



Scriptures and Doctrine :: Hard Sayings on the Cost of Discipleship-Matt.8:18-27

Hard Sayings on the Cost of Discipleship-Matt.8:18-27 - posted by Oracio (), on: 2014/7/25 18:50

18 And when Jesus saw great multitudes about Him, He gave a command to depart to the other side. 19 Then a certain scribe came and said to Him, "Teacher, I will follow You wherever You go." 20 And Jesus said to him, "Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head." 21 Then another of His disciples said to Him, "Lord, let me first go and bury my father." 22 But Jesus said to him, "Follow Me, and let the dead bury their own dead."

This is a passage of Scripture which many have found rather difficult to understand and apply. Here we have an account of two men who told Jesus that they were willing to be close disciples of His. Before diving right into it I'd like to touch on some brief context and background. In verses 1-17 of this chapter we read of Jesus performing many wonderful miracles of healing right after He preached His powerful Sermon on the Mount in the region of Galilee. In verse 18 we read that there were multitudes of people about Him. And we're told that in seeing the multitudes our Lord gave a command to his disciples to depart to the other side, meaning the other side of the sea of Tiberias in Galilee. Then we have these two men making pledges of commitment to Christ, one making a pledge to follow Him immediately, and the other making a pledge to follow Him at a later time.

We're told that the first of these two men was a scribe. We find throughout the Gospels that the scribes and Pharisees were always trying to contradict what Jesus preached. The scribes were those that studied the law seriously, the Old Testament scholars of the day. The fact that this man was a scribe is very interesting. This scribe seems to have been very eager and zealous to follow Christ. After he tells the Lord about his commitment the Lord tells him essentially that animals have homes and places to sleep but He Himself did not have a place to lay His head. Our Lord warned this man that should He really choose to follow Him closely, he would fair the same as He Himself fared, being homeless and always on the go. In reference to our Lord's poverty Matthew Henry writes, "Christ submitted to this, not only that he might in all respects humble himself, and fulfil the scriptures, which spake of him as poor and needy, but that he might show us the vanity of worldly wealth, and teach us to look upon it with a holy contempt; that he might purchase better things for us, and so make us rich, 2 Co. 8:9."

Our Lord would have this man to first count the cost of following Him and not be too hasty. It seems that our Lord was sort of discouraging him and confronting his zeal without knowledge. It is very probable that this man thought he could gain worldly status by following Christ. We know from the Gospels that many of the multitudes who attended our Lord's preaching did so from ill motives, for selfish ambitions. When many saw the awesome, miraculous powers which Jesus exercised, and heard His unique, authoritative preaching, they thought He might help deliver them from the oppression they were suffering under the Roman Empire. They were hoping to attain political freedom and power through Jesus. Our Lord warned them then, and He would warn us today that there is no such promise of worldly status or wealth to those who follow Him wholeheartedly. To the contrary, we are promised trials, temptations, and persecutions for the cause of Christ. Multitudes of true followers of Christ throughout history have suffered deep poverty and heavy persecution at the hands of evil men.

So does this mean that Christ calls everyone of His followers to literally give up all their possessions and live in deep poverty even as He did? I bring that question up because some Christians have taken this and other similar passages which mention giving up earthly possessions to mean just that. And there are some evangelists or gospel-workers who literally give up all they have and enter into a life of deep poverty and are always on the go from place to place, not really having a place to call home. So again, the challenging question which Christians ask themselves is, is that kind of poverty-stricken lifestyle God's will for all of Christ's followers? Based on my understanding of the whole counsel of God's Word I would contend that that is not what this and other similar passages teach. For example, in Luke 8:1-3 we read of many of Christ's disciples who "ministered to the Lord from their substance", meaning they gave financially to the Lord's work. So if some of the Lord's disciples were called to provide financially to the work of God's kingdom it follows that it was God's will for some of the disciples to have a regular paying job and home. The Word of God also teaches us that it is not a sin to have worldly wealth, as long as one is not proud about it or trusts in or loves their riches (1 Timothy 6:10, 17-19).

That being said, some believers are indeed called to literally give up all for the cause of Christ and enter into that kind of deeply sacrificial lifestyle of service to Christ and His kingdom. Such was the case with the 12 apostles and other discipl

es we read of, as well as many of the Old Testament prophets. It takes serious prayer and getting alone before the Lord and searching of the Scriptures to try to discern if we ourselves might be called to such a sacrificial lifestyle for the cause of Christ.

But I believe that some believers have been too quick and overzealous in this area. I have seen some believers literally forsake their families and children for the service of the gospel. 1Timothy 5:8 warns us, "But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever." Unfortunately, some believers have not duly heeded that warning.

On the other hand, I believe that many believers whom God has indeed called to forsake all for the gospel have disobeyed that calling on their lives and have settled for less than God's perfect will for their lives.

