

## **Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth One Verse at a Time***

### **The Cost of Discipleship**

Scripture: Selected Scriptures

Code: 90-23

To speak of the cost of discipleship in our society may be not the most needful thing from the viewpoint of the listener right now, it may become more needful in the days ahead. If we were in Eastern Europe tonight, we would be speaking on a subject very dear to the heart of the hearer. In fact, I would daresay that they are so well apprised of the matter of the cost of discipleship that perhaps it wouldn't need to be spoken of at all, except to encourage them. And frankly, the approach that I will take in this message wouldn't be needed at all because no one in a country where you pay a price for naming the name of Jesus Christ is going to do that unless they are willing to pay that price. There are no shallow, uncommitted believers. Why pay the price? And yet in our society here, we have developed this incredible theology that says you can be a Christian and not worry about being committed. In fact you can be a Christian and not even be a disciple. Those who teach that would say yes there's no question in the New Testament about Jesus assigning a tremendous cost to discipleship. But you don't need to worry about that because that's second-level Christianity. First-level Christianity doesn't really have any particular cost at all.

To show you how pervasive this is, one of the longest standing, most widely read fundamentalist newspapers in America is a newspaper called "The Sword of the Lord." In "The Sword of the Lord's" January 8 issue of 1988, this year, the editor writes this, referring to Luke 9:57 to 62, let me read it to you. In Luke 9, the Lord is speaking about discipleship. And starting in verse 57, He says this, "And as they were going along the road, someone said to Him, I'll follow You wherever You go. And Jesus said, The foxes have holes and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head. And He said to another, Follow Me. But he said, Permit me first to go and bury my father. But He said to him, Allow the dead to bury their own dead, but as for you, go and proclaim everywhere the Kingdom of God. And another also said, I will follow You, Lord, but first permit me to say goodbye to those at home. But Jesus said to him, Not one after putting his hand to the plow and looking back is fit for the Kingdom of Heaven."

The writer of "The Sword of the Lord" said this, "This passage has nothing to do with salvation. These calls are not calls to salvation, they are calls to discipleship. MacArthur, like many others, confuses discipleship with salvation and uses passages dealing with discipleship to try to prove that the sinner must give up all that he has and all that he is to receive Christ. This is simply not true. Nowhere in the Bible is the sinner told to forsake all that he has to be saved."

What is a disciple? Is it something different than a Christian? It's fairly clear in the Bible that Jesus calls men to follow Him. That writer is saying that doesn't have a thing to do with salvation.

Doesn't it? All of the calls of Jesus to discipleship, are they something more than salvation? You see, the word "disciple" is so much a part of our Christian faith that it hardly has any meaning outside of Christianity. You just don't hear that word outside of Christianity. It is used 262 times in the New Testament. The word is *mathetes*, the basic root meaning is to be a learner but it has much more content than that. The lexicons tell us that it means "one who shares a close and intimate relationship with a person." Quote: "The disciple is one who at Jesus' call follows after Him. He must observe the will of God and even binding upon himself unreservedly to the person of Jesus, go as far as death and the gift of his life out of love," so says Leon Dafur(?) in his wonderful study of the New Testament language.

Discipleship... more than just being a learner, being an intimate follower, having an intimate relationship, following to the point where you would go as far as death out of love. There's no question about the fact that the only message Jesus ever proclaimed was a message of discipleship. The call that Jesus gave was a call to follow Him, a call to submission, a call to obedience. It was never a plea to make some kind of momentary decision to acquire forgiveness and peace and heaven and then go on living anyway you wanted. The invitations of Jesus to the lost were always direct calls to a costly commitment.

Listen to Matthew chapter 13 and the familiar parable in verse 44. "The Kingdom of Heaven is like a treasure hidden in the field which a man found and hid. And from joy over it, he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field. Again, the Kingdom of Heaven is like a merchant seeking fine pearls. And upon finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had and bought it." Now we know those parables.

