What Does It Cost to Follow Jesus?
Scripture Text: Matthew 16:21-28

Introduction

We have been learning about discipleship, what it means to be a disciple of Jesus Christ. If you recall, we started by looking at some passages about God building His Church upon the cornerstone of Jesus Christ. Every member of the Church must be built upon the foundation of Christ. We have also learned that God wants His children to become mature followers of Jesus Christ. We have been learning how we should help one another to become mature disciples of Jesus Christ. God uses us to help each other to grow into the likeness of Christ. God uses each one of us to build His Church, one living stone after another. We do this by growing in our relationship with Christ and helping others to grow in Christ. We model this by loving one another, sharing God’s Word with one another, praying with and for one another, and serving one another as Jesus did. Essentially, discipleship means we ought to be Jesus to each other.

Last week, we looked at a fundamental question about being Jesus’ disciple. People have all sorts of ideas about who Jesus is. Even His own disciples had trouble knowing exactly who He was. The most important question for anyone is, “Who is Jesus”. He is the Savior, the Son of God, and also the Son of Man. Essentially, Jesus is Lord and we must surrender our lives to Lord Jesus if we are to be His disciples. We also learned last week that Jesus is building His Church and the evil powers that attack His Church will not be able to destroy her. Satan may attack the Church, and He certainly shows His ugly face in this passage, but He will not prevail against her. That does not mean that Satan does not influence people or attack the Church and cause problems for Jesus’ disciples. This passage reveals to us the importance of really knowing Christ and why He came, and completely surrendering to Him and God’s will no matter what happens.

A Disciple Knows Why Jesus Came

Now, imagine being one of the disciples, following Jesus around Galilee, seeing the miracles He performed and listening to the teachings He delivered. You have just heard that He is the Savior and the Son of God. Imagine being there to witness all of this and to know the Savior of mankind who God had long promised to send long ago. You would probably be very excited. You would probably have all sorts of ideas about what Jesus would do. Then imagine hearing something that did not make sense. Imagine hearing something that just did not match what you believed about this person. That is what Peter and the disciples heard from Jesus in this passage. Jesus warned His disciples against telling anyone that He was the Christ, since the concept of the Messiah was misunderstood by so many people. Even the disciples themselves did not fully understand Jesus, as this passage reveals. Look at the following verse.

Matthew 16:21 21 From that time Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised.

Scripture quoted from the English Standard Version (ESV) unless otherwise noted.
What did the disciples know about Jesus? Even when Peter confessed who Jesus was, there was some misunderstanding about His mission, which we will see in a minute. This moment in Jesus’ ministry marked the beginning of His journey to Jerusalem. This marked the beginning of His march to the cross. Up to this point, Jesus’ mission of the cross had only been implied; but here, He made it absolutely clear. Jesus’ suffering, death, and resurrection, were necessary for God’s plan to unfold and to fulfill scripture. The cross was central to Jesus’ purposes on earth. And here, Jesus revealed the nature of Him being the Messiah. He revealed to His disciples the nature of His mission, the reason God sent Him to us. He told His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, suffer many things, and die at the hands of the leaders there. Yes, Jesus is the Messiah, but He is a suffering Messiah. Jesus is the Son of God, but He is the Son of God sacrificed for us. Jesus is the Suffering Servant of Isaiah 53. We need to know why Christ came.

A Disciple Submits to the Will of God

So, here comes the moment of truth. You have heard from Jesus’ own mouth why He came to mankind. You have heard that His mission is to go to Jerusalem, suffer many things and die at the hands of those He came to save. How do you react to this? What would you say? The idea of the Messiah suffering and dying did not make sense to the Jews, but that is who Jesus is. Peter heard what Jesus said and he did not like it. In fact, he did not like it so much that he rebuked Jesus. Look at the following passage.

Matthew 16:22–23

22 And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, “Far be it from you, Lord! This shall never happen to you.”

23 But he turned and said to Peter, “Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me. For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man.”

Peter made an extremely strong protest against what Jesus had just told him. I do not know about you, but I would be a little nervous rebuking the one I confessed to be the Son of God. This just shows Peter and the disciples still did not fully understand who Jesus was. Even after confessing Jesus to be the Christ and the Son of God, they did not understand what that really meant. Can you imagine telling Jesus, “You are wrong”? That is essentially what Peter did. Peter had just confessed who Christ was by the revelation of God the Father and now he told Jesus that He was wrong. This was something that one just would not have done in a Jewish master-disciple relationship. It would have been extremely bold, even rude, for a disciple to correct his master, let alone rebuke him. Peter, like most of his fellow Jews, resisted the idea that the Messiah must suffer, even though it is found throughout the Old Testament (Psalm 22; Isaiah 53; Zechariah 12:10; 13:7). Peter told Jesus that this would never happen to Him.

Despite God’s profound revelation to Peter of Jesus’ identity, and despite the Savior’s promise to build His Church upon Peter (Matthew 16:13–20), Peter just did not get it. Peter did not understand Jesus’ mission must include suffering and death. And so, Peter went, in a short a time, from being the rock upon which Jesus would build His church to being a stumbling stone for Jesus’ mission. This was an opportunity for Satan to attempt to destroy God’s work by setting Peter’s mind on human things, instead of godly things.

