

The Cost of Discipleship

O Lord, we come with our hearts bowed before You in thanksgiving. And again, just proclaiming that there is none like You, Lord. You stand alone in Your holiness. You are the great lover of our souls. And so, we look to You and ask You to speak. And we thank You in Your most wonderful name, Lord Jesus.

I have this thing plastered in my Bible which has been here for about thirty years. I have read it once before here. But if I were to ask the question of us: "What is that distinguishing characteristic in your life that separates you from the world? Of course, everyone has to answer that question for themselves. But what is that one distinguishing characteristic that separates you from the world?

I will read this poem by Amy Carmichael, and it has meant a lot to me over the years. It is about thirty years in my Bible, and it is called "No Scar."

Hast thou no scar?

No hidden scar on foot, or side, or hand?
I hear thee sung as mighty in the land,
I hear them hail thy bright ascendant star,
Hast thou no scar?

Hast thou no wound?

Yet I was wounded by the archers, spent,
Leaned Me against a tree to die, and rent
by ravening beasts that compassed Me, I swooned:
Hast thou no wound?

No wound, no scar?

Yet as the Master shall the servant be,
And, pierced are the feet that follow Me;
But thine are whole: can he have followed far
Who has no wound nor scar?

Introduction

In Romans 12:1-2 there are two verses that we are all very familiar with. And Paul is crying out, as it were:

"I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God."

Well, today we are just going to really look at that first verse. Maybe someday, on another occasion, we could look at that second verse. But we are just going to look at this first verse today.

The Meaning of “Beseech”

I beseech you, brethren. When Paul uses that word “beseech,” here is this man who was in love with Christ. He had experienced the goodness of Christ towards him, the mercy and the kindness shown him, the demonstration of God's love for him. He grew and grew in a greater and greater appreciation of that great love of Christ for him. It compelled him.

So, in this word “beseech,” there is this pleading from the heart of Paul to these believers in Rome. He says, “I beseech you, brethren, by the mercies of God.” What he is saying there to them, actually, is that he wants them to take account of the great mercies that they have been shown. Wrapped up in that word “mercies” was the kindness he had shown them, the gentleness, the patience, the long-suffering, the revelation of Christ to them. He is saying, based on that, that should be the impetus in their lives that drives them forward. Therefore, “by the mercies of God, present yourselves a living sacrifice.”

The Motivation of Our Lives

It was to be the motivation of their lives. The Lord Jesus said, “No one takes my life from Me. I lay it down.” Here it says, “I beseech you, by the mercies of God, present your bodies a living sacrifice.” That is what we see in the Lord Jesus when he says, “No one takes My life from Me. I lay it down.” It was a living sacrifice.

In fact, when we look at the Lord Jesus, His whole life was sacrificial. From the moment that He was incarnate, from the moment that He left His throne in heaven and became a man and walked on this earth, He was living this life of sacrifice. He was sacrificed, crucified before the foundations of the world. This was His life. His life was for one thing, and that was to satisfy the very heart of His Father and to fulfill that for which he was sent. That was His life.

Set Aside By God For Himself

It says that as you present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God. This issue of holiness is that he is saying to them, “You have been set aside by God for Himself.” That is what makes you holy. God is the only One who designates holiness. He says, “Present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God.” But at the same time, there needs to be something stirring in our hearts where we then turn to God and say, “Lord, I separate myself unto You.”

So, God has separated us unto Himself, and yet there is something that he wants to do in our lives where we say from our heart, “Lord, I separate myself unto You. I offer myself to You. You are worthy of all my love and devotion.” This is an issue of the will, not of emotion. Now, emotion can be involved in it, but the decision is a decision out of the will. There is a recognition of God that He is wonderful and holy. It turns us to say, “Lord, I want to give myself to You fully. You are worthy of all of my love and devotion.”