A man found a treasure, sold all he had and bought it. A man found a pearl, sold all he had and bought it. Now that says that when a man comes across the saving gospel of Jesus Christ, he gives up all he has. He turns his back on all of life to embrace Christ.

But what do people who want to espouse that this is not a call to salvation do with that passage? This is what they do. They say what the parable is teaching has nothing to do with salvation. The man who found the treasure and the man who sought the pearl is Christ. The treasure is the church. The pearl is the church. This is a parable about Christ buying the church, giving up all that He had to purchase the church.

Let me suggest something to you. In the first place, the field here, they say the field is the world and so buried in the world is the church, why do we say the field is the world? And they will say, "Well, in the other parable about the wheat and the tares, the field is the world." Oh? That's another parable.

In the parable of the soils, the field is the heart. So we cannot necessarily interpret this parable by arbitrarily picking the other parable that seems to fit the interpretation we like.

Furthermore, Christ was not simply plowing along in the world and come stumbling across the church intact. Nor did Christ go on a life-long crusade to try to find the church that was most precious. The church before the Lord redeemed it was neither precious or valuable. It was not a treasure and it was not beautiful. Christ did not purchase the church because He discovered its tremendous value. Furthermore, Christ told these parables to the disciples to unveil the mysteries of the Kingdom, not to explain the atonement from God's viewpoint. But that is the extent to which the interpreter will go when he wants to eliminate a gospel that demands that a person give up everything to receive Christ.

There's a striking parallel in Mark chapter 10 and verse 21. This is what that says. "Jesus looked at the rich young ruler and said, One thing you lack. Go and sell all you possess and give to the poor and you shall have treasure in heaven." Same message. You want eternal life? Give up all you have and take the treasure.

That's not the only strong call of Jesus to discipleship. In Matthew chapter 10, very familiar to us and we'll go back to it later on, Matthew 10:32, "Everyone therefore who shall confess Me before men, I will confess him before My Father who is heaven. But whosoever shall deny Me before men, I will deny before My Father who is in heaven. Do not think that I came to bring peace on the earth, I didn't come to bring peace but a sword. I came to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law, and a man's enemies will be the members of his household. He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. He who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. He who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me. He who has found his life shall lose it, and he who has lost his life for My sake shall find it." A strong call to total commitment.

In Luke's gospel and chapter 14, we hear the echo of the same level of commitment, verse 25, "The multitudes were going along with Him, He turned and said to them," He's talking to the multitudes, "If anyone comes to Me and doesn't 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."

Now, someone reads that and says, "Well, that's... that's so hard, it can't mean salvation. So a disciple has to be a second- level Christian. They have to already be believers." Then why, pray tell, does He give this message to the multitude? Why does He give it to the multitude? It's very clear that He's speaking to unbelievers. It's very clear that He is speaking to those who do not know Him.

In John 8:31, Jesus said, "If you continue in My Word, then you're My real disciple." John 15:8, Jesus says, "My true disciples bear fruit." And every one of those contexts, Matthew 13, Matthew 10, Luke 14, John 8, John 15, are all contexts in which Jesus is calling men to salvation and still there are

many who deny that there is any such call involved in salvation. They say, "Just believe and take the gift... just believe and take the gift."

Again reading from a book entitled "The Hungry Inherit," the author writes, "How fortunate that one's entrance into the Kingdom of God does not depend on his discipleship. If it did, how few would ever enter that Kingdom," end quote. Oh? Isn't that exactly what Jesus said? "Narrow is the gate and... what? Few there be that find it." But wanting to assume that more than a few are saved, these teachers say one can be a believer saved without being a disciple obedient. So they come up with two levels of spiritual life. Level one is an uncommitted disobedient, even unbelieving believer who made a momentary decision to receive salvation but has no desire to follow Christ and they often call him "the carnal Christian." Hopefully someday such a person will come to level two. Level two is disciple. And there you have the obedient, committed people who love and serve the Lord, who turned their back on their former life and longed to live the new life. They're not perfect but the desire of their heart and the fruit of their life shows the work of God.

