

## Consider the Price

Wayne Waibel – 09/04/2022

How in the world are you supposed to put a positive spin on Jesus' exhortation to forsake mother and father, sister and brother, your own self-interests – essentially all that you hold dear – or you cannot be His disciple?

This passage from Luke from verses twenty-seven through thirty-three includes a negative particle or adverb in each verse – some of them have two. And the word "hate," bites through as if to stab you in the heart.

My capacity as a lunkhead provides a nice buffer for this seemingly impossible passage. I don't know enough to fully comprehend the magnitude of the chosen lesson for today, so my sermon will not be bogged down with errant theology.

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The beauty of theology is that it is not absolute. Critical evaluations are more or less opinions. Yes – they are based on considered study and devotion, but they are always open to an ever-changing worldview.

For example: it is documented in the book of Luke, and the other synoptic gospels as well that the multitudes following Jesus were growing ever larger as His time was drawing to the inevitable conclusion.

Perhaps the words we heard today were in no small way an attempt on His part to winnow down the crowd to a more manageable size.

An alternative examination confirms that Jesus' remarks are consistent with our lesson from a few weeks ago, which found Him informing the multitudes that He was not sent here to give peace on earth, but rather to pit father against son, and daughter against mother.

So – yes – Jesus was serious about those wishing to be His disciples needing to give up all that they hold dear if they were to follow Him.

But He does so in such a way as to advise, rather than command. What He is saying in essence is that you must consider the price of discipleship. If you would become a disciple of Christ – you must first count the cost. And the cost is putting Him above all else – including family and self.

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In Paul's letter to Philemon, he is expertly demonstrating one of the least noted, but most impressive characteristics of Jesus. Christ embodies not only a refusal to dominate other people, even though He could easily do so – but an almost casual disregard for others' attempts to dominate Him.

While Paul can command Philemon to receive his rogue servant Onesimus as a brother in Christ, he would prefer that Philemon do so instead out of love – not obedience. A far more powerful dynamic.

The rhetorical weapons Paul uses are deliberate and expertly delivered. Philemon is left to choose between being a master, or a son of God.

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We all want to do good. There is however a gap between doing good and being a disciple. That gap is between what we envision for ourselves and reality, and that gap creates fear. Fear of failure – fear of excess – fear of the unknown. All legitimate hindrances to the life of love Christ would have for us.

The quest then becomes a search for a reasonable alternative to fear. And that is something we can peel away layer by layer in a perpetual process. The first step is to recognize that what we own can come to own us, posing a serious threat to our spiritual welfare.

Put a simpler way – at least for us in this world, it may help to understand the difference between entitlement and gift. I know how listening to anyone drone on about their expectations and what we as a culture owe them can be infuriating. Even more so when compared to what passed as an entitlement two generations ago.

When you graduated high school in the late sixties and early seventies – you were entitled to a diploma, and you expected an entry-level job that you could fashion into a career if you chose to do so.

Today graduates expect a college education regardless of their ability to afford one, and believe they are entitled to a career based on their expectation of wealth.

What often passes for excellence these days, was merely adequate not so very long ago, and I fear what we are dangerously close to now as a society, is the sobering realization that future generations may lose sight of a simple truth: blessing is never an entitlement, but always a gift.

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Fortunately the grace of God bridges the gap between God’s acceptance and God’s judgment. As in the case of Jeremiah – God is explicit in His expectations of what’s left of the children of Israel – pretty much the land of Judah alone.

His uncluttered direction to Jeremiah forms the basis of understanding between God and His chosen people. That they decided to rely on their own devices instead probably came as no great surprise to either God or Jeremiah.

Perhaps it served the greater good in that it opened God's heart to include all of mankind as His chosen people, since the house of Israel could not be bothered.

And even though Jesus was talking about hate and giving up oneself – what He was exposing was the price of discipleship. He was very specific about what that cost was, and that one should be very deliberate as they engaged in the discernment process. Cost is what we give up to acquire, accomplish, maintain, or produce something. Cost requires effort and resources.

For John Calvin the Christian life should be understood from four implications of Christ's teachings: 1. Self-denial, 2. Cross bearing, 3. Meditation on eternal life and, 4. The proper use of the gifts of God in daily life.

What that looks like is as wide and varied as each individual that has walked, is walking, or will walk the earth. Denial of self is the escape from selfishness – that is a very true form of freedom.

Cross bearing is the dimension of self-denial that enables us to face suffering. Discipleship will always take precedence over security.

Meditation on eternal life allows us to fully engage our sense of wonder about the promise for us in the resurrection of Jesus from the dead.

And if we understand ourselves to be on an earthly pilgrimage toward home, we can freely engage in the right use of earthly gifts – chiefly – the simplicity of scripture to inform both our things of necessity and things of delight. Our needs and our pleasures.

In the final analysis – discipleship - we must remember - is a process. This process takes time and involves both false starts and modest successes as we grow in our faith journeys to live into the fullness of our humanity and dare to begin to live the holiness that resides in each of us. Amen.