Counting the Cost of Discipleship

Are you ready? Are you ready to present yourself, your body, as a living sacrifice upon this sacrificial altar? It is not something to be taken lightly. There is a cost involved in discipleship. There is a cost involved. But before we throw ourselves, as it were, on the altar, we need to count the cost. Jesus makes that quite plain as He deals with those who are around Him, He makes that quite plain. As the Master is, so shall the servant be. Jesus placed Himself on the altar of His cross. He was that living sacrifice, fully acceptable to God, holy unto God.

The Call to Die – Death Precedes Resurrection

When Christ calls, He bids us to come and die. Now, we do not really want to hear that kind of word, but that is the truth. When Christ calls us, He calls us to die. But that dying leads to life. Without the dying, you will not experience the life; that is just the way it is. Unless there is a death involved, you cannot see the power of the resurrection. We only see that in the Lord Jesus' life as our example. He went to the cross, He laid down His life, and then there was this resurrection that took place. All the power of God was vested in Christ, and He rose from the grave. He proved everything that He said was true. If He had not risen from the grave, then we could have discarded it all. But He rose from the dead and put a seal on everything He had done as being true.

The Call to Leave All and Follow the Lord

The Calling of Levi

Luke's Gospel: 5:27-28: "After these things He (Jesus) went out and saw a tax collector named Levi (also known as Matthew), sitting at the tax office. And He said to him, "Follow Me." So, he left all, rose up, and followed Him." There was something. Here was Levi sitting in the tax collector's booth at work, and Jesus is passing by and sees him and says, "Follow Me." There was something in Jesus' voice that spoke of power, that spoke of authority; so much so that Matthew got up from his tax table there and left all.

It was not something that you might say was done easily. Everything was tied up in Matthew as related to that tax booth. That is where his employment was. That is where his stature was. That is where he received praise and felt worth for what he was doing, in spite of even the persecution he was experiencing from other Jews. But there was something in Christ's voice when He said, "Follow Me," that just gripped Matthew and took him out of that booth. The Bible says, "And he left all." We never hear of Matthew going back to that booth again. There was something that transpired within Matthew that said, "Though that was all important to me, it is not as important as Him." There was something, and he was captured by Christ in such a way that he left all with no regrets. There is a cost involved in discipleship.

The Calling of Simon Peter

In Luke 5:1-11 we know the story here of Simon Peter, James, and John, the sons of Zebedee, who were fishermen, and they had gone fishing. They fished all night, but they

did not catch anything. Jesus came along, stepped into one of the boats, and began to preach to the crowd that had been following them. When He was all done addressing the crowd, He said to Simon Peter, "Put out a ways and lower your nets." Peter said to Him, "Oh Lord, we fished all night and did not catch a thing, but at Your bidding, I will do that."

Well, they went out and they lowered the nets, and they caught this abundance of fish. When Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord." There was something in what Peter was saying just then when he was saying, "Depart from me, Lord, for I am such a sinful man." Oh, but at the same time, there was something in Peter's heart that was saying, "Do not leave me. Do not! I have never seen anything like this before. I have never met anyone like You before. Please do not leave me."

When Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, oh Lord." For he and all who were with him were astonished at the catch of fish which they had taken. So also, were James and John, the sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon. And Jesus said to Simon, "Do not be afraid. From now on, you will catch men." So, when they had brought their boats to land, they forsook all and followed Him. Again, this was not something that was done flippantly. There was something that gripped their hearts. They saw something in Jesus that they wanted now more than the fish, more than the boats, more than their homes, more than their families. No. They were ready to forsake all and follow Christ.

A Personal Story

Are you ready to do that? This is part of the cost of discipleship. Is there something in your heart that is ready to walk away from everything else to follow Christ? I will tell you just this little story. It is actually quite a big story, but I am going to make just a little story.

In 1972, when I had come to the Lord, I began to meet with about 15 to 20 other young people, who were in our twenties. Some of us had children, and we had been captured by the Lord. We were meeting on Tuesday evenings in the basement of a Catholic church. We would come with guitars, and we would be singing some songs and reading from the Gospels and sharing what Christ was doing in our lives. It was wonderful! We had this wonderful fellowship. We used to go on summer vacations together. It was great. At that time in my life, it was the first time I actually started to have a steady job. I had just recently bought a little tiny house out on Long Island. Things were just good, you know, just good.

