



“The Cost of Discipleship”

Matthew 16:21–28

The Authority of the King

I. Christ Embraced Suffering (v.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 be raised up on the third day.” (v.21)

II. We Avoid Suffering (v.22–23)

“Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him, saying, “God forbid it, Lord! This shall never happen to You.” (v.22)

How many times have you tried to give God advice? There’s an old saying: “If you want to make God laugh, tell him your plans.”

“But He turned and said to Peter, “Get behind Me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to Me; for you are not setting your mind on God’s interests, but man’s.” (v.23)

Peter’s mind was set on worldly things rather than heavenly things. Jesus rebuked him because he was tempting Jesus to abandon God’s way of salvation—a way that involved suffering, sacrifice and death. One minute Peter is a rock. The next minute he’s a stumbling stone. Within the span of a few verses, he goes from being a messenger of God to a messenger of Satan. Beware of anyone who encourages you to take the easy road when obeying God’s will becomes difficult!

III. Three Conditions of Discipleship (v.24)

“If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me.” (v.24)

Many people have been taught that there’s a difference between being a Christian and being a disciple. But that’s not true. The call to salvation and the call to discipleship are one and the same. To be a Christian is to be a disciple of Jesus (cf. Matthew 28:18–20; Acts 11:26). If you want to follow Jesus, you must understand there will be a cost.

1. You must deny yourself.

Why is this the first condition—the place where discipleship begins? Because self is the problem. Our self is idolatrous. We worship at the altar of self. And we can’t enter into relationship with Christ until we recognize that and repent of it.

2. You must take up your cross.

This speaks of our willingness to die for Christ—literally. Jesus was heading to a real cross and a real death in Jerusalem. If we follow Christ, we may be asked to pay the ultimate price by laying down our life. But there's another aspect as well. In Luke 9:23, Jesus commands us to take up our cross "daily." That is not a single event. It's an ongoing attitude or way of life. It's a commitment to identify with Christ in his death, burial and resurrection... to continually reckon ourselves dead to sin and alive to Christ (Romans 6:11; Galatians 2:20). Therefore, taking up our cross daily means being willing to suffer shame, opposition, persecution, rejection—whatever God may call us to—for the sake of the kingdom. We must die to ourselves daily in order to live for Christ.

3. You must follow Jesus.

Discipleship is not simply a door to be entered but a path to be followed. Christ leads, we follow. He commands, we obey. The good news is that we walk the path together in deep-abiding fellowship. Being a disciple is first and foremost a call to relationship, and secondly a call to service. It may be hard, scary, or costly. But it's worth it!

IV. Three Reasons to Follow Jesus (v.25–27)

1. Your life depends on it (v.25)
2. Your life is priceless (v.26)
3. You will be rewarded (v.27)

V. A Mysterious Promise (v.28)

This statement has been interpreted in various ways, but the most natural conclusion is that it refers to the transfiguration, which immediately follows in context (Matthew 17:1–8). The transfiguration was a glorious foretaste of Christ coming into his kingdom.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Do you think it's possible to be a Christian without being a disciple of Christ? Why or why not?
2. What are some ways you have personally suffered shame, opposition, persecution or rejection because of your commitment to follow Christ?
3. What do you think it means to deny yourself in order to follow Jesus?
4. What do you think it means to take up your cross?
5. Why is it worth it to follow Jesus?