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Is the Price of Christianity Too High?

Matthew 20:22: (NASB) *But Jesus answered, you do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I am about to drink? They said to him, we are able.*



What does it mean to be a Christian? Seriously, what is the bottom line, true meaning of following in the footsteps of Jesus? Is being a Christian like an entitlement program? By professing Jesus, do we receive protection from evil, deliverance from trials or the healing of our maladies? Do we receive a promise of an abundant and prosperous life? Or, is being a Christian more like a "getting whipped into shape" work and endurance program where we lose our own will, learn to do without and have to somehow rejoice in tribulation every day of our difficult lives? Is the price of true Christianity a simple acknowledgment of Jesus being in your life or is it a "sell all that we have and change what we are" mentality? What does it cost to be a true Christian? Is it a price that we are willing to pay?

Many churches today are not teaching what is really involved with following Jesus.

To begin, let us look at this question through the eyes of Jesus' own twelve Apostles. The context of our theme verse takes place just weeks before Jesus' death. The miracles had been performed, the teachings had been given and Lazarus was recently raised from the dead. The raising of Lazarus dramatically accelerated the Pharisees' desire to trap and destroy Jesus. This was the first resuscitation from the dead where someone had been in the grave for multiple days - he began to decompose - there was no way to rationalize this and the Pharisees felt their positions were threatened. They needed to kill both Jesus and Lazarus before word spread. It is in this context we look at Jesus talking with his followers and see the true cost of discipleship.

Matthew 20:20-21: (NASB) ²⁰*Then the mother of the sons of Zebedee came to Jesus with her sons, bowing down and making a request of him.* ²¹*And he said to her, what do you wish? She said to him, Command that in your kingdom these two sons of mine may sit one on your right and one on your left.* (Also found in [Mark 10:35-45](#))

What a question! Clearly, there was no thought of what such a position might cost, some sort of trade-off that would have to happen. What would have provoked such a question, by their mother, no less?

What happened just before that request? **Matthew 20:17-19:** This revealed pain and suffering. Why would they want to be elevated to Jesus' right hand and left hand if it was in the context of human suffering? Did the Apostles listen to what Jesus said, or did they only hear about the coming kingdom? Sometimes what we need to hear are not the things we want to hear.

Footstep Follower Lesson 1: Sometimes we hear what we want to hear, which causes our reactions and responses to be based on something that is less than reality. This is not following!

Jesus knew their hearts and he knew their limitations. The mother of James and John was a follower of Jesus. There was a family loyalty to the cause of Christ. Of course she would want her sons to be as close to the Master as possible. Her heart was good even though the question was immature.

He addresses this immature question with compassion, tact and a dose of reality:

Matthew 20:22: Did they know what he was talking about? He just told them a few verses before that he would be going to Jerusalem, would be delivered to the chief priests and scribes, they would condemn him to death and he would be handed over to the Gentiles to be mocked, scourged and crucified! When Jesus asked, *Are you able to drink the cup that I am about to drink*, he is referring to what he just told them his experience would be. Jesus was not asking this because he was thirsty! Could they walk through the same experiences he would go through?

Without the Holy Spirit, they would have had limited understanding. They responded, *We are able*. While that might sound foolish, it shows how loyal they were. They wanted to be with him regardless of the experience.



Again, they hear Jesus' words but really do not understand his meaning: Matthew 20:23: God's plan included the creation of a "church class" who would follow in Jesus' footsteps - those who would figuratively sit beside Jesus. This honor was not Jesus' to give, but they would have to go through difficult experiences in order to prove their worthiness. They would have to drink from the "cup" of sorrow, the "cup" of trial, the "cup" of difficulty. Being his Apostle required this level of dedication.

The "cup" experiences Jesus had that we could share in: John 15:18-21: *If the world hates you, you know that it has hated me before it hated you.* - He was preparing his followers for what they would encounter. Are you able to drink of the cup? Part of that includes not being held in high standing by those around you. Do we stand for something different and higher that makes people uncomfortable? *You are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world* - You are different. *If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you* - Being pursued with bad intent - the "cup experience" is intense, requiring devotion, discipline and the desire to stay focused. *All these things they will do to you for my name's sake* - You will have these experiences as a result of being a follower of him.

