

[R5425 : page 90]

THE COST OF DISCIPLESHIP

– APRIL 19. – LUKE 14:25-35. –

"Whosoever will save his life shall lose it; whosoever will lose his life for My sake shall find it." – Matthew 16:25.

IT WAS at the close of the Great Teacher's ministry. Vast multitudes were following Him, all, according to the requirements of the Law, going up to Jerusalem to keep the Feast of the Passover, at which Jesus foreknew, that He would die as the antitypical Passover Lamb. Occasionally in the journey He would turn and address some of the multitude. Today's lesson gives us some of His teachings. It was the custom of teachers in those days to accept disciples, or pupils – those who considered them great teachers and desired to learn of them and profit by their instruction. To this day Christians claim to be the disciples, or followers, of Jesus, claim to be giving heed to His word and seeking the blessing which He promised to His faithful followers.

The terms of discipleship which Jesus set forth, it will be noted, are very different from those proclaimed by some who profess to be His mouthpieces, His ministers. They sometimes proclaim that it is a sufficient sign of discipleship for persons to arise in a congregation and declare that they desire the prayers of God's people. Such are counted converts. To get them to take even this step requires the holding out of inducements. Sometimes the inducements are of a commercial kind – greater business prosperity to the merchant, greater favor with the employer for the clerk, an entrance into society or a better prospect of political preferment.

If we contrast these methods with the words of Jesus in this lesson, we shall perceive that the vast number of [R5425 : page 91] nominal Christians have been, so to speak, inveigled into professing something that they never intended to profess. Many are

entrapped into professing Christianity who never became Christians, according to the Master's conditions of discipleship, and who hearken not to His Word.

"If any man come unto Me and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple. And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after Me, cannot be My disciple." Surely there is no excuse for us to misunderstand such plain terms and conditions. The Master did not say that only His disciples could *ever* gain everlasting life. His general teaching was that the whole world is lost, estranged from God and without the right to everlasting life. But He came to die, "the Just for the unjust," that all of the unjust might have the opportunity of returning to Divine favor. He did not say that none but His followers would have such an opportunity of future life. Those who so declare are adding to the Word and helping thus, eventually, to confound themselves.

What Jesus *did* teach was that He would in due time be "the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world." The world had already existed for 4,000 years before Jesus came, and no one will dispute that those who died previous to His coming had no opportunity of knowing Him and being His disciples. Yet He died to bless them, as well as to bless all who have been born into the world since. This blessing of the world, He declared, is to be accomplished by His Kingdom; and He told them plainly that His Kingdom was not of this world, age, or epoch, but of a future period. For the time being He was merely inviting disciples, and not attempting to reach the world. **[R5426 : page 91]**

The disciples were invited to become joint-heirs with Jesus in His Kingdom, that they might sit with Him in His Throne and participate with Him in His great work of human uplift – Restitution of all that was lost in Adam and redeemed at Calvary. He told them plainly that only through much tribulation would they be able to

enter the Kingdom class; that the tribulations would prove their love of righteousness, their loyalty to God; and that God had purposely made the way so narrow that only the few, the very choicest of humanity in God's sight, could find it – a very few walking in that way to its further end of glory, honor and immortality.

With this view clearly before our mind's eye, there is a reasonableness in the hard terms of discipleship. Only those willing to comply with such terms, and thus to demonstrate their love and loyalty to God, could properly be entrusted with the great power, glory and honor which will be granted to the Kingdom class, in association with the Redeemer, as soon as it shall have been completed. Let us examine these words carefully, meanwhile measuring ourselves – not our flesh, but our spirit, our intentions, our desires.

Well did Henry Ward Beecher say respecting this statement made by the Master: "Never was there before, and never has there been since, I apprehend, such a speech made to those that professed to be willing and desirous to follow another." And probably a parallel statement is found in Matthew's Gospel (10:37): "He that loveth father or mother *more than Me* is not worthy of Me." The word hate is apparently used in contrast with love. To be a disciple of Christ, then, means that we must love supremely the Lord and the principles for which He stands, so that love for others would comparatively be hatred.

This proposition in its very start signifies a cutting-off – so far as the man is concerned, the will, the purpose – of every other love that would conflict with our love for the Lord and with our obedience to His will. Our earthly loves are to be counted as nothing in comparison. We are to be ready to sacrifice at the Lord's command every earthly hope, aim, object, and to lay down our lives willingly, gladly. Such as manifest a devotion of this kind can be trusted with anything. Of these the Lord speaks, saying

prophetically, "They shall be Mine, saith the Lord, in that Day when I (come to) make up My Jewels." – Malachi 3:17.