Now the next man in this account also told Jesus that he was willing to follow Him, but only after he buried his father. In contrast to the quick assertiveness of the first man, this man was much slower in his zeal. On the surface it would seem that this man offered a very good excuse for delaying his full commitment to Christ. There are different interpretations from Bible teachers as to what this man actually meant when he said, "let me first go and bury my father". Some say that this man's father was at that moment very sick, or dying, or dead, and that he was asking to be excused to literally bury his father in an immediate sense. Others say that his father was only aged and that he wanted to take care of him and wait till he died so that he could discharge his duty to his father in his old age.

Whatever the actual case may have been with this man's father, our Lord knew this man's heart and exhorted him accordingly. Christ saw that this man had an unhealthy affection for his father, that he placed his father above God in his heart and life. Sadly, this is the case today with many of us who call ourselves Christians. We concern ourselves more with our families, friends, loved ones, and the affairs of this life than with God and the work of His kingdom. We fill our lives with so many mundane activities and crowd out the things of God.

Am I saying there should be no place for fun and recreation with our families and friends? No, there is indeed a place for those kinds of things, but not as a priority in our lives. Our Lord exhorts us in Matthew 10:37-39, "He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. 38 And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me. 39 He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for My sake will find it." And most of us are familiar with Matt. 6:33, "But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you." That means that we can trust Him to provide for our needs if we give Him and His kingdom first priority in our lives. In essence Jesus says to this man that he does not have any valid excuses for delaying his commitment to follow Him wholeheartedly.

In closing, I'd like for us to briefly consider the next passage which follows this account of these two men, because I believe it ties in very well here. In verses 23-27 we have the well-known account of Jesus rebuking and calming the storm in the boat after he was awakened from His sleep by the disciples. Let's look at it:

"23 Now when He got into a boat, His disciples followed Him. 24 And suddenly a great tempest arose on the sea, so that the boat was covered with the waves. But He was asleep. 25 Then His disciples came to Him and awoke Him, saying, 'Lord, save us! We are perishing!' 26 But He said to them, 'Why are you fearful, O you of little faith?' Then He arose and rebuked the winds and the sea, and there was a great calm. 27 So the men marveled, saying, 'Who can this be, that even the winds and the sea obey Him?'"

I found it to be very noteworthy that right after that exhortation from our Lord regarding the cost of discipleship we have this account which displays the awesome power and trustworthiness of Christ in the midst of a raging storm. That tells me that no matter how difficult following hard after Christ may be, no matter what kinds of trials we may face on account of that commitment to Him, we can rest assured that He will see us through it all. He is right there with us and will uphold us. In the words of the well-known Baptist pastor Charles Stanley, "Obey God, and leave all the consequences to Him."

Oracio Sandoval

Re: The Cost of Discipleship and the Trustworthiness of Christ-Matt.8:18-27 - posted by passerby, on: 2014/7/25 22:39

Does this applies as a requirement for salvation or for a seeker for an assignment to a particular or a special ministry in Christ.

Re: - posted by Oracio (), on: 2014/7/25 23:26

Quote:

-----Does this applies as a requirement for salvation or for a seeker for an assignment to a particular or a special ministry in Christ.

Good question. I believe that that passage can apply to both non-believers and believers. We see in the case of the rich young ruler in Matt. 19:16-22 that Christ commanded him to give up all his riches and give to the poor and follow him as a requirement for salvation. Was Christ teaching salvation by works? No. He was calling him to true repentance and faith in Himself. He knew that that young man's ultimate idol and sin was the love of money. That was the thing that was holding him back from getting right with God. For others it can be some other sin/s or idol/s in their lives.

An example of one who was called to a deeply sacrificial lifestyle of traveling from place to place after being stationed for some time is the apostle Paul. And there are other examples.

Sometimes believers are immediately called after they are saved to that kind of heavily sacrificial lifestyle in the service of the gospel and they miss that calling by allowing other things to get in the way. And then sometimes the same believers who initially missed their calling end up regretting it and making up for it later on in life. It's never too late to start obeying the Lord, as long as we have breath.

Re: - posted by passerby, on: 2014/7/26 0:24

My inclination also goes along your thoughts, though I am not ready to advocate without reservation that all must actually radically give up all earthly matters and possessions they have as a requirement before salvation can be granted.

But as said, everyone according to the counsel of God, according to the circumstances that He will lay in the moment of His call to each one of us. We did not choose Him, He has chosen us. He knew the elect even before the foundation of the world. The way on how we will meet our conversion and how we will finish our faith are works of His counsel.

To some their calling is intensely graphical, heroic, and inspiring but to some their calling is out of the limelight, with lots of falling, warnings, and disciplinary measures.

One thing though, what is impossible with man is possible with God, He is able to save those who will humble themselves and trust in Him.

Re: - posted by Oracio (), on: 2014/7/26 0:32

Amen passerby, sounds like we're on the same page here. May the Lord continue to show each of us His perfect will for our lives and lead us in those paths of righteousness for His name's sake.