Jesus revealed three times to his Apostles that he would be crucified. These three accounts give us clues as to the price he would pay and therefore the price to which we would be subject: Matthew 16:21-23 Mark 9:30-32 Luke 18:31-34 (See the Full Edition Rewind for the discussion on these points.)

Footstep Follower Lesson 2: Jesus let us know what is required to follow in his footsteps. The fact they are his footsteps tells us he has already been down the path!

What was the reaction of the other ten after the "sit on your right and left" question? Matthew 20:24-28: Jesus made quiet the angst of his followers by further revealing what true discipleship looks like. He was saying, "It is not what any of you think - it is about service and humility. You become 'less than' in order to be 'more than.'" Look at how Jesus lived every day.

Jesus hammered home his clarity on discipleship the night before his crucifixion:

John 13:12-17: Jesus puts humility and servitude on display. This is an obvious lesson.

Luke 22:21-23: First, Jesus gives them an obvious physical lesson in humility - he washed their feet, stooping below everyone in his service to them. Next, he would reveal that one of them would betray him. The disciples asked Jesus who the betrayer would be. Judas was revealed and then he left. Luke 22:24: Um....they are already back to who will be the greatest?!? What happened to that obvious lesson in humility? Human nature! This is why we have to be so focused on seeing what the will of God is.

Jesus refocuses them: Luke 22:25-30: He gave them the hope of greatness, but not before they would have to be servants! Humility and servitude would eventually sink in but they would need constant reminders (as do we). 1 Peter 5:6-9: What kind of experiences do I have to go through in order to be humbled by them?

Footstep Follower Lesson 3: How easily we forget the powerful lessons of following! The need for humility is much easier to see in someone else, yet it is the very basis of the cost of following Jesus!

Humility is an *accurate* assessment of one's self. We see our talents and abilities and use them. Humility does not mean being a doormat or having a "woe is me" attitude. We are good for what God has blessed us to be good for - let us use that in His service to glorify Him.

Jesus described what it takes to follow him in a variety of ways; one was drinking of his cup. Another was self-denial and all that goes with it: Matthew 16:24: (NRSV) *Then Jesus told his disciples, if any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.* This is a three-step process: *Deny themselves, Take up their cross, Follow me.*

We could deny the wrong thing: Luke 22:34: (KJV) *And he said, I tell thee, Peter, the cock shall not crow this day, before that thou shalt thrice deny that thou knowest me.*

Jesus used the same word *deny* to describe what Peter was going to do three separate times. How could Peter have gotten to that point? He was human. Our faith gets surrounded by life's experiences and sometimes we cave in when we are intimidated. We end up denying that



which we most love. Peter must have been broken-hearted at his actions, but Jesus brought him back with grace and love. Peter was eventually given important responsibilities.

Which will we deny - ourselves or Jesus, whom we profess to love?

Denial put to the test: To love and serve is one thing, to sacrifice and follow Jesus is another: Mark 10:17-23: This young man loved God, served God and lived honorably. Was this enough to follow Jesus? Jesus recognized all the good and honorable qualities in this man, so he showed him the next step. More would be required.

The truest test of discipleship is that of loyalty at any cost. What do we hold closest to our hearts? What are we willing to leave behind for the sake of the footsteps of Jesus?

Footstep Follower Lesson 4: Self-denial is the first of the two essential qualities needed to walk in Jesus' footsteps, for it personalizes the meaning of "not my will, but Thy will be done."

What does it mean to "take up your cross"? For the early Christians, this would have been a violently graphic picture of a life of suffering. Jesus used the picture to give full disclosure on what his footsteps may cost. We all might not go through such suffering and agony, but that is the recipe. The footsteps of Jesus means a difficult way.

Some of the aspects of Christian sacrifice used in the New Testament:

- ✦ Persecution: to pursue, being chased for a negative reason
- ✦ Suffering: to undergo, to be affected, to have an experience take root
- ✦ Reproach: to defame, i.e. rail at, chide, taunt
- ✦ Tribulation: pressure
- ✦ Temptation: (First Greek word) endeavor, scrutinize, entice, discipline, go through something so you can learn from the difficulty
- ✦ Temptation: (Second Greek word) a putting to proof - by implication, adversity, the proof is in what comes out of the experience

Is the average churchgoer taught that these things are part of the Christian walk and are to be expected? Is this really what it costs? Yes, according to Scripture.

