

Six Marks of the Disciple: Denying Yourself

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Caleb Payne

Hello, friends. In this week's prayercast as we meditate, we will be focusing on the third mark of discipleship with Jesus, which is the call on every christian to deny oneself. Denying yourself is an integral part of any walk with Christ, for we believe that in denying ourselves, we are actually becoming like Jesus and being transformed into His image, which is the fullness of the image of God. And that is the goal of Christianity, to have the image of God inside us renewed through Jesus Christ. As we begin, let us turn our hearts and minds to the Lord in prayer; *God, may the transforming power of your spirit be with us this morning as we think and meditate and pray over this mark of discipleship that does not come easy for us. Give us ears to hear and hearts to understand the obedience of Christ, that it may be less about us, and more about you. To the praise of your name forever. Amen.*

The mark of discipleship we are looking at today comes from a rich passage from Luke 14. As I've meditated over this passage in recent days, what struck me was how this passage is set up—that one day, Jesus is being followed by this huge number of people, and as he's walking, He pauses and has what can only be seen as a thinning-of-the-herd moment as he begins to tell the people some offensive stuff that would cause many to stop following him. So let's take a look at the passage, starting in verse 25 of Luke 14:

25 Now great crowds accompanied him, and he turned and said to them, **26** "If anyone comes to me and does not 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. **27** Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple. **28** For which of you, desiring to build a tower, does not first sit down and count the cost, whether he has enough to complete it? **29** Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him, **30** saying, 'This man began to build and was not able to finish.' **31** Or what king, going out to encounter another king in war, will not sit down first and deliberate whether he is able with ten thousand to meet him who comes against him with twenty thousand? **32** And if not, while the other is yet a great way off, he sends a delegation and asks for terms of peace. **33** So therefore, any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple.

Now that is a complex text. Of all the marks of discipleship that are covered in this series, this one will certainly give the most people the most amount of pause. To be a disciple of Jesus costs everything, including a complete turnaround in your thinking and in your living.

Hating Your Family and Yourself?

Now a lot of people over the years have had a hard time understanding this passage and why Jesus would call people to hate what is closest to them. Does Jesus really want us to hate our family and loath ourselves? Isn't Jesus all about love and freedom? Isn't love the greatest commandment, and isn't love the standard he gives to his followers? Of course, the answer to these questions about love is a *resounding* yes. So how is it, then, that we are being called to love and to hate, and apparently to do both at the same time to the same people?

I think the answer to these things can be found in the book of Romans, where the apostle Paul hammers home that the main problem in the cosmos is that what God loves most has merged with what He hates most—that we, his most beloved creation, have become united with our sin. So standing before God, without Christ, we exist as this loved-hated thing that by nature worships ourselves over God, and by repentance, seeks a new heart. And so in Paul's theology, when repentance is not found inside a person, the sinner and their sin are one thing before God with one broken identity—a frankenstein, a living dead, standing opposite of what God desires for us.

And we see throughout Jesus' ministry how he holds this view of humanity. The Jesus who heals everyone who comes to him is also the Jesus who calls all to repent. This Jesus who has compassion on the crowds, for they are like sheep without a shepherd is the same Jesus who calls the weary and the oppressed to come to him, for in Him alone they will find rest.

So when Jesus calls all of us to hate our family and ourselves, he is literally calling us to hate that which kills us and those dearest to us. This type of hatred is part and parcel to the love Jesus has for us. Jesus loves us for who we are but he loves us too much to keep us there. In love, he calls us to deny every part of who we are that is not of Him.

At the root of Christianity is walking and abiding in Christ, allowing this new identity in Him to blossom into a complete severing of our old selves.

As we come to our first moment of meditation this morning, let us pause to reflect on this view of humanity in light of my relationships:

- Is there someone in my life I need to love better by telling them the truth about what is killing them? And alternatively...
- Is there someone in my life I need to have more compassion on knowing that it is the sin and the slavery God hates, not the actual person themselves? Let us pause on this.

Counting the Cost

Now I would like to turn our attention to the second part of our passage this morning concerning the counting of the cost of being a disciple of Christ. In the New Testament, there are two veins in counting the cost. The **first** concerns my relationship with the

desires of this world, the desires of my own flesh and body that run contrary to the ways of the love of God. To be a disciple is to have Jesus crucify our desires and to give us a new heart, where obedience becomes natural to us, day by day and year after year of following closely to Christ. Jesus is upfront about this cost—*“any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple.”* But I think a lot of people in church read this and then make a mistake, they begin putting pressure on themselves to perfect themselves before the God they love. But Paul assures us in Romans 7 that this only leads to ever-present frustration. Rather, it is with the Helper, the spirit of the risen Christ, that this is made possible. If you want to meditate specifically on how this works, I would have you meditate on Hebrews 2, which is, IMO, the most undervalued chapter in the entire Bible. In Hebrews 2, we learn that Christ suffered for the purpose of setting us free from the fear of death. It is an immensely powerful chapter.

The **second** vein of counting the cost also concerns suffering, but another type of suffering that comes by living for Christ in a world that lives for itself. In Romans chapter 8, Paul states that the heirs of God are those who suffer with Christ. And because they suffer with him, they will be glorified with him. If you would like to meditate further on this second vein, I would have you meditate on Isaiah 53 and Philippians 2, both of which express the life Christ lives which we are to imitate.

It is a high cost to be a disciple of Christ. It truly costs everything. But by it we gain everything. By Christ, the presence of God comes and replaces our trauma with Joy, our sin with obedience, our despair with life. As Paul lays it all on the line when he says, “I am not ashamed of the gospel, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit whom he has given us.”

Closing Meditation

As we come to a close this morning, let us meditate together in prayer:
God, I desire to give you my all. I desire to be your disciple. Lord, the cost is high, higher than I can pay myself, but I ask that you will teach me to walk in your spirit day by day, to be transformed into the image of Christ, you beloved son. Less of me, God, and more of you. In Jesus’ name, Amen.