About two years into this situation, in these relationships, all of a sudden, my wife and I began to have a sensing in our hearts that God wanted to move us. I could not understand that because everything was good; everything was stable. What was happening was great. But we had this sense that God was wanting to move us. So, we began to pray. Then we asked the brothers and sisters to pray with us about this. And as

young as we were in the Lord, we began to put out fleeces before the Lord. Every time we would put out a fleece, boy, he would answer it just like it was supposed to come, as it were. And we did this a number of times to the point that we felt not to obey would have been sin.

We had this thought about moving to Florida, which I never liked because at that time in my life, I thought New York was heaven. But He showed me that that was not true. Yet there was this stirring in our hearts along with all of these fleeces that He met. So, we decided to take two weeks off from work and travel down to Florida and see what the Lord might do. We started traveling, and we stopped at Orlando and Fort Lauderdale and some other places. Every time we came to a new place, we would say, "Wow, this is really neat." It was like paradise with all the palm trees, and other beautiful things. "Wow! This is really good."

Yet that place did not really seem to be where He wanted us. So, we traveled to the next town, and the same thing, until we went over this bridge in Port Charlotte, Florida. As we were going over this bridge over this body of water, about halfway over we looked at each other, and we knew this is where God wanted us. Interestingly enough, after living there for a while, we discovered that the name of the body of water that that bridge was going over was called Holy Spirit Harbor.

Well, we go back to New York, and we have to tell everyone there that God is moving us. So that meant I had to let my mom and dad know that we were moving to a place where we did not have a home, I did not have a job, nothing. But we knew God wanted to move us. So I had to tell my parents, my wife Carol at the time had to tell her parents, her siblings, my siblings, my children were going to be now uprooted from their schools, my friends, the brothers and sisters, my cousins, who we grew up together. All my history was there, but we knew we had to go because of obedience. God can show us things that he would like us to do, but obedience has to be involved. And that is what we did.

Then we moved to Florida just like that, not having anything of any stability, nothing, but God was so faithful. Over those years, he proved himself faithful. We began to see Him like we had never seen Him before, as our Provider. He just built relationships. Actually, after a while, a number of my family moved to Florida with us. God is faithful. *He is faithful.*

The Rich Young Ruler

Discipleship will cost you, and you need to be aware of it. If you are going to follow after Jesus, know this; it will cost you.

Mark 10:17-27: "Now as He was going out on the road, one came running, knelt before Him, and asked Him, 'Good Teacher, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?' So, Jesus said to him, 'Why do you call Me good? No one is good but One, that is, God. You know the commandments: 'Do not commit adultery, Do not murder, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Do not defraud, Honor your father and your mother.'"

And he answered and said to Him, "Teacher, all these things I have kept from my youth." Then Jesus, looking at him, loved him, and said to him, "One thing you lack: Go your way, sell whatever you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, take up the cross, and follow Me." But he was sad at this word, and went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions."

Now there was a cost to be paid, and Jesus made this quite clear to him. "Do you want to follow Me? Then all of these other things actually stand between you and Me. All of that religious activity, all of those things that you have, come between you and Me. But if you want to follow Me, then you have to forsake all of those things and follow Me." What is important to you? Sometimes we just have to ask ourselves that question.

Nothing Between Us and the Lord

What keeps me from intimacy with Christ? Now, you might have a relationship with the Lord Jesus, where it is like you can have some of God and some of the world, but the Lord wants all of you; He wants all of me. And He will be faithful to point out what keeps you from having that intimate, abiding life with Him. Will we obey? When this young man approached Jesus and said, "What must I do?" It is as if he was saying, "Okay, Jesus, give me the task, and show me what I need to do. What else can I add to my resume?"