Level one people, these folks say, are saved but the only way they can know they're saved is by remembering the decision they made in the past. That's all the assurance you need, they say. If you need assurance, just reach back into your past and remember the moment you believed. Of course, if you get far enough along in your unbelief and disobedience, you won't want to be assured about something you're indifferent to anyway, so it's a moot point. But we are told it is enough for someone to simply believe, receive the gift without repenting, without confessing Christ as Lord, without surrendering their life to Him.

They say such believers will... will not be rewarded. The result of such a dichotomy is that there's a difference between a believer and a disciple. But there's more than that. This kind of thinking totally changes the whole ministry of Christ because all of a sudden Jesus instead of calling sinners to salvation is calling first-level believers to level two. And the one of whom it's very clearly said that He came to seek and save the lost, that He was not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance is not really an evangelist, He's a deeper-life preacher, totally changes the ministry of our Lord from evangelism to calling believers who live in sin, deny God, Christ, disobey, aren't committed to shape up. Is that the ministry of Jesus?

I don't think so. In fact, I'm confident it's not. I believe that every Christian is a disciple, every Christian is a follower of Christ. Some of us are following more faithfully than others, but every true believer has committed himself or herself to follow Jesus Christ. I do believe that as we have seen you can be a follower of Jesus and not be a real Christian. You could follow along without having a changed heart and say, "Lord, Lord," and He would say, "I never knew you." Like John 6:66, "Many of His disciples walked no more with Him." Like those who wanted to follow Jesus in Matthew chapter 8, but they certainly were not willing to make whatever commitment had to be made. They were the ones of whom we read earlier who said, "Let me go do this and let me go do that, and let me

go do the other thing." And He said, "You're not worthy to be My disciple."

So, there are some disciples, quote/unquote, who aren't real, but there are no believers who aren't disciples. It simply means that we have entered into a relationship with Jesus Christ in which we follow Him. We don't follow perfectly and please, we don't follow out of our own will and our own flesh, we follow because God in His sovereign grace transformed us into followers. The term "disciple" never in the Scripture is it applied to second-level believers. The truth is that evangelism itself is to make disciples. And that's so clear. In Matthew, do you remember the great commission? Matthew 28:19, "Go therefore and... what? Make disciples." Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations. How do you make a disciple? "Baptize them in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit and teach them to observe all that I've commanded you." That's evangelism. You have them publicly name the name of Jesus Christ, be publicly baptized as a profession of their faith and then set about to live a life of obedience, that's making disciples. We are called to make disciples.

The other accounts of the great commission, one of them is in Mark 16:15. He said, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation." Matthew says make disciples. Mark says preach the gospel because they're one and the same. "And he who has believed and been baptized shall be saved." Luke, he said, "Thus it is written, that Christ should suffer and rise again from the dead the third day," this adds more words to that great commission. "And that repentance for forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in His name to all nations."

Matthew says make disciples. Mark says preach the gospel. Luke says proclaim repentance for forgiveness and speak of the death and resurrection of Christ. It's all one and the same. The great commission then is to preach the death and resurrection of Christ, preach repentance for the forgiveness of sins, call for faith to make disciples. That sums it all up. The mission of the church is to make disciples, to bring people into an intimate relationship with God through faith in Christ Jesus. Disciples are people who believe the gospel, people who have turned from their sin to embrace the forgiveness of God, people who have had a transformed life so that they are motivated to obey what the Lord has commanded them.

