



Chapter 3

THE COST OF DISCIPLESHIP

Several months ago, a businessman and I were having lunch together. During the meal, I asked him what was uppermost in his thinking. He replied that he was in the process of reevaluating the cost/results ratio in his corporation. The concept was simple. To stay in business, he had to make sure that the cost of manufacturing his product was not greater than the price for which he could sell it.

Even I could understand the importance of a cost/results ratio. If it cost me \$5 to make a product, and I sold it for \$4.50, I would soon be out of business. As I mused over this concept, I thought how much the benefits of being a Christian exceed the cost. In fact, discipleship has been designed by God with our best interest at heart. It was not designed to “help God out,” but rather to “*help us out.*”

God does not need our help. It is we who need God’s. Discipleship was designed by God in order to give us the help we need.

One spring a family of five was driving through Georgia in a Volkswagen. It was late at night and raining so heavily they could hardly see 100 feet down the road. As they were inching their way along, they noticed a man and woman walking along the highway in the pouring rain. They pulled over, asked if they could help, and noticed that the woman carried a baby in her arm.

She said they lived in a town several miles back but the electrical storm had caused a short in the wiring of their house, starting a fire that burned it to the ground. They had barely escaped with their lives and were walking to the next town some seven miles away to stay with

her sister and family until further provision could be made. Feeling sorry for the destitute family and realizing there was no room for them in the VW, the man reached into his wallet, pulled out \$20, gave it to the woman and drove off into the night.

A couple of miles down the highway, he stopped and asked his family, “How much money do you have?” Their pooled resources came to a little under \$100. He drove back to where the couple was still walking. “Do you have the money I gave you?” he asked.

Quite surprised, the woman said, “Yes, we do.”

“Then give it to me.”

Perplexed, she reached into her pocket, pulled out the \$20, and handed it to him. He combined it with the money he had and handed it all to her saying, “Here, our family would like you to have this.”

When I first heard this story, I thought, What a beautiful and precise illustration of how God treats us. Our Lord gives us so many wonderful gifts, and then He comes to us and says, “I would like to have them all back—every one of them.” He does this so He can combine them with His unlimited resources and give them all to us.

Discipleship is our opportunity to tap the infinite resources of God. It is our chance to give our lives to significance rather than mediocrity. In discipleship we are not doing God a favor, He is doing us a favor. It is vital that the disciple grasp this important concept.

However, Jesus also warns us to weigh the cost and weigh it well, for discipleship will cost us something. It will cost us our lives. But the results are infinitely greater than the cost, so much greater that one would be foolish to turn down such an offer.

Let's walk through Luke 14 together and note some principles of discipleship as Jesus brings this great concept into focus.

Verse 1: "And it came to pass, as He went into the house of one of the chief Pharisees to eat bread on the Sabbath day, that they watched Him." Wherever Jesus went, the eyes of people were upon Him. He claimed to be the Author of a brand new way of life. He said, "I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly" (John 10:10). And because of His claim to uniqueness, people watched His every move to see if He was genuine.

What was true for the Savior in this respect is true for all godly people. The Christian or "Christ-one" is an ambassador of Jesus Christ. As His disciples, we claim to be in touch with reality; and consequently, the world watches us also.

Our Lord always lived by principle, never by circumstance. As His disciples, how do we live? By circumstance or by principle?

Your car is old; things are wearing out and are starting to give you trouble. The time has come for you to trade it in. So you make that familiar trek to the dealer. The salesman looks you in the eye, "Is there anything wrong with it?" You now have the choice to live by principle or by circumstance. Do you tell him the truth or a lie? The disciple is one who in every area of his life determines from the Bible what is right and lives it consistently, rather than allowing circumstances to shape his conduct.

Verse 2: "And, behold, there was a certain man before Him which had the dropsy." Jesus was constantly in touch with the needy. They were always "before Him." Seldom, if ever, in our

Lord's ministry did a person come for help and get turned down. Jesus seemed to deny the Syrophenician woman, but even then He ultimately met her need.

