerns for self. It was presumably these worldly allures that caused Lot's wife to look back, and looking back, she was turned into a pillar of salt. This was not the salt that purifies and preserves life, but the salt without flavor which is worthless. The worthless salt is the foolish longing for the life of the world, which is not truly life, but death:

Whosoever shall seek to save his life shall lose it; and whosoever shall lose his life shall preserve it. **Luke 17.33**

Forsaking the worldly life is not a withdrawal from the world, but a refusal to live according to the values and ethos of the world. It is an embrace of the kingdom, its ethics and its ways.

We should note, it was the poor, the maimed, the lame and the blind who received the invitation after the allures of the world caused the elect to excuse themselves from the banquet. Those who were considered unfortunate in life proved to be fortunate in accepting the invitation to the supper; those of the world who were thought fortunate proved to be unfortunate as they, deceived by the illusive fortunes and pleasures of the world, misplaced their priorities and turned down the invitation to the supper (discipleship).

Then Jesus looked around and said to His disciples, "How hard it is for those who have riches to enter the kingdom of God!"

And the disciples were astonished at His words. But Jesus answered again and said to them, "Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God!

"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." **Mark 10.23-25**

The world deceives many with its promises of pleasure and gain that turns out to be no more than vapor. To chase the promises of the world is like chasing a ghost – it has no substance, therefore you can never ever grasp it, though many foolishly try.

It is the promise of Christ that is real. This is the promise of the kingdom of God, and with it, eternal life. We enter this kingdom through discipleship to Christ.

Jesus asked us to deny ourselves, for we are not to serve self, but God the Father. When we commit ourselves to serving him, we establish life-giving priorities. These are the priorities that places God always first, forsaking all else.

Like Christ, we must bear our cross. We must surrender our attachments to the world without looking back, and willingly sacrifice in giving to others as Christ sacrificed for us. This sacrifice could include suffering the humility of persecution from a world that resents the Godly spirituality.

Finally, we are to openly follow Christ. Our baptism into Christ (the Church and Kingdom) is a commitment to discipleship, a commitment we must carefully, solemnly and deliberately choose, having reached a full understanding of the cost. Having chosen to follow his way, having chosen to openly journey with him, we are to persevere without looking back. We find the power to persevere when we detach or free ourselves from all else by placing all in their proper priority.