

Building a Life

Luke 14:25-33; Deuteronomy 30:15-20

Sunday, September 4, 2022 at The First Congregational Church of Marshalltown, Iowa

- Introduction-

Years ago, I had a friend back in the days when we lived in Boston who always played Monopoly with a distinctly capitalistic flair. He bought as many properties as he could and then would offer to sell them, but never at list price. He always wanted the buyer to "sweeten the pot." I thought of him and his style of playing that game as I read these passages that the Lord Jesus spoke about discipleship. Large crowds followed Him at this point, but when He addressed the requirements of being His disciples. To be Christ's disciple is to build a life, made up of the habits, routines and actions of our days that learn from, honor and serve the Lord Jesus. In fact He compares such a life to the construction of a building. But He warns us to consider the cost. He refused to "sweeten the pot". In fact, He made it very hard for those who listened to Him. But life is all about being a disciple of Jesus, is it not? Let's take a look at what He said.

- Set the Stage: This passage in Luke's Gospel right after the parable of the great supper, in which everyone has an excuse not to attend the banquet.

Shortly before the passage at hand, Jesus told a parable of a great man who organized a feast, only to find that everyone on the guest list declined to come. All of them had a reason of some sort, indicating that they lived busy lives and simply could not find the time to attend. Eventually, he instructed his servants to invite anyone willing to come. What he was implying was that if the people did not make following Him the ultimate priority, they would always find something else to do. The spiritual life is of ultimate importance, or it will not keep. They were hard words, but what Jesus said after that must have caused His listeners to pause in shock.

- Main Point: Hating your family; Being a disciple is to be maintained at all costs if necessary.

He said that anyone wanting to come after Him must hate his father and mother, wife, children, brothers and sister and even his own life or he cannot be a disciple. It is hyperbole. Elsewhere Jesus said that if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off, and if your right eye causes you to sin, remove it. He didn't mean it literally, or else we all would be maimed. He did mean to impress upon us that sin is to be hated and treated as something dreadful. Likewise, Christ impresses upon us the priority of being a disciple. If it costs you the love of your own family, as it does for some in other parts of the world, be ready to accept that. If it costs you your very life, consider that carefully if you are going to be a disciple of Christ. Matthew's Gospel uses the phrase "loves more than" rather than "hate". It's not that you're required to literally hate your family, but if you're going to love Christ, you must love Him more than anyone else.

Bear the cross

Jesus then went on to call on would-be disciples to bear their crosses. By the way, "bear" is present active indicative. He was telling them that they should all bear their crosses, starting now. In three of the four gospels Jesus speaks of His disciples picking up their crosses and following Him. If

there was anything that He could have said that was even more shocking than His comments about hating family and life, it would be this. Always remember, that dying on a cross was a brutal fact of life in that place and time and everyone had seen people nailed to crosses and left to die. It often took two or three days to do so. To make things even more humiliating for the victim, he was required to carry the cross-piece across town through a jeering crowd to the place of execution, in effect to say that Rome was right to condemn. One commentator wrote this: "So when Jesus enjoined His followers to carry their crosses and follow Him, He was referring to a public display before others that Jesus was right and that the disciples were following Him even to their own deaths." It is the same message was that given when one is baptized. The person chooses to follow Jesus, come what may. Years later, Paul wrote that he had been crucified with Christ (Galatians 2:20), that he had rejected the world as the world had rejected him and that he accepted all the trouble and loss that befell him when he decided to be a missionary. Not every Christian will literally be crucified. Some in different parts of the world are indeed martyred, but every Christian will bears a cross in some fashion. Following Christ always comes at a cost. Note, however, the irony that when Jesus could not carry the cross to His death, weak as He was, none of His disciples was there to pick it up for Him. Still, every Christian bears a cross. Mine will not necessarily be yours, but we all have a cross. We all pay a price to follow Jesus.

- Application: God is your life

One application is found in our Old Testament passage

Deuteronomy 30:20 (NKJV)

²⁰that you may love the LORD your God, that you may obey His voice, and that you may cling to Him, for He is your life and the length of your days; and that you may dwell in the land which the LORD swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to give them.”

Your spiritual life is your top priority, upon which all the rest of your life is based. Many people live in just the opposite fashion. Consider what you are willing to give up in order to be a disciple, but do so knowing that God is your life both in that He sustains your very existence, and He guides you into building a life of habitual goodness and grace. It is as a disciple of Jesus that we build our best lives.

- Conclusion

I've often wondered what happened to my friend in Boston who always liked people to "sweet the pot" while playing Monopoly. Hopefully he is doing well. Jesus never "sweetened the pot" when people considered being His disciple. On the contrary, He said that it would be costly, that the spiritual life of a disciple has to be the utmost priority and if you had to choose between that and the love of family, discipleship must win. He said that being a disciple involved carrying a cross, and the risk of rejection or trouble was always a possibility. You build a life as a disciple of Jesus. It is costly but it is worth it.