

Discipleship

The Cost of Discipleship

Lesson #13 for March 29, 2014

Scriptures: Luke 12:49-53; Matthew 10:34-39; 18:8-9; Deuteronomy 21:15; 1 Corinthians 9:24-27; John 14:1-3; Hebrews 11:32-12:4.

1. As the title suggests, this lesson is about the cost of discipleship. We know that in times past Christians have been killed by beheading, by crucifixion, by being thrown to the lions, and by many other means. They have suffered ridicule, lost their jobs, been thrown out of their families, etc. Those things seem very remote to most of us living comfortably in the 21st century.
2. Read 2 Timothy 3:12. Does that apply today? Everywhere? To all Christians? Why is it that we as Christians are not being persecuted today? Is it because it is against the law? Or, perhaps, is it because we are not truly “living godly lives in Christ Jesus”? Is persecution now or in the near future a popular message?
3. At some time, most of us have listened to one of the “health and wealth” preachers. Those people clearly suggest that if you follow them, you will be rewarded with fancy cars, a nice house, and financial gain. And they seem to try to demonstrate that by their own lifestyle. Is that what Jesus had in mind? Is Christianity worth dying for? Or, is it supposed to make us prosperous?
4. But, we can be sure of one thing: No matter what sacrifice we might have to make—even dying for Christ’s sake which could be our calling—the cost is cheap enough.
5. Read Luke 12:49-53; 14:25-26; and Matthew 10:27. Could these words be real? Did Jesus really mean that we might have to separate from our families? Aren’t Christians supposed to be the best husbands, wives, fathers, mothers, and children? But, we need to remember that we are in the middle of the great controversy; and it is a real war—a war of ideas and perhaps a physical war!
6. What do you suppose was the response when Jesus told His disciples that the gospel might separate them from their families? Try to imagine how this would be reported on a modern television newscast:

“Today, celebrated religious leader Jesus of Nazareth advocated familial hatred during His afternoon address. Analysts are comparing these current pronouncements with previously released statements that promoted loving relationships with neighbors and enemies. Informed commentators wonder if this indicates recent policy shifts. Other unconfirmed quotations suggest selling everything and turning the proceeds over to the Jesus movement. Stay tuned for further developments.” (*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide*, p. 105)
7. Surely, Jesus did not mean that we should hate our relatives! So, what is the point? What was He trying to say? Read Deuteronomy 21:15. If you compare that verse in several modern versions such as the *New Revised Standard Version* or possibly the *Modern Language Bible* or even the *Tanakh Jewish Bible* or the *New American Standard Bible*, you will see that they translate this not as *hated* but *disliked* or *unloved*. It seems clear from the parallel passage in Matthew 10:37 that that is what Jesus had in mind—to be *loved less*.
8. Is it possible that Jesus really meant that if our family receives precedence over Him and He becomes secondary, He is no longer Lord in our lives? He has told us that we cannot serve multiple masters. How far should we carry the idea that loving God unreservedly must be first and foremost in our lives? Do we agree that discipleship exacts the supreme price: Undivided loyalty to Christ? What does it imply to put Christ first even before family in the 21st century? Surely, we are not to give up our jobs and stop supporting our families. Of course, ultimate success would imply that we get our families on board with us. How do we do that? What is the best method?
9. Read Luke 14:27. Compare Matthew 10:38; 16:24; Mark 8:34; and Luke 9:23. What is the relationship between cross-bearing and the other teachings of our church? Does cross-bearing trump righteousness by faith? Christian forgiveness? Preaching the three angels’ messages? Or, preparing for the second coming?
10. Is living a cross-bearing life legalistic? How should we respond to those who say: “Divine grace has accomplished all, and the human race does nothing except receive it.” Do you think Jesus would

agree with that statement?