The term "disciple" is used synonymously for believer. Listen carefully to passages out of the wonderful wonderful record of the early church, the book of Acts. Verse 1 of chapter 6, "Now at this time while the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint arose on the part of the Hellenistic Jews against the native Hebrews because their widows were being overlooked in the daily serving of food. And the Twelve summoned the congregation of the disciples and said, It is not desirable for us to neglect the Word of God in order to serve table." Now it says that the disciples were increasing and the 12 summoned the congregation of the disciples. That can't mean anything but the believers. It certainly doesn't mean that he got all the second-level Christians sorted out and had a special meeting for them.

Verse 7, "And the Word of God kept on spreading and the number of disciples continued to increase greatly." Conversion, believers, disciples... same term.

In the eleventh of Acts, I think it's verse 26, it tells us, "And when he had found him he brought him to Antioch and it came about that for an entire year they met with the church and taught considerable numbers," listen to this, "and the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch." Barnabas being the key figure here. The disciples were first called Christians in Antioch. Disciple has to mean believer if Christian means believer...believer, disciple, Christian, all the same.

Chapter 14 verse 20, "But while the disciples stood around him, he arose and entered the city," and that has to do with the believers where Paul was stoned. "The next day he went away with Barnabas." You can begin to see now that Christians are called disciples.

And then in chapter 15 verse 10, "Now therefore, why do you put God to the test by placing upon the neck of the disciples a yoke which neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear?" says Peter. So believer, disciple, Christian, all the same. Why make a distinction? Why do people do this? Again I point out because they're fearful that if you have conditions involved in salvation, you have negatively affected grace. In other words, they want salvation to be purely of grace, only believe, purely grace, do nothing, just believe. And they say if you add the fact that you have to turn from sin, confess your sin, repent of your sin, surrender to Christ, you've added all these human works to grace.

Not so. All you've said is that God when He saved someone by grace does all of that. It's all in that saving grace. It's part of it. And then, secondly, I believe that people hold this view because they want to develop a theology that will dispose of the hard demands of Jesus. They want to make it easy for everybody to be saved.

And the third reason that people hold to this is because they would like to save some people that are lost. What do you mean? Well, they have people that they love who made a profession of faith in Christ, never demonstrated a changed life and they'd like to develop a theology that will get those people in heaven.

A pastor from behind the Iron Curtain said to me, one time, "There's no easy believism in our churches. There's no shallow professions of faith. Nobody is taking Jesus who isn't willing to lay their life down because that's the price in many, many cases. The cost of naming Christ," he said, "is so high that we don't have false conversion. If they aren't willing to pay the price," he said, "they don't want to be associated with Jesus Christ in any way at all." Now that would clear the air about a lot of things.

When He called them in that hostile environment, he carefully instructed them about the cost of following Him. Half-hearted people who weren't willing to make the commitment didn't respond. He turned away the reluctant to pay the price, like the rich young ruler. He told them the price, he went away. Those would-be disciples who said, "Let me go do this and let me go do that and let me go do the other," He said you're not worthy to be My disciple. It is a turning. It is a repenting. It is a giving up and an embracing of Christ.

John Stott wrote in his helpful little book *Basic Christianity*, "The Christian landscape is strewn with the wreckage of derelict half-built towers. The ruins of those who began to build and were unable to finish. For thousands of people still ignore Christ's warning and undertake to follow Him without first pausing to reflect on the cost of doing so. The result is the great scandal of Christendom today, so called nominal Christianity. In countries to which Christian civilization has spread, large numbers of people have covered themselves with a decent but thin veneer of Christianity. They have allowed themselves to become somewhat involved, enough to be respectable but not enough to be uncomfortable. Their religion is a great soft cushion. It protects them from the hard unpleasantness of life while changing its place and shape to suit their convenience. No wonder the cynics speak of hypocrites in the church and dismiss religion as escapism," end quote.

In Luke 14 Jesus put right on the line what Dr. Stott is referring to when He said, "Which one of you when he wants to build a tower doesn't first sit down and calculate the cost to see if he has enough to complete it? Otherwise when he's laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who observe it begin to ridicule him saying, This man began to build and wasn't able to finish. Or what king when he sets out to meet another king in battle will not first sit down, take counsel whether he's strong enough with ten thousand men to encounter the one coming against him with twenty thousand? Or else while the other is still far away he sends a delegation and asks terms of peace? So therefore no one of you can be My disciple who doesn't give up all his possessions."