He had already given Jesus the resume: "Yes, I have done all those things from my youth, but I know I need to do something else." But for him, it was just adding something else to the resume. And Jesus was saying, "No, I want you to wipe that all clean. I want nothing between you and Me." Actually, He asks the same thing of you and me.

Suffering the Loss of All Things

In Philippians 3:3-8 Paul is saying: "For we are the circumcision, who worship God in the Spirit, rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh, though I also might have confidence in the flesh. If anyone else thinks he may have confidence in the flesh, I more so: circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews; concerning the law, a Pharisee; concerning zeal, persecuting the church; concerning the righteousness which is in the law, blameless."

"But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ. Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, ..."

He had come into such a great appreciation of the Lord Jesus. He says, "I have suffered, yes, I have suffered the loss of all these things for Him because He is worth more than all of these things." That is what he is saying.

That is something that God the Father wants to see happening and working in your life and my life out of our great appreciation of our Lord Jesus, that we are able to say, "I have suffered the loss of all things, and He is worth more than all of these things." That is what Paul is saying. "Yet indeed, I also count all things loss for the excellence of the

knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith; that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death”

So, he gives this litany of things that he has done. A Hebrew of Hebrews, a Jew of the tribe of Benjamin. This was his identification. Paul the Apostle, Saul, as he came to know the Lord Jesus. These were his credentials. This was his life. This is who he was. This was what he was acclaimed for. He was given authority. This is who he was. This was his very life. But in that encounter with the Lord Jesus, he was able to say, “All of those things are nothing.” He says, “It is all rubbish.” Some translations say, “It is dung—all of these things in comparison to knowing the Lord Jesus Christ.”

At his conversion on the road to Damascus he was struck blind, and he continued on into Damascus. Jesus spoke to Ananias, a believer there, and said, “I want you to go to this address where you will meet a man. He is waiting for you so he can have his sight back.” Ananias said, “Oh, I am afraid to go there. This guy has a reputation of trying to arrest us and put us in jail.” But Jesus said this: “Go, because I will show him what things he must suffer for my name's sake.” Paul made a decision in his will to follow the Lord Jesus, and it cost him everything.

What Cost Have You Incurred?

What cost have you incurred in following Jesus? We have to ask ourselves that question. What has it cost me, as it were? What things have I held onto that keep me separated from the intimate relationship He wants to have with me?

II Corinthians 6:3-10: Paul says, “Behold, now is the acceptable time. Behold, now is the day of salvation. We give no offense in anything, that our service may not be blamed. But in all things we commend ourselves as ministers of God: ...”

It is interesting as he is addressing these Corinthians, that he is saying, “We commend ourselves to you.” He is saying, “We want you to look at us. Look at us as if we are living among you. It is just not words. We want you to examine us and see that we have been faithful to the gospel. Take note. We commend ourselves to you. Take notice.”

Verse 4-10: “But in all things we commend ourselves as ministers of God.” And he gives us a litany: “In much patience, in tribulations, in needs, in distresses, in stripes, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labors, in sleeplessness, in fastings; by purity, by knowledge, by longsuffering, by kindness, by the Holy Spirit, by sincere love, by the word of truth, by the power of God, by the armor of righteousness on the right hand and on the left, by honor and dishonor, by evil report and good report; as deceivers, and yet true; as unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and behold we live; as chastened, and yet not killed; as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things.” This was the cost of discipleship.

So sometimes when we are in school, or sometimes when we are on the job, or sometimes when we are in health issues, there is a cost that is involved in discipleship. How do we respond to all of those situations that we find ourselves in? How do we respond?

Christ Is Most Precious

As we mentioned before, sometimes we want what heaven offers, and yet we still want what this world offers. In all of those circumstances, there is a cost that is involved. He enumerated the cost that he was experiencing in following Christ. He would not have given up one of those things, one of those difficulties, because he valued Christ more than the circumstances of his life that he happened to be in the midst of. So, in the circumstance of your life and in my life, what are we counting valuable? What are we holding on to? Or is Christ more valuable than what we know Him to be?