11. Read Matthew 16:21-25; Mark 8:31-9:1; Luke 9:22-27; **21:12-19**; John 15:17-20; **16:1-2**; and **Revelation 14:4**. Are we really prepared to follow Jesus wherever He goes? Revelation suggests that is what the chosen people of God will do at the end. Is it possible that in free countries like the United States, God's chosen people could be hunted down, even killed? Will the time come when those who kill us will believe they are doing God's will? Did many participants in the Counter-Reformation as well as those hunting down the Waldenses and Huguenots think they were doing God's will?
12. At what point in the process of bringing new believers into the church, should we suggest that they have to bear a cross? Doesn't that sound forbidding? How many disciples would be scared away? We need to remember that conversion is a process of being forgiven of our sins and following the example of Jesus. And following that example means to be prepared to bear a cross when necessary. That is an essential part of being a Christian.
13. Is there anything this world has to offer that comes even close to what Christ is offering? Eternal life? Living with God? Absolutely nothing!
14. But, how many of us want to enjoy the pleasures of sin as much as possible so we do not have to pay too much for our "ticket to heaven"? Are we really trying to get the best of both worlds? Have we forgotten that Jesus said we cannot serve two masters?
15. Have you ever honestly tried taking up your cross? What was that like? What is your cross? Can you identify something in your life that is clearly an experience of cross-bearing?
16. Read Luke 14:31-33; 1 Corinthians 9:24-27; Hebrews 12:1-4; 2 Peter 1:5-11. Jesus suggested, and Paul and Peter seemed to agree, that we should be prepared to give up everything, even to die. Discipleship is not one thing among many others; but, if we are serious about being Christians, following Jesus has to be number one.
17. Is Jesus really asking us to surrender everything to Him? Would it be true to suggest that whatever we are not willing to give to Him will become an idol in our lives? Doesn't He promise us the power to overcome every sin? If we invite the Holy Spirit in, doesn't He have the power to actually change our lives, even our characters? What is implied when we say that "by beholding we become changed"? See *Great Controversy* page 555.
18. In 1 Corinthians 9:24-27, Paul said that in order to win a race you must do much preparation and set aside everything that hinders your progress. We cannot look back. The race we are in offers eternal life as a reward. Will anyone who arrives in heaven think s/he is not a winner?

The runners put aside every indulgence that would tend to weaken the physical powers, and by severe and continuous discipline trained their muscles to strength and endurance, that when the day of the contest should arrive, they might put the heaviest tax upon their powers. How much more important that the Christian, whose eternal interests are at stake, bring appetite and passion under subjection to reason and the will of God! Never must he allow his attention to be diverted by amusements, luxuries, or ease. **All his habits and passions must be brought under the strictest discipline. Reason, enlightened by the teachings of God's word and guided by His Spirit, must hold the reins of control.**—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 311. [Bold type is added.]
19. Modern businesses have learned how to use very sophisticated business tools. One of the best-known tools is called cost-benefit analysis. There are very sophisticated ways of trying to determine if we set about to do some new thing, will it benefit the company for which we are working. Will it produce sustainable returns?
20. Are we willing to honestly measure the costs of living a Christ-like life against the ultimate eternal rewards? We need to be honest. The costs may include emotional suffering, social rejection, and under unusual circumstances perhaps even physical torture, financial deprivation, imprisonment and, if history is to be repeated, death itself. Do we really believe discipleship involves all of that?
21. Read Matthew 18:8-9; Luke 6:35; and Philippians 2:3. But, contrast Mark 10:28-31 and Luke 18:30. Did Jesus really intend that we cut off hands or remove eyes? Did He really mean that we should

love our enemies? Are we actually prepared to consider others better than ourselves? Or, was Jesus just setting up an ultimate standard which is beyond possibility but is a good goal?

22. Do we have any questions about the ultimate benefits? Read Luke 18:28-30; John 14:1-3; and Revelation 22:1-5. Are you looking forward to seeing God face-to-face? When that happens, will you be fearful? Do you look forward to living with God for eternity?
23. It is generally agreed that if something does not cost, it is probably not worth much. Would that be true of the Christian life?
24. Let us imagine for a moment that you start a very successful business and you earn millions of dollars. Sounds like a dream. Doesn't it? Then, what if you were required to give all that up to follow Christ? If you knew Christ was coming very soon, would it really matter? Do we take heaven seriously enough? Have we studied it so that we have some clear idea in our minds exactly what God has promised?
25. In Hebrews 11, Paul talked about a group of famous saints who had suffered through all kinds of difficulties but remained faithful. He concluded with Hebrews 11:32-12:4 which is addressed directly to us. What does it mean to say we "have not resisted to the point of death"? Notice also Hebrews 11:35. What is implied by a "better resurrection"? Surely, we understand the difference between the first resurrection and the second resurrection. Revelation 20 makes it very clear that we should choose to be a part of the first resurrection to be taken to heaven and not wait until the second resurrection to be a part of Satan's group.
26. This year we will commemorate 170 years since the Great Disappointment in 1844. Why hasn't Jesus come back? Never has any people in the history of our world been blessed with so much information and so much help in living the Christian life. Jesus is here to help us. The Holy Spirit is here to help us. The Father is overseeing all the activities of His people here on this earth. Isn't it time we accept God's invitation not only to be a disciple but also to be a disciple-maker? Should we even stop to count the cost? Think of the implications of these statements from Ellen White.

