

The Cost to Follow Christ Revelation 10

In Luke 14 in the NT, Jesus explains that following Him is not always easy. Being a disciple of Jesus affects everything – your personal relationships, your whole life. He’s clear that the church is not to just make believers. We are to make disciples.

And to drive the point home, He makes an illustration. He says, *“Which of you, desiring to build a tower, does not first sit down and count the cost, whether he has enough to complete it? ...Any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple.”*

Are you willing to give up whatever is necessary to follow Him?

It can be difficult to go where Christ is leading. It can be hard to obey God. Of course, the circumstances in the first century Roman empire (when Jesus taught this) and 21st century America are very different, but the core challenges of the Christian life are the same.

We want to recoil in the face of trouble. We shrink back in times of suffering. We try to leverage life in Christ for our own comfort and ease, and we want to slide into a life that doesn’t make the sacrifices God commands.

Without God’s help, we become more interested in self-preservation than self-sacrifice.

Without repentance and renewal of our faith each day and each week, our lives become characterized by self-righteousness, not humility. And instead of outreaching, we start ingrowing. There’s a cost to obey God in this world.

But the gospel tells us that Jesus counted the cost to obey God in our place. He gave everything necessary to overcome sin and death and reconcile His people to God. And in doing so, He enabled us to count the cost. And that’s what you must do. But where should you begin? What will it cost you to follow Jesus? What does following Him demand of us?

Revelation 10 brings this into focus with three aspects of following Him. You can see them listed on page 6 in the WG. Following Christ requires a total acceptance, a delayed gratification, and an honest assessment.

Now, many people make an outward profession of faith in Jesus. Scripture teaches us that some of those people are truly saved, and some are not. Anyone who claims to believe in Christ should consider His words in Matthew 7, where He says that not everyone who claims to know Him truly does. In fact, on the Last Day there will be many to whom Jesus says, *“I never knew you; depart from me.”* The implication is that these people will be shocked. They thought they knew Him.

Maybe you know Christ. Maybe you only think you do. So let’s look closer at Revelation 10.

This chapter is like Revelation 7, which was an interlude between the 6th and 7th seal. It was a break, included to encourage and instruct believers as we live in the last days: walking by faith, making every effort to obey God, and waiting on the return of Christ.

Revelation 10 is another interlude. It's a brief pause to address the believer's experience during this "already but not yet" period of redemptive history. What I mean by that is that Christians are "already" saved but salvation is "not yet" complete – not until Christ returns.

With the 1st through 6th trumpets, we learned that so much of what we see in the world – the natural disasters and all the wickedness and the mental anguish and the wars – all of these are loud warnings to turn to God. These things will be ongoing until the 7th trumpet sounds – that moment Jesus comes back. That moment is described beginning with chapter 11, verse 15.

But first, there is this break.

We saw in chapter 9 that at the present time, demons rage and Satan wreaks havoc. But the church has a message and a mission that is guaranteed to succeed. Scholar Simon Kistemaker notes that this interlude between trumpets 6 and 7 is about *"the task of God's people on the earth."* It's about following Jesus.

Now look at verse 1 again. John says, *"Then I saw another mighty angel coming down from heaven, wrapped in a cloud, with a rainbow over his head, and his face was like the sun, and his legs like pillars of fire."* Scholars associate this angel closely with Jesus. It is perhaps the OT "angel of the LORD." He seems to at least represent Christ. The rainbow in Scripture is a symbol of God's covenant faithfulness, and *"Face like the sun"* and *"legs like pillars of fire"* recall OT descriptions of the LORD.

And verse [2] says, *"He had a little scroll open in his hand."* This is not the scroll of chapter 5. That was a big scroll with seven seals. It symbolized the whole decreed will of God – everything that ever happens. This is something different. See the rest of verse 2, *"And he set his right foot on the sea, and his left foot on the land, [3] and called out with a loud voice, like a lion roaring."* A foot on sea and land represents authority over the whole earth – land and sea. And he has this tremendous voice – *"like a lion."* The OT prophets Hosea, Amos, and Jeremiah all describe the LORD's "voice" in this way.