Another great principle of discipleship comes into focus for us. The disciple is one who is in constant touch with people in need. As Jesus' disciple, are you constantly meeting other people's needs?

Verses 8-10: "When thou art bidden of any man to a wedding, sit not down in the highest room; lest a more honorable man than thou be bidden of him; and he that bade thee and him come and say to thee, 'Give this man place'; and thou begin with shame to take the lowest room. But when thou art bidden, go and sit down in the lowest room; that when he that bade thee cometh, he may say unto thee, 'Friend, go up higher'; then shalt thou have worship in the presence of them that sit at meat with thee."

Jesus is in the house of one of the chief Pharisees. It is time to eat, and people begin to elbow their way to the best seats around the table. Observing this, He uses the situation to teach a principle.

When you come to the table, don't take the seat of honor. For when the host comes in with the guest of honor, he will have to ask you to move. The host will feel embarrassed because he has to move you; the guest of honor will feel embarrassed because he has to take your place; all the other guests will be embarrassed because they have to witness all this; and you will be embarrassed because you are the one moved.

Rather, says Jesus, when you come to the table, find the lowest seat and sit there. Then when the host comes in and realizes that you, the guest of honor, are sitting in the lowest seat, he will move you to the seat of honor. As he moves you, he will think, My, what a humble man he is. And as you move from the lowest to the best seat, you will be honored before everyone. How pleasant! Jesus is providing instruction that will result in your feeling good rather than bad.

An important lesson for the disciple emerges from these three verses; namely, that the commandments of God are never whimsical or arbitrary but are designed for our best. God is not in heaven thinking, I wonder how I can make life miserable for these creatures of Mine. Instead, He is thinking, What are some guidelines I can give my children to teach them how to live life to the fullest. God's laws and commandments are designed to help us, not hinder us. They are meant to make us happy and fulfilled. They were written to keep us out of trouble. If the disciple could learn this one lesson, many of life's problems would be resolved.

Verse 11: "For whosoever exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted."

Just as football has its double reverse, so also does God. It is in the form of a simple truth: our appetites and innate desires are not wrong in themselves but are God-created. They become wrong when we seek to satisfy or fulfill them in any unscriptural way.

For example, there is nothing wrong with wanting to be exalted or to be first or to live or to be free or to be a leader—or any of a dozen other drives or appetites. What Jesus is saying is that they must be satisfied in His way. The key to being first is being last. The key to living is dying. The key to being free is being Christ's slave. The key to getting is giving. The key to being exalted is to live a life characterized by humility.

Everybody wants to live, but nobody wants to die. Everybody wants to be free but nobody wants to be a slave. Everybody wants to get, but nobody wants to give. And this is precisely where we run into conflict with God.

He created the world, He made us, He made life, He made the rules by which we ought to live our lives. So often we want the results that God promises, but we don't want to pay the price. And in our scheming little minds, we think, "Surely it must be possible to get without giv-

ing, to be first without really being last, to live without really dying." And so we endeavor to shortcut God's rules for the game of life. But the Bible teaches us that when we shortcut the rules we short circuit the system. In no way can a person get without giving or truly live without dying. The disciple is one who has learned this great truth and is living his life accordingly.

Verses 15-24: And when one of them that sat at meat with Him heard these things, he said unto Him, 'Blessed is he that shall eat bread in the kingdom of God.'

Then said He unto him, "A certain man made a great supper, and bade many; and sent his servant at supper time to say to them that were bidden, 'Come, for all things are now ready.' And they all with one consent began to make excuse. The first said unto him, 'I have bought a piece of ground, and I must go and see it. I pray thee have me excused.' And another said, 'I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come.'"

"So that servant came, and showed his Lord these things. 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 hither the poor, and the maimed, and the halt, and the blind.' And the servant said, 'Lord, it is done as thou hast commanded, and yet there is room.' And the Lord said unto the servant, "Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled. For I say unto you, that none of those men which were bidden shall taste of my supper."