Wickedness is reaching a height never before attained, and yet many ministers of the gospel are crying, "Peace and safety." (*Acts of the Apostles* 220)

Fire comes down from God out of heaven. The earth is broken up. The weapons concealed in its depths are drawn forth. Devouring flames burst from every yawning chasm. The very rocks are on fire. The day has come that shall burn as an oven. The elements melt with fervent heat, the earth also, and the works that are therein are burned up. Malachi 4:1; 2 Peter 3:10. The earth's surface seems one molten mass—a vast, seething lake of fire. It is the time of the judgment and perdition of ungodly men—"the day of the Lord's vengeance, and the year of recompenses for the controversy of Zion." Isaiah 34:8.

The wicked receive their recompense in the earth. Proverbs 11:31. They "shall be stubble: and the day that cometh shall burn them up, saith the Lord of hosts." Malachi 4:1. Some are destroyed as in a moment, while others suffer many days. All are punished "according to their deeds."—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, pp. 672,673.

27. The title of this particular lesson, *The Cost of Discipleship*, comes from the title of a book written by Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Consider these quotations from that book.

The old life is left behind, and completely surrendered. The disciple is dragged out of his relative security into a life of absolute insecurity (that is, in truth, into the absolute security and safety of the fellowship of Jesus).—Pages 62,63.

If we would follow Jesus we must take certain definite steps. The first step, which follows the call, cuts the disciple off from his previous existence.—Pages 66,67.

The cross is laid on every Christian. The first Christ-suffering which every man must experience is the call to abandon the attachments of this world. . . . When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die.—Page 99.

28. Jesus lived in a very different time, place, and culture than we do. Do we understand clearly what it means to be His follower in the 21st century? Are we prepared to live a life of service for Him?

After this series of lessons, is it clear in your mind what it means to be a disciple? Are you ready to live a life of discipleship?

29. What attracted people to Jesus? What is the attitude of people in your community toward the members of your church? Toward Christianity in general? Toward religion in general?
30. We know that many, many people in Jesus's day admired Him, were healed by Him, and were prepared to make Him king! So, why was He arrested and killed? Do we understand clearly what was involved in that whole process?
31. Are you comfortable living a life of discipleship? Do you enjoy living the life of discipleship? As you look forward to events in your community and country, what are the chances that you might eventually have to suffer for Jesus? Are you praying every morning for an opportunity to witness for God? Do your neighbors and friends and business associates appreciate you and how you represent your church? If every Seventh-day Adventist were as active in the church as you are, would the church make progress?
32. Have you heard a sermon any time recently about discipleship? Were these lessons, something of a surprise to you? Are you prepared to put in the necessary time, training, and effort to become a true disciple of Jesus?
33. A recent book has been published suggesting that in many areas of expertise the real experts have to spend at least 10,000 hours focusing on what they do. That is a lot of time! How much time do you spend on your Christianity as compared to earning a living?
34. We all recognize that the world has changed a lot since the times of Jesus. However, we also recognize that there are parts of this world where religious persecution is a very real thing. In some parts of the Middle East, people and governments have become almost completely intolerant of Christians.
35. By contrast, what does discipleship mean in a society where people basically ignore anything to do with religion? They do not care about anything except their secular pursuits and materialism. Which do you think would be more difficult for you: 1) To live in a place where you could be persecuted for your religion? Or, 2) To live in a society where nobody really cares?
36. Read Matthew 16:24-26. What did Jesus mean when He said, "Whoever wants to save his own life will lose it; but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it"? Can we really gain life by giving it away? Jesus did!
37. A number of Christian apologists have noted the fact that "the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church." Why is that? Why is it true, historically, that the church seems to prosper and grow much more in times of difficulty than in times of ease?
38. Being realistic, how do we balance the needs of our jobs, our families, and other potential responsibilities with this responsibility of discipleship?
39. We know that a group of unlikely associates followed Jesus for a relatively brief time and then turned the world upside down! (Acts 17:6) Has the time come for Christians to turn the world upside down once again?
40. It may seem like you are worn-out, tired, even burned-out on religion. Consider these words from Jesus as translated in *The Message Bible*.

"Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to me. Get away with me and you'll recover your life. I'll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with me and work with me—watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won't lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with me and you'll learn to live freely and lightly." (Matthew 11:28-30, *The Message*)
41. Do we dare to take these words seriously?

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