In II Corinthians 11:22 again, this is the litany of things that are in his life. And he just says, "Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they of the seed of Abraham? So am I." And he goes on with these things that he had gone through. "From the Jews he had received five times, forty stripes, minus one. Three times he was beaten with rods; once he was stoned; ..." etc. We all know that Scripture; it is the cost of discipleship.

Obedience to the Word of God

Nevertheless, Paul came to realize the worth of Christ. So before you throw yourself on the altar, have you counted the cost? The Holy Spirit, though He is kind and gentle, long-suffering, gracious, yet He demands to be Lord of your life. *He demands to be Lord of your life.* He will take your personality and form it into the likeness of the personality of Jesus so that you are not able to say, "Well, that is just my personality. That is the way I am." Well, Jesus may have to say? "That thing has to go on the altar. It has to be put on the altar. It has to be adjusted." It is not an excuse. "Well, this is my personality." No, the Holy Spirit will adjust.

He will require obedience to the Word of God. Sometimes what we can do with the Word of God is take it and try to fashion it into our lifestyle. We will read the Word of God, but then we adjust it, as it were, to accommodate me, rather than me being taken in by the Word of God and it adjusts me. He will take the direction of our life out of our hands. Even though you may have plans, if you are surrendered to Christ, He just may take those plans and, as it were, tear them up and say, "No, this is the way I want you to go." You may have thought that this was the way you were going, but He will take the direction of your life away from you. Why? Because He is to be the Lord of your life, the Lord of my life. Are we able to face that? Are we able to come to grips with that kind of invitation from the Lord Jesus? For there to be fullness, there needs to be emptiness first. If we want to be filled with Christ, then we must be emptied of ourselves.

Passion for Jesus

So, let me ask, do you have a passion for Jesus? for Him? Do you have a passion for Him? Sometimes people do not like to hear that kind of word. It almost sounds too emotional. Well, it is emotional, but it is also because we have come to recognize this wonderful Master that we serve. Do you have a passion for Him? Is all this relationship with the Lord, this passion for the Lord, all absorbing? Is it *the* most important thing in your life? Is the desire for Christ consuming? Does it consume you? Is it *the* most important thing in your life? Is it so large that it presses everything else out of your life?

Spiritual Loneliness and Longing for Christ

When God begins to work in our life in this way, it can get very lonely. It can get lonely. You are left alone with Him. God is beginning to separate us from these other things that were so important to us, that made up our life. He begins to separate us from those things.

We sang Psalm 42: "As the deer pants for the water brooks, so my soul longs after Thee, O Lord." Is that going on in your life right now? Do you feel that hunger for Christ? Sometimes it becomes so acute that it is actually painful because you want Him, and you want more of Him. But it is costly.

The Clay Pot Analogy

You know, we use the scripture, we have all used it at one time or another, where we refer to ourselves as clay pots that contain this treasure. And that is true; we are clay pots that have this treasure within ourselves. But I had found myself taking pride in being a clay pot, how it could be almost insidious, our pride. But I would say, like so many of us, "Yes, I am a clay pot, and I have this treasure within me. Yep, I am a clay pot for Jesus."

But I have found that the Lord strikes that clay pot. Do you ever see a vase? I do not know how you would say it, but they have these fisher lines through it, and they look like cracks. So, taking pride in my clayness, the Lord would come and strike that clay pot. All of a sudden, all these fractures were there. I said, "Oh, yes, I am a clay pot, but I have these fractures in here, however, I am still standing." "Yes, I am a clay pot, and God is dealing with me." All of a sudden, the Lord recognizes. I mean, He knew all along, this pride is insidious. Then He comes along and strikes the clay pot. All of a sudden, a chip of the clay falls off, and another chip falls off, but I am still hanging on to my clayness. Then He comes along and strikes it, and that whole pot just falls down and becomes like dust.