The fact that Jesus was of this character Himself, and placed the Father's will above all other considerations, is an assurance that all amongst His joint-heirs in the Kingdom will have the same mind, the same spirit. He assures us that the Kingdom will not be a selfish one, but the very reverse. The kings and princes and judges of that Kingdom will be not only irresistible in power, but incorruptible, unbearably. With them the Divine standard will be first, in the absolute sense.

Such devotion to the Lord as is here described will necessarily at some time or other mean the severing of many earthly ties. It means that the followers of Jesus will be thought a peculiar people; and that many will think their course strange, unnatural, insane. Hence, as St. Paul said, we are counted fools all the day long for Christ's sake – because we preach the Wisdom of God and the Love of God in preference to the wisdom of humanity and the love of humanity. Of such St. John writes, saying, "As He was, so are we in this world" – ostracized, misunderstood; reprov'd, slandered. Only those who can stand such an experience can be winners of the crown to which Jesus referred, saying, To him that overcometh I will give a crown of life, and permit him to sit with Me in My Throne.

Who is sufficient for these things? asks the Apostle. And he furnishes the answer: "Our sufficiency is of God"; and in the promises – "My grace is sufficient for thee; My strength is made perfect in weakness"; and again, "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee."

DEFINITION OF CROSS-BEARING

Adding to the severity of the terms, Jesus declared, "Whosoever doth not bear his cross and come after Me, cannot be My disciple." It is not enough that we should start out with a

courageous intention, a bold acknowledgment of Jesus, and a bold profession of discipleship. After we have been faithful in taking our stand on the Lord's side, we must be proven. Not merely those who have a little enthusiasm at the beginning, but those who shall demonstrate their worthiness by their faithfulness will be accounted worthy, and will be finally accepted by the Lord. Cross-bearing must be a daily matter. Our crosses are those oppositions of the world, the flesh and the Devil which conflict with the Divine will as laid down for us in the Lord's Word. The only proper sentiment is that which the Master expresses, saying, "Not My will, but Thine."

As an admonition to all not to undertake discipleship without mature deliberation, our Lord gave a parable of a man who began to build a tower, laying the foundation, but who was not able to complete it, and thus wasted his effort and made himself ridiculous, foolish. Another illustration was that of going to war without adequate preparation – an undertaking which would result disastrously. All the followers of Christ set out to build characters and to "fight a good fight." Whoever enlists under the banner of Jesus takes his stand against Satan and sin, and must expect to have a hard battle, and not to receive the victor's crown, nor to hear the words, "Well [R5426 : page 92] done," except by faithful perseverance in well doing.

What a blessing it would be if all who espouse the cause of Christ would do so with a full, clear understanding of what they are doing and with the fixed determination to go onward in the good way, not even to look back! The cause of Christ would be much further advanced amongst men; and while their number would be much smaller, their influence and power in the world would undoubtedly be much greater.

"SALT IS GOOD, BUT – "

Salt has preservative qualities in connection with whatever it touches. It also serves to bring out the flavor of our food. In olden

times it was used as a symbol of faithfulness, loyalty; and it is said that even yet some of the Arabs would be faithful to death to any person in whose home they had eaten salt. To them it seems to mean a pledge of loyalty.

Jesus used salt as a symbol, representing His own loyalty to God and the loyalty which all of His followers must have, and not only so, but which they must maintain. If salt lose its value for seasoning purposes, it is useless for anything else. It will not serve as a fertilizer, for it has an opposite effect. It is absolutely useless except for its intended purpose. So the Christian has a special purpose in the world – to be a preservative power, to have, as it were, antiseptic qualities, and to draw out all the good qualities of those with whom he is connected. This is the mission of the Christian in respect to the world. If he fail in this, he has failed in the purpose for which he was called, and is of no particular value in the Lord's service.

"He that hath an ear to hear, let him hear," said Jesus, in conclusion. All of His followers are to take heed to these words. Whoever neglects them despises the One who gave them, and will surely fail of a blessing that might otherwise have been secured. But as for the world, "ears they have, but they hear not; eyes have they, but they see not." We are not to measure the world by the same standards that we measure ourselves and all who profess to be the followers of Jesus. The world's highest standard is the Golden Rule. The Christian's highest standard is self-sacrifice, doing God's will at any cost.

=====