Now verse 3 says, *"When he called out, the seven thunders sounded."* The number seven pops up again. Seven signifies "completion" throughout Scripture and repeatedly in Revelation. And these thunders have information. It's complete – but something is different. Notice verse [4], *"And when the seven thunders had sounded, I was about to write, but I heard a voice from heaven saying, 'Seal up what the seven thunders have said, and do not write it down.'" This voice is not the angel's voice. Perhaps it's the voice of Christ, perhaps God the Father. But this information is not for us to know. It is to remain concealed. What could that mean?*

Last week I mentioned Deut. 29:29. There, Moses distinguishes between the information concerning God's will for our lives that is not revealed to us by God and the information that is revealed. He writes, *"The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law."* In these last days, some aspects of God's will are made known to us. Some are not.

We must accept that many things cannot be known now.

Have you ever thought, *"If God knows everything, but He won't make everything known to me, does He really love me?"* Or have you ever thought, *"If God knows everything, and He wants me to do this certain thing, why won't He just give me all the information?"*

Part of following Jesus is coming to terms with what God reveals and what He keeps to Himself. We have to accept many things by faith. We have to accept that we have many questions. We have to accept the decisions we've made that we may not have made if we had all the information. We have to accept things that happen that we didn't want to happen. We have to accept that God's decreed will include bad things and hard things.

Following Christ requires a total acceptance. It's a complete surrender. We have to accept that we don't know better than God. Have you been holding back from following Jesus faithfully because you can't accept His will?

Now look at verse [5], *"And the angel whom I saw standing on the sea and on the land raised his right hand to heaven [6] and swore."* He's taking an oath, giving His Word. He's making a promise. Notice by Whom he swears. *"By him who lives forever and ever, who created heaven and what is in it, the earth and what is in it, and the sea and what is in it."*

He swears by the one and only true God. This is essentially God swearing by Himself. Hebrews 6 says *"People swear by something greater than themselves,"* and when God gives His Word, He must do so on authority of Himself, because there is no one higher. The message of the seven thunders cannot be revealed, but the angel assures us – therefore we have God's oath – see the rest of verse 6, *"that there would be no more delay, [7] but that in the days of the trumpet call to be sounded by the seventh angel, the mystery of God would be fulfilled, just as he announced to his servants the prophets."*

This means that when the seventh trumpet sounds, that will be it. Time will be up. At that moment, no more delay, like we experience now, in these last days. This is a promise that Christ will return. There will be a final judgment of sin once this God-determined period of time is complete.

How long is that period? The lesson of the seven thunders is that we shouldn't speculate. But at that time *"the mystery of God"* will be fulfilled. Interestingly, another word for "mystery" here would be "secret." The secret of God will be completed and revealed. What is unknown will be made fully known.

What is this mystery? It's the secret things of Deut. 29. It's the information of the seven thunders. Actually, the gospel is described in the NT as a mystery. How could a holy God save and unify himself with wicked sinners? Christ revealed this, but at this time, only believers see it. However, on the Last Day, all people will see the glory of Jesus Christ, and all of God's will in Christ will be made known in full. We anticipate that Day. We wait for it.

We generally don't like to wait. We can get angry when we have to wait. Have you ever been in a restaurant or at some event and you had to wait longer than expected, and you thought, *"I'm paying good money for this. How dare these people make me wait!"* And you probably had a point. But how do you deal with God making you wait?

Having to wait on God can seem like just more time to make mistakes, and more time to struggle with longing, more time to be sad or worried or dissatisfied. But following Christ requires a delayed gratification. We have to wait, and we must remain faithful while we wait.

What are your greatest desires and goals during this delay? Are you mostly just concerned with building your own little life where everything works and all the comfortable pieces are in place? When our gratification is delayed, we naturally become consumed with selfish desires.