You see, my clay pot was the clay pot I fashioned myself. So now He builds a clay pot that He fashions to contain the treasures of His life. Costly is discipleship, *costly!*

The Dark Night of the Soul

As the Lord works with us in this way, there are times when He takes us through this darkness, what has been referred to over the centuries now, the dark night of the soul. If

you read the books of some of these great saints, men, and women of God, who have gone through these dark nights of the soul, you find that there is no consolation, no sense of God's presence, yet God was dealing with them. *God was dealing with them.* I do not know if you have had a dark night of the soul, but there are many, many, whom God brings through these dark nights of the soul.

Living Sacrifice, Days and Nights

Also, something that we, I think, need to understand when we are considering making ourselves a living sacrifice and casting ourselves upon this sacrificial altar is that it is not a one-time event. It is like consecration. I have noticed that with consecration, as best as I knew myself, I consecrated myself to the Lord: "Lord, I give myself to You. I want to serve You. Here I am."

Then down the road away, the Lord begins to show me some things in my life that He still wanted to address. At that point, I said, "Lord, I consecrate myself to You. As much as I know myself, I consecrate myself to you, Lord." Something of that is what happens in this whole issue when we are called upon to cast ourselves as a living sacrifice upon this sacrificial altar.

The Call to Deeper Discipleship

So, what happens and what has happened when we first came to the Lord, so many of us, the Lord took us out of, like in my case, terrible situations, morally and otherwise. In His mercy He rescued me, as He did each one of us. He rescued us from ourselves, and we came up in new life. So, we are standing, as it were, on the shoreline and we are rejoicing over the fact that God has done such a wonderful thing. He took me out of the gutter, as it were, out of the dump, and worked this new life in me. And I am standing there rejoicing in this fact.

Three years later, I am still there on the seashore rejoicing in the fact that God has done this wonderful work. But it is like someone standing on the seashore and the water is just rippling over our toes. It is just rippling over our toes. We are thinking, "This is the greatest thing since apple pie." While in front of us there is this sea of Christ, the vastness of Christ in front of us. And He is beckoning us to come into the deep waters where He can reveal Himself in a deeper and deeper way. But so many just stand on the seashore and live these compromised lives, these stupid lives where Christ has so much more for you and for me, but especially for Himself.

He is calling us into the deeper water. It is costly because when Christ calls us in this kind of way, He does not often give directions right up front to say, "This is what I am going to do. This is where you are going to go." No, you are leaving everything and not knowing where you are going. Oftentimes there is no security, no job. Your life has been turned upside down; the direction you thought you were going in is no longer there.

Oh, discipleship is costly! The Lord Jesus tells you that right up front, if we are listening. But so many, unfortunately, end up living these compromised lives. The Lord is

ready right now if He is showing you something of that in your own life. If there are things right now in your own life that keep you somewhat separated from Him, and He wants to get rid of it, because some of these things are good things, but they still get between you and Him. They are not all bad things. There are things that are good, but they keep you from the fullness of Christ in your life and in my life.

So, the Lord calls us and lets us know right from the go; "If you want to follow Me, you have to forsake all and follow Me." So the only thing that I would say to each of us is that if God is stirring your heart right now, if He is pointing some things out in your life right now, even some good things, I ask that you take the time and do some business with Him. Let Him point it out and be ready to say, "Yes, Lord, I am going to follow You. I am leaving this behind, and I am going to follow You. I have counted the cost, and I have found You worthy; I have found that You are the Christ. There is nothing that can compare with You, Lord, and I am going to follow You by Your grace."

I just encourage each one of us today to make that decision to count the cost, and then present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. It sounds reasonable to do that. It is reasonable to forsake all to follow Christ. It is not meritorious; it is not that you gain something more of God. No, it is your reasonable service. He will prove Himself over and over and over again that He is a wonderful Master to serve, and You will find your contentment in Him.

Dear Lord, work this kind of work in each of our lives, Lord. And we do want to say again, You are wonderful, Lord. There is none like You, Lord. No place I would rather be but in You. Again, we bow our hearts in thanksgiving. Amen.

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