

## **Discipleship-Counting the Cost**

### **Mark 8:34-35**

"Whoever desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me.  
NKJV

That must have seemed a very strange request for the disciples. It no doubt meant something very different to them than it does to us today. Today we are surrounded with crosses. They are in our churches and in our homes. We find them as ear rings and tattoos.

But in Jesus' day that is not what crosses were about. The cross of Jesus' day was the desired form of execution. It was meant to inflict the great horror among those who were occupied by the Romans and to instill fear and submission. The Romans often did not worry about trials and due process for their victims. During later times the roads of Rome were lined with crosses of Christians crucified for the offense of being Christians. I doubt very seriously if those early Christians venerated the cross as worshipers do today.

#### I. How the Romans used the cross

- A. Life Application Bible Commentary: Luke 23:26 As they led Jesus away, Simon of Cyrene, who was coming in from the country just then, was forced to follow Jesus and carry his cross. (nlt) Jesus was led away from Pilate and out to the place where he would be executed. Condemned prisoners had to carry the crossbeam of their own cross on their shoulders through the streets of Jerusalem and to the execution site outside the city. Jesus started to carry his cross, but, weakened from the beatings he had received, he was physically unable to carry it all the way. A man named Simon from the country of Cyrene was coming into the city. Cyrene was in northern Africa (see Acts 2:10). He may have been a Jew coming on a pilgrimage to the city for the Passover, or he may have been from Cyrene but resided in Palestine. Soldiers were free by law to coerce citizens at any time. The soldiers were probably experienced in these matters. They knew how to read the crowd's reaction. A staggering criminal could be hated and humiliated by the crowd, but one completely unable to shoulder his cross might stir up the sympathy of the same people. Through public executions, Rome showed that it meant business. Criminals were not to be pitied. So a stranger was forced to follow Jesus and carry his cross.
- B. Life Application Bible Commentary: Luke 14:27 "Whoever does not carry the cross and follow me cannot be my disciple." (nrsv) Besides being willing to love Jesus more than any others and more than life itself, the true disciple must be ready to carry the cross and follow (see also 9:23 and commentary there). Jesus' audience was well aware of what it meant to "carry the cross." When the Romans led a criminal to his execution site, the criminal would be forced to carry the cross on which he would die. This showed submission to Rome and warned observers that they had better submit too. Jesus gave this teaching to get the crowds to think

through their enthusiasm for him. He encouraged those who were superficial either to go deeper or to turn back. Following Christ means total submission to him—perhaps even to the point of death.

- C. Holman Bible Dictionary; A person crucified in Jesus' day was first of all scourged (beaten with a whip consisting of thongs with pieces of metal or bone attached to the end) or at least flogged until the blood flowed. This was not just done out of cruelty but was designed to hasten death and lessen the terrible ordeal. After the beating, the victim was forced to bear the crossbeam to the execution site in order to signify that life was already over and to break the will to live. A tablet detailing the crime(s) was often placed around the criminal's neck and then fastened to the cross. At the site the prisoner was often tied (the normal method) or nailed (if a quicker death was desired) to the crossbeam. The nail would be driven through the wrist rather than the palm, since the smaller bones of the hand could not support the weight of the body. The beam with the body was then lifted and tied to the already affixed upright pole. Pins or a small wooden block were placed halfway up to provide a seat for the body lest the nails tear open the wounds or the ropes force the arms from their sockets. Finally the feet were tied or nailed to the post. Death was caused by the loss of blood circulation and coronary failure. Especially if the victims were tied, it could take days of hideous pain as the extremities turned slowly gangrenous; so often the soldiers would break the victims legs with a club, causing massive shock and a quick death. Such deaths were usually done in public places, and the body was left to rot for days, with carrion birds allowed to degrade the corpse further.
- D. So you see that when Jesus spoke to those who seems so eager to follow Him about the cross, it was meant as a deterrent, not an encouragement.
1. Today we never associate the cross with our own suffering and death.
  2. We do not consider that following Jesus would ever result in our death, at least not in America.
  3. Well that is partially true, for often it is in the foreign nations that Christians are more often made to suffer and die for their faith.
  4. Each week I receive from VOM a list of places and people who were persecuted and often times martyred for their faith.

II. Jesus called on people to consider the cost before they signed up as a disciple.

- A. Luke 14:5 Now great multitudes went with Him. And He turned and said to them, 26 "If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple. 27 And whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple. 28 For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not sit down first and count the cost, whether he has enough to finish it—29 lest, after he has laid the

foundation, and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him, <sup>30</sup>saying, 'This man began to build and was not able to finish.' <sup>31</sup>Or what king, going to make war against another king, does not sit down first and consider whether he is able with ten thousand to meet him who comes against him with twenty thousand? <sup>32</sup>Or else, while the other is still a great way off, he sends a delegation and asks conditions of peace. <sup>33</sup>So likewise, whoever of you does not forsake all that he has cannot be My disciple.

- B. What a foolish plan to have no plan to follow through.
  - 1. Building a tower but leaving it only begun.
  - 2. Or worse yet going off to battle without considering if you can win or not.
  - 3. Years ago when I was a kid, my dad had a track type loader and he would dig basements for new houses. He dug many on the east end of town here in Toulon. Well there as a couple who wanted to build this big house. So they hired my dad to dig the basement. They had big plans but never were able to fulfil them. That dug basement was there until they finally sold the property and the new owners had to hire someone to fill it in.
  - 4. I have here in my hands a simple dollar bill. I have had this since the early 1990s. There was a man at ALCOA where I worked who was sort of over-weight and had this big plan to loose a lot of weight. He wanted to bet everyone that he would make it. He bet litterly hundreds of dollars with his co-workers. Well I didn't want to take his money so I bet him \$1.00 and here it is with this signature on it.
  - 5. And I know a lot of people who made a promise to be true to Jesus, to follow Him through thick and thin. They accepted the challenge to take up the cross and follow Jesus. But it was only show, it was only hype. They had got caught up in the moment and now they had drifted away.
- C. Jesus did not say that if you did not take up the cross you would not make a very good disciple, He said you could not be His disciple.

III. This all involves self-denial.

- A. All that is in the natural man is bored with God.
- B. All that is in the natural man wants to satisfy himself.
- C. We live in a new age today.
  - 1. It is the age of narcissism.
  - 2. Why do we live in a world where life seems so cheap.
  - 3. It is because people today love themselves to the extreme of harming others without thought because it is what brings them pleasure.

4. But before we jump all over the child molesters and those who kill their own children we need to examine a society and a political and judicial system to gives them a right to kill children in the womb, the most dangerous place for children in our world.
- D. Only in surrender of your life to Him can you receive the power to live for Him.