Peter verifies the intensity of the Christian experience of taking up your cross:

1 Peter 4:12-16: Fiery ordeals should not be surprising. But notice they are mixed with rejoicing. If these experiences are coming to you in your life, you can say the Lord is working with you, helping you to grow. We have to be willing to accept these trials with open arms - that is difficult. But God perhaps is stretching you further than you have ever been stretched - are you willing to go through that? Even a physical stretching of a muscle by working out causes pain, but you are stronger tomorrow. These are the experiences of our life. *This too shall pass*, and this lifetime is short compared to eternity.

Make sure the suffering comes to you *not* because you have done wrong; it should come because you are a Christian and are living life differently than those around us. You must be willing to pay the consequences and be blessed of God for standing up for something higher.

It is not all bad - the pain and challenge are balanced out through faith, peace and God's love: Romans 5:1-5: This world does not have peace with God as it is contrary to Him.

Rejoice in our sufferings - Rejoicing is the calm, positive contentment that things are good because God has them under control. Why do we suffer? Because it is fertile ground for strong and necessary growth. Our suffering is not supposed to be like the Pharisees, who stood on the street corner after fasting, looking miserable because they were hungry. It was an outward show of piety. We should not necessarily be wearing our sufferings on the outside, because we have a calm peace within us. The grace of God should flow through the pain and difficulty - we want Him to shine through us.

All of this brings us into a NEW FAMILY arrangement: Romans 8:14-18: *Abba! Father!* - Translates to "Daddy," showing our closeness with the Father; a very personal relationship.

This new family offers us to become joint heirs with Christ at the cost of suffering for a short time: 1 Corinthians 12:26: (NIV) *If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it.* This proves ourselves trustworthy to be given heir-ship. It is not just us as individuals, but the suffering of the body of Christ. We share with one another and work through the trials to encourage each other.



Footstep Follower Lesson 5: "Taking up our cross" is the second essential quality needed to walk in Jesus footsteps, for if we do, our hands and heart will have no strength or focus left for our own interests.

Follow him to where, through what and why? **To where? An eternal dwelling with the Captain of our faith:** John 14:2-3: Heaven is not an entitlement we receive by just speaking the name, "Jesus." We have to put ourselves into a position of living this costly but blessed lifestyle. We follow him through the sacrifice and suffering, and by God's grace, we will receive a heavenly reward.

Through what? Difficulty, but not without strength and support from above:

Matthew 11:28-30: *My yoke is easy* - Two animals are yoked together so they can pull a load more efficiently. An "easy" yoke is one fitted to the particular animal where they can do the most work possible without pain and strain. We have a lot of work to do, but we have a custom-made yoke. Our life experiences are ours alone, and we will not be given more than we can handle.

We CAN make it through the most difficult trials in life with our lives in Jesus' hands:

Romans 8:35-37: The Apostle Paul literally went through these experiences.

A casual follower would NOT be led as a sheep to slaughter. This describes mature followers: Romans 8:38-39: Only a true footstep follower would have this conviction and focus regarding their purpose, but this high calling is not taught in many churches.

A true follower prepares to fight - to actually be engaged in the event - to lay everything on the line: Ephesians 6:10-13

Why? Because God's plan has ALWAYS been for the blessing of his entire human creation.

Galatians 3:28-29

Micah 4:1-2: We want to be used in the kingdom to help reconcile the world back to God. We have peace with God now and the world will have it later.

Footstep Follower Lesson 6: To follow him is not a thought or a feeling or even an event. It is a way of life that encompasses all of our heart, mind, soul and strength and is fed by the grace of God.

Following in Jesus' footsteps is not an event or one-time decision or feeling.

Daily we must be willing to show ourselves to be humble clay in the Potter's hands, to be shaped and molded to whatever He needs. We must be willing to go through the difficulty, trials and suffering. We will receive the grace and strength of the power of Jesus and God's Spirit working through us to be overcomers. The result will be the blessing of all the world of humanity.

*So, is the price of Christianity too high?
For Jonathan and Rick and Christian Questions...
Think about it...!*