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This was a decisive moment to either follow God’s will or to follow Satan’s will. Satan loves to lead God’s people astray. Satan loves to get God’s people off of God’s mission. And so, Jesus had to rebuke Peter. Jesus had to show Peter that he was not setting his mind on the things of God. Jesus had submitted to the will of God, even unto death, and that is exactly what we all must do. A disciple of Christ must submit to God’s will no matter what it is, otherwise we become a hinderance to God’s work. We must change our human-centered ideas about Jesus and His Church and submit to His will no matter what. Are you setting your mind on the things of God’s? Have you submitted to His will?

A Disciple Denies His/Her Life to Follow Jesus

Following the will of God is a wonderful and blessed thing, but the road upon which it is traveled is rough with many hardships. Let no one say that following Jesus is easy. If it is easy, it may mean you are not on the right path. For Jesus to follow the Father’s will meant experiencing the shame of rejection from His own people, even from His closest friends, and death by crucifixion. Most people who follow Jesus get that. They know Jesus suffered and died for them. What many of us do not realize is the cost of being His disciple. Salvation may be a free gift, meaning we do not earn it (Ephesian 2:8-9), but it is not without a cost. Anyone who chooses to follow Jesus should count the cost of being His disciple. As Jesus once said, who builds a tower and does not first count the cost of completing it? What king goes to war with another without first considering whether he can win the battle (Luke 14:25-33)? Look at the following verse.

Matthew 16:24 Then Jesus told his disciples, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.

Jesus is the glorious Messiah. He is the Son of God and Son of Man. Jesus, however, could not reign as the glorious Messiah until He went to the cross as God’s Suffering Servant. Likewise, Jesus’ disciples cannot reign with Him until they deny themselves and suffer with Him. Those who are Jesus’ disciples must suffer with the suffering Messiah. In fact, Jesus’ description of denying oneself and suffering with Him was crucifixion. Jesus said that anyone who follows Him, anyone who wants to be His disciple, must take up a cross. Crucifixion is a shocking description for discipleship. A disciple of Christ must die to his or her own self-will and embrace God’s will, no matter what the cost is. A disciple of Christ must follow Jesus even if it leads to his or her death. We must be willing to die for Him. To follow Jesus requires the disciple to follow the example of Jesus, emulating His character and behavior. Jesus gave three reasons why Christ-like self-denial and sacrifice is the path all of His disciples must pursue. Let us look at these three reasons.

Matthew 16:25-27 For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what shall a man give in return for his soul? For the Son of Man is going to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay each person according to what he has done.

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The first reason states a paradox, that preserving your own life leads to self-destruction, whereas denying oneself leads to self-fulfillment. For whoever would save his life will lose it. The person who rejects God’s will and instead pursues his own will for his life ultimately loses everything he is trying to protect. The second reason for self-denial speaks of the folly of gaining material wealth while losing one’s own soul. It is foolish to acquire wealth and riches and lose one’s own soul in the pursuit. Acquiring all of the money, pleasure, and power of this world brings no lasting benefit if one forfeits his or her soul to spiritual death and separation from God. Jesus mentioned earlier in Matthew that we ought to lay up treasure in heaven, not on earth, where it will truly last (Matthew 6:19-21). The third reason for taking up one’s cross is the prospect of future reward at the glorious return of Jesus with His angels. For Jesus is going to come again with His angels in the glory of His Father and will bring judgment for those who have chosen to follow their own will. Jesus will reward only those who have taken up the cross.

The values of this world and the ways of man always threaten to infiltrate the Church. Jesus’ disciples need to constantly pursue Him and be different from the world. The point is not that glory and reward never await faithful disciples of Christ, but that such things are attained only after a life of self-denial that follows in the footsteps of Jesus. God does not call all His followers to suffer equally or in the same way. But, those who preach only the material blessings of Christ, or who promise freedom from persecution as a reward for Christian maturity, contradict Jesus’ teaching and risk being excluded from His kingdom. Prosperity is by way of the cross, but that may seem distant to many of us. Some of us cannot fathom having to die for following Jesus. What does this look like for our daily walk with Christ? If Jesus asks His disciples to be willing to die for Him, then it is nothing for Him to ask them to give up their time. How many of us schedule time for God? How many of us are willing to do this or that for Christ and His Church as long as it is convenient or does not conflict with our own desires? If we are willing to die for Christ, then we should certainly be willing to give up our comforts and our own desires. We must be willing to sacrifice whatever we have at the foot of the cross.

**Conclusion**

In closing, if you are following Jesus as Lord, if you are His disciple, then you must deny yourself, you must sacrifice your own life, and you must follow Jesus wherever He may go. A disciple of Jesus Christ is one who has surrendered His or her life to Christ and is following Him wherever He leads. This is a perfect time to consider the cost of discipleship. The season of Lent reminds us of Jesus’ sacrifice and invites us to share in His suffering. It reminds us that the road of suffering for Jesus does lead to the glorious resurrection and new life in Him. The momentary afflictions, trials, and tribulations of this earthly life do not compare to God’s wonderful promise of eternal life with Him in heaven (Romans 8:18). The road of discipleship ultimately leads to glory, which is something Jesus showed His closest disciples (Matthew 16:28). All of Jesus’ disciples, though, have the promise of seeing Jesus come in glory. This road to glory is through the cross. Are you His disciple today? Are you following Him wherever He may lead? If not, surrender your life to Him that you may receive abundant with Him. This is good news. Thanks be to God. Amen!

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