Pretty straight talk. You don't want to be like the guy who wanted to build the tower, got half way in and didn't have what it took to make it all the way. You don't want to be like the general who went to war and wasn't ready for what he was to encounter. In other words, there's a sense in which you recognize the total cost of giving up your life for Christ. The Christian isn't somebody who buys fire insurance, who signs up for an escape clause to keep him out of hell. Puritan William Perkins wrote these words, "The true Christian is of this disposition of mind that if there were no conscience to accuse, no devil to terrify, no judge to arraign or condemn, no hell to torment, yet he would be humbled and brought to his knees for his sins because he has offended a loving merciful and long-suffering God," end quote. That's the difference. The truly repentant sinner is devastated by the way he has offended God with his sin. He's not whimsically looking for some fire insurance. A true disciple loves, a true disciple obeys. We don't love perfectly, we don't obey perfectly. Sometimes we love very imperfectly and disobey, but the pattern of life is obedience and love for the Lord. And even when we fail to love Him, we feel the guilt, we fail to obey Him, we feel the guilt because we do

belong to Him. We have that intimate relationship which God has in His grace given to us.

Let me say it again. I do not believe that these are human efforts, I believe that this is what God does in your heart. God gives you a love for Himself. God gives you a heart to obey. God turns you from your sin. They're not pre-salvation human works, they're inherent in God's saving work. Let me take you back as we draw things to a final focus to the passage of Matthew 10 and point out to you the important things to note in this matter of discipleship. Remember now, Jesus says in Matthew 10, "Everyone who confesses Me before men, I'll confess before My Father." Jesus says, "I came to set a man against his father and against his daughter, and he that loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me." Jesus said, "Take up your cross and follow after Me," giving all of these elements of discipleship.

You say, "Well, now is He... is this a call to salvation? Or is this a call to believers to become disciples?" Well, as I've said to you, it obviously is a call to salvation from the general sweep of the New Testament but just one simple little thought might even make the case in this passage more clear. In chapter 10 verse 1, and I started reading at verse 32, but in verse 1 it says, "And Jesus have summoned His twelve... what? Disciples." Beloved, they were already... what? Disciples. This is not a all to discipleship. He already addressed the twelve as disciples. They were already called disciples. Yes, Matthew 10 is addressed to them, but they're already disciples. He's simply defining what discipleship means.

And in the parallel passage of Mark, Mark says He was talking not only to the disciples, which Matthew emphasizes, but to the disciple and the crowd. And in Luke 14, which we referred to earlier, Luke eliminates the disciples and has Him speaking only to the crowd. This then is simply Jesus laying out the standards of discipleship, it is a call to salvation... nothing short of that.

You say, "Why did He give to the disciples?" So they would know how to give it to the crowd, so they would know how to evangelize. Jesus calls for total commitment. What does it mean? Number one, I'll give you three thoughts. Number one, it means confessing Christ before men. Verse 32, "Everyone therefore who confesses Me before men, I will confess before My Father who is in heaven. Whosoever shall deny Me before men, I will also deny him before My Father who is in heaven." It is a confession of public confession.

Now public confession in and of itself is not enough. In Matthew 7 the people say, "Lord, Lord, we prophesied in Your name, did many wonderful works," and so forth. "He said, I never knew you." There are those who profess the name who aren't real, but there are none who are real who don't profess the name. Everyone, He says, therefore who shall confess Me before men. That is openly affirming relationship to Christ. "If thou shalt," Romans 10:9 and 10 says, "confess with thy mouth Jesus as... what... Lord." Confess Me before men, that's a universal generic term, open confession public confession, wherever one is that's where He starts this matter of discipleship.