We live in a consumer culture, and consumer culture is inherently self-serving and self-focused. Those don't fit well with following Christ. Yes, you need to take care of yourself. Yes, your family matters. Yes, your life will look like a non-believer's life in many ways. But following Jesus is different.

Christians should not be just living for the here and now. We are called to say "no" to many things in which the world indulges. Have you been held back from following Jesus because you're focused more on instant gratification of your desires?

Now let's look at these final verses. Verse [8] *Then the voice that I had heard from heaven (this is God) spoke to me again, saying, "Go, take the scroll that is open in the hand of the angel who is standing on the sea and on the land."* [9] *So I went to the angel and told him to give me the little scroll. And he said to me, "Take and eat it."*

The OT prophet Ezekiel received an identical command in Ezekiel 3. God's Word is described throughout Scripture as food. Deut. 8 says God fed the ancient Israelites with manna from above, *"that he might make you know that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD."* Jesus quoted this verse during His wilderness test. God's Word is our spiritual food – ultimately, Jesus Christ is the bread we need to live. His gospel is our sustenance.

Only knowing God through Christ can truly satisfy us. And so John, in this vision, receives the command not to read or copy the scroll's contents, but to digest it. And notice what God says to John: *"it will make your stomach bitter, but in your mouth it will be sweet as honey."* Now,

chronologically, it would be mouth first, then stomach. But God is upfront about the bitterness to come. He doesn't conceal that reality. And in the same way, we shouldn't conceal the cost to follow Jesus.

Granted, people are called simply to trust in Him, to put their faith in Him and His finished work alone, but like we see in Luke 14, Jesus warned that following Him is always easy. There should be no bait and switch. For those who are born again by the Spirit's power, the gospel of Christ will be sweet. They will savor the truth. But turning from our old life and ways will not be a cake walk.

Have you ever done a cake walk? There's a reason "cake walk" is synonymous with "easy." The Christian life is not presented in Scripture as a "cake walk". This is additional proof of that reality.

Now notice verse [10] *And I took the little scroll (John says) from the hand of the angel and ate it. It was sweet as honey in my mouth, but when I had eaten it my stomach was made bitter.* There is also a bitterness for the servant of the Lord – God's prophet – in that the sweet and rich Word of the LORD is not always received with joy by those who hear it.

Ezekiel wrote that after eating the scroll, God told him to go and preach to Israel, *"But the house of Israel will not be willing to listen to you, for they are not willing to listen to me: because all the house of Israel have a hard forehead and a stubborn heart."* Isn't this why we hesitate to tell people about what Jesus has done in our lives – because we fear rejection? We are intimidated by hard-hearted, hard-headed people.

Look at verse [11] *And I was told, "You must again prophesy about many peoples and nations and languages and kings."* This is a picture of God's servant proclaiming God's revealed will – the things that have been made known by God. This is the sharing of the gospel. It's the preaching of the whole counsel of God.

It can be puzzling – how the truth of God, which is so sweet to us who believe, can also create a pit in our stomachs as we deal with the lost world. But the message is clear: until the Last Day, it's God's will that we make Christ known. And we must count the cost to do so.

What would it cost you right now to make Jesus known? Have you been holding back from proclaiming Christ because the cost is too great? What if it would cost some relationship you have, or some comfort you enjoy? We have to take a close look at our hearts and our lives. Following Christ requires an honest assessment – of the lost world, yes, but also of ourselves and what Jesus is calling us to. We need to get real.

We need to be honest – first with ourselves – about the situation here in the last days.

We need to be honest about our hangups and our shortcomings and our sins.

We need to be honest about our hesitations to follow where Jesus is leading.

God is honest with us here in Revelation 10. It's not going to be easy all the time. But it will be good. And it will be worth it.

Will you believe in Jesus Christ and follow Him today? Will you entrust your soul and your life to Him? He makes sinners right with God. And He tasted the bitterness of suffering and death so that you could enjoy sweet, eternal peace with God. Call out to Him today in prayer.

Admit your sin, and trust in the cost He paid to redeem you.

Let's bow together in prayer.