As Jesus is eating with the chief Pharisee and his guests, one of the people in a burst of enthusiasm says, "Blessed is he that shall eat bread in the Kingdom of God!" Jesus then proceeds to tell the parable of the Great Supper. The parable obviously refers to the kingdom of heaven and to that great feast with God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Why would anyone reject an invitation to dine at God's table? Only if they did not know who was extending the invitation. As Paul says, "None of the princes of this world knew: for had they

known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory” (1 Cor. 2:8). The Romans and the religious leaders of the Jews crucified Jesus Christ because they did not know who He was. People today refuse God because they are not aware of who is extending the invitation.

The parable of the Great Supper reveals that a preoccupation with the insignificant makes it impossible to bring priorities into perspective

Possibly if our Lord Jesus were to tell the parable today, He would talk about building a dream house instead of buying a piece of ground. Instead of five yoke of oxen, He would refer to a business venture or playing the stock market. His marriage example would remain the same, for marriage through the centuries has never changed.

Becoming a Christian is free of charge. It costs the believer absolutely nothing. “For by grace are ye saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest any man should boast” (Eph. 2:8-9). But there is a cost attached to becoming a disciple. The cost is to become involved in God’s “things” rather than our own. How easy it is for the Christian to become preoccupied with his dreams, his aspirations, his own little deal, and miss God’s perfect plan for his life.

Rarely does the Spirit of God shout at a person. His voice usually comes in the form of an inner prodding (as the believer reads the Scriptures). The disciple is one who is in tune with the voice of the Spirit of God.

Verse 25: “And there went great multitudes with Him.” It has always been in vogue to speak a good word for Jesus. The politician is assured of extra votes if he can work a quote or two from the Bible into his orations. Gandhi, though a staunch Hindu, was an admirer of Jesus Christ. Yes, the multitudes have always followed Jesus. But note who it is that hears Jesus Christ. “Then drew near unto him all the publicans and sinners for to hear Him” (Luke 15:1). The multitudes followed Him; the publicans and sinners heard Him.

This is the way it has always been, and it is the way it will probably always be. Christianity is a religion of rescue. It is designed for the desperate. It is for people who have a craving for something more than they can eke out of life by themselves. They are candidates for what Jesus has to say. They are the ones who “hear Him,” who not only listen to what He says, but act on it. One of the fundamental requisites for true discipleship is a spirit of desperation that burns deep within the soul.

Verses 26-33: “If any man come to Me and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, he cannot be My disciple. 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? Lest haply, after he hath laid the foundation, and is not able to finish it, all that behold it begin to mock him, saying, ‘This man began to build, and was not able to finish.’ Or what king, going to make war against another king, sitteth not down first, and consulteth whether he be able with 10,000 to meet him that cometh against him with 20,000? Or else, while the other is yet a great way off, he sendeth an ambassador, and desireth conditions of peace.

So likewise, whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be My disciple.”

Now we begin to talk about the cost. It starts with a willingness to renounce all other loyalties in preference to Jesus Christ.

Numbers 14 describes the children of Israel at Kadesh-barnea about to enter the Promised Land when the twelve scouts return, bringing back an “evil report.” The cost of entering the Promised Land is far too high; for alas, giants live there, the sons of Anak (see Num. 13:32-33). In a moment of terror, the people decide to turn back, with the excuse that the giants would kill their wives and children.

God never promised there would be no giants. He simply promised that He would assume

responsibility for their safe arrival in the Promised Land. But in their panic, the Hebrews hid behind their wives and children. One of the first signs of unbelief is an undue concern for family.

To be a disciple of Jesus Christ I must follow Him and do His bidding even when it appears that it will cost me my mother and my father, my wife (or husband), my children.

To drive home the impact of this cost, Jesus uses two graphic illustrations—building a tower and preparing for battle.

Verse 28 describes a man starting to build a tower but not finishing it. Have you ever started something and failed to finish it? Have you ever made a promise and failed to keep it? Have you ever vowed a vow and not fulfilled it? If so, Solomon has a word of counsel for you: “Be not rash with thy mouth, and let not thine heart be hasty to utter anything before God; for God is in heaven, and thou upon earth. Therefore let thy words be few. When thou vowest a vow unto God, defer not to pay it; for He hath no pleasure in fools; pay that which thou hast vowed. Better is it that thou shouldst not vow, than that thou shouldst vow and not pay” (Eccl. 5:2, 4,5).