The heart of discipleship, beloved, is a commitment to Jesus Christ. That means that you're willing to publicly identified with Him no matter what that cost. That means you're willing to face a hostile world boldly to acknowledge Jesus as Lord and master. Oh, we don't always do it. Even Timothy was dangerously close to being ashamed of Christ. Peter denied Christ. We have those lapses, but a moment of failure doesn't invalidate the disciple's credentials. All of us have times of failure, but it's not our purpose, it's not our desire to keep our relationship to Christ hidden, it's our desire to pronounce it, to proclaim it. And if we willingly affirm our loyalty to Christ, then we are the ones that He will affirm His loyalty to as well. If we're willing to say I belong to Christ, He'll be willing to say this one belongs to Me. On the other hand, those who consistently deny the Lord by silence, by ungodly living, by words are simply masquerading, they're not God's disciples at all.

So, it all starts with that public confession. If someone denies Christ, says they don't believe, they don't care to obey, they can't possibly meet this characteristic of a true disciple. And again I say, this is not something we do in our flesh, this is something God produces in us by giving us the heart of a disciple. He gives us a heart to love Him, a heart to want to proclaim Him, a heart to want to announce that we belong to Him.

Secondly, following hard on that one, a disciple not only confesses before men his Lord, but prefers Christ over all others. Verse 34 starts to talk about the family and how the sword comes down between father and mother and sister and brother and enemies become people in your own household and you cannot love father or mother more than Me and be worthy of Me. You cannot be My disciple if you're not willing, if need be, to cut those relationships off. Very strong language... very strong.

And Luke's language is even stronger. Luke in chapter 14 verse 26, "If anyone comes to Me and doesn't hate his father or mother, wife, children, brother, sister, and even his own life, cannot be My disciple." Well, what do you mean by that? Do you mean you literally have to hate your family? No, no, you have to deny your... your natural human relationships that would constrain you and hold you back from Christ just like you have to deny yourself... just as you have to consider yourself dead, Romans 6. Just as you have to lay aside the old self, Ephesians 4:22, just as if you have to treat your flesh with human contempt, 1 Corinthians 9:27. So if your family holds you back, you have to treat them as dead.

Our dear brother, Misko Horvatek said it tonight. His only family has not spoken to him in three years. That was the price, but he prefers Christ above all others... above all others. Talked to a young lady a week ago, brand new in Christ from a Jewish family, suffering the tremendous alienation that her family put upon her for her faith in the Savior. That's what Jesus is talking about. If there's any human relationship that holds you back from naming the name of Christ, from serving submissively under His Lordship, you're not worthy to be His disciple.

Why is Jesus so strong about this? Because He wants to chase away the uncommitted. You understand that about Jesus? He wanted to drive away the false disciples. He didn't want the tares. He didn't want the false believers. He didn't want them because He didn't want them to be deceived and He didn't want His church to be affected by them. So He chased them away by the strength of the call to commitment. Thirdly and finally, the Lord Jesus Christ must not only be the one we prefer above all else but the one for whom we would willingly give our lives. Verse 38, "He who doesn't take up his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me, he who has found his life shall lose it, he who has lost his life for My sake shall find it."

You know what I believe, beloved? I believe that if you and I ever got in a situation where we had to give our life for Jesus Christ, we would experience joy. I know when you're here you say, "Oh, man, I don't know if I ever got into that if I could ever do it." I believe you could because I don't believe God gives you the grace to bear that until you need it. And I believe you would come and experience what Peter says is the grace, the spirit of grace and glory would rest on you and you would be like all the rest of those martyrs that don't surpass you in spiritual strength, don't surpass you in knowledge, who in facing death through the years of the history of the church faced it joyously and victoriously because they were given grace for that hour.