When I lived in Fort Worth I had to make frequent business trips to Dallas. As I drove along the freeway, I used to pass a large structure which appeared to be an unfinished apartment house. The skeleton was there; but for some reason, it was never completed. Month after month I drove past the structure, but there was no apparent progress on the building. Later I discovered that a man had started building, but had miscalculated the cost. He had exhausted his credit and was unable to draw any income from the apartment house. It stood as a monument to his poor planning.

Jesus used this kind of situation to emphasize the importance of carefully counting the cost of being a disciple before committing oneself. Don't start something unless you are willing to finish it.

Note that Jesus said, “...and is not able to finish it.” The Dallas contractor was not able to finish

his building. For the disciple, however, the ability traces back to the will. The ability to be a disciple is ours through the resources of Jesus Christ (2 Peter 1:3); the only factor we need to add to the equation is that of our will.

The Lord Jesus gave a second illustration on counting the cost: a king going to war. When engaging our enemy in battle, two questions must be answered. First, can I with my resources beat him? Second, do I want to pay the price involved in beating him? If the answer to either of these questions is no, it is wiser to send an ambassador and sue for peace.

The Lord Jesus said, “Upon this rock I will build My Church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it” (Matt. 16:18). Gates are for defense, not offense. Have you every heard of a person going to battle swinging a pair of gates at the enemy? Gates are used to keep the enemy out. The disciple is called upon to do battle against the massed forces of Satan, to break down the gates of Hell and set the prisoners free in Jesus' name. Jesus promises that when we do battle like this, the gates of Hell shall not prevail against us. But there is a cost involved in doing battle.

“If you are unwilling to pay the cost,” says the Lord, “then send your ambassador and sue for peace.” As a Christian you can go to the devil and say, “Look, Satan, I am already a Christian and I am on my way to heaven; but I want to make a deal with you. If you leave me alone, I will leave you alone. I will not be a true disciple of Jesus Christ. I will not threaten your hold over the lives of men or invade your kingdom. In return, don't you bother me. Let me live in comfort and quiet.”

And the devil will say, “Friend, you've got yourself a deal.”

But remember, Satan is a liar and the father of liars. You have no guarantee that he will not double-cross you. The cost you will pay for not being a disciple is infinitely greater than the cost you pay for being one.

Verses 34,35: “Salt is good; but if the salt have lost his savor, wherewith shall it be seasoned? It is neither fit for the land, nor yet for the dunghill; but men cast it out. He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.”

Jesus concludes His dissertation on discipleship with this strange parable of the savorless salt. For a long while I could not understand its relation to discipleship. Then one day it occurred to me that this parable is an illustration of the believer who refuses to be a disciple. It is God’s design that every believer be a disciple. But when one goes back on his commitment, he becomes good for nothing. You can’t save him; he is already saved. You can’t use him; he is unavailable. He is like savorless salt. “Men cast it out.”

Week after week as you see him going along to church, he becomes an example of what not to be. All you can say to your “Timothy” is, “See that man? He is a believer who has refused to pay the price of becoming a disciple. In making that decision, he has relegated himself to a life of mediocrity. Given a chance to be first, he has chosen to be last. To use the words of the Lord Jesus, he is a savorless salt. Whatever you do, don’t become like him.”

When Cortez landed at Vera Cruz in 1519 to begin his dramatic conquest of Mexico with a pocket-sized force of 700 men, he purposely set fire of his fleet of eleven ships. His men on the shore watched their only means of retreat sinking to the bottom of the Gulf of Mexico. With no means of retreat, there was only one direction in which to move, forward into the Mexican interior to meet whatever might come their way.

In paying the price for being Christ’s disciple, you too must purposefully destroy all avenues of retreat. Resolve in your heart today that whatever the price for being His follower, you are willing to pay it. Either that, or send your ambassador and sue for peace.