But I'll tell you something. There's no way that statements like that can be made to accommodate the kind of carnal approach to conversion that is in vogue in our generation. Jesus is saying you have to be willing to take up your cross. Somebody says, "Oh, yes, my cross... that's my 1959 Chevy that doesn't run... that's my leaky roof... that's my mother-in-law, my cross." I've heard all kinds of things.

In the first century a cross meant one thing and it wasn't a Chevy and it wasn't your leaky roof and it wasn't your mother-in-law, it was death. He's talking about forsaking everything, even your own life. "He who has found his life will lose it," you possess your life, hold on to your life, don't let go, boy, you keep your physical safety, don't let anybody get near you and accuse you of anything, deny Christ under pressure, deny Christ under persecution, hold on to your life... you don't have a transformed life because one with a transformed life that is bound by God's gracious transforming power to love Christ would never do that. You lose your soul if you do that cause you're not a true disciple. But the one who is willing to lose his life for His sake gives evidence that he has a changed life cause that's not natural, that's supernatural. And only because God has transformed you, put His Spirit within you would you do that or be willing to do that.

Genuine disciples don't shrink back from death. In Hebrews it says in chapter 11 verse 38, talks about men who... who were so worthy the world wasn't worthy of them. They wandered in deserts and mountains and caves and holes in the ground. And all these having gained approval through their faith did not receive what was promised because God had provided something better for us so that they apart from us should not be made perfect.

Those dear people endured never really seeing the reality that we see and they were just folks like us. They went through all kinds of things. They conquered kingdoms, performed acts of righteousness, obtained promises, shut the mouths of lions, quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, from weakness were made strong, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight, women received back their dead by resurrection, others were tortured, not accepting their release in order that they might obtain a better resurrection. Others experienced mocking and scourging and chains and imprisonment. They were stoned. They were sawn in half. They were tempted, put to death with the sword. They went around in sheepskins, goatskins, destitute, afflicted and ill treated. And they never vacillated, never vacillated.

Why? One chapter earlier, "My righteous ones shall live by faith and if he shrinks back, My soul has no pleasure in him but we are not of those who shrink back to destruction but those who have faith to the persevering of the soul." True believers can face death victoriously. If you really know Christ you can. I can. We may not feel now that we can, and that's a good expression of our humility, but in the hour of our need God will provide what we need.

You see, salvation is not an experiment. Salvation is a life-long commitment. Salvation is not "try Jesus," see if He works. Salvation is a life-long transformation. Those who would tell us that a person can become a Christian without becoming a disciple do a great disservice to Scripture and they do a great disservice to people who then live under the illusion that they can be saved without following Christ in obedience. They can be saved without giving up all they are and have and ever hope to be unconditionally to Christ. That's tragic.

And I say, as I said at the very beginning of this brief series, we had better get the gospel message straight. We can mess up on some things, not on this... not on this. Eternal souls are at stake. The words of Thomas More reflect, I think, the sentiments of a true disciple. He wrote this, "Since first thy word awaked my heart, like new life dawning o'er me, wherever I turn mine eyes Thou art, all light and love before me. Not else I feel or hear or see, all bonds of earth I sever, Thee, O God, and only Thee, I live for now and ever. Like him whose fetters dropped away when light shone o'er his prison, my spirit touched by mercies raised hath from her chains arisen. And shall a soul thou bidst be free, return to bondage? Never. Thee, O God, and only Thee I live for now and ever." That's a disciple.

John Bunyan brought before the magistrate to be sentenced for his discipleship to Christ said, "Sir, the law of Christ hath provided two ways of obeying...the one to do that which I in my conscience do believe I am bound to do actively. And where I cannot obey it actively, there I am willing to lie down and suffer what they shall do unto me," end quote. That's the spirit of a disciple. Someone wrote, "I could not work my soul to save, that work my Lord has done. But I would work like any slave for love of God's own Son."

I trust that's your heart, that you're a disciple who follows Christ. If not, then you better examine yourself to see whether you're genuinely in the faith.

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